# Exploring uncomfortable situations in the practice of a Swedish leadership consultant

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**Abstract**

**Key words: process consultancy, uncomfortable and disturbing situations, conflict management, anxiety, complex responsive processes, reflection, reflexivity-in-action, power, idealisations, social selves, identity**

**Key authors: Stacey, Mowles, Elias, Mead, Foucault, Honneth, Bourdieu, Bauman, Arendt, Shaw, Brinkmann, Rahim**

This research examines the practice of process consultancy in Sweden with a particular emphasis on working in disturbing and uncomfortable situations. The managerial discourses that consultants are working in are dominated by an abstract language with a relentless eye towards imaginative futures in the form of visions, missions, strategies, and goals (Stacey 2011, Mowles 2014). Based on linear casuality thinking that comes from the natural sciences, the assumption is of predictability and control. Therefore, disturbing, uncomfortable, or conflicting situations arising in practice are generally overlooked, avoided, or suppressed as they—per definition—are neither predictable nor controllable. Although process consultancy in many respects gradually has changed from delivery/expertise of ready made concepts into more of conversational facilitation, speaking partnerships, inquiry and coaching, disturbing and uncomfortable moments are still generally being avoided or overlooked.

This research is a narrative-based inquiry that has served as a basis for engagement in literature, reflections, reflexive inquiries, and conversations with fellow researchers, members of faculty, and other practitioners. Out of this iterative and intese process, the arguments have emerged and developed. In describing a multitude of uncomfortable and disturbing situations from my practice, and while paying close attention to them in local context, a view of these situations as problematic and avoidable has moved into a wider and deeper understanding regarding what might be taking place among us.

Interpreting directives, policies, and strategies —what to do and how to do it—in order to find the most functional ways forward is imperative in organisations. Hence, corrigibility and definite inquiries into worlds of practice and relations are necessities. As ideologies and intentions among people differ, problems and disturbances are inevitably encountered in processes of particularising (making concrete in specific contexts) generalised plans and strategies, which, in turn, creates different and new generalisations (Stacey 2011, p. 358). Utilising process consultancy in order to 'deal' with the above situation may, however, paradoxically enhance anxiety and disturbancies even more.

In drawing attention to disturbances as central, 'normal', and generative (norm-forming), I have come to think of the actual *process* in process consultancy as having felt dissolving qualities. As 'states' of body/mind are temporary, shifting, and changing when we are being influenced and influence others and ourselves (constrain and enable) at the same time as we speak, a *sense of solution* often occurs in the process. Rather than solving or resolving issues—a more traditional approach, intentionally aiming at fixing something—acts of conversations and reflexive inquiries are not aiming anywhere in particular. They are explorative and mind-moving and make us re-identify or re-form our sense of self. Hence, in the process of 'loosening up or breaking apart' identity, a sense of solution (I refer to as dissolution) is felt to emerge. This process can be disturbing per se, and the newly gained thinking—also of a temporary kind—can be felt as 'better' or 'worse' or neither, as movements and outcomes are unpredictable. In process consultancy, the understanding of people as an elusive science—changeable, fluid, and plural (messy and needy rather than tidy and rational)—is helpful in order to understand 'stuckness' and enable movement by taking experience seriously rather than engaging in excessive quantification or being futuristic and idealising.

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**The context**

Process consultancy—the way I am taking it up—is situational, contextual, and social. The work is conducted over longer and shorter periods of time with various teams and leaders within organisations in all branches. This happens mostly with top management teams over periods of six to twelve months and meeting them once a month. This thesis is focusing on disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual *situations* that often arise in these processes and do not separate the process from the content.

Process consultancy is located in a discourse of managerialism in general where rationality and predictability is dominant; the management role is often seen as 'objectively analysing data' and designing strategies and objectives for securing certain outcomes (market shares). This concept builds on assumptions of management as a linear, instrumental 'science' and managers as being able to predict and produce certain desired outcomes in unforeseen and complex situations (Stacey 2012; Mowles 2014). In practicing leading teams in 'development' processes for a long time, I have been treading lightly when disturbances and outright conflicts have occurred—attempting to appeal to the reason of the contestants or trying to provide alternative ways of viewing the situation. Witnessing people leaving the processes in various stages of anxiety, I have found consultancy interventions to be unsuccessful. Feeling unable to help and uncertain in how to release this tension or 'unleash' it towards something 'good',  a productive goal, or a (positive) constructive outcome, I saw processes like these as failed and not 'leading anywhere'. However, after starting the DMan programme three years ago, I have come to think differently about this assumption. I have been re-thinking my practice from an understanding of us as predictably taking up instrumental tools, techniques, and models as it was intended by design into what we do together as non-linear and unpredictable.

I have been drawing upon complex responsive processes of relating in order to support my experience and arguments, a body of authors in an eclectic tradition of Stacey, Griffin, Shaw, and Mowles in turn drawing from Mead, Elias, Hegel, Foucault, and Bourdieu, amongst others. As such, this is a meta-theory of activity—of what we find ourselves doing—and a unique pragmatic approach that suggests *taking experience seriously*. This process has led to (final/temporary) confirmatory and emergent (at the same time) understandings of what we do in process consultancy and how to proceed in my practice.

**My argument**

What we do on a daily basis, as is deeply socially embedded in societies, seems to be inherently conflictual and takes its origins from cultural/ideological/political differences, economic differentiation, and psychological development.

My main contribution is to draw attention to the centrality of disturbances in process consultancy practice:

1. I *am arguing about disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual states as a norm* when issues are at stake and people with different ideologies and intentions are trying to create results together. However, when we encounter our differences and tensions arise, our habitual ways of dealing with them is avoidance or surpression. We will usually try to decrease the tension and maintain or regain harmonious ways of working together by focussing on consensus—cooperative and collaborative approaches—rather than acknowledging and exploring differences. Avoiding or surpressing situations marked by high tension can cause anxiety and bring about unpredictable, surprising, and disruptive outcomes.  These circumstances, in turn, may call for instruments of control that cause further anxiety and further control. Attempts at coercive 'implementation' of certain steps, procedures, or change programmes into organisations often causes resistance due to people feeling restricted or 'unfree', and it can also be felt as pseudo-democratic by giving employees an illusory idea of having a say in the matter and a choice whether they would *like* to take the new ideas up or not.

2.  *I argue of the above—disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual states—as changing our sense of self or identity.* Due to no emotional 'state' of mind—such as fear, anxiety, or harmony—being stable, foreseeable, and predictable but rather temporary, fluctuating, and changing in unstable and unpredictable manners, identities are constantly being re-formed. I have come from thinking of identity as a stable 'core' to an understanding of identification as an ongoing social process (Honneth 1995, p. 96) developing the social structures we find ourselves in and these in turn forming us. This procss then contributes to an understanding of 'managers and consultants themselves participants in the ongoing pattering of relations that they seek

to change' (Mowles 2011, p. 8). As identity develops through experiences of crises and contradictions that every individual has to overcome, managers' and employees' 'processes of identification' may be a more accurate description of what occurs. In this case, we have people socialising as the backdrop for identity formation due to the paradoxically predictable-unpredictable (a quality in complexity) processes we go through. In process consultancy, the processes—enhanced by tensions and contested interpretations when we encounter differences—could potentially have profound impacts on identity formation.

3.  *I am arguing for the potentiality of acknowledging and exploring disturbances when we encounter differences.* Exaggregating 'pretend' stances—that all is 'normal and well' when changes occur and that we *should* feel good about them and see the possibilities ahead (idealising) and not feel the way we actually may feel (anxious, ambiguous, i.e., reality)—causes people to feel alienated and unsure. They cannot trust their senses and practical judgment. Meanwhile, acknowledging anxieties and exploring differences when encountering and facing the prospect of changing relationships in the organisation due to reorganisations and change programmes allows for movements, novelty and identity- and norm- forming. That is to say, in exploring the conflictual, we might be able to understand more of the dynamics we are engaged in. This recognition will enable us to respond in different and potentially more helpful ways. However, reflexive inquiries and explorations also pose danger because power relations may be perceived as being laid bare and exposed. These examinations inevitably have implications for ethics since what are perceived as ethical ways of engaging are emerging *in* such explorations.

Rather than traditional problem-solving aiming at solving/'fixing' perceived problems, I propose thinking of the actual *process* in process consultancy in terms of holding *dissolving* qualities in the acts of inquiry and conversation. I speak of the potential for the emergence of different thinking patterns and understandings as we are being 'moved' in minds/bodies and moving ourselves at the same time. As such, different meanings occur and we re-identify/change.

**Brief overview projects**

During the course of my years in the DMan community, I have written 4 projects, which are attached. I give a fuller account of them in the synopsis. Here is a short overview:

In Project 1, I give an autobiographical account of my background and the ideology that arose from my past and present contingencies. It becomes an account of past and present influences, a mish-mash of personal experiences of relationships, a secure childhood, and a sudden and unexpected death and its effects. I address influences from secular Protestant ethics and later of Hinduism, Buddhism, theosophy, and 'new age' ideas, all mixed with popular reading at the time particular within the field of brain research (neuroscience) and pedagogical learning later going into 'organizational learning'. This is also an account of a basically 'self-made' consultant with a background in law (far from behaviourism or psychology, which is a more common ground for doing this work),  increasingly coming to trust my ability in political game-playing, moving from conducting courses in 'presentation techniques' into top management and leadership training.

Project 2 continues to explore what it is that I find myself doing as a leadership consultant in processes. I draw upon two narratives based in the same organisation in the 'Bra' community, a long-term client, and I describe a number of disturbing and difficult situations where I am struggling to make sense of what is going on and how to deal with the same. In a move away from my originally individualistic, autonomous understanding of the self, I conclude that our radical *social* nature makes us conditioned as I am becoming aware of power dynamics and on the provisional and improvisational stance of my work and how this involves 'bearing and holding tension' in consultancy.

In Project 3, I bring in a narrative from a top management programme in the Star organisation were I go into processes of improvisation and practical judgements in action and how these have had an effect on issues of identity. In the process—which turned out to be highly anxiety ridden and unpredictable—I come to view myself as a political 'tool', highly constrained by the expectations of the HR department and equally constrained by the management team not seemingly wanting the process in particular. I start to explore more of my own identity as a 'problem-solver' as the process in the team frequently 'froze' and left

me at loss in how to proceed in order to 'solve' the problem. As I struggled together with the team in the process without aborting it and speaking more directly (as had been my approach in Project 2), I became more attuned to the strength of *particulars*—the situation I found myself in here was indeed different than the one in Project 2.  Hence, the same method and thinking did not apply. I found myself increasingly having to rely on my own experience of 'stuckness' rather than retort back and find a new or different 'method' or 'tool' to aid in the process.

Project 4 revisited the Star organisation, working with a different team of managers aimed at 'development'. A tumultous and tense workshop set the stage for inquiry into what was taking place, and thus, interesting responses emerged, which led into a difficult question regarding 'surveillance' located in the group. The managers found themselves coerced into carrying out certain procedures that gave rise to issues of ethics and 'disciplinary power' (Foucault). The conversations that followed were being played out in ambiguous, unpredictable, and conflictual ways that pointed at contradictions in the organisation and led to explorations of social selves, power, and our ways of dealing (or not) with conflicts and disturbances in order to experience a sense of movement. The clients valued these conversations when the disturbances we encountered were explored together and they witnessed them as being both moving and meaningful.

**Project 1**

**Making sense of me: Influences**

One of the things that have always interested me is the use of language. From an early age, I was a keen reader and—luckily—had a small local library nearby in the small town of Luleå, where I grew up. Luleå is about one hour's drive from the Arctic Circle in the north and hence has a climate best suited for anybody who enjoys ten months of darkness and snow—and plenty of it—and two months of 24 hours of light and sunshine (the famous "midnight sun"). As I set off for school in the morning with the local bus, it was dark and was just as dark when I returned home again. In between it had been "light" for an hour, or so we were told. Being in class, we usually missed this event.

So what can you do during these long, dark winter months? Well, as a child and teenager, the choices were very limited. We had TV, of course, but the choice was restricted to two channels that only broadcast in the evening. So we tended to huddle up at each other's places for a lot of coffee and smoking (fashionable at the time), plus there was always sewing and knitting if you were into those things (which I wasn't); of course, there were also the weekly Bingo nights that took place in town. Faced with this, it is no surprise that reading became a companion and comfort to me.

My reading list must have been very erratic indeed, as my parents were non-readers and kept about ten books at home purely for decorative reasons. However, starting with those wasn't bad considering they were a series of adventure stories by Jules Verne, among them *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *The Mysterious Island.* Those made me interested in further reading.

My father had been a sailor and crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the America Line a few times before setting up as a ships chandler in Luleå after meeting my mother at the local YMCA dance. I grew up with a younger brother and lots of stories surrounding ships and sailing, as we often socialized with sea captains, stewards, etc., that my father dealt with in his business. The large ships that arrived in Luleå at that time carried iron ore from the mines in Kiruna in Sweden and Narvik in Norway (transported by rail to the seaport in Luleå) out into Europe and beyond. The speed of loading ships was much slower than today, which meant the crew normally stayed put on the ships in the harbour for two to four weeks and thus usually befriended my father and our family.

As I was bored stiff, physically and emotionally, in the restrictive environment of a small town, I began dreaming of adventure and travelling. The social and political environment present in the northern part of Sweden at that time consisted of an on-going propaganda to persuade people to move south, as manpower was needed there. This gave rise to constant public demonstrations as the "we will *never* leave" movements turned the fairly ordinary social democratic thinking people into fierce socialists. The north became known as the "red" area with radical journalism directed towards the government's "imperialistic" tendencies. This all coincided with the Vietnam War (1955 – 1975), which muddled things up and helped fuel the demonstrations from being not only "Stop exploiting the resources of the North" but also "USA imperialists get out of Vietnam!"

In our community, many worked at the local steel factory while my family were quite affluent (being in trade) in comparison. My father, a social and generous man, would walk around the village in winter when the shipping business was low, having coffees and chatting at people's houses and giving supplies away: small packages of soap, food, chocolate, etc. At a class reunion some 30 years later, old friends witnessed of his kindness and support of their families, much of which I had not been aware of at the time. The demonstrations and rifts going on between people in the town worried him, as he was an inclusive kind of person and, probably due to his earlier travelling, capable of seeing more than one view.

As I loved and admired him, his ideology influenced me; one of the expressions was that I am happy in belonging to *all* groups rather than one or two as this will—per definition—exclude those who are not in it. My father moved in between the two predominant social circles in the village: on the one side the workers at the large steel factory and on the other side the upper middle class represented by the medical doctor and the engineers / managers at the factory. I can sense that this has influenced my way of connecting with groups, moving in between them, wanting to belong to "all" camps. Thinking back, I can see two other major influences that have impacted my choice of lifestyle; the first was that my father loved his mother and—consequently—women. My mother was working when they met and continued to do so as my brother and I went to school. Until then women had mainly been housewives and many still were. This meant that my sex was never an issue as a hindrance to doing what I would set my mind on to do. The second one was that my father ran his own business when I grew up; I have always run my own business too. If the ideology influencing me from my father's and paternal grandparents' side were one of generosity and freedom, the other ideology, the undercurrent that affected my mother's upbringing, was different; in fact, quite the opposite.

Her parents had a small farm even further north than Luleå, at the Lapland border. This northern part, dominated by the Sami culture as well as being a melting pot of Swedes, Russians in horse-trading, Gypsies, and Finns had earlier had extensive social problems with theft, poverty, and alcoholism. Salvation from this had arrived in the shape of Lars Levi Laestadius about one hundred years prior to my mother's birth. Ordained as a Lutheran minister, he was a part of the "Awakening" movement sweeping through Scandinavian Lutheranism as a countering to the rationalistic view (represented by French philosophers and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant) that promoted more rationalist beliefs at the expense of faith in God and the Bible. LL Laestadius emphasised moral reform (having had an alcoholic father himself), and after having an emotional religious experience, he preached in the Nordic region about the evil of drinking and the necessity of abandoning it. He became quite famous (or infamous) for his engaging, evangelical sermons containing strong language and vivid imagery about God and the Devil, and people attended from far away to listen and join in the "Hallelujahs". The non-drinking message actually turned out to be very helpful for the Sami population at the time, as they were having major problems in their communities related to alcohol.

However, this "moral reformation", also meant stern churchgoing, regular reading of the "catheches", the small Lutheran Bible that all homes had to possess (it was common for the minister to turn up in homes unannounced and keep "husförhör"—interrogating into the biblical knowledge of the family), and giving up of worldly, sinful things like dancing, dressing up, etc. In my mother's family, it also meant hard work and no play. So she left at 18 for the nearest, larger city, which was Luleå, rented a room with two old ladies, and started to work.

Many years later, some of our 9th grade teachers were ardent followers of "Laestadianism" too. My English teacher usually began the term by pulling down the curtains from the windows and ripping them apart, in class, claiming they were "sinful". He also proceeded with checking if we (girls) were wearing any kind of makeup, if we did, we were downgraded. This happened to me every term.

And so at 16, and still in school, I tried to join a ship and sign up to work my way around the world. As I was underage, I needed my parents' consent, which—needless to say—they wouldn't give thinking I was far too young to be sailing off into the sunset on some dodgy Panama registered piece of junk (which is what I had my mind set on).

My father insisted I finish high school. And so it was that two years later I made my move to the South of Sweden. Initially working as a waitress and then some part-time studying, I enjoyed a new social life immensely while floating carefree through life. It was a wonderful, easy-going period. A few years later I met a nice boy and became pregnant.

**Defining moment**

Although unplanned, the pregnancy was welcomed by both of us. We were in love, excited at the prospect of a baby, and had by then settled into a nice apartment in a nice city with good jobs and studies going for us. Life was good.

A healthy baby boy was born but died suddenly and completely unexpectedly four months later; it has since been termed "cot-death". The shock of this numbed me totally and overwhelmingly. Prior to this happening, I had been happily plodding along without a worry in the world. Babies were not supposed to die; not in our clean and orderly world, not in a civilized community where there is proper nutrition and tender loving care. He was not even ill.

What was going on with my sense of identity at the time?

> "The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience." (Mead 1934 p 140)

What Mead is saying implies that different selves emerge depending on the set of social reactions in our environment.

The social setting that I was immersed in will have influenced me and my sense of how to behave in this particular context at the time; the ideology, thinking, and values on death in general and in dying suddenly in particular mirrored my gesturing and my responses in the different situations that occurred.

I fell into a strange bubble for years, uninterested in anything from eating to any form of activity. I felt as if I apparently *did* things with my body—worked, ate, talked—but was not willing to take part or be present mentally. I felt utterly alone. I felt as if nobody would be able to reach me in this state (I would not let anybody), but I could not see anybody trying very hard either. They simply did not know what to do.

It took about two years for me to become yet another "self". In this gradual "awakening", I also felt a strange and new power within; I was sadder and more serious but also happier and

more joyful paradoxically. My whole emotional area, the span between love and hate, sorrow and joy, had somehow expanded. The historical figure of that self today when constructing the memory images remembers a sense of constriction at the time but also, paradoxically, of freedom! A freedom from behaving or expressing myself in a predictable way—I was excused from saying and doing all kinds of things outside the norm and thereby surprised myself as well. I had no problems in saying all kind of things outright, thus hurting a few people's feelings. "Normal" civilized diplomacy had temporary ceased to exist—after all, what did I have to lose? Nothing worse than what had already happened could possibly happen again.

It would take me some time yet to "recover" into more of the norm and rediscover the point of empathy and kindness.

**Into the world & new culture**

With my "new" energy, a different form of determination emerged, and I changed my life; the young relationship between me and my then boyfriend didn't survive this crisis. We were not able to deal with it together but were rather grieving apart, which finally made us split up. For me, this meant a new city and full-time studies this time. I did law at the University of Stockholm for five years. After graduating I took all of the money I had and went hitchhiking across Europe. I finally ended up in the Canary Islands, where I signed on a ship as a cook and sailed across the Atlantic Ocean—first to Africa, then to South America (Brazil), and finally to Jamaica, where I ended up staying for two years.

A colleague of mine once remarked on me being  "brave" for doing all these things, setting off sailing across the Atlantic Ocean alone, etc. But this wasn't bravery as I wasn't afraid (which bravery implies).

> "The extent of this original courage, without which action and speech and therefore, according to the Greeks, freedom, would not be possibly at all, is not less great and may even be greater if the 'hero' happens to be a coward." (Arendt 1958 p 187)

I was neither a coward nor brave; I was adventurous.

At first, I could not separate one Jamaican from another when arriving there! My "seeing" was until then limited to differences between "whitish" people only, and I realized for the first time how we come to see or not see objects and people who are not familiar to us, who have not yet entered our "frame" of mind. I learned to differentiate between the Jamaicans as

I got to know them and as I created memories of small, local differences in their way of speaking, the intonation and their way of walking, and their looks. Taking the attitude of "the others" (Mead 1934 p 193) meant adjusting into a new kind of society where I was different and moreover stood out like a sore thumb—I was colourless. Apart from "yellowman", the island albino, we were only a handful of white people at the time and hence highly visible.

During my years in Jamaica, I befriended the other "whities" as well and noticed they lacked any interest in broadening their view of the local community. They still adhered to much of the colonial attitude with servants to run big houses and were constantly complaining and whining about the ill functional Jamaican society while secretly longing for their former homes and societies in Germany or the U.S. or somewhere else. They were living much in the same way as in their former countries, reluctant to "go native" as they would say.

I, on the other hand, thrived. I loved the friendliness and directness of the new culture. I experienced curiosity and generosity around me as I moved between high and low in society, being a big fish in a small pond and generally asking questions to try and get into and understand what had shaped the people that crossed my path. This made me gain access to all kinds of groups and situations as people responded accordingly, which further broadened my view. I wanted to fit in and understand. I was straining as well; I truly had no idea how this particular society worked. I withdrew more and more from "friends" whose attitude towards the Jamaican people and culture (due to fear of the unknown?) was more of a controlling one. This was a sad thing as I needed them as well probably due to my desire for belonging to "all camps". This feeling of being squeezed in between cultures made me feel very lonely.

Two years later, as I landed in the Miami airport, I exhaled, realising that I had been holding my breath for a few years. I was anonymous finally; I looked like everybody else, and I felt relief at not being so different!

**Changing direction**

Unconsciously, I had already decided to change careers as I came across the ideas of "Learning Organizations" in "The fifth discipline" (Senge 1990). The law studies had been a refuge at the time; they meant something more instrumental, like pure facts, rather than psychological evaluations, as I had had a fair share of when I lost my baby. I was indeed proven right—the years doing law were almost comical. The nitty gritty of rules and regulations, stipulations, interpretations, and rhetoric made me sometimes laugh and cry at the same time; it was all so removed of emotional content and human endeavours.

Furthermore, I was an outsider; most of the students had parents (fathers or uncles) who were lawyers; I was the first academic in our family ever. I came from the north and was considered a "leftie" (which I probably became in that particular environment); they were all very conservative and the (few) girls in the law institution would put on their pearl necklaces, take their small expensive cars, and go for lunch at fancy places with their grannies. I did make some good friends there too, though, which probably was part of the reason that I stayed on. The other part was that I did not know what to do otherwise.

The studies did something to my thinking; I had to set my emotions aside and force myself into thinking within a certain framework; in retrospect, not wholly bad for someone strongly leaning towards intuition as the main guiding tool at the time. But the tipping point came as I heard a famous black feminist, Flo Kennedy (lawyer, civil rights advocate), from NY saying something like: "Law is just for people who can pass a pool of blood and remark on the colour of it." I liked the idea of thinking, but I didn't like the idea of leaving out emotions to the extent that I felt I was forced to do in the law institution. I liked to think that working-life; organizations, corporations, and societal institutions would be the ones driving change in the future—into a more humane and perhaps fair society—and hence needed to be more "learning" (thinking *and* feeling) about what made people tick and how. Looking back I can see how naive this was! Law as a working, practising subject does not in any way exclude emotions; there are always an extraordinary amount of nuances taken into account in all legal judgements based on a broad set of values and practices. In my immaturity, I was highly run by emotional impulses and a fundamentalist, right-and-wrong approach to the questions and issues that arose, and I was thinking that they made it all very (unnecessarily) complex!

I started studying pedagogic in "working environments": how do we learn at work, how do we teach so that people learn at work, and how does learning happen? I had a great supervisor, very radical at the time, who taught us to trust our instincts and study the small things, things that sometimes appeared in the margin of big things. This particular course I took was brand new, and thus we were given the freedom to explore the area ourselves to a large extent.

As I had started consulting by then my own experience of inheriting an already existing concept of "Presentation Techniques" from a friend, who had several requests for it, it proved to be interesting indeed! She basically handed me the concept, and I went and "performed" it. After a few of those courses, I started changing the concept and brought in little things and ideas for exploration that were of more interest to me, inspired from my new studies. Finally I

changed the complete content of the course. I increasingly came to understand the significance of pedagogy in management and leadership. Ira Shor, a leading exponent of "critical pedagogy" defines it as:

> "Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse." (*Empowering Education*, 1992 page 129)

My course participants responded accordingly. We all felt drawn into discussions that were more important or significant in our everyday working life than "Presentation Techniques", and I became brave at experimenting with all kinds of themes—stress, meaning of work and life (yes—pretentious…), how to influence people at work and so on. Very much in cooperation and dialogue: What do you want to talk about today? This must have led into nearly therapy, but the participants enjoyed it, and the courses became very popular.

This need for a deeper enquiry into the state of things had no doubt been spurred by my own emotionally near-death experience when I lost my firstborn.

In particular, all the discussions and questioning we did into "Stress Management", which was a fairly new concept then, were interesting; the explorations that took place within the different groups often led to similar conclusions. It relates to "Life Balance". Stress is not necessary bad. We need a certain amount of "disturbances" in our life and work otherwise we risk becoming "balanced", and that kind of equilibrium is a dead end street where the system (i.e., person) shuts down. It seemed to us that if we fell into periods of too little or non-stimulation, or boredom, we ourselves unconsciously tried to create "disturbances" in our lives, starting an argument, throwing in a statement, provoking… I remember wondering why I, myself, had needed such a massive disturbance or stability-challenge in my young life when my baby died, or did things actually just happen?

Stacey points out how instability is necessary for a system to change of its own accord (Stacey 2011 p 236), and we were not inclined to think that it all just happened! In our ideology at the time, there was not much room for coincidences; we leaned towards the idea that the universe was somehow meaningful without further exploring what we meant by it, no doubt heavily influenced by our Christian Lutheran Sunday-school upbringing.

As I started to realize that consulting was my area of interest and since I enjoyed the variety of people and situations, I increased my experimenting with groups. I learned as I went along. I was fortunate enough to encounter surroundings that helped me to do that. I gained a reputation for being an "inspirational" speaker and landed a lot of "hit-and-runs" as we—my colleagues and I—jokingly called them. We were a handful of Consultants on the lecturing circuit at the time, a kind of inspirational gypsies—frequently meeting in airports. Where one had been, the other one arrived soon afterwards. We rarely had a chance to listen to each other. It was usually the nearest, easiest, and fastest means of transportation to the next event, thus terming it "hit-and-runs".

I enjoyed this immensely for a couple of years. The travelling, the attention, and the love (actually) it brought me on stage was fantastic and highly infectious. The subjects of my "talks" varied, and I was influenced by all kinds of concepts, picking and choosing the things that resonated the most with me in amongst Transactional Analysis (TA), Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Learning Organizations, the concept of "Flow" by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, and Brain Research. Later influences were "Happiness Research" (Seligman), "Emotional Intelligence" (Goleman), and certainly dozens of other "concepts" long buried and forgotten!

**Writing books**

I came about to writing books by coincidence. By this time life had changed again, and I lived in New Zealand and tended to young twin boys. During that period I started writing and by chance met a Swedish book publisher at a social gathering who encouraged me to publish. As I look through my books today—four published, written during the period of 1992–2006—I notice several things; I draw heavily on brain research influenced by my time at Brain Training Seminars in the U.S. but most of all by Dr. Matti Bergstrom, who is Professor Emeritus of Physiology and docent of Bioelectronics at the University of Helsinki, Finland. He is an author of several works on neurophysiology, most of them in Swedish. His themes (and those I draw upon in my early books) are the paucity in modern society of ethical values and the need for them in human life. Creativity requires the "Chance generator", which occurs in the meeting between the rational cortex and sensory input and intuition in the physical brain. Here is where order and disorder meet and "generate" new ideas. This electrical field is being disallowed by materialistic techniques, and he advocates a different attitude towards children's education (he terms children "our last slaves"), one of much more

play and experimenting rather than too many cortical activities. Art, history, and orientation towards different value systems are what he emphasizes, as nature is ensouled. Thus, he says, the capacity for "better" judgment (based on wholeness) will evolve better.

This "wholeness" idea—the notion of us being small, fragmented parts of a wholeness towards which we constantly strive to somehow be able to unite with it *all* (whatever that is)—I now sense was strong in his ideology and thinking as well as my own thinking and more or less everybody's thinking at the time. And it still is!

It was not until now—me starting the DMan program—that I have come to reflect upon this. This tradition of thinking may be based on feelings of existential loneliness—us always striving to belong to something "bigger" than our selves. As if it is a part, or parts, of us missing.

One of the current models I am using today in my practice is based on this idea as well—the idea of us coming together in our thinking and talking and generating new outcomes and solutions to problems from separate "views" via questions and dialogues' into a "meta-logue" where our separate views come together in a kind of mutual understanding or "wholeness."

I can sense how my thinking is beginning to shift in this respect. New thoughts emerging are that we may always be in "wholeness" as well as in "parts"; it's not like we have a choice in this matter. The instrumental way of using this "model" and thinking about it would imply a choice of disciplining oneself into suspending judgment and thus being able to see or experience the "greater good" for us all, the community, humanity, etc. The "wholeness" idea in Bergströms thinking (as my own was) is that you do things for the "greater good" and that you strive to do the best for the community in order to do the best for everybody (as if we were to be able to decide what that would be). I can see that this is yet an expression of the ideology of control.

 Human beings develop into full maturity late in life, according to Bergström; by "maturity" he refers to the ability to ascribe value to different events in life. In order for "capacity for value" to expand, however, it is of utmost importance that human beings take part in *all* aspects of life, particularly through socialising, rather than overemphasising materialistic sciences. This thinking suited me, not being very well rehearsed in subjects relating to materialistic sciences! I did all right in school in most subjects but enjoyed the socialising with friends at the breaks much, much more. In retrospect, I realise that I enjoyed the politics

that relations inevitably breed best of all, hence moving between different settings and groups and enjoying the social aspects.

Another important influence was Carla Hannaford's research (neurophysiologist). Her book, *Smart Moves – Why Learning Is Not All in Your Head*, was published in 1995. She advocates the importance of movement in all education, linking the lack of it to stress-related symptoms as well as ADHD and other learning disabilities. She presented a lot of scientific evidence that movement is crucial and offers clear alternatives to enhance learning ability. These recommendations included much the same as Matti Bergström's above: arts, sports, music, physical movement, etc. She is also the founder of the so-called "Brain Gym"—exercises to reduce stress.

New thoughts emerging from starting the DMan in respect to what Carla Hannaford and Bergström were saying is also true. Learning is not all in your head; however, it is probably not all in your body either. It is more a case of it happening in local interactions—in the actual interaction—with other human beings.

As I flick through my old books, I am struck by the titles of the chapters first of all. They are all quite witty "one-liners". It seems as if this was important to me at the time to gain interest in the writing because of the headlines. It is kind of journalistic chronicle writing, and I cover a plethora of ideas and areas. The different chapters can nearly stand by themselves! It is more a collection of short stories rather than a coherent novel in each book.

At the time—being influenced by Bergström's and other brain research—I guess I found it reassuring that things could be compartmentalized; it all sounded so easy. We were basically a big brain! And if you practice the activities that are associated and correspond with the different centres in the brain, you can become more "whole". I was advocating that everybody took up and practice these fine ideas—so why didn't they?

Today I can sense that it was far too simplified. Its technique-based approach did not take power and status, how we gesture and respond to our way forward, or our sociability into account. The techniques imply that we are or can be in control of the outcomes of the different thoughts and emotions that our bodily responses produce in interaction with other people.

Apart from "techniques", the message in the books that comes across is an undercurrent of "leave your old, bad ways of working and join the new, good, modern way of working"(and be happier and healthier and more successful).

It is slightly evangelical and very messy in the sense that I am introducing ideas from all kinds of disciplines. The messages are simplified in that the connections between the disciplines are not very clear and the books are full of prescriptions for how to work and live better. It is very much a case of "do A and B will happen", which manifests my then belief of us being in control of the actions and the outcomes. This is a strong and firm belief of control that is starting to slowly melt away, starting this programme.

It is interesting re-reading them, though, and I can sense more philosophy than I remember as well as doubt seeping through as if I weren't very sure myself where all this was leading to. There are also a (very) few open-ended questions. The first two books contain more recipes—do this and that will happen—but in the two later ones the tune became more of a questioning one. One of the latest books comes with a small workbook attached that contains some good questions aimed at groups in organisations to reflect upon together. However, the ideology of us being able to be in and maintain control over what is happening in an organisational context is strongly present.

The streak of philosophy in the writing is probably due to my interest in esoteric areas and "New Age" prior to and parallel to all the above, being alternatives to the dominant discourse in business and organisations at the time. I had early contact with The Theosophical Society movement (TS) in Sweden at about the same time as I started studying law. Through the various influences there I came to think that everything was connected. This notion of "connectedness" was one of the dominant theories in that field. It rhymed well with brain research as to how the brain makes connections and patterning emerges as a result. The thinking in the Theosophical Society was going along the same lines, although into a much bigger "brain".

I had, by chance, walked into a small bookshop/library they (The Theosophical Society) were running in Stockholm and met Curt Berg, one of the most influential persons in this movement in Sweden. He was a retired scientist (physics) and a kind, thoughtful person. My experiences with the different people active in The Theosophical Society were immensely positive. The Society's objectives were, at that time (might be slightly updated today):

1. To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science
3. To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man

I felt in harmony with those statements and came thus into contact with all kinds of people that were also interested in what constitutes the world. They were Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Atheists, stern yoga practitioners, martial arts experts, and scientists and students alike. The Theosophical Society in Sweden was a very small movement that arranged gatherings around areas and subjects such as "Modern Science – Ancient Wisdom", where a theoretical physicist (Hans Liljenström) dialogued from the scientific view and Curt Berg from the ancient wisdom view. They would have tremendously interesting dialogues between them. They would arrive at a similar point—interdependency and connectedness between everything alive—out of two very different angles. Another event I particularly remember was the tapes of the dialogues between David Bohm (theoretical physicist, 1917–1992) and Krishnamurti. Jiddhu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) was an Indian-born speaker and writer about philosophy and spiritual matters. He was, in fact, raised by the Theosophical Society in India and was considered to be a "World Teacher". However, he later disavowed all kind of labelling and spent his life travelling the world speaking to groups. We would gather in the small bookshop in Stockholm and intently watch the tapes while trying to make sense of what was being said.

The library at the Theosophical Society contained treasures of literature from all areas. "Systems thinking" in Theosophical Society context was understood as everything in nature being conscious and connected (GAIA, the goddess of Earth, was the primordial mother of all the gods to the ancient Greeks)

As my beliefs had started to change gradually from us as individuals being in control and slid towards a view that corporations, rather than governments, would be more in control of events in the world and be the way forward in creating healthier environments for ordinary employees in ordinary companies, the fact that everything we did could possibly have an effect on everything else—as it was all connected—was an idea I was keen to get into practice somehow. I believed we needed enlightening about this. The Swedish government was generally conservative and slow to pick up on research and/or new concepts as to how people worked, learned, and motivated themselves. The climate in corporations was quite

harsh. If you made mistakes, you were out; the public transcripts were that you were encouraged to speak your mind but the hidden transcripts (Scott 1990, page 4) were if you did speak your mind, you were out. Leadership styles were highly authoritarian and rarely questioned. New age influences gave us plenty of things to talk and speculate about, not least the ideas of everything being connected.

**Going further**

However, certain tiredness crept in eventually. I sense now, in thinking back, that although people responded readily to everything that I was saying in my eagerness to help them all, not everybody was responding, and I had from time to time some difficult conversations arising in class that left me saddened and bereft—it had not been a good course this time. The difficulties arose when I, as the authority in the group, was trying to be "right", thus ignoring opposing views.  There would normally be two camps forming fairly quickly: those who agreed with me and those who opposed or themselves had concerns about what was being said. The dialogues sometimes turned into debates, which I didn't find fruitful at all; it was shattering at times.

At one point when I had been contracted for a longer job over a period of time, I discovered that I really enjoyed it. As I was meeting up with the group again and again for a long period, my approach had to be slightly different. I could not "afford" to get into discussions about right or wrong or claim research facts with them as I wished for us to have an ongoing experience and a nice learning environment. I had to change strategy; I had to stop wanting to be right about my views. I wanted them to want to return to our sessions. I had to let go of the fear of not controlling the process as it became much more complex. I wasn't just lecturing anymore; now we were getting into the murky waters of process together—nobody knew how it would end. I still did try to maintain control with the help of structure; this part in the morning, this after lunch, and the purpose is this... and the outcome should be something along these lines…

I was very anxious from the beginning. This was a completely new step for me. Would it "hold"? Would they expose me as a fake who really hadn't a clue as to what I was doing? I was "feeling my way forward", because I felt inclined in doing so, curious and bold, but it must also have come out as reckless and insensitive at times as I still had to maintain control and wouldn't let people speak about things that I didn't consider as appropriate in the course or for what we were trying to achieve.

I started to go beyond the already known, to go deeper into my own mind and those of whom I worked with. But I still feared letting go too much and struggled to keep to time schedules and areas to cover before lunch, etc., which generally meant that the conversations became too superficial. I could sense that small conflicts, opposition, and some form of expressed resistance were indeed needed in order for us to move forward in the group. These conflicts could not come too late in the day though; my experience was that if the members of the group left with negative emotions that hadn't been addressed properly, it would follow us like sour dough. The conflicting views or emotions had to be dissolved before the end of the day, so part of my worry was the timing that the disturbance arrived at the "right" time!

I remember one part of a particular group process; we really struggled to get into "something" that everybody felt was important, and I can still recall the feeling of deep satisfaction as I left that day. It was as if a kind of "mutualness" had appeared, quite outside of us; the process itself had come alive and somehow elevated us to a common understanding and increased awareness. We did not find "something", we expressed it as if it was the common intention and willingness to explore that was rewarding. I felt as if this was closer to the true meaning of why I enjoyed my work and was the next step in the right direction for me.

**Fluid minds**

I am struggling these days with getting out of the habit of "having the answer" or the solution, the prescription, to a certain problem or question. I am practising holding my impulses and *never* believe what people (or I, myself) say in the first instance these days. Not because they don't know what they are saying but because they know what they are saying right *now*—that can change very quickly in the next *now*.

Because we don't know what we will be saying in the next moment, I've come to think of us all as "fluid minds", capable of always thinking new, different, and fresh thoughts.

As I reflect upon this, I can now see where my aversion for employee satisfaction surveys and tests and too stern policies comes from. They imply that we will be thinking in the same way tomorrow as we do today. They may be useful as an indicator on the politics going on in the organisation, but they may also be self fulfilling, expensive to carry out, and fairly useless. We would be better off to encourage communication.

One powerful experience once led me to this fluidity idea:

While working with a theatre director, she did an exercise with one of my groups (I included). The exercise was ascribed to Keith Johnston, and I found it interesting as I had, many years earlier, received his book, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, from a friend.

We were told to walk around the room we were in and re-label everything in there (we were not told the meaning of the exercise). It should be done with some speed, however, and said out loud. As I and the others walked around in the room and assertively shouted "wall" to a cup on the table, "newspaper" to a chair, etc., I suddenly had this amazing experience of the room expanding and becoming limitless. There was no longer a room with walls there; they dissolved, expanded. I realised, as I stood there staring out to nowhere, that the labelling we ascribe to people and objects is what keeps people and objects in place! I was the only one who had that experience right then, and the director told me that I had experienced it as Keith Johnston meant it to be experienced.

In the using of "fluid minds" as an analogy of our ability to constantly change our thoughts, emotions, and actions, I can see that it gives an impression of separateness between the mind and the body. Thoughts, emotions, and actions are located as much in the body as in the mind. Indeed, the body may be a part of the mind. Why not a concept of "fluid bodies" in that case, and why, indeed, "fluid"? Why not "moving minds" or something along those lines. There have been experiments that have shown that merely *thinking* that we are putting a hand into a hot oven will cause the bodily temperature to raise a few degrees. The physical body can apparently be slightly altered with the help of our mind—but the body changes the mind too. It may form and be formed at the same time too.  I am becoming aware of the fact that there is some sort of preference (hierarchical) of the mind above the body, "mind over matter" as it is commonly expressed; I am not so sure any more that this is the case.

My understanding is that we are "relatively" aware (rather than unaware) and can always make provisional decisions, decisions that can be altered again and again. Through exploring, going further with the help of inquiry or questions into the issue, our awareness will increase, and we may find out what the "real" issue may be—if there indeed is one—rather than what was first stated. This means that I like the idea of working with an attitude of "dissolving" problems rather than "solving" them. By this I mean that the problem may take a sudden turn during enquiry and turn out not to be a problem at all (or someone else's problem) or a completely different problem, thus it is "dissolved".

"In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says or does." (Arendt 1958 p 179)

This is my experience; we are forever and always speaking about ourselves. Every utterance appears to be a reflection of us and who we are in that particular moment and context. We reveal ourselves as soon as we speak.

We also reveal ourselves to *ourselves* as we speak. As what I am about to say I cannot always be certain of—this depends on the situational context and how people are responding to me—what I am saying in the living, present moment can frequently be a surprise to me as well. This, I think, is the connection to the inquiring/coaching approach. With the help of questions, I can find out by myself about myself; my own thoughts and emotions around a particular issue or situation, as I am reflecting over them as questions, encourage reflection and reflexivity.

**Coaching and inquiry**

I much prefer the idea of *inquiry* or the English *enquiry* rather than *coaching* today (also due to the fact that I have started the DMan programme). It provides a wider perspective and is more incorporated with the every-days of worldly events rather than being a special "concept". Questions are a natural part of everyday life. And coaching is looked upon, and marketed, as a concept with specific rules and regulations. Indeed, it is probably harder for somebody calling themselves a "coach" to get coaching jobs these days if they are not "certified", another marketing concept and something that has appeared in the last years *en masse*. As soon as we conceptualize something, it implies borders to other areas and becomes another method for using in management.

However, one of my entrances into more inquiry has been the concept of coaching as I came across it some twenty years ago for the first time. I agree with Stacey (Stacey 2012, p 109) in that there are two "types" of the coaching approach: the one which is more instrumental and rational who will follow a model and step-by-step approach and a more "discursive" way. There are several coaching models on the market; the one most frequently in use and well-known is probably the GROW model (Whitmore) G=Goal, R=Reality, O=Options, W=Will.

It is a simple model and fairly easy as a starting point whilst learning to practise coaching. Keeping the model as a back-bone (as coaching is not entirely a free-form) whilst trying to listen to what the client actually *says* can be demanding to begin with.

Then there is the coach that works in a "discursive way" (ibid.), where the idea is to widen and deepen the awareness as to what is going on and what the real issue at hand is. This is the approach I have been taking during the last few years, finding that attitude is a tremendously valuable source of conducting my work. Because it is an *attitude* rather than a concept once you have made it more of a natural way of working and dropped the "models". Once the approach becomes freer and your own doing, you discover the importance of not mixing into the actual "issue" yourself. You need to stay as neutral as possible in order for things to emerge. However, today, after getting more into complexity sciences, I understand that I am fully involved in the process and never really stay "outside" of it. I believe that the struggle is to stay "with" the person (emotionally) and outside the issue at stake as much as possible. When I lose control of the temptation of getting into the jam jar and "help" the (poor) client, I am leaving the enquiring approach, thus becoming the adviser and in doing so consequently taking on more responsibility for "solving" the problem.

Stacey writes (2012 p 109):

> "The problem with coaching is that the coach will probably not have the kind of expertise which the client needs to develop."

My understanding is that this is the general idea with coaching and is even the strength with the approach as I see it. The coach should not have that expertise (a mentor may) but rather *stay away from the issue* and promote the client's thoughts and awareness around it with the help of inquiry and open questions. The problem with most people using coaching may actually be that they know too much of the area or the problem, thus doing much or most of the thinking themselves and internally and unconsciously trying to solve it—ahead of the client. Ideally the best is to find a coach that knows nothing about the line of work the client is involved in; then it is easier to stay outside the issue (although not staying outside the client's emotions, as you are always in the process together) and not be tempted to get tangled up in the issue and offer advice or try to manipulate the client with questions that will make them see what you "see".

I, myself, struggled immensely, when I started to learn and practice coaching. Habitual behaviour from a consultant those days was to have all the answers to clients' problems.

Once I understood the client's situation (or thought I did), I would go into problem solving mode and offer advice in how to deal with the situation. As this new approach meant no advising whatsoever in the learning sessions, I was very quiet to start with, trying to keep all my own inner assumptions about the solution at bay before I finally could start thinking more in terms of open questions.

The coaching approach hence means exercising a high degree of emotional control in the beginning; and exercising sensitivity rather than being emotional and keeping a close watch on your own thinking and assumptions. You may have solved the problem long before the client has (you believe), but after a few more questions, you will come to realize that the problem was something completely different to what you had in mind.

The best results from working with stressed out managers has been with the help of this inquiry/coaching approach during the last few years. Our thoughts and emotions towards a particular issue (because it is usually a *specific* issue one addresses) need "sorting out" now and again; we may get very muddled up sitting in our chamber thinking and talking to ourselves, and a few questions from somebody else can aid us in understanding how much of a worry this specific issue really is and how to deal with it in case it, indeed, needs dealing with. It is a way of helping each other to cope with worry and anxiety. This helps, providing the client is in an approachable (and thus coachable) mood—nothing but empathy helps if you are in a state that is highly tensed or in some sort of crisis. Here, I am using "empathy" in the respect of *going with* somebody's emotion and acknowledging the feelings. All kinds of feelings are the "right" kind of feelings; there are no "wrong" ones, although the actions they sometimes cause may be the wrong ones according to norms in that particular society. It is a question of "finding people where they are" emotionally in the Danish philosopher Kirkegaard's sense rather than trying to get them to where you are and into your own emotional state of being.

Several of the managers I work with are burdened with a kind of diffuse worries—not being at all sure what their worries are about or why. The worries can be all kinds of things and typically muddled up. A client a few weeks back said: "I have pressure from the board for producing more, pressure from employees who think I should be more "clear" about what I want or where we are going…my wife is mad because I am never at home" (which was a fact).

As we sat down to do some "sorting" in emotions and thoughts around the worries, it turned out that neither the board nor the employees was the problem, which I discovered as I asked for more "specifics" and for more emotion around the different areas. As I've understood it in our earlier sessions, his relationship with his wife was fine, so what was this about not wanting to go home? So we dwelled a bit around that particular issue. As it turned out, his father-in-law had been staying with them for a while, and he detested him. As he gradually became aware of what the problem *really* was—his emotions around the presence of his father-in-law and the guilt this implied—his face finally lit up. He didn't have to please the board more—they were already pleased enough; he didn't have to please the employees more—they were okay. And he did not have to get a divorce—apart from bringing the issue of his father-in-law up with his wife and "divorce" from him, things were actually all right!

From there we went on to talk about how he could address this matter with his wife and father-in-law in a practical way.

The turning point in a process like this—the moment the client becomes aware of what the issue may be—is mostly visible. You can see the shift in the face (in this case his face lit up) and in the body and even hear it in the tone of voice. People are generally experts on themselves; sometimes we just need the "right" or different kinds of questions. If a shift like the above does not occur, I will usually not consider the inquiry a success. One approach I may use then is to ask for more help from the client themselves: "What would the best question for you be right now?" They will often have an idea.

This approach helps the client to raise his awareness about the perceived situation, gaining more control and thus finding ways of dealing with it. Awareness is key, I believe, and it is sad that people frequently say things like: "I shouldn't have said that" or "I should have said/done that" or "Why didn't I say/do that instead".

We say what we say and do as we do. It makes us as perfect or imperfect as ever. We cannot say anything we don't say. Our awareness is always *relative.* If we don't get it, we don't get it. We are not "supposed" to get it then either…and if we get it, we get it.

Naturally, all situations are different, and a pragmatic view seems to me to always be the best; mixing and matching an inquisitive or coaching approach with mentoring and advising (particularly if dealing with inexperienced clients as they may genuinely not know what to do) is a must.

**Conclusion**

How has my thinking changed over time?

From the very beginning of my consultancy practice, I have been very eager to simplify things, thinking that complexity equals complicated!

Over the years I have become more aware of the difficulties in simplifying and of the straining in controlling processes and people due to them being "others", different, and objecting to subordinate their organisational needs, hence being very challenging and complex. Thinking and feeling in my early working life has certainly been of a fundamentalist character with a strong preference for thinking in terms of black and white and right or wrong. The understanding of us being products of our own thoughts and emotions and of the surroundings we are in, the specific circumstances, has been there to some degree, but the notion of reality actually emerging in relationships—in between us—and certainly does make much more sense to me now having started the DMan.

Paradoxes have been a curiosity, but my view today is shifting towards more of an understanding of them as a key element in understanding what we are immersed in and what we are doing when we are doing it together. The need for labelling issues and events as good or bad has softened, and I am more inclined today to think that nothing is necessarily good or bad—it is indeed pretentious and hard for anybody to be the judge of that. It is what it is, but it also becomes what it becomes due to our micro-actions and intentions that form the macro-reality. This does take into account our free will or our ability to act when we perceive something as fundamentally "wrong" according to the values we hold and are being formed by.

The "marinade" I have been in and currently am in—my particular, personal circumstances, the social environment I have been shaped in and am, in my turn, shaping constantly—has certainly been upgraded in my thinking when starting the DMan, mainly due to me reflecting on my background and early circumstances.

The notion of us creating meta- or macro- patterns through our local interactions has in the course of starting the DMan become very appealing to me. It has become clearer how interdependent we are; how I am shaping things and being shaped in the process simultaneously.

a/ I used to believe that I stood outside the process, was being "neutral" and shaped, influenced, and controlled it much more than the participants on my courses. Today I am as much in the process as involved!

b/ I used to believe that we are, as individuals, more or less equal in group conversations; we are all as powerful and are influencing outcomes by action or non-action equally. This non-action may be as powerful an influence as action is, as we are always in interplay with each other. Today this may be true in the idealised world, in the setting of power being balanced, which power never really appears to be. Our power is not the same, as we are constantly negotiating our way forward in different settings. The balance or imbalance of power can shift very suddenly and must constantly be renegotiated.

c/ I used to believe that we needed models, illustrations (I am still inclined to make "models" in my mind), for example a coaching model, a strategy "fishbone", etc. Today, as models are "labels", are they perhaps always deceiving, restricting, and too simplified? Do we *really* need them?

d/ I used to believe that I am the one shaping me first (the inside–out principle). When I have understood more of "me" and decided what I am valuing and thinking and want to do, then I can go out into the world and make a difference. Today I realize I am being created and create at the same time through socialising in my particular environment.

e/ I used to believe that we are all small parts of something bigger; we need to move from fragmentation towards wholeness and then gain some other sort of feeling. Today: What kind of feeling would that be? A deeper sense of belonging to anything greater than ourselves perhaps? We are always "whole" and in "wholeness". It is hardly anything missing; it is more a question as to how we make sense of the world and us being in it. Here is where communication enters, the use of language, our need perhaps for "thicker descriptions" (Geertz C, 1973 p 3–30) in what we are doing and how we want to go on doing it together in the organisation in the future, while finding additional ways of making sense of our perceived reality. The reason, I believe, for me being interested in different enquiry approaches is because this is the way forward in my approach to the different consulting experiences I am having at the moment; it helps with the sense making.

**To be further explored and the research question**

I would like to explore more of and make sense of what I am actually doing in my role as a consultant in complex environments that constantly change and thus give rise to resistance and disturbances.

I have now gradually come to better understand that sense making happens in relations and the importance of language and communication in that process.

As I today use methods that resemble what is termed Conversation Analysis (CA), I will typically "sit in" and take part in ordinary board meetings, paying some attention to what they are talking about "what can be said" (McHoul & Grace 1993, p 31) but having the main focus on how it is being said and how turns are taken in conversations typically restricted by the dominant discourse of the specific trade.

"Whatever constrains—but also enables—writing, speaking and thinking within such specific historical limits." (as defined by Foucault (McHoul & Grace 1993, p 31)

The enquiring approach has turned out to be a very useful tool as an entrance towards more openness and the development of the communication within the different teams.

The teams developing habits of conducting a mini-meeting about the meeting they just had with the help of questions, or having a conversation about the conversation, secures reflection, reflexivity, and thus a different awareness of how to go on together  in  the discomfort of feeling ones way forward dealing with complex organisational issues. As we are trying to make sense of the perceived reality we are in together, we are all in power relations in the process, more or less constraining or enabling.

I aim at looking into and exploring the disturbing and the uncomfortable as well as the dilemmas these qualities produce in my consultancy practice.

What am I actually doing, how do I find myself participating in such situations, and what am I really contributing in my role as a consultant in organisations today?

I would like to develop more of my understanding around issues of power and interdependency in order to explore my role as a consultant further, as I have worked in this trade many years and influenced people and been influenced at the same time.

As I and the environments I find myself in have changed over the years, how has my consultancy role changed? Does the consulting role today mean less of vision-, strategy- and goal-mapping and more of assistance, in sense making it how to play the everyday game at work, helping with awareness regarding everyday politics, addressing anxiety and worries, becoming aware of the game and playing the game? Am I assisting individuals and groups in making sense of what additional ways they can think and feel in a particular setting in organisations? What am I actually doing with a particular emphasis on how I find myself participating in disturbing and uncomfortable situations?

As idealizations are such a major part of organizational conversations, what would the gains be in moving out of this "idealised reality" and into "reality" (if indeed there are gains)?Why am I so keen on keeping up appearances in organizations? What is happening to me in the sense-making process as I perceive different and sometimes utopian realities? Does this breed contempt or disillusions? Or is it, in fact, necessary to idealise in organisations? Am I aware of my idealizing, or how can I become more aware as I speak out of my ideology? What is happening in me when I perceive other realities to be more or less idealized? The "otherness" of others?  What decides what reality is real?

By "idealised reality" I am referring to the things I assume I need to be doing in organisations in order for me (and them) to become successful. Activities like securing a mission statement, a vision statement, a business idea, a strategy, goals, a list of tactics, and activities, etc., and after all of this has been installed, we may look forward to a happy, glorious future. This make-believe reality may be one of the causes of a certain feeling of disjointment and discomfort in me and a great deal of high levels of stress and anxiety in organisations. On the other hand, how important is fantasy? Perhaps it is absolutely necessary.

Is it at all possible for anybody outside or inside the organisation to challenge the dominant discourse without being marginalized and/or thus being overlooked in (consultancy) jobs and/or promotion?

*The research question will address the following areas:* Unconsciously instigating disturbances or conflict in organisations: As we won't ever (as it seems) give peace a chance, one way of going further in my work would be to go further into giving "war" a chance. How do I contribute to "war-making" in organisations simply by speaking up? How do I find myself in conflict and resistance when I am aiming at creating honesty and openness? Is conflict necessary?

Can I move forward from a discourse of methods that aim at simplifying and idealising what I do and am doing together with my clients every day in different organisational settings into allowing reality to be as complex as it appears to be? Embrace complexity and try to find ways of working with the tension. This will create maybe one way forward, as in finding out more of how to move between consensus (a functionalized idealisation?) and conflict (a functionalised non-idealisation?) as a norm. Can we converse about conflicting views and values in a non-conflicting way? How may I instigate and participate in this as a consultant, and how do I find myself dealing with the tension, the anxiety, and the worries this evokes?

**Project 2**

**Working in the Bra community**

**Introduction**

As a follow-up to project one, this project continues to explore what it is that I find myself doing as a leadership consultant involved in management processes and leadership development, often over longer or shorter periods of time. In particular, I want continue to explore how we make sense of and generate meaning in organisational processes in order to move forward.

In this particular project, my approach will be to lay out two main narratives in order to exemplify what may happen in my daily practice of working in the "living present" in process consultancy. The two narratives occurred in the same organisation and contain disturbing and discomforting qualities. These specific qualities gave me an opportunity to explore and deepen my inquiry into how a sense of movement emerged in these particular contexts. My research method presents itself as a series of reflexive field notes in which I am transparent regarding the movement of my thoughts. Making this movement visible is a quality of my method as I aim to take my nearly thirty years of experience in business consulting seriously.

As I and the environments I find myself working in have changed significantly over the years, I aim to look at how we have moved and been moved with the times as we are in social processes of sense-making in organisational settings. I will explore how the consulting function is being taken up differently today by a growing community of consultants and argue that it involves less strategy- and goal-mapping than was the case in the early 1980s and more of a supporting, coaching "political" function these days, assisting in and advising managers how to act in the daily relations of power dynamics that we are all involved in.

This growing awareness of us all being in webs of interdependent relationships characterised by power dynamics where we enable and constrain each other may call for different competencies in consultancy today than those needed earlier.

When one entered an organisation as a consultant in the mid-1980s, the expected contribution would be to share one's specialist knowledge and assisting with the layout and design of business plans with a perceived planned outcome. This would involve setting up vision

statements, strategic plans and plans of actions that the management team had decided upon. The dominating discourse was one of predictability, control and a belief that the unruly movements of people must and could be controlled. As I read one of my old consultancy contracts from 1985, I find statements such as *"and we further expect you to help us find our core values, motivate us and make sure that we will come out of the session with a clear set of action plans that we can implement immediately."*

This indicates the kind of assumptions we held then: that I, as an individual and external consultant, was expected to help them find their "core values" as well as "motivate" them, implying a divide between the inside and the outside of the organisational boundaries and between "me" and "them". I was also expected to "make sure" that they came out of the session with a clear set of action plans. This nearly demigod status that was attributed to me as an external consultant implies an ability to predict and control the outcome and secure that all of this would happen.

**Management consultancy**

Management consultancy is a wide range of activities performed by different actors in different fields. It ranges from consultants working with an advising or lecturing approach in fields of specialised knowledge to more of a facilitative or processing consultancy approach. An advising approach may be within fields of strategy, finance, marketing and HR (human resources) in implementing specific management systems, for example "lean management", a set of tools derived from Japanese management that aims to increase effectiveness through identifying "waste" in the production line – that which does not to the maximal amount of "value" for the end customer.

Process consultancy may emphasise and facilitate the actual working processes in the workplace, thus using conversations over longer or shorter periods of time, encouraging inquiry and paying attention to how management concepts are being taken up in the organisation. The emphasis may be on enhancing a broader, deeper awareness and understanding regarding the daily realities and how movement occurs in the midst of these. This last approach to process consultancy may often spring out of a perceived need for regulating, directing and dealing with tension and worries that will inevitably occur as we cooperate and compete in the workplace.

The relatively "young" tradition of management consulting allegedly started in the late 1880s by Arthur D Little, a professor at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and was

driven by a demand for advice on organisational issues of resourcing and objectives and was thus of a technical character and built much upon similar approaches such as traditional schooling, where the teacher (management consultant) was the one with knowledge and skills that were then communicated to docile and receptive followers.

As the view of schoolchildren as empty vessels to be filled with appropriate knowledge has slowly changed, so has consultancy, and by necessity it has become somewhat faster as we are dealing with adults with extensive work and life experience in business settings. Adults may oppose the firm rulings of the expert management consultant and question the static quality of the knowledge being transferred, knowledge required in a completely different setting and context than the one it may now be applied in. The Japanese idea of "lean management", the effectiveness-driven (value-driven) concept derived from car production lines (Toyota), being applied at Swedish hospitals is an example of this.

My role and function has changed over the years and developed from an expert role within areas of "learning organisations", "leadership" and "team development" into more of an facilitator, organisational therapist, speaking partner, conversationalist, coach, mentor and deputy leader. This approach is highly invitational, built on assumptions that people working in a certain area dealing with certain issues on a daily basis will be the experienced and therefore "real" experts, provided that they are willing and able to attempt to take a detached view of the situation through reflection and reflexivity.

I am increasingly dealing with the "messy stuff": the unpredictability of emotions, worries and insecurities. The need for my services typically occurs when the ordinary leader or manager has neither the time nor the inclination to deal with the above as they may be busy with "taking care of business", which is looked upon as something other than dealing with the above. "Taking care of business" may typically be described as looking after finances, sales, marketing etc., all looked upon as separate subjects or "bodies" outside physical persons.

I help make sense of what actually goes on in the organisation, encouraging an understanding of the organisational games that are being played and how to play them. A contribution may consist of formulating and describing different and multiple "realities" and the tension these may give rise to. It may also consist of providing additional ways of seeing, thinking and feeling in particular settings in processes of constant change, with the resistances and disturbances that then may occur.

However, all authority, as in sharing expert knowledge, is not rejected in process consultancy but is of a rather new and different character. The content of the knowledge being transferred has changed, now involving issues of how to work and communicate together in processes with a high degree of complexity rather than knowledge regarding technical or organisational issues. I can sense myself balancing between advising clients and encouraging them to take account of their own personal experiences.

As an analogy, Dewey writes about what may be happening in traditional versus progressive education, "The problem, then, is how these contacts [of external authority] can be established without violating the principle of learning through personal experience" (1997, 21).

I address consultancy differently today than in my infancy as an expert consultant and find myself struggling with issues similar to the ones Dewey describes.

In using the two coming narratives as examples of the disturbing and uncomfortable situations I work in, I enter into deeper reflection and reflexivity in order to broaden my understanding regarding the "current times" we are in, drawing on descriptions made by, amongst others, Foucault and Norbert Elias regarding our evolving human history. I am interested in how movement of minds ("mind" being an activity of the body) occurs and how disturbances and resistances may be one prerequisite for movement.

I will attempt to draw a few conclusions as to what I am contributing in my role as a process consultant and how my particular experience in participating in sometimes unexpected and uncomfortable situations may be generalised and of use for people who find themselves in similar situations.

## The Bra organisation

Around 100,000 people live in the municipality of Bra, which is a fast growing community due to its convenient location close to the city centre of Stockholm with its own beautiful archipelago. It has received many awards in recent years for the "best municipality to live in", having the "best schools" etc. and is popular with young families as housing prices are still decent.

The city office leads and manages the municipal organisation based on the vision and the objectives the (current) political bodies formulates. The city office's mission is to provide the

city of Bra and all of its committees with the support and information needed to be able to assume political responsibility.

The office is lead by the city manager (mayor) and the directors responsible for the management of different processes and production activities in the municipality.

The municipality of Bra is organised into three types of processes. There are "main processes" – Building & Planning, Traffic & Roads, Care & Support, Recreation & Nature, Preschools & Schools, Family, Business & Work – that are directed towards citizens. In addition there are "supporting processes" such as Human Resources & Personnel, Economy, the Judicial Process and Strategic Planning. Lastly, there are a number of "controlling processes" designed to lead and direct the city council's intentions regarding vision and core values and to ensure that the overall goals are being met. The city manager (mayor) is responsible for the overall processes, including Objectives and Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation, Strategic Long-Term Development and Dialogues with the "owners" – the citizens of the community and the politicians. All these different processes in the organisation overlap each other in a giant matrix, bringing a lot of ownership, mandates and responsibility issues to its head.

Ethel, the new city manager (mayor) of Bra, brought me in to conduct a series of meetings together with a selection of the managers responsible for the "main process", the "supporting process" and the control functions in the municipality. The aim was to get them all together and to discuss any leadership issues that they might have.

The meetings took place over a period of six months, and it was clear from the start that the management team that Ethel inherited had not met as a group in order to talk very often under the former city manager. Most of the meeting time revolved around them taking the opportunity to solve practical and urgent issues regarding their own agendas and arguing with each other regarding the use of resources available. Issues of what they should be doing and how to cooperate in this were met with lukewarm interest. The meetings started out in a solitary and defensive note as they were in the habit of doing what the former city manager had told them to do, not doing a lot of "thinking" themselves. In the folklore of the organisation the former manager was portrayed as a "man of action", usually making fast decisions.

As the municipality had adopted a modern form of organisation, largely a matrix consisting of the different process owners' responsibilities cutting across the different disciplines, they were struggling to understand it, and hence, after solving the perceived urgent issues, the meetings were dominated by confusing discussions about the organisation at large.

There were some minor disturbances and tensions in the group as they opposed each other's interpretations of different issues, which we managed to navigate through successfully, but largely they tended to be overly polite towards each other.

They all seemed pleased with the program after our initial six meetings (of which Ethel participated in one) and I felt that we had done what we could have done given the circumstances, particularly considering that they did not know each other at all. They therefore remained largely in a "safe" zone and opened up to a degree comfortable enough to be talking a lot of the "organisation" and the "general culture" rather than dwelling too much on their *personal experiences* in working in the organisation.

Thinking back, I now sense that they *were* talking about their personal experience, perhaps not in telling of particular events but simply by talking. Saying what they did say, they were conveying the ideology and the culture of the organisation that they were engaged in a mutual process with. From a reflexive view, I can also sense that in perceiving them as being in a "safe" zone, my ideology and belief of them achieving better or greater things if they moved into an "unsafe" zone is coming through.

I was unconsciously pushing for more conversation around "personal experience", valuing this as something better or needed in order to move the process forward in this particular context. In my ideology, I detect a belief that we tend to switch to a more general mode when feeling uncomfortable in talking about our personal experiences.

As we constrain and enable each other in conversations, we may calculate whether certain risks are worth taking when talking into the unknown. If we imagine that there is a "right" way of expressing ourselves (and we also have listeners who are being governed by similar thinking), and if we are still unsure as to what the right way may be, we restrict ourselves to saying things that may appear abstract or impersonalised due to the anxiety the opposite may provoke.

Human communicative interaction is thus essentially predictable and unpredictable at the same time and so involves taking risks of being misunderstood and experiencing the anxiety this brings. (Stacey and Shaw 2006, 129)

In experiencing this anxiety, we may retort to social chitchat rather than talking about issues that are bothering us and thus risk losing support in the group as this might cause too much anxiety and challenge the status quo of the group. In order for organisations to function fairly smoothly rather than being too fragmented or anarchistic, we may all assume a similar way of thinking; we will attempt to find ways to fit in with the current dominant thinking in order to survive and be able to manoeuvre, influencing and being influenced in the playing of the daily "game". The game playing, according to the sociologist Norbert Elias, is our acting out of the figurations of power that we are in from the day we are born. As soon as there are two people, there is a power figuration at hand; it is a "structural characteristic of human relationships – of *all* human relationships" (Elias 1970, 74).

Sociology as a field of study may be distinct from other fields, such as psychology or biology, that study individuals rather than the figurations of power that interdependent people form and are being formed by. Studying figurations of power – as the subject of sociology concerns problems of society – may be a valid approach as organisations and organising are being formed and performed by oneself and other people together and thus form "society".

A year later, Ethel invited me to spend two full days with her newly formed management team. Half of the team consisted of those I had met before and the other half were new to me. One year had elapsed since I last met them and as I arrived, one of the main process owners, Judy, immediately said that she was happy to see me as I was a person whom she trusted to be able to take care of any disturbances that might occur in the course of the process. She told me that they had had other consultants in the newly formed team which had "stirred things up" and not been able to take care of or regulate those disturbances, thus leaving her and the others in a state of limbo and frustration. I felt a bit apprehensive as she told me this – even a bit like a hostage – as I felt as if she was telling me, "We trust you to take us through this process, and if you stir things up, you will be able to take care of them." I felt that in saying what she did, she wanted me to take responsibility for her *personal process*, what she was going to feel and how she was going to react when she got frustrated for whatever reason.

As we are parts of particular processes, as well as a global/universal process, we *are* really always responsible for each other's "personal process", whether we intend to or not, as we are always influencing and being influenced in social processes. My anxiety was stirred due to the expectations I felt she had. I felt restricted by what she said; I sensed resistance due to my belief that she was attempting to constrain my freedom to act in a way that I would see fit.

I knew that it was very possible that things were going to be "stirred up" anyway just by me being there. Although I did not mean to instigate conflict, I knew from experience that a very polite and defensive climate could easily be stirred up as some groups would defend their status quo which I, simply by being there, could prove a threat to. They would probably be thinking that, after all, the city manager had brought me in for some reason; she obviously wanted something to come out of the process, and what could that possible be? They would probably be speculating, as Ethel had said only that these two days were to aid the "change program" taking place in the organisation at that time.

In my pre-talk with Ethel I had initially remarked upon the size of the new management team; twenty persons, each one of the different process owners / directors of the different departments of the municipality. Ethel wished to eventually downsize the group and perhaps keep the larger constellation as an advisory board in the future, to be called upon at certain occasions, and keep a smaller cluster of people as an executive team. I agreed in her reasoning regarding this, thinking also that a twenty-member management team was a bit too large a group for her to have as closer confidants – and thus a hindrance to running the complex and diverse operations as effectively and smoothly as possible.

The reason we were gathering for the two-day session was that the earlier initiated change program had mainly been induced for political reasons, for necessary cost savings and for efficiency reasons. My client felt as if the gap between the managers' understanding of what they were going to do in order to initiate the necessary changes and what they were actually doing was too large and needed to be bridged somehow.

**The process – day I**

As the day arrived and the management team entered the light and airy room at the conference centre for the two-day session together, it seemed as if they just kept coming. It was indeed a large group. More than half of them were new to me, I realised. I had some slight trepidation in working with such a large group as the brief was to improve

communication and emphasise the *urgency o*f the change process that had just been "rolled out" in the organisation. There was a set agenda for the two days with each of the participant reporting how the change process was coming along in their specific department, as a number of sub-processes had taken place prior to the two-day event. I was initially to give a presentation, and then they would report on the progress of the changes in their department. Ethel wanted me to get them to "talk" more about the change process in general as she felt that they didn't take the proposed changes seriously enough and she was keen to establish more of a sense of urgency and action into the proceedings.

**A sense of urgency**

Ethel's brief to me was that she wanted them to "talk". In contradiction to what she was saying, I sensed that she wanted them to *act*, preferably without doing the talking. They were not acting in the "right" way as they were not getting the desired results. She wanted them to say and possibly list how to act differently.

We tend not to look upon talking or conversations as "actions" in themselves but rather as "merely talking", a means of transporting words or ideas to another person. The general assumption is that talking itself does not lead anywhere. This strong need for *doing* something, for producing something visible and/or tangible, may cause frustrations, particularly in meetings, as talking often is looked upon as an unnecessary or time-wasting activity as we spend time conversing rather than being "out there" acting.

Conversations are not visible; we can't see them. We can hear them, but the moment we have heard them, they are gone into oblivion, never to be heard or said again in that particular context or with that particular tone of voice. They escape us and can't be pinned down as certain actions that produce something physical. The alternative way of looking at this is provided by Stacey, referring to Mead:

> He [Mead] thought of one body making a gesture to another body where the gesture calls out, or evokes, a response from that other body. The response is itself a gesture back to the first body which, in turn, evokes a further response. What we have, then, is ongoing responsive processes, which Mead called *the conversation of gestures,* where beginning and ends are purely arbitrary. The conversation of gestures is temporal, social processes…. (Stacey 2011, 331)

Stacey is pointing out that the idea that I myself possess the meaning of the conversation, and politely sharing it, or rather trying to transfer it to another person (thus influencing them in thinking in *my* way), is an aspect of the dominant linear thinking, as "meaning does not arise first in each individual, to be subsequently expressed in action, nor is it transmitted from one individual to another but, rather, it arises in the interaction between them" (ibid).

The idea was that my brief would be about communication in general with an emphasis on a dialoguing aspect in order to try to stay away from too many fragmented opinions and end up in discussions leading into making judgments about right and wrong actions, something the group tended to get stuck in at their ordinary Monday meetings.

I did this by pointing out the opportunities that lay ahead of them as a team if they would let their guard down and open up with their perceived worries and anxieties with regard to being the perfect people creating the perfect organisation. We all knew that reality was quite another thing and it would be helpful if we didn't pretend otherwise. They listened politely and seemed to understand the general idea of the exploration – keeping the conversation open with the help of questions but without questioning as it could trigger defence mechanisms which could make it harder to move the conversation forward. The idea was more of "posing" questions – placing them in between us – as we were trying to explore, rather than having rigid opinions, which tends to close down conversations too early.

There was tension in the room, and after a direct question from me, they confessed that there was some anxiety going on as to the reporting of the status of the "changes" they were supposed to do. A few of them expressed that they had not really understood them all, they hadn't had enough time to do them yet, they were not prepared for this, they didn't know that they were supposed to present them NOW etc.

Ethel assured them in every way that this was merely a status report – saying a few words about how they were getting along in their respective groups with the process. This did not decrease the tension but rather fuelled even more questions and protests about the limited time frame, the stress it caused etc. I was trying to be helpful by pointing out that they did not have to be "clever" about all this – that they were perhaps overemphasising the importance of doing it "right" and "perfect" etc. In doing this, I now sense that I was taking power dynamics far too little into account.

This reporting was not to happen until the afternoon, but the discussion around the subject was already on. One of the managers suddenly stated that she refused to do it, claiming stress and anxiety about it all. As soon as the question regarding the reports (which had been on the agenda a few weeks already so she could hardly claim surprise over it) came up, she flew into flushed outbursts of irritation and anger. At one point she proceeded by giving a full account of her working week, what she had been up to, whom she had been talking to, what meetings she had participated in etc., and that she could NOT be expected to do this as well.

I was surprised and quite intrigued when this took place, thinking, "What are you doing? Your manager, who clearly stated weeks ago that he requires this report from you, is sitting opposite you right now, looking perplex – where is your self-perseverance?" She would certainly need to come up with a more convincing performance if she did not want to lose her seat in the management team, I thought. Acting in such an unguarded way in the face of power would hardly do her any good. Ethel's concern would be the running of the "business" as smoothly and effectively as possible, and bringing out such a *hidden transcript* (see p. 59) in the open, thus making it public, could eventually force Ethel into taking some sort of action. Ethel might be afraid of be seen as a "weak" or soft manager if she did not deal with what was brought into the open. She was, in a way, cornered.

> If subordination requires a credible performance of humility and deference, so domination seems to require a credible performance of haughtiness and mastery. (Scott 1990, 11)

This particular manager had, in hindsight, appeared to be highly tensed already as she arrived, so as the room grew quiet, there was a kind of mutual silent agreement to leave her be at the moment, thinking that she could probably not cope with more pressure right now.

Ethel´s way of mastering the situation was to do nothing.

> Power means not having to act or, more accurately, the capacity to be more negligent and casual about any single performance. (Scott 1990, 29)

A few people seemed uneasy about this sudden outburst, and there was still some coaxing to be done before the coming of the reports, but eventually they all did a brief presentation regarding the status of the proposed changes, apart from the woman claiming stress.

I now think that perhaps another way of moving forward together in this context would have been to curb my own need to satisfy my client (Ethel) and perhaps to insist that we enquire further into the situation. Our need to keep to the schedule made us push for the reports to be conducted and might thus have prevented us from deepening and widening the communication further. This insisting on keeping a forward view, making sure not to "get stuck" in reality, I sense is a remnant from the coaching technique I once learned, and in using this approach, we were skipping some important steps. There may be a need to stay in the situations that are causing resistance and enquire more into these to help with the sense making. Stacey talks about the "techniques" that foster and sustain the capacity for practical judgment: "Mindless action does not yield practical judgment; instead mindful action is required in which the actors reflexively think together about how they are thinking about what they are doing" (2012, 110).

The strong focus on "forward thinking" (futuristic approach or "desired outcome"), which the coaching technique shares with cognitive therapy methods, may be helpful for people stuck in repetitive patterns, unable to get out of the rut they have created for themselves.

Daring to stay in the unknown and the paradoxical requires some stability of mind and/or possibly a certain level of trust. Such a process may also need some guidance as habits often govern us, making us settle with too simple solutions. We were still stuck in repetitive patterns of communication in the management team; the pattern was one of free associations, a kind of collective monologues and statements, everybody speaking for themselves, out of their own insulated reality without paying much attention to other realities or what was being said.

I realised that I had been tainted by this "sense of urgency" that Ethel had brought up already in our first meeting. She needed the team to understand the importance of getting things done, and this urgent need rubbed off on me, mixing up the urgent perceived actions needed with perceived urgency in the *process*. I wanted to try to bring this process back a bit – the idea was to find out more of what it was that was blocking our understanding, what could be done in order for all of us to become more aware of what the best thing to do right now would be.

As Ethel and I talked that evening, I suggested that they perhaps needed more time to talk amongst themselves about different situations they encountered on a daily basis with regard to the change process rather than us pushing ahead with the schedule. To my relief, she

agreed to move forward in this way, probably in view of the disturbing performance of the stressed-out manager earlier in the day.

I now sense more of the full force of the restrictions I deal with in my consultancy role and practice. I would have behaved differently if Ethel had not been in the room. I would have acted more freely, opened up with asking them to share their emotions regarding the "change process".

**Mediating between Ethel and the group**

It is common for participants to idealise the consultant and the consultancy process. If the relationship between the manager and the group is of a weak kind, the group may project idealistic properties onto the consultant as being a "better" manager or leader, somebody that may help them get into greener pastures. As Ethel was in the group and had proven that she wanted to steer away from "too much emotion", worrying that it would halt and/or delay the process forward, I had to balance her emotional needs with the emotional needs of the group.

In this particular case, had I been alone with them, I would still have acted with Ethel's future status in the group in mind, but nevertheless I would have acted differently as the approach and the statements may be interpreted differently when a person of powerful standing is in the room. In doing this, I would have been drawing on my own professional experience (which is not Ethel's experience and cannot be – that is why she brought me in) to assist them in making sense of their own emotions in the specific contexts they were in at that particular moment.

Had Ethel not been there, the intention would have been: I am the deputy here today, carrying out Ethel's recognition of your work and the confidence she has in your ability to get through this new change process. This is why we have this particular process. I would have tried to ensure that they associated the time and space they had been given for sense-making to her, not to me.

Reflecting over and writing the above has enabled me to deepen my understanding and discover the agility and adapting that occurs in different consultancy situations as well as to explore my assumptions and intentions on a deeper level. My contribution in the consultancy process may be idealised, particularly in times of upheaval or tensions in the organisation where the consultant may be seen as the saviour, and/or I as a person may be seen as their

now new (albeit temporary) leader. This is a phenomenon I dealt with quite a bit when I started consulting.

The dilemma – satisfying the client and satisfying the group and myself as well – still exists and may always exist since the consultancy role contains many different aspects of relating: patiently waiting, bearing tension, suspending the need to interfere too much or to be "right" and mediating. I cannot do what I want to do unless the client is in agreement with me and is mentally prepared for the outcome of it all. Making the client "look good" is part of the consultancy relationship. If I make the clients "look bad" or deprive them of the sometimes glorified leadership role, I would probably swiftly be made to leave the organisation.

Being idealised as a consultant (or as a person), I sense, often gives rise to feelings of uneasiness, maybe in the light of knowing that the fall from temporary stardom will come. Consultants deal with all kinds of projections, idealisations and demonisations, as in dealing with life; it occurs in the power dynamics and game-playing as surely as if you are probably alive if you are not dead. This appears to be part and parcel of the constant struggle for recognition, love and rights when people get together and negotiate meaning.

Writing this has made me reflect more on the importance of me being in agreement with my clients. As I myself am a participant in the ongoing patterning of relations that I seek to influence or change, I can never rise above the politics of the organisation. As clients look for prospective consultants, so do consultants look for prospective clients. We need to resonate with each other; I need to sympathise with their perceived needs in order to be their "deputy". If along the way in our consultant–client relationship I detect values, ideologies or behaviours that differ significantly from those I hold myself, I will attempt to speak openly about it and ultimately leave the organisation if we cannot agree on how to move forward together.

Ethel – my main client in the Bra organisation – I like. I sympathise with what I perceive she is trying to achieve in the community. Our values resonate well as I perceive that she is trying to achieve "people's wellbeing", opportunities to influence and deal with the situations we may find ourselves in, in order to cope with life and work. This does not mean shunning the use of propaganda or manipulation as tools of "everyday politics" in the execution of the work we all are set to carry out, but rather that there needs to be a certain fit between our values before undertaking consultancy that might continue for a year or more.

My clients often become long-term business partners – and occasionally friends – as we work closely together to help us all deal with whatever emerges. Having too many conflicting views as to what is going to be achieved, what outcome we might be able to expect etc. may not be favourable for anybody involved.

In the beginning of my consultancy career, I entered into situations where there was sometimes a high degree of disagreement between my own values and that of the client. I was working out of some "improvement" ideology, an idea that I would be able to "help them reach their goals". Those times were a great learning curve, but today I am different, and thus my consultancy business and I am acting out of this different, but not necessarily easier, current perspective.

Thus the reason I would have behaved differently had Ethel not been in the room in the particular situation that was being played out above, was that I would have been freer to act out of what I perceived and judged to be in her (and the team's) best interest.

My sense – in the situation – was that she would not have looked at it this way.

She carried much more anxiety regarding the whole situation, and her feelings had to be accounted for as well. She wanted some "action" done, preferably something outright physical (action lists) or commitments to different behaviours etc. The gap between her and the group that I perceived I felt (at the time) could have been bridged more easily by me had she not been present. She now needed to gain more emotional information regarding the state of the group in order to become more aware of what was going on and how she could best contribute to moving the situation forward.

She had a set agenda; mine was a looser one, although the desired outcome appeared to be similar – raising awareness as to what to do if indeed there was anything to be done. My intentions would have been to act for her as if she were already in that place mentally, as if she already had the emotional information she would now have to be updated on, and thus would have made her "the star" so that the projections of the idealised leader would have stayed on her rather than being associated with me.

**The process – day II**

Moving into day two, I suggested that the team bring up questions that the group could benefit from exploring together right now; thinking that the stress issue from the previous day would come up and we would be able to have more of a neutral dialogue about that particular subject without too much reference to the "patient" before us.

As they asked for examples as to what kind of questions that could be, I suggested this could be all kinds of issues, for instance how it makes you feel performing under pressure with a lack of perceived appropriate information and perhaps an issue regarding the "size of this group". Maybe that could be something to venture into as it was a very large team; who should be in this management team and why? What was this particular group supposed to contribute?

As I mentioned the last point, I unknowingly stepped into a wasps' nest. The room basically exploded, led by Judy (who, I felt, had tried to take me hostage earlier). She stood up from her chair and screamed, "I will not talk about this! I will not listen to this nonsense. I will leave immediately. If we bring this question up, I will get on the bus outside and leave the conference and not come back and [towards me] you have destroyed this conference for me now. I will *not* talk about this!"

She did not leave, however, but sat down again in her chair and folded her arms demonstratively. Other participants mumbled approvingly and Leif, a traditionally attired man in a blue suit and a serious, formal approach, carried on: "Yes, I agree. I will not *tolerate* any more talk of this. We have been through this enough. I will also leave. This is quite enough of this and you are seriously disturbing me," he said in my direction.

Stunned, I watched this taking place. I could – in the moment – only stand frozen on the same spot. Intuitively I did some nodding in various directions. I watched the fear grow in me. I was sensing, "I am losing them. We had quite a good conversation going, feeling our way forward, and now I blew it completely. Why did I not understand that this must be a far too difficult question for them to deal with? Trust has not been established yet." Even further back in my head, I was calculating the time we had left, one afternoon, and there were still quite a few other items on the schedule to be covered. Would the time be sufficient to smooth things over? How could I do that? I felt I could not possibly let them out of the room in that state.

Particularly in view of what Judy had said earlier regarding the incompetent consultants they had had earlier, I would now go down in history as one of them. The bad feelings would linger in our minds. My imagination was running wild. He, Judy, would feel – however emotionally aware she was – that she had made herself ridiculous by letting out all that steam on a seemingly trivial issue. She would feel that I was the one who made her look ridiculous by suggesting the subject – the size of the group.

I was desperately trying to find a way to go on in the midst of this disturbance. My immediate survival strategy was to pretend that all of this was quite normal. I nodded intensely and grunted soothing sounds – as you would to a child or animal in distress – "yes, yes, don't worry, this is going to be fine" – more than anything soothing myself in the process. I really did not know what to say, so I said nothing.

As I shut myself down and tried to think in the situation, I can sense that I was struggling to find a way to respond. The reaction of the group had not been what I had anticipated, and I was therefore silenced (under threat) and silencing myself at the same time.

> So far as I can see, the individual is not a self in the reflexive sense unless he is an object to himself. (Mead 1934, 142)

Depending on the specific social process at hand, Mead means, there is a different self answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is not one ready-made self that one brings out into the specific situation but rather the actual complex responsive process that causes the "appropriate" self to emerge. I was unconsciously struggling to call out a response from one of my "selves" in the living present, feeling uncomfortable and trapped in the moment.

Pretending that this disturbance and turbulence that emerged in an unexpected and surprising way was normal and a part of the process that I had previously anticipated and designed makes me reflect upon two aspects:

Since starting the DMan, I have come to think of disturbances that may cause uncomfortable situations and emotions, as in the narrative above, as being "normal". They occur every day where people are negotiating their way forward, enabled and constrained by power relations. They may not, however, easily be recognised as "normal" in the discourse of control and predictability that the majority of organisational life is dominated by as they are *beyond*

control and predictability. Hence, disturbances and uncomfortable situations like conflicts or opposition may be suppressed in organisations keen on keeping up the appearances of having a satisfied workforce. Some of my clients today aspire to get into or stay on in a place on the list at "A Great Place to Work", an American concept currently growing in Sweden.

Excerpts from the website of "A Great Place to Work":

*Great Place to Work® is a global* **human resources consulting, research and training firm** *specializing in* **organizational trust**. *The Great Place to Work® Model is built on 25 years of research and data collected through our Trust Index© Employee Survey, which is taken by over 10 million employees annually worldwide.*
*Our data show that building workplace trust is the best investment your company can make, leading to better recruitment, lower turnover, greater innovation, higher productivity, more loyal customers and higher profits. Our model provides specific, actionable steps to get you there. While* you'll be the one to lead your company on this journey, *we can provide steady guidance from one of our 40 offices around the world.*
*Headquartered in San Francisco with offices in New York City and satellite locations throughout the country, Great Place to Work US* fosters *a multifaceted and multi-disciplined team dedicated to its mission of improving society by helping companies to transform their workplaces.*
*Our Leadership Development Program reveals how managers at the Best Companies create strong teams, shows you* how you measure up, *and provides you with simple tools you can use within your organization. (,* [www.agreatplacetowork.com](www.agreatplacetowork.com) *my* underlining *above)*

The claim that "*you'll be the one to lead your company on this journey*" through specific, actionable steps may be doubtful as it implies a single source of change rather than the social webs of interdependence and multiple intentions that we are in when enabling and constraining each other in power relations. The idea that A Great Place to Work "*fosters*" a multifaceted and multi-disciplined team implies that we indeed need fostering. We may need fostering into acting in certain, predictable ways rather than allowing multiple realities to emerge from local, self-organising interactions, drawing on Elias and Stacey. The "*how you measure up*" statement, I sense, may give cause for real anxieties and worries as this may emphasise the need for us to measure up to a certain standard, maybe comparing ourselves to other more successful participants in the competition, triggering more competition and thus contradicting the idea of "building workplace trust".

Searching deeper into the website reveals that of the two founding members of the company, one is a practicing Quaker, a Christian movement with an ideology based on a doctrine derived from a verse in the New Testament (Peter 2:9) – *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* – and that the other founder asserts that "Trustworthy leaders... typically follow a path she calls the Virtuous Circle which has six distinct elements: honor, inclusion, engaging followers, sharing information, developing others, and moving through uncertainty."

"Uncertainty" is the only label in the above statement one is supposed to be "moving through", which implies that it is something we cannot avoid but nevertheless need to "move through", whilst the other attributes – honour, inclusion etc. – we may "stay in", assuming a positive improvement ideology. The use of the word "honour" is interesting as it is placed historically by Axel Honneth as pointing to a fusion of two meanings: you were automatically moral if you were born into the bourgeoisie in pre-modern contexts.

> One's standing in society and one's status as a moral and political agent were fused typically, in the concept of "honour". Rights and duties were rights and duties of one's status group or "estate". (Honneth 1995, xiv)

You were awarded legal status on the basis of class privilege.

I would argue that this is one representative example of the dominating discourse of predictability and control in current management thinking – that one person alone, the manager or the leader – may be able to design and lead desired change programmes, that employees may be "fostered" and disciplined towards a certain outcome and that the outcome may be predicted providing one follows the said "steps" or recommended actions.

In keeping up the pretence of control in the management meeting with Ethel´s team – as if I were OK and able to deal with the situation at hand – I was unconsciously strengthening the dominant discourse of control and predictability where programs are designed, implemented and expected to produce a certain outcome. Ethel and I had already designed the process and the desired outcome, based on the assumptions that everybody involved in the process would agree with this and act as we had anticipated. As they did not act predictably, I was unable to deal with the situation and sensed a loss of power.

As the situational tension decreased somewhat, I was still struggling with uncertainty regarding how to go on. Eventually a manager came to my rescue by saying, "Well, Åsa didn't know that we have already addressed this issue a thousand times. She was being naïve."

I was a little disturbed by her use of the word "naïve", but now was not the time to be priggish, so I kept nodding and grunting in agreement. The group slowly relaxed and started talking about the tension this issue involved, how important it was to belong to this specific group, how they feared being excluded from it, how many times they had already covered this issue and even made a decision at an earlier meeting regarding who was going to be in this team, how they all really wanted to be there out of fear of losing out on important information.

I risked getting involved in the conversation again by hinting at the process at hand; what happened just now and did they feel the communication had changed from earlier in the morning? The atmosphere was quite transformed. They agreed that this is what it must mean to be in a dialogue; we are actually sharing feelings as well as our facts now. We are letting doubts come through also.

The self – as per Mead's – that had emerged in me in the process was now inviting the participants into what Stacey refers to as reflexivity-in-action, thus trying to enhance our capacity for practical judgment.

> Supervision and mentoring are at their most effective in sustaining and enhancing capacities for practical judgment when they take the form of reflexive inquiry into what they and those they are supervising and mentoring are doing together and why they are doing it the way they are. (Stacey 2012, 108)

Had we stayed in this phase longer, it would have been a good opportunity for me to open up more regarding my own disturbing experience and to encourage more inquiry around themes such as what is going on in ourselves right now? What are our feelings and thoughts? What do we make of all this that just happened?

I realise that I was projecting on "them" as not trusting enough in the process because it occurred the way it did. Then, of course, they were as trusting as they could be. I may have

been expecting a smooth process as being an ideal process; this uprising was likely an expression of them *being* trusting, only my expectations had been different. I, being on a semi-secret mission from Ethel, was severely restricted and had tried to herd them in a certain direction in order to close the process in time.

Ethel had been mostly quiet during the rising of the tension. I sensed that I would be the one having to take the "blame" for having caused this tension to occur. This may be a major part of being a consultant: increasing, decreasing and bearing the tensions that occur in the interplay of intentions in-between us.

"But will we *really* be talking about the size of the top management team again?" they asked Ethel, and she assured them that they would not. It was already decided who was going to be in the group, and it was the twenty of them, full stop.

She was soothing them back to normal, and they were visible relieved and possibly grateful to her for saving them from this unpleasant situation. They did not need to talk about it further. They were returning to the familiar, ordinary, repetitive pattern, and though I was relieved as well at having this dispute end, I also strangely felt a bit disappointed. I would have liked to go on and thus regain some power. I would have felt it more rewarding to move on into exploring this disturbance.

> Putting it in terms of "paying respect" to status, Hochschild observes, to have higher status is to have a stronger claim to rewards, including emotional rewards. (Scott 1990, 28)

Ethel had a stronger claim to reward as she had "saved" them, and she got her emotional reward: gratefulness. As I observed my disappointment, I was also, at the same time, thinking that to keep going now perhaps would merely be to keep a small, irritating wound open. I had to suspend my need for a deeper enquiry. Besides, part of my job was to keep Ethel "looking good", as she was the one who would have to face the consequences when I had gone and she was the one paying my fees.

Ethel and I glanced at each other, knowing that this seemingly controversial question regarding the size of the management team would probably have to be addressed much later, perhaps after trust had been better established. Even then, perhaps twenty persons would be the optimal size in this case. We would have to find out.

**Public and hidden transcripts**

James C Scott talks about *public transcripts* – what is in the open interaction between those who dominate and those who are subordinates – and *hidden transcripts*, as the public transcript is unlikely to tell the whole story about what goes on in power relations. According to Scott, there are three characteristics of hidden transcripts: they are context dependent, specific to a particular set of actors and to a given social site. They contain a whole lot of practices apart from language, like intentional foot dragging and payment evasions, and for the dominant and powerful, it can be luxury and privileges that are being kept offstage. Third, the borders between the two are a "zone of constant struggle" (Scott 1990, 14).

The "glancing" between the consultant (me) and Ethel (the powerful boss) was a visible action of a hidden transcript and contained a mutual agreement between us to avoid the question regarding the size of the group right now. As we had the agenda and the power to change it as we saw fit, and as we both recalled the conversations we'd had with each other in pre-meetings, we were both being governed by the "rules" we had agreed upon earlier. She knew, for instance, that I would compromise my professional values to a certain degree when I saw or heard things during our work together without stepping in and risking our relationship. I was not likely to publicly contradict her (unless this was not a part of the process and she was in agreement with it); she could then use her power to get rid of my services. I, on the other hand, knew that she had hidden agendas regarding a few of the people in the management team, some doubts concerning their future capacity and their ability to perform under pressure.

> The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. (Scott 1990, preface xii)

There were clearly other powerful people in the room too, busy playing out their intentions in the situation that arose. The outburst, represented by Judy, may be looked upon as an act of resistance. Hence, the situation was highly unpredictable.

*Conflict*

The nature of us, our selves, has throughout history been speculated on and researched about. It has been rationalised and romanticised. The eternal questions – why are we here, where do we come from, what is the point of life and what is the nature of human beings – have

perhaps come to mean something different in our time than they did during medieval times. As Hegel claimed that our need for recognition inevitably leads to social conflict, and Machiavelli and Hobbes both made subjects (us) struggle for self-preservation, Axel Honneth writes in "The Struggle for Recognition" that they considered "the ultimate purpose of political practice to be the attempt, over and over again, to bring a halt, to this ever-threatening conflict" (1995, 10).

Is it our eternal struggle for recognition, love and rights that causes social conflicts? Besides, what is a conflict if not social? As we are social through and through, so must conflicts be, as they are "us", and they emerge and are being created at the same time as are organisations and society.

If we attempt, as Honneth is suggesting above, to bring a halt to this ever-threatening conflict, and these fundamental needs (love, rights, recognition) are our strongest driving forces, avoidance and the need for early and fast closure of any situation resembling a brewing disagreement is apparent and understandable.

These disturbing situations may be perceived as threatening the very cores of our existence. They may be not only slightly uncomfortable but also, to some extent, a sense of a matter of life and death.

**The story of Curt**

Sometime later, one of the managers working for Ethel, Leif, invited me to deal with a situation that had arisen in one of the departments that reported to him and he was overall responsible for.

The department had a rather troubled history regarding managing, having had three sets of different management over the last five years. Curt had only been there about a year, and already emotions were running high as two people had resigned with more people threatening to, and the yearly "employment survey" had come out with highly doubtful results regarding his leadership.

Leif wanted me to give Curt support in this situation and work with him and his team.

I started by conducting interviews with everybody on the team. I wanted to get a feel for the situation by talking to them individually. I was prepared for all of the team members being negative and projecting everything on Curt. This, in my experience, is usually the case if a

team–manager polarisation has occurred. They were going to say that it was his own fault that he got bad results on the survey, that he was a bad manager etc.

Instead, I found myself facing people whom I felt sorry for. The situation was worse than I had been led to believe. Leif had implied that these were "seasoned people". I found them tired and resigned, feeling that earlier complaints regarding the situation they were in had not been taking seriously.

The picture they painted was not nice regarding Curt's behaviour, with stories such as "getting mixed up in all processes", "changing his mind as we speak into something that is going to be impossible and twice as expensive", daily harassments (including sexual) and open power play, "remember, this may end up on your payment slip", an extreme need for control and constantly reminding everybody who was in charge.

Stacey makes a distinction between polarised and explorative conflicts. Polarised conflicts are the situations which we have come to regard as ordinary "conflicts" where we take up opposing positions and end up in power struggles where one "wins" ant the other "loses". Drawing on Mead, Stacey emphasises the explorative conflict to be one of negotiating and conversing "in which people explore how to interpret generalizations and negotiate different interpretations with each other to make them particular" (2011, 358).

I wanted to bring more of the conflict into the open in order to transform it from polarised to "explorative".

The team process started with us intending to talk through the different issues in the survey. Curt insisted on starting the process through addressing the team himself and thus "setting the tone". He said, "In the survey, you are all saying that you do not trust me. Well, I do not trust you either." Then he sat down and proceeded to sit in the same position for the next two days. He was interacting by not interacting, paying little or no attention to what was being said in the room.

**Improvising**

I had to be as open and honest as I could without alienating Curt from the group. They all appeared uninterested, almost sedated. I told them why we were there (the survey) and asked questions about the climate of openness and cooperation in general.

During the course of the process, one of the participants was coming in late (again) after the break and another person got some heavy feedback from a colleague regarding an issue that had taken place earlier in the morning and got up to "get some water", visibly sad and disturbed. I decided to risk it and address these issues head on. "How do you feel about xxx being late again after break? Is this okay? Do you not mind, or what are you thinking? And what about xxx getting water? We can all see that she is crying. What do you think or feel about that?" I immediately got their attention, and there was a moment of what Scott refers to as "political electricity":

> Finally, I believe that the notion of the hidden transcript helps us understand those rare moments of political electricity when, often for the first time in memory, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power. (Scott 1990, preface xiii)

The group responded well after this – possible seeing me being there as a chance out of this – and did try their best given the circumstances to be as open as they could without risking being fired then and there.

They tried to help Curt – whose attention had been aroused a bit more by now – by being specific regarding the issues they brought up, but nothing they said was well-received. He argued every case, claiming "unfairness", and even at one point, caught off-guard, behaved in a rather threatening way towards one of the girls.

"There," he said when he walked me out, "you see what I have to work with – idiots. Especially Maria. I am having a major problem with her. She opposes me far too much. I am going to clarify who is the manager here." He said this in such a malign way that I felt a sting of fear. Maria had been the bravest in the room that morning; she had tried to pose sensitive questions to him and pointed out the effect that a certain decision earlier in the week had had on a group of schoolchildren visiting the premises.

The fear in Curt seemed to grow, and he was not prepared to receive any of the feedback that was being offered or change anything about his management. It was all them (the team) who had got it wrong, he said.

In the following two team sessions, it became clearer for the team that the situation was not going to change. We did our best to try to help him but in vain. Next, the team members proceeded by writing down everything he had said to them and when: the condescending and

outright sexist declarations, the sneering and the constant changing of plans making their work impossible. They did this knowing full well that they were at risk of losing their jobs. They presented the list to the unions and to Leif who immediately called me up to his office demanding an explanation.

I explained that my sense was that there was nothing wrong with the group apart from "ordinary differences" but that those small schisms were not on this level. This was something different. In fact, I was thinking that it would probably serve Curt better to leave this situation as it could escalate even more since he did not seem to be prepared to listen and showed no signs of minimising his defensive reactions. I was starting to sense that he might have a psychological problem. Leif was a bit taken aback – as I had been – that the team was not to blame for not receiving him properly or giving him a fair chance. He was, however, not easily influenced. As the recruitment of Curt had also passed through him, having the last word in it a year earlier, he experienced a double loss – first of being part of a badly conducted recruiting process (if indeed it was) and second for having to act in this situation, hotter by the day, which by now had made three people leave.

As he started to look into the recruiting process, it turned out that the recruiting officer had not checked up on Curt's background (he had a psychiatric history) or called the references. Curt had been "a nice and verbal person", so he had felt sure that this was going to be a true success.
Curt was made to leave the organisation immediately.
As I continued my work with the team, I was no longer restricted by Curt being in the room, and Leif, the manager, had given me full authority to act as I saw appropriate in order to "install security" back into the team. We were reasonably free to act into the unknown, and hence the group developed a high level of honesty which helped them deal with "older" issues as well.

Regarding the issue of teams often projecting idealised properties onto the external consultants, this case was in contrast to the one described earlier regarding Ethel and her management team.

In this particular situation, I was to lead the group into a state where they were prepared to accept A) aligning with their manager and each other, B) being without a manager for a few

years if needed, and/or C) accepting and further welcoming a new manager as someone would (eventually) be recruited.

In this specific context, the feeling was one of me entering into the situation and saving them. The idealisation of me being in that particular process with them was open. They would express, "This is great to talk like this, I wish you could stay here with us as our manager forever," which we laughed at and got some good conversations out of: "When I am gone, how will you support each other and whoever will be recruited in keeping a continually open process?"

## Conclusion

As the narratives indicate, the "body of working tools" I may have as a consultant, the use of my senses, my body, my experience and various management techniques, was applied differently in these two example process consultancy situations.

Mainstream contemporary management literature rarely addresses uncertainties or doubts that arise when working in the living present. If they are dealt with, it is typically under the notion of "*Managing* stress or conflicts". But how do we go about working in and "managing" the unmanageable or controlling the uncontrollable? Situations typically arise that cannot be foreseeable, predicted or controlled.

In taking experience seriously, "coming to know" involves methods of "operating on the world", according to American pragmatist John Dewey (1984, *The Later Works 1924–1953*, intro xi) and thus places practical judgment in praxis or action. Out of praxis, we may refine practical judgment and come to know how to act into a certain situation.

*Improvisation*

The generalisability of the narratives is in the improvisational approach that takes place in process consulting today rather than twenty years ago. At that time, there was a stronger belief in following certain laid-out procedures and recipes for successful management practice, step–by-step action guides that would lead us towards the desired results.
As this did not occur, resentment grew, and new and different approaches surfaced, for instance the strong use of metaphors rooted in sports ("peak" performance, going for the gold etc.) or theatre (the gestalt approach etc.), which eventually lead to more of an understanding

for "situational" approaches as everything depends on the context. Thus, I find a more improvisational stance useful when working in fresh and current situations.

An improvisational approach may demand different sets of skills than those traditionally taught at business schools.

The function may be one of a highly sensitivity or sensible (as in using the senses) approach in the face of context and a rather pragmatic view, making do with "what there is" rather than attempting to introduce novel management concepts that may not be taken up as they may be perceived to be too far away from reality, too idealised.

> With *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Simon & Schuster; 1990), author Stephen R. Covey became the unabashed champion of personal management. A dozen years after its publication it remains on bestseller lists – with more than 10 million copies sold. The real wonder is why, despite so many people having purchased the book, the average guy is still no more effective today than he was a decade ago. The book even gave rise to a public company of its own, FranklinCovey, "an international learning and performance solutions company" with 2001 sales of $525 million. (Forbes.com 2002)

Idealised concepts with a strong Christian or evangelical ideology (Stephen R Covey had roots in the Mormon Church) – of which there appears to be quite a few in the management market – may alienate people and cause feelings of guilt and shame as we may try and eventually feel unable to take up the teachings of the *"Seven Habits of Highly Effective People"* (1. Be proactive, 2. Begin with the end in mind, 3. Put first things first, 4. Think win/win, 5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood, 6. Synergize, 7. Sharpen the saw) in order to produce the ideal, desirable person. Some of these statements may be of interest from a philosophical point of view; however, paired with "Weekly Worksheets", it ventures into improvement schemes, thus implying that we need to be improved.

Abraham Maslow is once supposed to have said, "When the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail". A growing need for different approaches in talking and working together implies a need for a broader set of "tools", including abilities and properties not traditionally linked to idealised management concepts rooted in belief systems or ideologies that cannot or must not be questioned.

Current approaches may encourage a broader, deeper understanding of uncertainty and complexity, an awareness of the feelings of being overwhelmed that people may experience when looking at or listening to news regarding the state of the world, and how we tacitly enable much of what we may fear out of habitual thinking and acting.

The events that cause our identities to emerge are of a different kind than in medieval times, and as we pay attention to other things today, it causes our ideologies to shift as "identification is an ongoing social process" (Honneth 1995, 96).

Consultancy practice has largely been shifting from one-way communicative delivery out of the expert position into processes that are aimed at dialogues and multi-level inquiries and at becoming more conscious of our own practice in relation to others as we are depending on each other.

However, engaging in processes and encouraging more reflexive practices may also be disruptive and destabilising and may cause anxieties in groups.

I find myself struggling with different approaches, no longer getting the recognition I got earlier when I "delivered" something the client would perceive as valuable, something more tangible – prescriptions and recipes for action plans. Part of the struggle is in finding an adequate and appropriate way of describing what it is that I am attempting to do together with my clients and why – to find a voice and a language.

The emotional exhaustion that we may be experiencing today in organisations and, as an effect, the sense of reduction of personal and professional accomplishments are looked upon as problems concerning the individual and his/her ability to cope. This is an expression of the influence of the Enlightenment movement beginning in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century in Europe, when individualism rather than tradition was being emphasised, thus moving away from the understanding of individuals as being entirely social and, in drawing on Elias (1991, 23) society-specific, carrying with us the past that informs us of how to think and act out in the present where we are always co-creating the realities we find ourselves in.

These tensions and struggles may, however, serve as generators of structural changes in society; they may propel us forward and never be reproduced in exactly the same form in different generations.

I find Elias's description of August Comte interesting, taking into account the times he was in, referring to "law" regarding certain sequences of types of thought that would be understood more readily "if the development of thought structures in a certain direction is itself seen as an aspect of the development of social structures" (1970, 45).

Awareness of power dynamics and the social processes that are being played out in the web of relations that we are in – consultant, management and teams – may be a part of the social structures of sometimes troubled and disturbing situations we encounter as we compete and cooperate.

Some themes that emerged for me in writing project two and to be further explored in entering project three are:

- How radically social we are and how conditioned this makes us. We were born into this already existing social setting and are enabled and constrained by power dynamics. I will be exploring more of this conditioning from a process consultancy perspective. I find myself enabled in a much more constrained way than earlier, never free or outside of any process.

- The improvisational approach in consultancy – how moving from idealised reality into reality may also be an idealisation – our ability to be reflexive is formed by habitus (Bourdieau) and is thus limited to being a "game inside a game" – and how the consultant may enquire into the gap between the two realities as a way forward, a craft of bearing and holding tension and paradoxical thinking, attempting to regulate it towards workable situations.

- How process consultancy is being taken up today rather than thirty years ago, as identification is an ongoing social process that develops the social structures we find ourselves working in. How self regulation occurs as our degree of self control has increased over time due to longer chains of interdependency, and also how this (paradoxically) has the effect of individualising – if you do not exercise this

regulation in forms of self-control, you are a "bad" or weak person and should be ashamed of yourself – all this being a social process but felt by an individual which leads to anxiety and depression. It makes me think that "shame" could be an interesting aspect to explore further, and it also spurs an interest in the ideologies behind avoidance, not recognising feelings of anxiety or shame.

- Development of social structures: what actions or attitudes may enable or constrain the development of these as resisting regulations and control and maintaining a sense of freedom, as in how we take up rules – or not (generalisations that are being particular) does support the idea that oppression may be a form of resistance.

**Project 3**

**Working in the Star organisation**

**Introduction**

Project three continues to explore disturbing and uncomfortable situations from my consultancy practice with particular emphasis on making practical judgments in action and how this affects issues of identity, identification and identity formation. Disturbing and uncomfortable situations arising in and between people attempting to negotiate meaning and work together will usually be avoided, neglected or suppressed in a discourse largely dominated by predictability and control (Stacey, 2012, p. 1) as is common in business today. Tense situations may contain valuable information and clues as to what it is that we may be avoiding and why, thus allowing us to explore marginal discourses that could enhance our capacity for taking up new or different meanings and understandings.

One additional theme that emerged for me in writing project two is how leadership consultancy is being taken up today versus thirty years ago, when I started consulting. As identification is an ongoing social process (Honneth, 1995, p. 96) that develops the social structures we find ourselves working in and these, in turn, form us, I aim to look into this from a general theory of action – complex responsive process – view drawing on Stacey, Griffin, Mowles and Shaw (going back to Hegel, G. H. Mead, Elias, Bourdieu and Foucault, amongst others); how are my clients and I being formed and forming current processes of consultancy, and how may these movements be influencing and shaping social structures and identities emerging today, as I am arguing that "managers and consultants are themselves participants in the ongoing pattering of relations that they seek to change." (Mowles, 2011 p 8)

The approach will be the layout of a narrative which takes place in the Star organisation.

I will follow in the tradition of Aristotle and concern myself with practical wisdom or *phronesis* (Stacey, 2011, p. 56), thus examining how generalised management visions and strategies are being taken up and particularised by me and the people I am working with.

As consultancy today means more of processes of improvisation and judgment in action rather than the rolling out of ready-made management concepts (as addressed in project two),

I will explore how this basis of judgment may be formed and forming in the exchange of ideologies arising from continuously reiterated identities between people involved in relations of power dynamics and struggles for recognition, love and rights. Our "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 52) – the unique structuring dispositions we have been born into and gather through practical experience of functionality – are the backdrop for intentions, attentions and concerns that form our "sense of self" or identities. The norms thus arising from these social structures may both enable and constrain us at the same time. As I am playing a game within a game (Elias, 1970, p. 1), I am constrained by my own contingencies and have to – within these limitations – make assumptions myself. However, these are being checked by my peers on a regular basis and may be validated only to the extent they may make sense to a larger community. Elias introduces the idea of "the game" as a way of pointing to the interdependency of people and how power is a relational phenomenon: "People or groups that have functions for each other exercise constraint over each other" (Elias, 1978, p. 7). Hence they "need to respond to each other's gestures" (Stacey, 2011). The pragmatic sociologist George Herbert Mead and his ideas regarding the conversation of gestures lie at the heart of complex responsive processes (Stacey) and identity formation. Mead also stressed the social character of perception; our first encounters are social, and we are being born into social settings, with parents or caregivers, and into communities.

Consultancy practice is taken up differently today, from the carrying out of given assignments and using static models, to increasingly acting – consciously and unconsciously – as "political tools". Acting as a political tool means using the circumstances that are emerging and being used in the same when we are feeling our way forward in the organisational game. We could be labelled as *zoon politikons*, or "political beings", to use a term derived from Aristotle. Arendt later translated this into *zoon logon ekhon*, referring to the role of speech in politics, the central activity in the *polis*, the political body in ancient Greece, as opposed to crude (barbaric) action as in the pre-polis times (Arendt, 1958, p. 27). Today, however, we would consider speech as action in itself. We are in the game (Elias, 1970), and our ability to secure inclusion in organisations and society may depend on how well we are able to play it.

**The Star organisation**

The Star organisation and I already had a brief history together. About three years prior to the main event – my working with the management team – the following had occurred:

I was asked to provide a proposal for a leadership training program. The HR team in charge of the tender liked the layout of it and wanted to go ahead. They told me the proposal had to pass through one of the senior project leaders first (he had insisted on this); otherwise he might be working against it. With his perceived history of obstructing changes, it was felt that it would be advisable to try to win him over to our side. In this short introduction, they had clarified the rules of the game (Elias, 1970) we were going to have to play if we wanted to secure the carrying out of the leadership programme. His position was important in the organisation, overseeing large infrastructural projects of which he was in charge more or less singlehandedly. HR had recently given him this position in the hope that he could do the least damage there, the HR team explained, as his handling staff in his earlier position had been disastrous, and after much complaining and negotiating, he had been transferred to this particular function instead – senior project leader – which in reality was a more senior position within the organisation although he did not have people directly reporting to him.

In the meeting that followed the line-up were myself, two HR representatives, one leadership strategist and the director of communication.

The senior project leader was a large and loud male, and the rest of us were all female. He seemed to be using every trick in the book to intimidate us through displaying different "master suppression techniques" (sometimes called domination techniques), a term coined by the Norwegian psychologist and philosopher Ingjald Nissen and further developed and popularised by another Norwegian social psychologist, Berit Ås. These are defined as strategies of social manipulation; the idea is to indirectly suppress or humiliate opponents.

> Males may clearly reinforce and maintain male privilege by their use of space and language. Males may also assert power and expect to be treated more favourably than females. In some situations, men may express their resentment that women are there at all, stating that they are "taking a place away from a man". It is not only inequalities of power that leads to domination techniques, but a conscious or often unconscious sense of entitlement to privilege. (The Centre for Gender Equality, Norway, 2001)

After initial greetings he gave a lengthy account of what a leadership program should look like and what issues it should address. None of this was in my proposition. In fact, I started to wonder whether he had read it. A coaching approach was nothing the organisation needed either, he said, as he already had a coach once and knew about "all that". The rest of the team

(I kept quiet mostly) were struggling to get into the conversation as he ridiculed what they said or brushed it aside, claiming it was "irrelevant". The room grew increasingly quieter by the minute as nobody challenged the assumptions being laid before them.

This quite overpowering behaviour may have been a resisting act directed towards the representatives of the HR function as they had been the prime executors in stripping him of personnel earlier. Although he had, at the time, claimed to be satisfied with that, there may have been ambiguity involved, with him not feeling competent enough to handle personnel issues. The whole setup with the HR representatives, the strategist, the communication manager and me may have been highly anxiety provoking and identity threatening; there were five of us, he was alone, and the HR people had removed him from his last position due to communication issues, which may have increased his anxiety as the person responsible for communication in the organisation was present and the proposal was geared mainly towards leadership communication improvements. He may have felt compelled to clarify his power ratio in this new game being laid before him, being technically more powerful now in his new position. If he identified himself as someone notable to communicate very well, he would not be likely to sanction a programme aimed at improving communication that might have posed a threat to his current identity. If he indeed were generally inclined to such open demonstrations of power or felt that he had a conscious or unconscious sense of entitlement to privilege, the HR team and the organisation had enabled it by promoting him.

Instead of dealing with difficult behaviours and uncomfortable situations in organisations, one strategy may be to move people around and even promote them, claiming that the new position is of more strategic importance etc. The senior project manager was having communication issues in dealing with staff and was – in a sense – rewarded for having these by being promoted into a higher-status position with a higher pay check. These movements were, no doubt, interpreted by the rest of the organisation in many unintended ways. The easiest route had been to free him from staff responsibility and give him the juicy projects instead – HR wrongly thinking that he would not have to communicate and relate to the same degree in this position. The effect had been a decline in business projects instead.

I sensed anxiety and insecurity in the small planning team and in the senior project leader. The power play that had been on show in the meeting may have been a defensive action, a need for recognition in the "new" role he had not consciously chosen to play himself but rather been forced to accept. He may not have intended to silence us, but this was the effect.

The following day the brief came from the HR team that they were not able to go ahead with the programme as planned as other "changes were coming up".

I had already assumed that this would be the outcome in view of what had happened and answered the e-mail, wherein I described my feelings regarding the demonstration of power I felt had been acted out and my understanding of the difficult situation I sensed they were in. The largest and most important projects in the organisation rested on one particular person (with perceived communication issues); what would happen if he was taken ill? It was highly unlikely that they would get his consent (unless they did not bring him into the design team of the program, which would be a conscious political action from the HR team). But if they ever did get consent, they were welcome to pick up where we had left off.

I was thinking that the decline in business they experienced may also have been due to the disrespectful behaviour that had been on show at the meeting, where the prompt disregard of the work the HR team (a full month) had put into this project was made unaccounted for. There may have been a pattern, a consenting social structure, which tacitly enabled him to continue to behave in this manner.

**Three years later**

They did pick up the thread about three years later, now with the senior project manager replaced with a "people person" in the function. There was also a new MD in place. The HR team felt that he could do with some assistance in developing the management team after having been there for about two years.

I was briefed regarding the eight people that constituted the management team, and they lingered in the description of Petra, head of the judicial department, which was central for their business as it handles many legal processes aimed at obtaining concessions and permissions to carry out the large infrastructural projects. She seemed to have a history similar to the former senior project manager, by now gone, of not being capable or willing to deal with or communicate with staff, and she had thus also – in a similar way – been freed from all of those personnel duties to concentrate solely on the judicial processes, obtaining the all-important concessions and permissions needed. The new senior project leader held most of the operative business in his hand and had taken over the personnel from Petra and was successful in running it all, mainly owing to his ability to delegate and trust staff to execute what was needed. However, his workload had increased significantly with this reorganisation.

The circumstances under which I entered into this project had been my being frank in the e-mail regarding the difficult situation concerning the old senior project leader. This had made them reflect and eventually deal with that issue and also given them high hopes regarding my ability to solve a perceived similar problem now: the "Petra issue". As this was flattering for my professional identity, I had a momentary sensation that I was not going to let them down. I was going to do this for them, show them how it was done. After all, this was what they had brought me in for. Their view regarding the problem seemed clear enough to me, and I set out to gain my own impressions of the situation and execute their will. I was aiming to help HR solve a problem.

**Problem solving**

Coming into consultancy practice in my mid-twenties, my professional identity became one of a competent person able to solve problems. Thirty years ago consultancy was highly dominated by taking care of problems the organisational groups had and carrying out the appropriate work these problems gave rise to by solving them. The briefs regarding the problems or disturbances that had occurred would, at the time, come from the personnel departments (later replaced with the term "HR"), and the consultant would rarely have direct access to information from the responsible directors or anyone else who was supposed to participate in the seminars or training programmes that may have come about. The organisation had already mapped out its perceived needs and wishes in internal conversations, often with an instructional note from the directors, and thus – owing to power relations – it was the will of the manager of the specific department that was supposed to be executed. The personnel department had an administrative and translating function rather than making their own analysis about what was going on and what might be done. The process would typically be a manager encountering some problems in his/her relation to the team, thus needing a consultant that would (briefly) enter the organisation and tell them – the seemingly obstructing team members – all about their wrongdoings and lay out the "correct" way of cooperating and communicating. This would preferably happen in an inspirational, lecturing way. There was room for questions and answers but rarely room for deeper conversations or opposing views. Conversations and dialogues were often regarded as a waste of time, as in "we have access to this inspirational consultant for two days only, let us not waste the consultant-expert's time by talking ourselves during these days". Hence consultancy was highly performative, with a strong sending-receiving approach, lecturing and occasional exercises. The exercises may have been informative and provided certain insights,

but they were rarely reflected upon or talked about at any length as time was of the essence. Emerging insights were thus hard to contextualise in a way that might have provided deeper reflections or knowledge of the patterns that were being co-created in the organisation, how we were forming and being formed at the same time. The identity of the personnel department and the consultant at the time was thus one of acting on the information provided and not questioning the judgment of the responsible manager. That would have been viewed as pretentious and signalled distrust in the managerial competence in the organisations. It would have been unwise to question whether they knew what they were doing and why. This instrumental approach slowly changed for several reasons, I believe. First, in the rare event an evaluation of the management training programme was done, it could come out either way. It was usually highly unpredictable what people would say and write in an evaluation form, no doubt because of their inability to speak up regarding the daily work situation due to power relations. The (mostly) anonymous evaluations may have been staff's single chance to air other disturbing issues or grudges they might have had. Speaking up to the same degree as today, where we encourage oral evaluation directly within the frame of a workshop and even critique (to some degree), was rarely encouraged. Secondly, coaching and more enquiring approaches made their way from psychology/therapy areas into the consultancy profession. Thirdly, consultants had their own agendas; entering the programmes, one usually became aware

> that the "real issues" facing him are the political and social structures of a
> corporation rather than the problem defined for him. (Jackall, 2010, p. 153)

I had to respond to the "real issues" facing me in the present as parts of them surfaced in different conversations and exercises. There was often a sense of worry and uneasiness in the groups when the manager was in them. Without the manager – although group members were still restricted by power relations, albeit to a lesser degree – there would be a more open approach to what was going on.

That I still, in the above situation with the HR people thirty years later, had a spontaneous and momentary sensation of acting as the senior "skilful consultant", as I may identify myself, and aimed to help solve a problem is a strong reminder of the powerful strings attached to the past and how dominant this linear thinking was and is. However, as this first immediate thinking also changed in the next moment, owing to practice, I was able to take a more detached turn through self-distancing (Elias, 1970, p. 122), inhibit my first thoughts and recall my determination not to believe everything that was being said until I had heard all

people involved. These methods were likewise a part of my social formation and different identities emerging through practice. I knew now that I would make better practical judgments if I stalled first judgment and contained the situation by listening to all the different players in the game. However, the particular circumstances that had brought me into *this* particular game with the HR department were the above – the assumption of me being able to deal with situations like these and their inability or insecurity in dealing with them.

**Meeting the team**

When I met with the team, there appeared to be two factions, with the new managing director as the diplomat trying to balance between the two. They had all individually expressed their positivity about the coming development program, but I found them collectively defensive. Everything was rather fine, and they did not *really* need any development. "Group life is inherently paradoxical" (Smith & Berg, 1997, p. 11), which led me to think that they did not want development but at the same time wanted it. They considered themselves aware of what they were supposed to be doing: to look after business as a whole rather than represent their own department, they said. This ready borrowing from the natural sciences of parts and wholes is inappropriate to apply in human interaction, according to the sociologist Elias, when the actual relations and how they emerge in social structures may be studied, him referring to them all

> as "mine", "his", "ours", "yours" and "theirs". Instead we habitually speak of all such structures as if they existed not only above and beyond ourselves but even above and beyond any actual people at all. (Elias, 1970, p. 16)

This creation of dualities in our minds as parts and wholes may have an effect on our talking about organisation and society as a "body" outside of us that we may be able to design and control. As we all bring in historical solutions, methods, attitudes, sayings that have worked in previous situations through our habitus (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 52), we reinforce them and often engage in habitual practices as it may be time consuming to constantly reinvent the wheel. Our eagerness to save time may lead to low levels of reflection and opposition and no or little understanding of the depth of ideologies. Thus, new and different understandings will fail to emerge also. My challenge was to keep us from collapsing into only one way of seeing, keep the pressure up, encourage different views and ways of thinking regarding our work but also be sensitive to when and how to ease up when/if tensions became too high. Coexisting opposites hold paradoxical tensions, and as we were all schooled in ways of

thinking that encouraged finding solutions to perceived problems and collapsing our thinking into right/wrong or better/worse, the notion of "there may not be any solution" usually proved an even greater challenge to us.

Things were probably not always as fine in the group as they said. Individually, half of them expressed concerns regarding the new MD's ability to deal with Petra and also their being a bit intimidated by her. They felt that her department had a large degree of attention and status and was a big focus in all of their meetings and general work. It was as if they were a law firm rather than a governmental-run infrastructural business, they said. In the majority of management meetings, Petra stated what could and could not be done. They also felt that the processes she was responsible for (judicial concessions and permissions) took far too long and that competitors – for some unknown reason – were given more and speedier services than they themselves were. It was generally felt that it was not possible to discuss this in the management team as Petra would become highly defensive and it was not regarded as wise to end up on her wrong side. This sounded familiar. I remembered similar things being said about the earlier senior project leader that had left. I had sensed that HR had signalled that there was a concern they would end up in a situation similar to the one earlier experienced with him. Emotions regarding Petra came over fairly strong when they talked about the subject, and although it was not explicitly in my contract, they left little doubt in my mind that they harboured hopes that this process – that I – would deal with this.

Entering the process with the above knowledge stored in me and with lenses tainted by these revelations, I did indeed find Petra very defensive. She managed to behave politely and hostilely at the same time, and it was a confusing, testing and trying account to find our positions in the relationship regarding power ratios. Wearily feeling our way forward, I sensed that we needed to find a kind of appropriate balance in order to get on in the game we were in. One of the other two women in the team had earlier confided in our face-to-face talk that she had been advised to be careful of what she brought up in the management meetings regarding Petra's business, which in her view meant to avoid challenging her opinions.

Although I found Petra defensive, the whole team appeared so as well, suspicious of each other, of me, of this process and what the point of it all was. Wanting "development", as they had expressed, meant in my view a willingness to try out new or different approaches and allow for influences. I sensed little of that and found it harder than expected to move forward; the process seemed to freeze and had to be eased up in order to provide a sense of temporary relief.

> The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. (Mead, 1934, p. 140)

My social experience in this setting was one of inertness. It was hard to move forward, like wading in thick syrup. Getting very little or no response to my different gestures was highly identity provoking. The consultant's sense of self may often be patterned by those one is consulting for, but the responses my gestures had provoked had so far not been helpful. I did not recognise them and struggled to re-identify with the setting I was in, as identification is an ongoing social process (Honneth, 1995, p. 96). Emotionally it felt like leaving or losing my sense of self and being viscerally reiterated. As the consultant's uniqueness still is being built out of common material, I was struggling with emotions of being excluded from the group and simultaneously losing my sense of self into "them", the social. As I was interdependent and constrained in relationships of power, I had little choice in the matter. I was wondering what prevented them from responding predictably, the way I was more used to with groups responding to my gestures in a start-up process. The process of getting to know and understand more of what we were in together had to begin somehow; hence I kept making gestures as they were not making any (which, of course, is a *very* powerful gesture) and hoped that some sort of recognisable response would eventually occur. It was like attempting to tease out very tangled hair – I had to be careful not to brush too hard. We were struggling in a process none of them seemed to want. They were all being polite and curiously motionless after the first day out of two. I found the "motionlessness" as an embodied experience to be a very powerful response to my gestures and highly anxiety provoking. They did not seem that interested in any overt participation in the process; although they had expressed their interest as individuals, the social experience right then and there was different, much more anxiety ridden and uncertain than what I had expected.

**Group identity**

Under the cover of an upbeat conversation about how they were considered great and fast "problem solvers" in the organisation, I sensed galloping anxiety. In particular Petra stressed how the staff found their problem-solving abilities fast and *amazingly* good. This ability to solve problems fast, implying that it was good, held some valuable information; they could perhaps be leaving little room for reflection, uncertainties and doubts in their ordinary processes of conversation towards making decisions. In interviews with a few of the staff in an attempt to find out how the management team was perceived, nobody had mentioned the particular quality of problem-solving abilities; rather their anonymity had been an issue. This

difference in perception may have been due to the recent changes in the team; the staff felt generally unsure as to who was in the team these days and/or what they were doing.

One of my normal ways of approaching an inert situation like this is to abort the struggle and challenge the game, act into it with a political sense and perhaps ask them if they could see the point of this process and how they felt we should go on if we should go on that way. But I was holding back; circumstances did not at all feel right or ripe for such a challenge. I had to muster all of my patience and not move into solving anything that may not have needed solving. I very gradually won their confidence. I came to think of them as anonymous to each other – apprehensive, even fearful. They told me the previous management team had made a decision many years ago to be anonymous, looked upon only as a team in the organisation, not as individuals. They had succeeded in planting this idea, obviously, but it had turned on them too – they were struggling with issues of anonymity amongst each other too.

My proposal to work with further conversation and enquiry through open questions around perceived issues they might have, thus gaining broader and deeper views of the current issues they had and increasing reflection without collapsing into too quick solutions too soon, caused further tension and some loud sighing from Petra. We proceeded with caution. After attempting to work in this way for a while, they seemed to be flickering in and out of weariness and impatience.

I was pondering the level of reflection. I had to keep reminding myself that they were indeed a fairly new group. They had been working together in this particular constellation for about a year and yet seemed to have some strong habitual patterns, an approach of "solve the problem directly without too much delay", no doubt acquired from earlier teamwork and settings they had been in as this particular approach may be considered part of the dominant discourse today: "time is of the essence", as in conducting business fast. If you are too slow, you may lose your temporary monopoly – the market bracket in which you may earn a profit right now. As most monopolies may be considered temporary, the feeling of valuable time slipping away if we do not move or act quickly and our losing out on our slice of the current cake may not be questioned.

I kept going and had to put in a high degree of effort to keep them from reverting back to the familiar pattern of problem solving. The resistance was massive from half of them, and the other half was tacitly enabling it by saying nothing, doubtless owing to power relations. They seemed to watch me expectantly as if to see what I was going to do about it. I could sense the

real strain in my body, how conditioned I felt in the process. I was tempted to switch into a mode of lecturing and serve them a model or graph of some sort. I was severely constrained, unfree and in the midst of the living process.

Patricia Shaw writes about how a senior manager once reached out to her in order to

>        amplify certain "developing tendencies of feeling" (Shaw, 2002, p. 98),

trying to recreate them in communication with each other as the manager had found the essence of an open-ended dialogue hard to talk about. Shaw points out that

> silencing of certain aspects of experience in certain dominant discourses and that certain "traditions of argumentation" amplify or diminish our sense of self, the kind of person we feel we can be, the nature of our agency in the world. (Ibid.)

As I forced myself and was forced by the particular setting into trying every conceivable trick in the book to entice more communication, I was forming my identity anew and being formed in the process into identifying myself as someone that wanted to stay flexible and open, gain more information and frequently change my sense of self in social encounters. The whole process induced a massive amount of anxiety and insecurity. *Suppose they see through me*, I thought. *Suppose they regard me as spineless and way too insecure and fluctuating, changing position too often, to be dealing with such a complex process as "leadership development".* How pretentious of me to believe that I would be able to handle such a process; after all, what did I know? We were all stuck in the "traditions of argumentation" Shaw is referring to, they in their rhetoric and I in mine. I felt determined to not give up my reality and collapse into theirs entirely – that was not what they were paying me for. I had been brought in to make a difference.

Smith and Berg, drawing on Glidewell, tell the story of him giving a young student constructive criticism and trying to blunt the pain by saying that it was an attack on her idea, not on her. She explained that it did not hurt less as she was her idea at that moment but that she nevertheless needed him to destroy her idea in order for her to develop her creativity (Smith and Berg, 1997, p. 144).

If I was denying them destruction, I could not hope for their creativity. Me holding back was, on reflection, due to feelings of uncertainty; we were yet unestablished regarding basic trust, unready for movements. The power play between Petra and me also caused a sense of

rigidity. My challenging the process in this moment might have caused them all to turn against me and protect Petra. I could sense at this point that Roger, the MD, was not entirely convinced about the value of this process; he would most likely protect his colleagues against the perceived intruder. Not yet having sufficient standing in the team, I needed alliances.

**Identity**

Through local interactions, people build social structures in an organisation which, in turn, is shaping and forming personal identities and group identities at the same time. Recent years' emphasis on individualisation and autonomy may have been a consequence of the Enlightenment period and modernity, beginning in late 17th- and 18th-century Europe. One of the reasons was the advances in scientific methods and a challenging of ideas rooted in superstition and tradition. These promoted individualism, scepticism and rational thinking and have had a tremendous influence on the ecology of thought of the whole western world. A person's identity had largely been looked upon throughout history as a collective matter; you belonged to a clan, an estate or a group of people and were associated and identified with the group, later superseded, in some societies, by specific classes. As increased travelling and people movement occurred – emigration from a poverty-struck Europe, the Irish famine etc. – new societies (the United States of America, for example) grew. People born without belonging to a specific group may also have caused greater individualisation to emerge. These new societies promoted individualism, as in "every man for himself" and meritocracies. In relatively stable societies, issues of class may still linger and prevail to a higher degree.

The word "identity" may suggest something stable, a stable immutable core inside of us, inside our bodies, partly genetic and partly acquired owing to our social environments and circumstances. It is often referred to as both uniqueness and sameness, whatever makes us recognisable and definable, different from others. If identity is more of a label, identification is the process by which it may be acquired. However, I have come to think of identity as being both stable and unstable at the same time.

Erik Erikson, the famous German psychologist and analyst, developed the concept of the epigenetic principle, meaning that every new phase of life adds something specific to the next phases and refers to all the previous phases. For Erikson, identity was not static, and he talked about several "identity crises", experiences every individual has to go through in life,

pointing specifically to their emerging not only because of changes in an individual but more because of changes in the socio-cultural environment. He described identity as

> a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. (Erikson, 1970)

If identity develops through experiences of crises and contradictions which every individual has to overcome, "processes of identification" may be a more accurate description of what goes on with people socialising, and the backdrop for identity formation due to the processes we go through in life. Identification as an "ongoing social process" (Honneth, 1995, p. 96) implies a more fluid and unstable than stable process of identity formation, one that may be social through and through – influencing and being influenced – albeit unique in the genetic blueprint. The formation of one's identity thus occurs through one's identification with significant others, primarily parents or early caregivers, associations with groups when growing up etc. According to Parker J. Palmer, there is an ever-evolving core within where our genetics (biology), culture, loved ones, those we care for, people who have harmed us and people we have harmed, the deeds done (good and ill) to self and others, experiences lived, and choices made come together to form who we are at this moment (Palmer, 2008). Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher and sociologist, argues that identity is not a result; it is more a task. He describes his concept of "communicative action" (drawing on Mead's concept of communication as a conversation of gestures) as a process of achieving mutual understandings; it serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge and is finally the process through which people form their identities (Habermas, 1987, p. 140).

Identification, identity formation and identity were thus being co-created and emergent – stable and unstable – simultaneously in me and the management team of the Star organisation.

**Identity dilemmas**

As the ongoing process in the management team of the Star organisation felt uncomfortable and rigid I needed to find ways of working where we could gain confidence in our ability to establish more of a sense of who we were and what we were to do, finding our own senses of self as well as the team's, a "we" identity. In bringing our individual identities into this group, long-established and with already formed images due to belonging to previous groups in our life,

the collective identity, and as part of it the collective pride and the group charismatic claims, help to fashion his individual identity in his own as well as in other people's experience. (Elias and Scotson, 1994, p. 105)

How would our individual identities be moulded over, change and emerge differently in the process of identification within this group?

John, the marketing manager, said, "But we cannot work with questions [as I had proposed earlier] without giving people the answers! And how can we know the answers if we don't know more about what they are doing? We need to understand everything they are doing in order to ask good questions." At this Petra giggled loudly. Trying not to take too much notice, I was intent on seeing the process through. We continued to struggle. Had my anxiety level been lower in that particular moment, I might have drawn attention to the ambiguity in the room, trying to address the giggling and what it might have stood for. However, I still found the relationships in the room very risky and uncertain and both consciously and unconsciously decided to stay in more of an instrumental mode – that is, keeping to the time schedule.

It is interesting to think about what may make up a "good" question. This may be an expression of the dominant discourse of predictability and control – if only we knew everything people were doing during their working days, we would be able to come up with the "good" or "right" questions – thinking that there is such a thing. "Bad" questions may occur as often or cause as much movement to occur as seemingly "good" ones.

**Autonomy**

Bauman writes how "identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities" and is possibly a "surrogate for community" (Bauman, 2001, p. 10), meaning that as communities (our collective sense of self or identity) diminish, autonomy, individualism and independence are hailed as something desirable to aim for within managerial contexts. The general romanticising of autonomy and "strong alone" may also lead to a sense of being pushed out of our social context. It may lead to emotions of being excluded. Richard Rorty in *Contingency, irony and solidarity* mentions the writings of Nabokov and Orwell as examples of writers that may be "warning us against the tendencies to cruelty inherent in searches for autonomy" (Rorty, 1989, p. 144) in pursuing private perfection or/and serving human liberty. Identities in disturbing and uncomfortable situations in particular may be highly changeable and transformative as we fear exclusion but we may also, paradoxically, exclude ourselves at

the same time because we may feel that we ought to know the answers to questions being posed to us or we ought to be more independent. Dependency may be looked upon as a sign of weakness or for children or as a mere "following" rather than "leading" your own life. Modern self-help literature often addresses this issue, as in "Who is in charge of you?", implying that you and nobody else ought to be. There are plenty of books in the area, two relatively new ones being *Mastering self-leadership: Empowering yourself for personal excellence* (6th edition), by C. Neck and C. Manz (2012), and *Self-leadership: How to become a more successful, efficient and effective leader from the inside out*, by Bryant and Kazan (2013), where the authors state:

> When our past beliefs no longer provide a safe path to guide us through the decisions we have to make, we can only count on solid personal values*,* on our own independent ability to reflect, to make things happen, and to make our life move on. If anything can remain solid through the world changes, it is our character manifested through our self-leadership. That will not only guide us through whatever we will undergo but may also inspire others to transcend. In organisational behaviour, an area where self-leadership can have a particularly positive impact, governance is often dependent on human interdependence and trust (Poppo, Zheng and Sungmin 2007). Self-leadership acts upon both trust and interdependence as it allows people to exercise their true self with peace and dignity, consistently and responsibly. (p.163)

That our past beliefs no longer provide a safe path to guide us today is certainly something we may all feel as we are trying to make our ways in life; however, our past beliefs may turn out to be the main traits of our solid personal values in the present, the ones no longer providing the safe path.  Interdependency and trust in organisational contexts appears to be something one can act upon and thus allow people to exercise their "true self" (whatever that may be) if one exercises self-leadership. Our constantly reforming identities in all contexts where we influence each other and are being influenced at the same time may inspire transcendence – in highly unpredictable ways though – as we may have limited choices in the matter, never quite knowing how our gestures are being taken up and responded to. If, in the prescriptions of self-leadership, individualism, independent thinking, acting and autonomy indeed are desirable traits in a leader or manager, it may be easier to understand why managers may have an overwhelming feeling of consistently being under pressure to perform *themselves,* not feeling as if they are exercising the *right kind* of self-leadership efficiently

and effectively if they are to use and perhaps even be dependent on their management teams to move the organisation forward.

Returning to the management team of the Star organisation, I sensed we were not at all ready for any deeper levels of confrontations. I wanted to slow down the process and get to know them better. I knew there would still be time to bring up difficulties; there was no need to fast forward things. Bauman writes in *Identity in the globalizing world* of individuals as being chronically disembedded and haunted by problems of identity traditionally confronted by pilgrims, as in "How to get there? How to find truth and eternal bliss?" Without mustering the strength to tackle the obstacles that may be lying ahead of us in life, we thus tend to pick the easier routes, consistently tormented by questions of

> *which* identity to choose and how to keep alert and vigilant so that *another*
> choice can be made in case the previously chosen identity is withdrawn from
> the market and stripped of its seductive powers. (Bauman, 2001 p 7)

The choices I made to go on with the process in the specific way that I did were bodily embedded and mostly unconscious. I had some choice in the matter – during the breaks I had opportunities to reflect on how to go on – but the choices were limited as I was not able to grasp alternatives and their consequences right there and then.

Roger, the MD, was mostly quiet. He seemed to have left it to me to deal with whatever came up. I sensed that he – being fairly new – was trying to work out and balance the different ideologies emerging and being iterated.

According to Elias, drawing on Comte, social structures may be looked upon as thought structures (Elias, 1934, p. 45). "Organisation" in this respect may be viewed as people interacting, influencing and being influenced and emergence of new and/or different thought structures occurring. There is not simply a group of people that suddenly emerges with a different thought structure than before; we can but find what we are looking for within certain frames as we are conditioned by the thought structures/social structures we are in. We cannot find what we cannot formulate, what we cannot imagine. I found it hard to formulate what we were doing together and where we were going. If we are caught up in an assumption that we indeed *are* trying to go somewhere – somewhere better preferably – this incompleteness may be due to the "improvement ideology" we are caught in; "We are at present incomplete and need to move forward towards completeness. We need to be improved as we are not good enough as we appear in the present." Moving towards us being complete, already whole and

as improved as we could be, we may be able to ease up on tensions and avoid collapsing into the "ought". We may not need to get somewhere; we are already somewhere. If we could accept this for the time being, we might be more patient in staying where we actually are and exploring the local interactions as opposed to holding a mental model of trying to get somewhere frantically, which might cause singularity and close down reflection. Reflecting on issues of where we are and where we are going might hold the perceived improvement we are looking for; it could provide a sense of development. *Development* seems indeed to be laden with positive connotations as opposed to undeveloped, underdeveloped or static, as in rigid. Development is typically associated with sudden insightfulness or a sense of flow that may be fun or interesting, and I would like to identify my function as a process consultant with somebody who provides people with these "good" positive feelings, not somebody who stirs up disturbing or uncomfortable emotions in their wake. I did not expect things to run smoothly all the time, but I certainly did not expect things to be uncomfortable and disturbing either, albeit on a low level, all the time, as in this case. I sensed a lot of ambiguity in myself; I was thinking that I ought to confront my uneasiness by drawing attention to what I felt was going on in the process, but held myself back.

**Competing identities**

We could aim to experience moments of temporary relief, temporary insights and understandings in a temporary setting. Paradoxically, perhaps, temporary understandings could be seen as and taken up as definitive solutions and as developments, I thought.

One generalised principle I had taken up was to not give money to the beggars increasingly filling up the streets of Stockholm. There had been articles and news about them belonging to European cartels (mainly from Romania), and their job was to sit on the street and beg all day, being able to keep only a little of the money themselves as the rest went into the pockets of greedy pimps. I had adopted as a principle the generalised idea of not giving anything. On discussing the matter with other people, they seemed to think in similar ways. When I fell ill with the flu and had to spend a few days in bed feeling awful, I noticed I felt slightly better if I (in bed) kept moving from position to position; the pillow would be cooler on one side, the sickness I experienced would fade for a moment in a different position etc. As I kept these movements going, they provided me with temporary relief from the feelings of sickness, and I came to think that this was probably what a few coins could do for a beggar on a cold wintery street – provide a sense of temporary relief. *What is life but a series of temporary moments really?* I thought, and thus started giving money again. It may not solve the long-

term problem as we see it generally, but who can know for sure? At least it may provide temporary relief.

Working in a temporary, improvisational way in the moment may not be contradictory to keeping an eye towards the future or planning ahead. Ethically, this may be the only way we are really able to work, in local interactions where ethics arise in the action itself rather than spelling itself out as a rule of behaviour, as is common in organisations where business ethics may be formalised as generalised rules or codes of conduct (Griffin, 2002).

When identifying with competing images of my sense of self, the person who does not give money to street beggars and the one who does, the decision will be made out of the particulars; will I give this particular person sitting here in this particular street in this particular moment something? Out of my acting in the living present out of my (temporary) identity, ethics will thus emerge. Identity formation has been the process leading up to this moment, influences experienced and collected out of all the different social settings and structures I have been a part of until that particular moment. My identity has been formed owing to my encounters with a whole spectrum of different situations where I have been formed and forming in ongoing motions. As the situation is paradoxical – give and give not – it is highly anxiety ridden: How will I choose to act in the present? What qualities inform my decision and cause me to judge what I find to be the most adequate way to perform right there and then?

Prior to the next session with the management team of the Star organisation some weeks later, I was feeling anxious and unsure as to how to go on.

The gestures I had made had not had the effects I anticipated; the group had been anxious, and the whole exercise felt volatile and unpredictable. I had continued to make gestures that seemed to be taken up differently than I intended. This caused me to rethink my approach, reform accordingly and attempt to change how I took things up. I could not continue in the same way as I had so far; I needed to identify even more with the group and try to gain a deeper understanding of what it was that was bothering us. The meaning of the gesture arises in the response, according to Mead, which means that it was partly out of my control to know what my gestures might come to mean – which created a lot of anxiety in me, which made them, in turn, anxious. As resistance had been higher than anticipated, I decided to ease down and do something more mechanistic (in my mind) this time, not worry so much about them getting something out of this process (the way I had perceived that they would in my

idealised outcome) but do something they earlier had requested: sort out their format of working by introducing meeting techniques. How could the management meetings be conducted? How did they prioritise common issues in the team, and how did they approach and solve them (or not)?

**Reframing**

This layout of the day was clearly met with relief from half of the team and slight disappointment from the other. I could sense the negativity from Petra, who, in a subtle way, was ridiculing things I was saying as the session moved on. She had seated herself very close to Roger, folded her arms and was physically leaning towards him, as if saying, "Please, save us from this." Roger was not easy to read; he appeared neutral and rational.

*Am I imagining all of this?* I wondered. I was starting to mistrust my senses. I sensed that I had to try and keep my ground but not let my imagination blow out of proportion.

Feeling my way forward as to what would be workable, I was describing emergence, how we were co-creators in this game and whatever we talked about we talked about. I was improvising. I was talking to them and I was talking to myself simultaneously.

> The individual comes to carry on a conversation of gestures with himself. He says something and that calls out a certain reply in himself which makes him change what he was going to say....The effect on himself of what he is saying checks him; there is here a conversation of gestures between the individual and himself....The very process of thinking is, of course, simply an inner conversation that goes on, but it is a conversation of gestures which in its completion implies the expression of that which one thinks to an audience. One separates the significance of what he is saying to others from the actual speech and gets it ready before saying it. He thinks it out and perhaps writes it in the form of a book; but it is still a part of social intercourse in which one is addressing other persons and at the same time addressing one's self, and in which one controls to other persons by the response made to one's own gesture. (Mead, 1934, pp. 141-142)

I was addressing them as well as my sense of self, my identity, in the short lecture. I was trying to remind us all what we were attempting to do, and my intention with this small act of

leadership was to show us all a way forward in these tensions, trying to encourage us to not become too caught up or frozen in the now, creating a sense of movement.

After coming back from the next break, Susanne, in charge of maintenance, told me in confidence that Petra had said something in the vicinity of what a "load of humbug this is" when they were getting coffee, but Susanne had stood up to her and said, "I think not. I think it is very interesting." That was, in a paradoxical way, a small comfort to hear, both that she was supportive of what we were trying to do and that I was not making it all up; there was some real (albeit hidden from me) resistance and opposition going on. Alliances were emerging. Talking about the language of consciousness and the language of a mechanical model, Bourdieu, in *The logic of practice*, refers to anthropologists preferably thinking more of

> the games they themselves play in social life, which are expressed in the
> language of tact, skill, dexterity, delicacy or *savoir-faire*, all names for practical
> sense; (Bourdieu 1980 p. 80)

I was all too conscious of several games going on and tried to act into the same, exercising practical and political sense

> in order to be carried along by the game without getting carried away by the
> game beyond the game, as happens when simulated combat gets the better of
> the combatants; the art of playing on the equivocations, innuendoes and
> unspoken implications of gestural or verbal symbolism that is required. (Ibid.)

Petra's talking in that way to Susanne during the break may have been an attempt to undermine my authority, and this posed a threat to my professional identity in this particular group. We were locked in a kind of mental combat. It may have been not directed towards my person solely but rather a reaction towards the constraint of being steered, unwillingly, into this development process. It was an act of resistance to be noticed and recognised; after all, she had lost responsibility for personnel, and although she claimed to be satisfied with this, it may also have been paired with a sense of failure and loss. As there may always be an "incompleteness of identity", according to Bauman, parts of new identities may be found in the mutual processes we are in. The gossiping made me feel a loss of power that I was now struggling to regain through refurbishing my identity in the social process; however, a feeling of completeness of identity may most likely be regarded as temporary and probably mostly

never occur (we may hope it does if we are religious) as we appear to be "chronically disembedded individuals" (Bauman, 2001, p. 6) in highly complex environments.

On a more encouraging note was the fact that John, the marketing manager and deputy MD, had a different attitude now. Staying in the disturbing and uncomfortable situation the last time, being patient and insisting that we attempt to keep the enquiring mode, had been worth it. I now sensed a different understanding and support from him, which gave me a comforting feeling. The shift may have happened when he gained more of an understanding that he did not have to know the answers in order to pose the questions.

The "social structure", according to Mead, the prime one, the self, identity, is specific for the society that has been and is moulding us. The process in the team when minds/bodies mingle may produce new identities in the team and in ourselves simultaneously, as we influence and are being influenced by each other. This prime identity may be one built for reasons of coping. Throughout our lifetime we may encounter happy and joyous but also sad and deeply disturbing moments. Coping with whatever events we find ourselves in life may be a real test of endurance; thus, being challenged and struggling with adversaries and resistance may be an important part of process consultancy. These were the thoughts starting to appear in my mind when I experienced some unexpected support from John. A new group identity was being formed and forming me, I was getting to know them, they were getting to know me – we were changing.

**Maintaining control**

I also came to wonder why the latest group process had been so challenging and difficult; what was going on in my practice?

As I had left many of the prescriptive pieces and four-field consultancy models in favour of working more in the living present of the processes that emerged – keeping conversations going and immersing myself in the present without consultancy models to refer to – I, in moments of clarity, felt that we still needed the simplified models, the recipes, the prescriptions to hold on to when trying to understand and assimilate new and emerging meanings. Rather, I realised in a flash of clarity, I needed them. We needed them in the process of identity formation, in the process of our forming new senses of selves in the group. I did not yet feel entirely comfortable working without any means of lifelines: tools of the trade, management techniques that I could draw upon and refer to if I perceived that the team members were not getting enough new emergent thoughts or insights. I was caught up in

thinking that if they were unhappy when leaving the process, I had failed. They did not need to be particularly happy, but they certainly could not be *unhappy.* I realised that my own fear of losing control must surely come through in the process, as I felt I was entering murky unknown waters. I needed to bring back a bit of the old way of working, my old identity; I was moving forward too fast, and the inertia I encountered in the group was most likely partly a reaction to this. The old methods and models had become less interesting to me, even boring, but I needed the comfort they provided in this transitional period I found myself practicing in. The "meeting techniques" session had been more of a rational methods section. It had been as much for my own sake as for theirs. It had left me psychologically more secure albeit unsatisfied and troubled. I felt as if I had made us all compromise our way forward and left the newer calling too soon. Although this may be a normal state of consultancy, bearing tension and improvising, the tensions were multiplied as my desire to try this novel approach out was strong. I felt that this highly rational group dominated by a discourse of "fast problem solving" could benefit from different approaches, allowing things to be as complex as they actually were without attempting to solve everything, an approach they did not yet understand or subscribe to easily. This was due to my lack of understanding and inability to explain what we were doing as I was still unsure how to go about it myself; I felt as if my identity was holding divisional rather than paradoxical tension, I was flickering in between, wanting both, attempting to hold on to both, the old and the new, and was carrying incongruity – unsure whether this could be done without collapsing into one or the other, thus creating this in the group as well. My pushing the process had, on the other hand, brought to the surface longstanding difficulties and behaviours (like being perceived as anonymous), which caused the process to become uncomfortable as there were different intentions and desires in the team competing for attention.

**Critique of complex responsive processes**

Avoiding extensive use of tools and techniques and allowing conversations to emerge, as in complex responsive processes, could be likened to a psychoanalytic approach. Conversations *do* emerge without us allowing them to, and the task of process consultancy may also be to provide certain answers and reality checks, to encourage polyvocal views – which rarely will come forward without encouragement, even pushing at times – and to provide temporary leadership and direction for stressed-out managers internalising shame and guilt, feeling that they are not being good enough and that they ought to behave differently. This particular attitude may, however, consist of as many, albeit new, tools and techniques applicable to the

consultancy profession. Shaw writes that "we must act with intention into the unknowable" (2002, foreword). I would argue that we already do; however, intentions differ, and how we come to act will always be unpredictable. Difficulties I encounter are team members without the means to act, without speech, the ability to express themselves, hence not being able to partake in the polyvocality. There is also a lack of reflexivity (as Stacey points out, it is not for everybody) as levels of critique and opposition are low in general in organisations and can be highly identity provoking, whip up much resistance and cause processes to freeze. And if it is not for everybody, it becomes elitist. As tribes and communities are losing ground in favour of privatisation, so is our general ability to influence each other, and we risk a growing number of citizens that may not be reachable, united only in resisting the established. Successful performance depending on harmonious relationships between the organisational members is, according to Stacey (2011, p. 191), a taken-for-granted assumption in the organisation. My experience is indeed that it is only in harmonious relationships that I may gain a listener and be able to influence. In disharmonious relationships I may also influence or have an impact but not at all to the same degree. Trust is usually connected to harmonious relationships and thus a necessity to get people to pay attention to what the consultant is putting forward. My belief is that maintaining harmonious relationships in consultancy is important – although not at all costs.

At the end of the day, the new senior project leader, Paul, pointed to the fact that we had been talking about idealised reality this time rather than about the real reality. The previous time, I had drawn on the writing of Christopher Mowles in *Rethinking management (2011)*, where he points to tendencies in management to work with idealised concepts, thus emphasising what we think we ought to be doing, producing visionary plans and strategic structures, and failing to look into what we are actually doing, thus avoiding addressing relational issues, conflicting views and power dynamics. This may be out of habitual patterns, by not being knowledgeable in how to address them but also by fearing that in being brought up, they could cause a lot of (unnecessary) anxieties. I agreed in this regarding the issues we had been *talking* about, like meeting techniques, but we were also simultaneously *acting* in the other zone, the "real reality", as he had termed it, playing the game of relating and influencing (we influenced each other in the breaks as well, as I pointed out), and it may be uncomfortable to talk about these issues, thus we rather maintain the status quo. He nodded as if he had understood my thinking. The rest of the group was quiet, no doubt in a reflective process of their own.

I went home and reflected. It all seemed disjointed somehow. I could not put my finger on any particular spot or point to a cause of it all. There appeared to be multiple causes, as in multiple intentions and relations coming together, trying to fit in somehow.

## Ethics and practical judgment

The crises we sometimes encounter on a deeper level within an organisation may be of an ethical kind. Organisations do not behave; people do, in ethical and unethical ways. And people take it personally. We are persons. The problem is that maintaining a mental image of an organisation as something separate may cause anxiety and fears, as the impersonal organisation may not approve of *my* work next and I risk exclusion. Organisations may be perceived as anonymous but bound to follow general rules and principles, "ethical universals", according to Douglas Griffin. We may constrain each other in not bending these general rules (What would that look like? We may have to make exceptions for everyone then) and thus find ourselves identifying with competing images of ourselves – the private and the professional – and behaving, from the perception of the private, unmorally or unethically to secure financial survival for the organisation (which pays our salaries).

Griffin takes the temporal, living-present stance:

> One can think of ethics as an interpretation of action to be found in the action itself, in the on-going recognition of the meanings of actions that could not have been known in advance. Motives then do not arise from antecedently given ends but in the recognition of the end as it arises in action. (Griffin, 2002, p. 182)

We will attempt to justify what is going on in relation to what is desired for the organisation to go on rather than in relation to the ends that arise *within* what is going on. Antecedently given ends are powerfully described on the homepage of any normal (as in following the norms of a dominant discourse of predictability and control) organisation today.

Telia Sonera, the Swedish telecom giant, has an extensive code of conduct that can be downloaded on a PDF, and also a mission, a vision and values with headlines that read "Add value – Show respect – Make it happen". Under the sub-headline "Show respect", the first line reads, "We demonstrate trust, courage and integrity in everything we do...." This is a good ambition; one wonders how this is being taken up and carried out and if it really can be in "*everything* we do", as everybody in the organisation, however enabled, also must be constrained by power relations and only to certain degrees and in unpredictable ways may be

able to demonstrate the above in everything they do. Further down in the document, "We carefully protect customer privacy and network integrity and always act in the best interest of our customers and our company." Acting in the best interest of customers and the company may be highly contradictory and paradoxical! The customers' view of what is in their best interest will most likely differ highly from the company's best interest. The universals – values, mission, vision and code of conduct – of Telia Sonera had probably been carefully worked out and well intended, but they had not been taken up "correctly", according to the company, and thus produced unwanted consequences when a crisis was dealt with. In 2012 four senior management executives were fired after an ethics review determined that deals in Asia were conducted improperly. Telia Sonera dealt with this, it is understood from the webpage, through making the existing code of conduct even more extensive and detailed. The saying "The disease becomes the medicine" seems applicable; making the rules and regulations tighter may point to a belief in the necessity for tighter control of unpredictable behaviour rather than taking up conversation in the organisation about how these generalisable statements are being particularised and how practical judgments are being formed and forming in worldwide processes in that ethics arises in the action itself. Rules regarding how one ought to behave separated from specific contexts may distort action and prevent reflection.

**Power session**

In yet another session with the management team, I brought in my friend, Jan the Philosopher, to address power dynamics.

Petra declared that she would not be present as she had important things to attend to in Brussels. My intention was to increase the level of reflection in the team. I had briefed Jan and expressed my worries about how to go on with the group. Being meticulous, he clearly had gone out of his way to make the session eye opening but not too identity threatening. I felt my spirit lift when he started the session in a humble small-talkish way (a carefully thought-out approach) and immediately got their attention. I felt as if it was a great loss that Petra was not there. Then again, perhaps it was not, I also found myself thinking.

Jan demonstrated, exemplified and got them to open up regarding issues of power. He posed questions – "How do you use your personal power everyday in your work and how does this help and/or limit you? Who would you consider to have the highest power ratio in the group and why?" – they discussed in smaller groups. Erwin, director of communication and PR,

described later in the larger group how his small group had immediately thought of Petra and her department regarding power ratios. He also confessed, "I would never have said this had Petra been here." A rupture had occurred; a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990, p. 14) was out in the open. It was now public. Roger gave a slight nod to acknowledge the information. The rest of the group also nodded carefully, except for Ken, who did not move. He might have felt disloyal to Petra, I speculated, by doing so.

The power session gave my image a push in a favourable direction. Jan's being so well prepared might have been an expression of his sensing how worried I was – how important it was to me that things went in the right direction from now on. I felt as if I did not have many chances left to prove my worth in this setting. They might still perceive my identity as undetermined as they were keen on getting clear yes-or-no answers to what was the right way of behaving as a manager, and I would not give them. What I gave them they perceived as too situational and would frequently express, "Yes, but we have to have some *rules* as to how people should behave too" (which I did not oppose although they seemed to think so). I sensed that causing higher levels of anxiety would be politically unwise; there had to be positive emotions associated with our meetings, or they could simply choose not to show up anymore.

The day ended on a high note. They did not want to leave the conversations. The fact that Petra – and thus her and my particular tense relation – had been absent had, no doubt, contributed to the group bringing some emotions regarding her department (and her person) forward. I realised that I, as well as the HR people, had been thinking that the group would be better off without her. After all, her having lost responsibility for personnel as conflict was mounting due to her difficulty in relating to people was not exactly a recipe for success in any team setting. Now I came to think that equally, the group could have been better off without me too, without the tensions our particular relation was causing. On the other hand, the group would have been better off without all of us.

I struggled to understand what the HR department was thinking. They may have been stuck in a repetitive pattern of promoting and rewarding behaviours they clearly did not want, but somehow they had done it again. Petra had one of the most important key positions in the management team and a huge amount of relations to take into account in bringing the all-important concessions they needed. How did she relate to them, the people giving the concessions? I had been thinking that it might be better to use Petra's expert knowledge, bringing it into the team when needed, and place somebody else in the frontline, somebody

interested in building the relationships badly needed to get the concessions. She would serve the team best by being outside of it, as a source of reference rather than making the teamwork messy.

Reflecting on all this, I started to change my mind and identify with her.

Suppose contributions of this particular quality Petra was bringing in were exactly what the team needed right now? She, being identified with and identifying herself as somebody with a need to control what was being done in the team and why, could equally prove to be an asset to the group. Some of the managers had experienced not daring to send certain documents to authorities without passing them through Petra first as they could be wrongly done otherwise. This might well be helpful on the team, provided it was understood as such. Right now this was not the case.

I recalled a similar process that had just ended in a different top management team:

They had also been eight people, as in this particular setting, and there had been conflicts in between them. The HR person and the MD brought me into the process and gave me the initial briefing. I interviewed them all; the HR person had been very impatient to get the process going, expressing huge dissatisfaction with the situation. I felt that she was a main source of the anxiety in the team and was wondering how to approach it all without pointing to her as a perceived "patient" to be improved. When the process started, she became ill (long term) due to exhaustion and stress. We had to go ahead with the process anyhow. After a while it turned out to be very successful; the small schisms that had been going on in the team were quite easily dissolved, and they proceeded to work very well and creatively together as a team. They all expressed being "ecstatic" with the process. There was little doubt in my mind that the HR person had been connected to many of the conflicts and the disturbing qualities that had earlier been a part of their teamwork.

Was I caught up in thinking in the same manner right now? This was not just about Petra or her department; this was about all of us and a yet unestablished and fairly wobbly "we" identity. Roger was only two years in his position, two other members were fairly new and one had just left the group. They, together with me, were in a process of reformulating identity, getting to know each other, getting a feel for what was possible to bring up in this setting. This ongoing process of identification gave rise to insecurity and disturbances in all of us. It was a transitional period. We were all a bit lost. I had dropped many of my ordinary ways of working. I co-created a setting of insecurity and anxiety in the team as I was a part of

it. The dilemma arising in the back of my mind was thus moral, ethical: The successful process with the team where the HR person was perceived to be a problem became highly successful when she – and what was projected on her – was not present. This might have caused the rest of the team to prove themselves right; look, what a successful process this turned out to be when she was not present. They were happy (seemingly), and I was happy, as they kept bringing me back for more work, thus continuing the positive feedback. This smooth-running process could have prevented us from discovering qualities that might have benefitted them better had the perceived "problem" participated in the group. The road might have been bumpier, and the likelihood of them bringing me back if too uncomfortable emotions were associated with the process, considerably less.

Social norms often demand that we take things in order, and in this particular case I was going to apply them, slowing down. I understood that this was as much about me, my temptation to get on. I had to give it time and not let my impatience run our process.

The novel sense would appear anyhow, I reminded myself, as Mead writes:

> The response enters into his experience only when it takes place. If he says he knows what he is going to do, even there he may be mistaken. He starts out to do something and something happens to interfere. The resulting action is always a little different from anything he could anticipate. (Mead, 1934, p. 177)

*What exactly is it that I would like to see?* I asked myself. I may have been caught in a thinking structure where novel things had to happen in the groups I worked with before I could derive any major satisfaction from it. I needed to scale down my own expectations, allow them to come forward at their own pace and make allowances for small things.

The following session, Petra was back again but Ken was absent. I found myself wondering whether this was coincidence. The surprise this time was a small shift in the attitude of Petra. She seemed more low key although not exactly positive. Had her colleagues' talk regarding the successful latest session with Jan the Philosopher reached her? As we all talked, I noticed a slight difference in the power dynamics between her and Roger. Roger's body posture was different; he was sitting taller than I remembered and looked altogether more decisive. Could he have been addressing her behaviour, or had she come to think that this process would not go away so she might as well embrace it?

The intensity of our meetings became less feverish; I found myself meeting up with less trepidation. As disturbances are identity changing, we had all, albeit temporarily, settled into our new identities and learned to be more skilful players in the games we were engaged in together. I had come back to myself although I had struggled as I could not find myself in the old way of working anymore – like a priest who has lost the vocation – and tried to meet their demands for more techniques, methods, instruments as these open-ended conversations had been highly anxiety provoking. It was a matter of combining the two approaches as they seemed to worry about losing face in front of each other and they did not yet feel as if they were competent enough to pose questions as I had suggested. Additionally, it is not always helpful or timely to call things into question, and reflexivity may be carefully framed so as not to point out the weaknesses of other people and claim superiority by undermining taken-for-granted truths.

As I was talking to Roger, the MD, about the success in getting to know each other to communicate better, he suddenly blurted out, "Yes, but it is necessary to keep your distance to people at work too!" I could sense anxiety in the statement. I could identify with this; it is a common held belief in management that you can detach yourself from people, be free standing or neutral and, in particular, emotionally detached. This wishful thinking may be to protect ourselves from the pain of having to give somebody a bad review or – even worse – fire them. It implies a separation of the professional and the private identity; the organisation that I am representing is bound by procedural rationality and is supposed to follow rules or generalised business ethics while I may not consider myself as taking these up in the same manner from my private identity, thus causing a split in thinking. With me as an individual rests the abilities of practical judgment, from whatever identity I may judge out of. It is a functional and particular process. In having to fire people, we are excluding them from the workgroup, and this action may be highly identity provoking as it causes us to bump up against ourselves, our personal values and ideologies, which may be ridden by anxiety as we ourselves may fear exclusion most of all, uncertain what that might do to our identity.

**Conclusion**

In coming from project two, I concluded that an improvisational approach – which I favour – may demand different sets of skills than those traditionally taught at business schools or learned in consultancy practice over the years.
Needing a pragmatic view, making do with what there is, implies a need for a broader set of tools, abilities and properties not linked to idealised management concepts rooted in belief

systems or ideologies that cannot or must not be questioned. However, my attempt to question what was being done and what the thinking was did not go down well in the management team of the Star organisation. Instead, the effect was disharmonious relationships, and I had to come back to myself, be reflexive and question my own intentions and contingencies. In this I came to understand how my relationship historically and presently with the HR team had influenced my approach in the current situation and how this created a duality, as I was set to "help them solve a problem". Reforming my thinking and opening for more voices also meant encouraging more reflexive practices, which likewise became disruptive and destabilising and caused anxieties in myself and the team. Not getting recognised by the team made me aware of the vulnerability of balancing working alone and the need for alliances and still maintaining my position of guide and challenger in the perceived badlands of power dynamics in relationships, simultaneously bringing up longstanding conflicts and difficulties in the team. The constraints I found myself in may have been partly due to my wanting to move forward too fast, trying out new ways of working. In holding myself back, I sensed too little effect or results. In coming more to terms with these non-effects being felt by me, I am still a detached and involved participant (Elias, 1987) sensing these emotions and simultaneously a need to stay in this tension and harbour it. In storing within myself the different stories I hear from the individuals in the group, I may use my practical judgment and come to know when to act on information stored or not, thus acting as a political tool. I proudly identify myself with my ability to change and adapt. Slowing down the process allowed different identities to emerge in myself and the management team of the Star organisation as we were reforming our identities constantly. This, in turn, means that self-regulation and self-control in my process consultancy role, increased over time due to longer chains of interdependency, has an individualising effect (felt by me) and may lead to anxiety and worries and the overwhelming feeling of holding myself back. Being too political in playing the game may cause discomfort due to ethical considerations and feelings of compromising my way forward in order not to make myself impossible to work with amongst my clients. On the other hand, that is also a part of the game, how Petra in the Star organisation was resisting regulations and control and maintaining a sense of freedom, taking up rules and initiatives, or not (generalisations that are being particular), and how this was provoking for my identity in my function as the expert-consultant, where I considered myself to be the one who ought to have been in control.

**To be further explored in project four**

As I have come to think of activities being located in the social environment as well as in the individual at the same time, I have also come to see how a general lack of understanding of this produces certain effects. Looking at the state of the world and the various perceived crises addressed in the media every day, one observation is that taking the front stand in discussing or debating these issues are representatives from disciplines such as economy or government-run law-enforcement agencies. Occasionally a political scientist may be brought in. I can hardly recall having witnessed representation from social sciences – sociology, anthropology, philosophy, ethnology – and hence influences from these areas may be of a weak kind regarding the general population (of which I am a part). As focus on autonomy and individualism is strong, with frequent self-help books flooding the market, reinforcing that it is entirely up to me whether I want to exercise my own free will and change my old, bad habits, this may give rise to feelings of urgency and anxiety about not being quick enough or good enough to secure future health and happiness. Stacey talks about how "harmonious relationships" are assumed to lead to desired performances and about conflicts as being *"unfortunate distractions"* (my italics) (2011, p. 191). Exploring what may be gained from looking into alternative disciplines and research into "unfortunate distractions" and disharmonious relationships (possible harmonious relationships without the positivity) and how these may be one prerequisite for change will be interesting and generalisable for practitioners working in similar areas. Closing down enquiries too soon through simplifying, a general need to move on and the singularity of positive thinking may be too idealised and not allow reality to be as complex as it is. As Hegel claimed that our need for recognition inevitably leads to social conflict, and Machiavelli and Hobbes both claimed that we struggle for self-preservation, Axel Honneth writes in *The struggle for recognition* that they considered "the ultimate purpose of *political practice* [my italics] to be the attempt, over and over again, to bring a halt, to this ever-threatening conflict" (1995, p. 10). If it is our eternal struggle for recognition, love and rights that causes social conflicts, then avoidance and the need for early and fast closure of brewing disagreement may be apparent and understandable; they may be perceived as threatening the very core of our existence. Aggression and oppression may thus be one way of trying to maintain a sense of freedom (and recognition) – this, in turn, may be an effect of our feeling excluded or pushed out of our social context, as the case may have been for Petra in the Star organisation. We may paradoxically want to be free and unfree at the same time. The push for freedom and independence implies responsibility for individual choices and shame if we are not successful in making the "right"

choices – choices that may bring us wealth, health and happiness – according to the norms in our communities. Organisational life comes about as fairly tensed due to power relations and struggles between autonomy and interdependency. Political practices in management – power, conflict and autonomy – will be an essential part of project four as coercive persuasion, the topic of managerialism – controlling and being controlled, enabled and constrained – is not generally a much talked-about subject in organisations. Conflict will be addressed as being more evolved disturbances, anxiety provoking and uncomfortable, what exactly it is that is being disturbed or "stirred" in various conflictual management situations and how it is changing and forming our identities. As we cannot ever work out of context, reality emerges out of particular situations; we need to pay attention to the narratives and the quality of the relationships that we are involved in because we are necessary for and need each other. The alternatives to bringing the eternal ever-threatening conflict to a halt, as Honneth suggests, may be to bring it into further explorations in today's political practice: How do practitioners in the field actually go about dealing with disturbing and uncomfortable issues, and can we come to know more the kinds of effects and influences we may have, as "narratives are both about and become the change process", according to Buchanan and Dawson (2007, introduction), meaning that as we pay attention to practices in organisations, we also change them at the same time? As we powerfully influence each other in organisations – as in management teams – we influence the way work "should be conducted" and have  been forming patterns that suppress opposition and dissenting views and thus create patterns of even more resistance, bringing about further issues of power and control.I will be arguing for maintaining harmonious relationships without being positive and also the need for developing tools and techniques for the craft of bearing and holding tension and paradoxical thinking, practicing opposition and attempting to regulate opposites and sometimes inconsistencies towards workable situations. In fields of high tension, encouraging opposing views may create less exclusion for groups without "speech" submitted to crude (barbaric) action, as in the pre-polis times, as opposed to the *zoon logon ekhon* – referring to the role of speech in politics in ancient Greece (Arendt, 1958, p. 27). We will be highly restricted in how we play the game (Elias 1970) and secure inclusion in society if we do not have the power of speech. The effect will be constantly reforming identities. Taking into account the extent of the individual resting with the social may to a large degree be a blind spot in business today, and another way forward is in exploring marginal discourses further to make sense of what we are in and how to go on together in organisations. By this I am thinking of, for instance,

exploring the myth of our autonomy, which, at this point in time, is a strong societal feature that may cause a high level of pressure and stress in management.

**Project 4**

**Revisiting the Star organisation**

**Introduction**

Project four continues to explore disturbing and uncomfortable situations from my process consultancy practice. As I have come to think of organisations as being individuals in social relations engaged in communicative action, constrained and enabled in figurations of power, I will, in this project, seek to explore how this organisational makeup is being played out in practical process consultancy work in ambiguous, unpredictable and sometimes conflictual ways. I will illuminate this with a specific case, a tumultuous workshop and a meeting that followed in the Star organisation, a long-term client of mine.

Process consultancy – the way I am taking it up – is situational, contextual and social. It focuses on disturbing, uncomfortable and conflictual *situations* between individuals and groups and does not separate the process from the content. A fuller description of the difference between this take and a more traditional one will follow later.

**Prologue**

The management discourse my clients and I work in has roots going back to the Enlightenment period, beginning in late 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, which in turn came about as a reaction to dogmatic religious beliefs and traditional lines of authority during the medieval period. The Enlightenment period is referred to as the "age of reason" and has a distinctive intellectual angle. It coincided with the scientific revolution, with social and economic transformation that promoted analysis and rationality and gave rise to some powerful conceptual thinking in modern management and process consultancy, the ideal of individuals as autonomous (reductionism) and theories of spatial systems as far-reaching analogues from the natural sciences: "wholes" that consisted of "parts", referred to as organisations, societies, schools etc. that can be "dealt with or changed" and ideas "implemented into". Feelings of things not being quite as easy or straightforward as this dominant discourse often claims they are have mostly been avoided in my practice, and I have, through starting the DMan, come to question some of the basic assumptions we hold, for instance, that conversational activities and communicative processes can be designed, directed and controlled and disturbing and uncomfortable situations and conflicts avoided. This has increasingly become an irritant over the years, both to my clients and to myself, and

has given rise to feelings of helplessness in dealing with unforeseen situations that have felt like (unnecessary) deviations from our desired outcomes of interventions. Process consultancy work being predictable has not been my practical experience, and this was recently expressed in a workshop that I conducted in the Star organisation.

The Star organisation is a governmental-owned organisation running large infrastructural projects all over Sweden. Susan, the HR director, had been my main contact in different interactions I had and was involved with there, notably process consultancy programmes with several of the managers, including the top management team over time (as written about in project three) and smaller interventions in different departments.

Susan now asked me to hold process consultancy sessions with her HR department and several other managers in a development team aimed at creating more-effective ways of working to meet the future expectations that were about to descend upon them, in particular from the government. She wanted me to "stir things up" in the process as she found the newly founded team to be too complacent, and she wished to get some feedback exercises in as well for them to get to know each other better as she felt that people being quiet and frankly too disinterested was one of the reasons they were not performing well in the meetings. I felt that bringing feedback exercises in might be a too instrumental approach and suggested encouraging more conversation around the different issues they were supposed to look into. I sensed some urgency in her plea, but after a lengthy conversation, she, to my relief, agreed to "just making conversations" as she had previous experience of me encouraging this as being a way forward for herself. I was curious about this particular group, which also consisted of some managers I had not yet met.

**The workshop**

The participants, the HR department and eight managers, were gathered in front of a room when I arrived, waiting for it to be unlocked. We had some casual conversation, and when asked what I was doing there, I explained my role as facilitating conversations on issues that they might want to bring up to make sense of their mission, what they were to do, and perhaps create some movement. I detected both tension and relief at this, and somebody said jokingly, "Well, I hope you are not going to destroy the harmony we have built in the group." I joined in the laughter at this, thinking about this worry (and worrying myself at the same time) that I might destroy the harmony (did I have a reputation of doing that?) and how contradictory this message was to Susan's, who wanted me to "stir things up".

We sat in a semicircle in a nice room with comfortable chairs. Susan placed herself a little outside the group in a corner. This confused me; I had understood she would be a participant like the rest, and her actions did not seem consistent with that. I was thinking that I needed to bring this matter to her attention at some point. I tried to let myself into the emotions in the room; there was tension, curiosity.

After explaining my function in the group and it being a process – we were going to meet another four times – I invited them into a first conversation about what they were going to do and why. As this created not much liveliness and only short, odd comments, I suggested they first speak in pairs before bringing issues up in the larger group – thinking they *had* to communicate then. This made the energy go up a bit, and eventually discussions and clarifications came about easier. It was still curiously hard to get the dialogue going, and I reflected on this being very similar to other encounters I had had in this organisation, both with individual managers and with the management team, people not easily coming forward or opening up. There seemed to be a pattern of holding back in the organisation, and I experienced it yet again in the workshop. I felt irritation welling up; I decided to leave the simple structure I had anticipated using as it started to feel pointless and instead told them about my feelings of it being hard going. "What is bothering you?" I said. "What is this tension about, what are you thinking of?" Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Susan's face freezing. This was clearly not what she had expected me to do. A few of the participants looked uncomfortable. "What is going on?" I asked again. "Are we wasting our time being here?" A manager, new to me but old in the organisation, said, "You are right, I think". He hesitated. "I think *for me*, I am just so pissed off at the moment at these new log-ins we have to do in the computer systems". He glanced in Susan's direction; she now looked very distressed. "I mean", he continued, "are we really going to be carrying out this kind of *dirty* business? The government controlling how we are controlling each other? That is sick". We were all taken aback at the strong wording, but it had a releasing effect on conversation; a few minutes later everybody was engaged in a somewhat heated discussion regarding this new directive. Susan was defending the initiative from her corner, clearly under attack from several directions. I was thinking how to get her out of the line of fire and started insisting on facts; this new directive had been given by the government due to perceived security breaches, presumably from the Star organisation, in the form of unauthorised peeking into and leaking of classified material connected to a large infrastructural project. This directive meant managers had to carry out spot checks on employees, randomly checking who had been looking at specific files and whether they were authorised to do so. These random

checks had to be carried out at least ten times every month and demanded more personnel resources than they currently had or were able to employ. Accusations left hanging in the air concerned the HR department being far too complacent in this matter and agreeing to it without consulting the managers or demanding explanations as to how it could be certain that the (supposed) security breach came from the Star organisation in the first place.

The other HR employees present looked on helplessly as Susan, by now fairly aggressively, defended the idea, explaining that it was not necessary to make such a fuss about it; this was mostly a simple administrative issue to undertake. This made the managers even more irritated. "So you are saying we don't have to do it then, it being such a simple administrative task?" It had to be done, Susan claimed, and at this one of the managers that had spoken first got out of his chair, walked around the room and stopped in front of Susan, saying, "Right. I am not going to do this. I think it is a shame you [he nodded in the direction of Susan's coworkers] are trying to coerce us into doing something like this". He sat down again. "But", Susan pleaded, "you need to—" "I don't *need* to do anything", he replied angrily, "and I am not going to either. I have neither the time nor the resources. And on another level I think this is disgraceful in a modern organisation. It is a kind of surveillance I don't want to be involved with!"

A few of the managers looked like they were going to applaud. This was quite a rebellious act, and Susan needed their cooperation if this was going to work out. She had no control of the situation. I felt bad (for Susan) having started it, but at the same time I knew she trusted me, and I also felt there had been little choice; we could not continue being overly polite, nobody talking about what was clearly on everyone's mind. Everybody was expectantly looking at Susan now except for her coworkers, who seemed to be studying their shoes intensely. It would not be helpful if this turned into a game of tennis – this was hardly Susan's own doing – so I interfered, saying, "Let's slow this down and attempt to look at this situation step by step". I was aiming for some sort of rational entanglement. Everybody reluctantly settled down, and I had a momentarily flash of "they almost seem to want conflict!" The discussion eventually became more intimate as I semiforced them to hear each other out and ask more questions on the issue of surveillance, and more people came forward, including Susan, who confessed to feeling very anxious about it, saying that she had initially not supported the idea either but felt pressured to carry it out.

When walking out for a break, I overheard the communications manager whispering (in a rather annoyed tone) to Susan, "I thought we had an agreement!" Susan giggled nervously

and said something along the lines of "I thought she was going to do feedback exercises". I wondered what Susan had promised that I would deliver. I manoeuvred myself closer to the communications manager, whom I knew a little and asked her about work in general. She appeared insecure but told me about the different communication concepts and platforms they were currently developing and working on within the organisation. "However", she said, "we should be working more with the concept of feedback, but in a *nice* way. We don't want to upset people". She emphasised "nice" in such a way that it seemed to me as an invitation to speak, so I asked her what she thought of this way of working, what we were currently involved in and doing right *now*. She replied, "Well, it's not very harmonious, is it? It must be possible to talk to each other without arguing. It is not very nice to have these kinds of surprising discussions popping up at all times". She looked genuinely worried. "Is this common here, you feel?" I asked, and she said hesitantly, "Well, HR, for instance, isn't an easy place to be in when decisions are being overruled all the time. And this is affecting my function as well in a negative way". "Why are they being overruled?" I asked, meaning the decisions. "I don't think they like *her*", she answered, referring to Susan.

The talking became louder after the break and more nuanced. We finished the workshop on a hopeful note, agreeing on the helpfulness of not jumping to conclusions too soon or accusing each other. They experienced having gained different thinking in the process which might prove to be helpful regarding the surveillance. "We may not even have to do it", somebody said, "just *pretend* to", and one of the managers said, "I am not so angry anymore", when leaving the room.

*First argument:* As situations like the above are everyday work in organisations, I argue that process consultancy, the way I am taking it up, is always dealing with conflictual, disturbing and uncomfortable situations located in a wider discourse of predictability and control that dominates management today. There would be no need for bringing a process consultant in if things were running smoothly without interruptions or conflicts. Important issues are always at stake when bringing my colleagues or me in: factual, emotional and political.

**Meeting after the workshop**

The meeting with Susan and the HR department that followed was full of emotions, relief that the workshop ended well but also general worrying. They talked about one of the first conflicts that I had encountered in the Star organisation (as described in project three): Petra, head of the judicial department, had lost responsibility for her staff as she had communication

issues. With the help of HR, the staff had been transferred to another manager. This had been a time of turmoil as the staff, three middle managers, had threatened to leave. The situation had been dragging on, with gossiping and rumour spreading as a consequence. It had been a highly charged emotional period of HR's recent history, and they were now revisiting the emotions of those days.

"Well, the workshop was a bit of a surprise!" Susan said. Conversational patterns often reproduced themselves in Star, even the same sentences being recycled. The sustainability manager had once told me she wanted "no strange surprises" regarding the content of an employee day I was going to be in charge of. Susan had, prior to this, used exactly the same sentence in regard to the management programme I had been responsible for carrying out; she had wanted an extensive report on the progress of the programme before it had finished, making sure there would not be any "strange surprises" at the end. The communications manager had worded it as "surprising discussions popping up all of the time". The workshop had now come out as yet another "surprise", something they could not predict or control.

The process of complaining about the past continued for a while, about the management team, in particular Petra, who was still on the management team, but also about Roger, the MD, who allowed Petra to stay and also did not give enough direction regarding the work they were to carry out and seemed to lack a powerful vision for the organisation. "You sort of think that you should do things the proper, the 'right' way according to the hierarchy, but I think we need to change strategy", Susan said to her coworkers. She seemed to be involved in an internal identity reformation process, for herself and possibly for the whole HR department. I was thinking about Susan's position; I knew she had a personal history of being on sick leave for long periods of time due to stress. I often sensed a great deal of worry surrounding her person, and when walking me out, she said, "Maybe I'm not cut out for this job. There are so many pressures in it. I shouldn't really be a manager; I am not good enough". She also told me they were about interview the managers about what kind of competence they were looking for in the future regarding employees; "I think it is best if the communications manager and I do the interviews", she said. "My staff at HR is not really up to it. They are too soft and too loyal with the staff in general; they don't really understand that we need to look after the *organisation*". Reflecting on this her own staff was, according to Susan, probably not playing the game in the "right" way. The sociologist Norbert Elias introduces the idea of "the game" as a way of pointing to the interdependency of people and how power is a relational phenomenon, "a structural characteristic of human relationships –

of *all* human relationships" (1978, p. 74). Susan seemed to be suggesting that her personnel were not functional enough as they were looking after individuals – "giving in to personal needs", as she expressed it – at the expense of the organisation, which she looked upon as "groups of people". Thus, a need for them to readapt was important, to lobby for the HR function and reform their identity to fit in with the organisational games being played out, even to the point of reproducing the same language, as in "no surprises".

One of the core assumptions within dominant management thinking today – often being played out in process consultancy situations – is that fierce competition happens in perceived limited markets and this force us to try to foresee and forecast where business opportunities or new markets could emerge next. This has created a need for more or different tools, methods and measurements to assist in this, based on an ideology which implies that what we are doing at present is not good enough and needs to be improved. It also creates an ongoing *sense of urgency*, as I experienced when Susan wanted me to "stir things up" in the workshop. This ideology implies that we need to be striving for something better than what we are at present; we should attempt to improve ourselves and our processes to enhance effectiveness and be "right up there" and preferably ahead of the competition. *Effectiveness* is a word frequently used within the context of management and could be described as the capability to produce a desired result or an intended or expected outcome. It relates to getting the right things done and "can and must be learned", according to an influential management thinker and writer Peter Drucker (2006).

This way of thinking seems to lead to prescriptions and implementations of "more of the same", things we have already been trying, and this has, in most cases, not prevented or predicted disturbances or undesired or, indeed, desired outcomes so far. We are still very much in the dark as to what exactly produces certain outcomes of the interventions that process consultancy inevitably is about.

I have come to see a marginal discourse, a theory of activity – complex responsive processes of relating – as an interesting alternative from which to explore my daily working situations. Complex responsive processes follow in the tradition of Hegel, Foucault, Bourdieu, Mead, Elias, Stacey, Griffin, Shaw and Mowles, amongst others, and the difference between the current and dominating perspective and this complexity approach – as I have come to see it – is that the first one works out of what we *ought* to be doing in management and consultancy and the second pays attention to what we actually *are* doing, what *is*.

**Coming into 'the social' of the Star organisation**

The contingencies we are in, the "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 52) – which is the unique structuring dispositions we have been born into and gather through practical experience of functionality – and the different ideologies and intentions we bring into meetings are the backdrop for our doings and particular outcomes. The habitus of Star is being formed by all the members (employees, clients, advocates, stakeholders) it is influenced by and is influencing in ongoing processes in volatile and versatile ways, forming and being formed at the same time. The (social) culture in Star was one of anxiety and lack of (perceived) control, as felt by me. I had rarely encountered processes with such high levels of tension, whether working through or with the HR department (Susan) and the managers in the workshop or in the earlier process consultancy interventions I had done. The highest level of anxiety and tension had been displayed in the top management team. They had all individually said they wanted the development process, but when we were underway, the process frequently froze, making it heavy going and confusing. I felt very little response to my gestures, to the point of my losing confidence and starting to question my competence in running the process. I felt relief when the process was over, as opposed to feeling sad, as I often had in other organisations when it was time to part from the group.

**Process consultancy evolving**

According to traditional definitions (Schein, 1987; Block, 2000), process consultancy is a general theory, a philosophy of helping and a methodology of intervening. A process consultant is a highly qualified professional with insights into and understandings of psychosocial dynamics of working with various clients: organisations, groups and individuals. The consultant acts as a facilitator to help groups deal with issues involving the process in a meeting rather than with the actual tasks themselves, and does not solve the problem but helps the group towards, if not conflict resolution, conflict management. The consultant will initially have an observing role and, based on the diagnostics of these observations, design interventions and later participate in the process through giving feedback, paraphrasing and asking questions. Edgar Schein wrote about the subject as being an art of knowing what to look for and how to look at and interpret it and act upon it. His idea was to analyse the patterns of communications going on in the organisation, thus arriving at a diagnosis and helping institute patterns that the client considered more helpful. His take on process consultancy was thus coming from a systemic perspective, a participant-observer view (further developed later), and did not take into account change variables. On the one

hand, he understood process consultancy activities as "a patterning that cannot be understood as intended by any single person or group. On the other hand, he suggests that people can introduce new patterns that they "do intend" (Shaw, 2002, p. 9). The second part of this contradiction – that we intentionally may be able to introduce new patterns into processes – has been and still is heavily influential and may lead to process consultants and managers expecting and being expected to fill the looming gaps of structural voids in the organisation with matrices, frameworks, policies, exercises and structured agendas.

I would have agreed with the above definition earlier, but the character of my work, as well as that of some of my colleagues, has changed in recent years. Process consultancy – the way I am taking it up – is situational, contextual and social. It is a common process, carried out in groups, and it attempts to deal with disturbing, uncomfortable and conflictual *situations* rather than focusing on individuals (as in a "society of individuals", according to Elias (1991, p. 10), in situational relationships. The separation of the process and the content (issues involving the process in a meeting, *how* we go about conducting it together rather than the actual task itself) has become problematic as these are increasingly mixed and may be one and the same, as Mowles (2015, p. 32), drawing on Hegel and Kainz, suggests. Problematic *situations* can be more fully explored through externalising[1], exploring the relations and multiple interpretations of the situation, depending on what particular participants bring into it. Thinking about problem-driven as opposed to method-driven research as an analogy to content and process in consultancy work, one can draw on Mowles proposing that Hegel could have been suggesting that, although starting with a few preconceptions about experience, try and engage with it by allowing experience to experience itself (Ibid., p. 31). Experience *itself* being the experience could further be seen as an analogy to what White (2007, p. 9) suggests: that the problem itself may be the problem, not the individual having a problem. When perceiving Susan to be in the line of fire from several directions in the workshop, I attempted to externalise the contested situation – freeing it up from polarised views for us to be able to collaborate more around it, talk about it first in a factual way and later address ideologies and intentions that cause differences, thus slowing down defensive reactions and verbal attacks and, ultimately, causing the tensed situation to become less tense.

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[1] Through employing practices of objectifying a problem (externalising) rather than objectifying people, one can provide an antidote to internal understandings, the problem becomes the problem, not the person (White, 2007).

**'Strange surprises'**

I was used to dealing with tension in groups, but there had been a high degree of it in the Star organisation, even with occasional eruptions in the processes (as in the workshop).

This wish for harmony and niceness in the organisation may have stemmed from events that had produced disturbing and uncomfortable emotions earlier; Petra being stripped of personnel and, prior to this, another manager also being stripped of personnel and being forced to leave the organisation made any emergent situation with disturbing elements attached to it reproduce these old emotions and create avoidance behaviours when everybody protected themselves from the anxiety this could create.

Simmel remarks how the disappearance of the original object of struggle often gives "peculiar shadings to the termination of conflict" (1904, p. 801). As specific "objects of struggle", the earlier issue with removing personnel from Petra, for instance, had now gone from the horizon of HR in a rational, practical move as they had left the actual situation and not addressed it again, but the *emotions* surrounding the events, still ongoing, had not been addressed and were lingering in the background, occasionally seeping through, as in the meeting following the workshop. The movement towards rational solutions of these highly charged events had swung into emptiness, a void; they had no forum in which to address the "old" situation again. These tumultuous emotions somehow had to work themselves out before they could eventually come to a rest. Many of the emotional issues that arose in the workshop felt resolved, but there could be no certainty of them not being revived in new or stressful situations and provoked to surface when perceived threats or uncomfortable situations came about. The rational expressions would be that these bygone events were not of such practical importance any more, but the emotions were still looming in the background as tensions and nervousness, as they had stirred and provoked issues of recognition, identity and power, finding expressions in the language used, "no strange surprises please". Rationally, Susan had hinted that it now had lost some of its interest to her – or at least that it *should* have – as she now seemed to want us all to brush aside these *unnecessary* emotions and free ourselves up for other kinds of activity, regroup and create and adapt into other figurations of relationships.

The wish of the communications manager for us to work with feedback exercises in a "nice" way suggested her being drawn to the status quo – do not upset us, do not stir things up – as my way of being open regarding what I felt was going on had not created harmony, according

to her. She had been genuinely worried in saying this, and I got a feel for the tension she was harbouring. As the communications manager, she was expected to communicate in an upbeat and positive way regarding the state of the organisation to keep moral standards high, and it would be hard to maintain that perspective if people were arguing or got upset.

Susan's and the communications manager's messages seemed ambiguous and contradictory; Susan wanted me to "stir things up", the communications manager wanted me to maintain harmony. Susan wanted me to conduct feedback exercises, and in my experience of doing feedback exercises, people in general always get a bit upset; we are protective of our sense of self, our identity, and giving feedback can rarely be done in a way that is nicely felt. It would inevitably have stirred identities and provoked various degrees of defence mechanisms. Things can be nicely meant but not necessary nicely felt. Apart from this approach being instrumental, this may not have gone down well with the communications manager, although the turn the events had taken (without feedback exercises) had not gone down too well either. However, this does not preclude that things can be nicely meant and nicely felt, as meaning emerges in the social act, in our gesturing and responding (Mead, 1934, p. 80). In a conflict, we struggle to negotiate meaning in the situation and capitulate to claims or ideas of what is going on for us. As there had been anxiousness and attempts to avoid the disturbing situations that clearly were on everybody's minds, it might have produced contrareactions, amplified and erupted when there was a forum for them to do so. It seemed to me that they were all able to live with the outcome of the workshop although there had been "surprises".

There had been dissolving qualities in the conversations as thinking and talking had moved us all into more pragmatic views. Rather than coming out of the workshop with a number of positive views and/or bullet points on what actions to take next, we had gained a better understanding of what was going on. I am referring to "dissolving qualities" as in our holding on to an idea (the original) when entering a conversation, being influenced (at the same time as we are influencing ourselves when we speak, "behaviour in which the individuals become objects to themselves" (Mead, 1934, p. 139) and may experience movements when gaining different, often sudden insights, a move from the original idea into a new and different one. The effect may be that the "old" one (rather chains of old connecting thoughts building on one another) may be felt to dissolve. I distinguish between solutions and resolutions, which both aim to fix something, and a dissolution, which is an emergent quality present in the social act of conversing; when a different and/or new meaning occurs, the old one dissolve/disappear into the new one. Hence, solutions in consultancy processes may often be

dissolutions; our thinking has been moved in several directions, and we exit the conversations with different thinking and insights than when we entered. We do not aim to solve something, but something may be felt as having been solved through being dissolved – evolved into different thinking.

**Systems thinking and social selves**

Susan had placed herself outside the team in the workshop; she had taken up a corner position outside the semicircle, and when I approached this subject with her, she described her position as "observing". We talked about the differences this would make in the team and how we could think of all of us as becoming more "detached in our involvement", as Elias suggests, as the task (of sociological research) is to make "*uncontrolled processes more accessible to human understanding* by explaining them, and to enable people to orientate themselves within the interwoven social web" (1970, p. 154). Sitting outside a group (yet in the room) did not make much sense. We would not know the difference this was going to make; we agreed to being, in a sense, involved in sociological research.

The idea of an organisation as a system – a whole separated by a boundary from an environment and consisting of parts interacting to form the whole and themselves (Stacey, 2011, p. 187) – is a common metaphor in process consultancy. Kant (1790) held it out as an *analogy,* according to Stacey, in that he suggested it was helpful to think of living phenomena as if they were wholes formed by interacting parts but meant that this ideaould not be applied to human actors as that would mean losing our rational autonomy. It is mainstream today to talk about organisations as systems, schools as systems, even as "living" systems: closed, open or semi-open/closed. These spatial constructions in our minds (as we cannot see them) imply borders and the possibility of an observer. The idea of people being in the same room yet *outside* or *inside* a system (a group), participating as an "observer", as Susan suggested she was, assumes that groups are particular "bodies" in space (and thus boundaries) to observe, design or implement into. This is problematic, and attempts to widen the boundary to incorporate the observer lead to an infinite regress in argument (Stacey, Ibid. drawing on Bateson). Thinking in terms of systems thus means thinking in wholes (the system) and parts (human beings) and disregards that which is truly human: choice (to some degree), creativity and spontaneity (Ibid.).

It may be helpful to think about process consultancy processes, organising and forming organisations in the sense Mead (1934), Elias (1987/2000) and Stacey (2011) make of them;

whilst gesturing and responding in conversations, we are organising, and *organisation* emerges. Organising is thus what we do/are involved in making together, and understandings, meanings and patterns emerge over time and change, moving all of us in ongoing improvised conversations. We cannot know where we will end up in conversations as meanings change owing to the responses we get to the gestures we make. Gesturing can thus not be separated from responding; it is one act resulting in the "basis of meaning" (Mead, 1934, p. 80). Process consultancy is an act of co-researching with the clients in the organisation through gesturing and responding in conversations and is as *real* as any event taking place. Thinking of consultancy encounters as outsiders intervening in organisational life is a product of systems thinking; consultants are as much in the acts in each and every situation they may be involved in.

Burkitt proposes the term "social selves" for three reasons: we are born into a network of relations, and all its contingencies will influence the self we become; the search for self involves what we do, different activities informing us of who we are, our capacities and talents; and lastly, who we are or become involves a political struggle – "And the identities forged in such struggle are not formed prior to it, but in it" (2008, p. 4). The sense of self (or identity) then is nothing that can be found inside of us, a riddle locked inside our bodies, but rather a social activity, something that is created in joint activities with other people; it is thus not being but *becoming* that is the case. And we are becoming through being in social settings making conversations; we all *became* different through being influenced and changing our thinking in multiple ways in the workshop. Ready identities are not given at birth but made and can be seen as pluralistic, quite unstable and subject to radical change over a lifetime (Giddens & Sutton, 2014, p. 140). We were all carrying internal voices, past and present invisible audiences which we perform for, each other's voices in the organisation, the power relations we were in and their limited choices in taking up the proceedings of surveilling staff or not and in the workshop we were testifying of a specific situation:  The rebellious act – the manager refusing to carry out what he considered *dirty* business – thus *became* in the workshop, the meaning emerging in the negotiating going on in the social acts of gesturing and responding. Susan had voiced they could not choose whether to take up the requirements demanded. This may have been felt as coercive and caused even more resistance. She had been unsure in how to go on as her gestures had not been taken up in the way she had hoped and she had backed off the official organisational stance, hoping we would come back to it; otherwise, her functionality would have been felt impossible. Coming back to ourselves to comply with what is expected of us may finally be an act of choosing to trust the leadership

and the proceedings in the organisation or of coercing ourselves and rationalising, "It is probably being done for the better".

The intrapolitics of subordinated groups (Scott, 1990, p. 18) offers a way of addressing the issue of hegemonic incorporation. People are being socialised into believing and accepting a view of themselves and their interests; the face may grow to fit the mask. Foucault's work *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* focuses on modern forms of social control, scientific techniques, market forces of supply and demand and bureaucratic rules, as opposed to earlier, when retribution was enacted on the criminal's body. Scott take Foucault's point of something different in quality when referring to claims to authority based on technical, impersonal and scientific rules, as "science" often equals truths in our society. Today,

> our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralisation of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated within it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (Foucault, 1977: 217)

Panopticism – physically consisting of a tower (panopticon) in the centre of prisons surrounded by a ring-shaped building composed of cells, each housing a prisoner – allows for continuous observation of inmates. This is an example of how disciplinary power functions; it relies on surveillance, and the internal training this produces instil states of docility in the prisoners. There is no need for direct force or violence; the surveilled subjects discipline themselves. It is thus an apparatus designed to alter behaviour and to train or correct individuals (Ibid, pp. 58-59).

In the organisation – as it was being played out in the workshop, we, in a sense, "fabricated each other". Disciplinary power and its techniques are not only negative aspects; modern societies and organisations need them to sustain sufficient order for carrying out complex tasks, according to Stacey (ed. Bush and Marshak, to be published). This critique amounts more to the fact that we are covering it over, pretending that this is being done in order to improve outcome – sometimes in confusing and contradictory experiences of organisational talk, as in Star: "We are being surveilled by the government to make sure we surveil

employees, find the culprits and secure a better fit into the fabric of the organisation, but it is mostly an administrative task really". Thus we risk losing awareness of the ethical dimension, what the morally responsible thing to do is when these techniques are taken to an extreme. The managers in Star were already resisting this in the hidden transcript[2] and the reluctance to speak; bringing the hidden into the open is always risky due to relations of power.

> Those at each position *defer* to those placed higher. Looked at in this fashion, deference is one of the consequences of a stratification system rather than its creator…and the term *deference* is best thought of as "the form of social interaction which occurs in situations involving the exercise of traditional authority." (Scott, 1990, p. 23)

Hence, Scott sides with Mead (1934, p. 80) in thinking that subordination or domination is a consequence of the social act itself, as he is indicating that the hidden transcript receives its emotional resonance and norms from impulses that are being censored in the presence of power. It is not a ready-made approach to behave in a deferential way; it is a cause of the social act in the living present, the living relationship coming about there and then.

**Idealisations and reality in process consultancy**

The idea of the group in the workshop was that they constituted a development group, and although I tried initially to focus on their different interpretations of this – what did they all think of development in Star, what exactly were they going to be doing in the group, what were they going to develop and why? – these gestures were not taken up with any particular interest. As managers and consultants "are themselves participants in the ongoing pattering of relations that they seek to change" (Mowles, 2011, p.8), I took an interest in how the purpose of the group was interpreted by them. As identification is an ongoing social process (Honneth, 1995; Elias, 1970) that develops the social structures we find ourselves working in and these, in turn, form us, this did indicate something of the social structures in Star. As there seemed to be little or no response, I attempted to create a rupture (due to my own irritation/impatience) to talk in the present about what was on everybody's mind and chose to address these issues, rather than the planned ones. This process could be considered development if we define more what we meant by it: it did not necessarily lead to positive or negative outcomes but rather helped us to encounter our differences. It was due to the

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[2] A "hidden transcript" represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant that every subordinate group creates out of its ordeal. The powerful also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed (Scott, 1990, p.18).

conformity and the disengagement I experienced in response to my first questions that other questions were created that may have come across as challenging or uncomfortable. Had there already been a certain level of disagreement, the need would not have arisen. Twelve people in a room, hardly talking, create bodily sensations of something as being at stake.

Out of these local interactions, ongoing conversations or, in this case, a certain amount of nonverbal communication, patterns emerged, which in turn influenced our local interactions, which in turn caused a different pattern to emerge etc. In the interplay of all different intentions, both unexpected and undesired population-wide patterns can emerge which no one single person – however powerful – can control (Elias, 1994/2000, p. 366; Stacey, 2011, p. 484). All things can manifest themselves only in local interactions. A powerful player, a leader, manager or process consultant, for instance, may formulate visions and goals (equally influenced by all local interactions), but there is no knowing how these will be taken up. The responses to these more or less powerful gestures can never be predicted. People may be seen to conform, but this may be an empty pose to minimise discomfort or exposure.

Susan could see this point, but her insecurity in not being seen as delivering something more tangible in the form of bullet points, a strategy for development, made her (and me) unsure of how to describe it. We were searching for a language not common or even particularly welcome in this management setting. Our take on the process was to try to resist solving problems but rather stay in and explore tensed, ambiguous and contradictory situations, as could be advocated from a complexity view, hoping that this would provide us with information and clues to what was being avoided and why, thus illuminating new or different meanings and understandings that we may have wanted to take up.

The workshop shed light on these issues eventually. The traditional way may have been to make the rebellious manager into a "patient", somebody who was being disruptive and in the wrong. We could have gone the route of attempting to "cure" this through making his relationship with Susan the main issue and coaching or coercing him into a suitable way of thinking, or we could have gone the route we finally took: trying to make the issue ours, looking into the situation as a common responsibility and through facts and questions attempting to address the emotional attachments to the situation, still remaining involved but making an effort to self-distance, as "every person is one among others, and all the consequences of that idea" (Elias, 1970, p. 122).

This process was helpful in illuminating and increasing awareness of a transformation or change, not necessarily a change of content (refutation of old errors) or of theoretical forms (modifications in models etc.) but rather a rethinking. "It is a question of what *governs* statements", as an analogy to what Foucault is suggesting regarding the politics of scientific statements (1994, p. 114). This we were attempting through enquiry.

**Roger, the MD of Star**

I had come to think of Roger, the MD of Star, as severely constrained by the different political bodies in which he took part many times a week. He had little say, I believed, in what kind of routines were going to be carried out to ensure that the leak was going to be stopped or what kinds of visions were supposed to be encouraged in the organisation. Although the government of Stockholm emphasised the importance of openness and sustainability, local politicians and other advocates all had different ideologies and intentions, severely constraining the issue and enabling it in another sense. Roger's position was highly politically charged, to the point where he nearly abandoned the organisation; he clearly felt that his job was to keep the board happy, thus leaving the running of everyday business to the different managers. They all had different intentions and found it hard to unite in their efforts. I saw Roger as a very careful team player, loyal to the board and the government. I felt him to be fairly unconvinced by the conversations I had been trying to entice in the management team, although he had chosen to trust Susan's judgment in the matter. He affirmed his team when they were working together in a nice and *effective* way, a term which he frequently used.

> Consequent organizational effectiveness, a moderate amount of substantive conflict is necessary, but affective conflict should be minimized, and organizational participants should learn to use the five styles of handling conflict to deal with different conflict situations. In other words, if the variables, other than conflict, that affect organizational learning and effectiveness are controlled, effectiveness can be maximized if effective conflict management strategies are implemented. This indicates that the management of organizational conflict requires proper understanding of the effect of conflict on organizational effectiveness. (Rahim, 2001, p. 65)

Perhaps if I had taught the five styles of handling conflict Rahim advocates above, Roger would have felt more comfortable than with the conversations I tried to entice, as his ideal

outcome still was to achieve effectiveness, which he found to be rational discussions without too many emotions being stirred. We would, however, first have had to control the other variables as well as had a proper understanding of the effects, according to the above. This technocratic worldview, dominant in management, builds on a science of certainty rather than complexity. I will address this particular book further as it is a typical example of the literature on dealing with conflict.

The preface in M. Afzalur Rahim's book *Managing conflict in organisations* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2001), sets up the basis for the book:

> Organisations are constantly changing in order to improve their competitive position, but this does not, of course, mean that our organisations are learning to manage conflict more effectively. The previous two editions of this book mentioned that managers and administrators attempt not so much to understand and deal with conflict functionally as to find ways of reducing, avoiding or terminating it. *It appears that this state of affairs has remained unchanged*. As a result, valuable resources are wasted as employees engage in dysfunctional conflict and miss the opportunity of utilizing functional conflict to improve their effectiveness. In this edition, the major objective (i.e., to develop a design for the effective management of conflict at various levels in an organisation) *has remained unchanged*. (my italics)

It is a comprehensive account of conflict based in idealisations of management and an ideology of improvement. I found the sentences highlighted in italics intriguing. If the state of affairs regarding organisations managing conflict "has remained unchanged", one would assume that the third edition of this book would address this unawareness or refusal to "learn" and perhaps change the ways in which to address the same. Maybe the quest could be rephrased; one can turn to the Foucault quote once again in asking what is g*overning* statements (1994, p. 114). I would say that as people are functional, "reducing, avoiding or terminating conflict" are indeed functional activities within this discourse; otherwise we would hardly be doing them. "Getting it to work" in the way it *should* (ideology of improvement) may be blinding us to finding out why it isn't.

In the modern view of organisational conflict, Rahim concludes that ..."It is now recognized that conflict *within certain limits* [my italics] is essential to productivity"..." (2001 p 12) and that too little or too much conflict are both dysfunctional for an organisations effectiveness

and that a moderate amount of substantive or task-related conflict, but not affective or emotional conflict, is appropriate for attaining and maintaining an optimum level of organisational effectiveness. These conclusions lie within the frames of idealised strategic management but may be seen as problematic from a complexity perspective. Assuming the "right" amount of conflict (not too little or too much) is productive is hardly anything we can predict as it may well turn out that the "wrong" amount of conflict – at the time – may turn out just as or more productive or functional in the long term. I would argue that substantive or task-related conflicts cannot be separated from affectiveness or emotions. This comes across as a reductive view that would reduce human beings to robots. Thinking and feeling arise at the same time in our bodies, as we are embodied beings.

These ideas are based on certain assumptions; organisations need to improve their conflict management skills, and this needs to happen in certain ways being laid out: diagnosing, classifying and intervening/handling the same. This ideology, leaving our bad organisational selves behind and becoming better ones through following said steps, is common within process consultancy. There is a systemic approach by which managers or consultants are perceived as standing outside of the direct action and may (from the outside) deal with or manage conflicts or design and implement conflict management systems *into* the organisation. A third assumption builds on people being autonomous individuals that choose to engage in dysfunctional conflict and thus miss opportunities to improve effectiveness.

Our contingencies and contexts affect how we act in specific situations, and ethics emerges as a consequence of our actions which cannot be foreseen by anyone (Griffin, 2002, p. 182). We are always whole and affect the social settings we are in; there is no standing outside of anything. We are enabling and constraining each other and are thus limited in our free will by the social. Change happens anyway, whether we are willing it or not, and what is constitutive of effectiveness is nothing we can know. This may be one of the most common sayings in organisations today: people resist change. But resisting change is also change – minds are constantly moving. We deal with whatever comes our way in local activity; whether it turns out to be effective is hard to tell. Short-term things that seem effective may turn out to be ineffective in the long term. Human beings as radical social are not taken into sufficient account in this idealised perspective, and neither is how we always are in relations of power.

The book contains a classification of conflicts containing ten sources of conflicts, four levels of analysis, four models of styles of handling them and further measurements of conflict for which two instruments have been designed by the author for measuring the amount of

conflict at individual, group and intergroup levels, including the five styles of handling interpersonal conflict through the Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory–I (ROCI-I).

The notion of people having fixed identities and originators of measurements not taken sufficiently account of our fundamental sociality may make it hard to conclude anything valuable on deeper levels from conducting conflict inventories in organisations, apart from perhaps stimulating conversations. This may be one reason why they are not taken up more broadly in the manner that the author hopes. Although results from inventories may point towards tendencies, drawing conclusions from context-free inventories must always remain speculative. In the epilogue Rahim concludes, "Evidence from recent studies generally indicates that substantive conflict may be functional, but affective conflict may be dysfunctional for an organisation" (2001 p 197). Apart from the separating substantive-affective conflict, this is further problematic as it, in the current rational discourse, may prime us for dealing with substantive conflicts but failing to address emotional issues as emotions. Knowledge of how to address emotional issues is generally lacking in organisations. These may be skills coming from experiences and practical judgment in practices with high sensitivity around people, issues and context. Labelling affective displays as "dysfunctional" may further limit the scope of expressions in an organisation, allowing people to express emotions only in certain ways that would be affirmed as substantive.

**Origins of conflict**

Conflict in the general Machiavellian and Hobbesian sense – people being driven by endless ambition and, in the raw nature of things, always facing each other in fearful mistrust, suspiciously defending themselves against possible attacks from the other – made a sovereign ruling power the only reasonable outcome to regulate interests. They, (Hobbes and Machiavelli), made us struggle for self-preservation and "also consider the ultimate purpose of political practice to be the attempt, over and over again, to bring a halt to this ever-threatening conflict" (Honneth, 1995, p. 10). This tradition may still constitute the fear of conflicts and bring about different prescriptions of how to halt them at all costs in contemporary literature.

Susan took the function of 'management' in the workshop. HR having to carry out certain (uncomfortable) tasks in the organisation made her defend the initiative, although she later confessed to being unhappy at the proceeding as well. She wanted us to talk about it but simultaneously halt eventual upcoming disturbances for fear of them escalating into a full

and open conflict; that would not have made her popular with *her* peers, the top management team who expected her to be in control.

I recognise the vast field of psychology and psychoanalysis but am not addressing these more specifically in this project as my work focuses on people being firmly located in the social and constrained and enabled in relations of power (in the tradition of Elias, Bourdieu and Stacey) in the disturbing situations that I am exploring in my practice.

When Freud in the 1920s replaced the Enlightenment's idea of rational man with the concept of the unconscious, psychoanalysis encouraged the idea of an *individual* life distinct from the family, persuading people to look inward rather than follow a path ordained by custom or birth. This eventually led to the birth of other therapies and movements (Zaretsky, 2004). *Individualism*, which privileges the individual over the group, is central in most schools of psychoanalysis. In his pioneering work, Wilfred Bion was influenced by the work of Melanie Klein in forming the Tavistock tradition based on a group relations model, which examines behaviour (including thought and emotion) from a systemic or "group as a whole" perspective. Bion conceptualised the difficulties in working with others in object relations theory; doing work in a group is similar to the development challenge an infant face in negotiating the relationship with the maternal object.

There is an absence of the social in psychoanalytic discourse in the *orthodox* rendition. If there is a social involved, it is a "social unconscious", which retains the division between the personal and the social, and these are generally conflicting. The whole field has, however, been undergoing a re-examination in recent years due to the discrepancy between mind and behaviour and much acontextual research (Smith, Mackie & Claypool, 2014) and tensions between theory and abstraction on the one hand and social practical application on the other are increasingly being recognised, for instance, in Lazarus's *Stress and emotion* (2006). Paul Hoggett sees a revival but also thinks of the area as still mainly psychologistic and undersocialised and states that the task of a team or organisation is always problematic, contested and socially constructed (Armstrong & Rustin, 2015).

Group analytics, however, has significantly contributed to bringing *the social* in: Farhad Dalal, in *Taking the group seriously*, has examined the more *unorthodox* aspect of group analytic theory where he takes up a radical side of S. H. Foulkes, founder of group analysis – a form of psychotherapy that values relationships, communication and dynamics within a group as focus for the work – as trying to bridge the nature/nurture dichotomy (*nature* as our

true selves and *nurture* as the process of living with others) in a move away from individualism and prioritise the cultural and the social in-group settings. Although Foulkes considered group analysis to be an act of liberation from the psychoanalytic foundations he found himself in then, Dalal is not convinced whether he *quite* managed to take the leap into a radical social in the meaning of Elias, where the individual and the social are part of the same phenomenon. Perhaps because he was caught up in the politics of belonging to a psychoanalytic tradition, it then might have been problematic to stay on in the same (Dalal, 1998). Dalal continues to advocate the radical Foulkes rather than the orthodox in his 36th Foulkes Annual Lecture by stating "that the 'we' is prior to the 'I', and that the 'I' is a conflictual entity constituted out of the varieties of 'we' that one is born into. The fact that the region of the 'we' is constituted by power-relations, leads to the assertion: that the psyche is constituted and patterned by the field of power-relations one is born into" (Dalal, 2012 p. 407).

One can think of conflict as an *eternal struggle for recognition* in the traditions of Hegel, Mead and the thinking of Honneth. Axel Honneth (1995) thinks of struggles for recognition as a driving force of development of social structures and the ideal of human flourishing as dependent on the existence of reciprocal relations of recognition. He questions the self-interested motives and the atomistic character of the state of nature and thinks of it as social actors trying to establish patterns of reciprocal recognition on which the possibility of redeeming their claims to identity depends. The struggle may be the balancing of and tension between recognising each other and ourselves for what we are doing and further challenging each other to do things differently as well. Entering the workshop, Susan saw herself as being "right" and expected the managers to conform in carrying out this "simple administrative task", as she phrased it. This had the opposite effect to what she anticipated; the managers felt misrecognised, it would take up their time and resources, they objected and threatened to overturn the whole proceeding.

Hegel, in "System of ethical life", considered conflict as the road to ethical life in the form of processes of *recurring negations* that would lead to successfully freeing of one-sidedness and particularities and a "destroyed equilibria" that rested upon the existence of differences that allows ethical life to move and ultimately lead to a unity of the particular and the universal (Honneth, 1995, p. 15). We may not be able to see new dimensions of ourselves without conflict; subjects are always learning something more about their particular identity and may as such see new dimensions of themselves confirmed thereby; therefor they must

leave again, by means of conflict, the stage they have reached, to achieve the recognition of a "more demanding form of individuality" (Ibid., p. 17).

Seeing new dimensions of ourselves being played out in the social of the workshop were vocally expressed by Susan turning on herself, backing off the official policy and witnessing her own anxiety in this; although she had opposed the surveillance originally, she had felt obliged to carry it out.

Thus, the proposition is of alternating stages of reconciliation and conflict and no longer a "struggle of all against all", as in Machiavelli/Hobbes. Here is the concept *social*, where internal tension is contained constitutively and practical conflict can be understood as ethical moments in movements occurring within a collective social life.

The conversation had gradually become more open as to what constituted the "right" thing to do in the workshop. Nobody seemed keen on taking up the instruction the way it seemed intended. Insights had landed more in ways of getting around it – pretending to comply – which had led to further talk regarding the ethical aspects in that.

George Herbert Mead, writing in the Hegelian tradition, develops the "I/me" concept, a way of describing ongoing transformation. He took up the pragmatic idea that it is through problematic situations we may gain cognitive insights. If we did not encounter problems, there would be no gains; difficulties make us rework the meanings of situations in creative ways. Vocal gestures – as mainly being used in human communication on a day-to-day basis – are the first to affect both ourselves as well as our interacting partner at the same time.

> But it is where one does respond to that which he addresses to another and where that response of his own becomes a part of his conduct, where he not only hears himself but responds to himself, talks and replies to himself as truly as the other person replies to him, that we have behaviour in which the individuals become object to themselves. (Mead, 1934, p. 139)

> The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. (Ibid., p. 140)

It was in the conversations in the workshop the managers were able to rework, create and recreate new meanings and understandings.

*Second argument:* If movement is to occur, creativity to happen, disturbances, uncomfortable situations and encountering differences that may be conflictual could be a

route towards this; they change thinking and provide opportunities to take up new and/or different meanings

These abilities to stimulate ourselves and others at the same time and to respond to both accordingly Mead refers to as "social object". The "me" – preserving momentary activity already past – and the "I" – spontaneous activity responsible for responding to problems in action – is a social object. The "I", momentary experience, can never be glimpsed but constantly refers back to the expressions contained in the "me" and changes the social object. He suggests that individuals can become conscious of themselves only in the object position. The formative process of a human being from a child's "play" – as in playing out the attitudes of the other, thinking in terms of right or wrong when reacting to one's own acts or remembering the words of parents – to "game", where the social norms of actions of the generalised other (significant or other people in our environment which we organise into a sort of unit), becomes the self-image and controls the response of the individual. The "unit" constituting the workshop was a temporary, contingent setting which controlled the responses of all individuals participating in that moment; when the response was not satisfactory (which Susan's had not been), the rest of the unit objected and exerted control regarding the possible responses Susan was "free" to give.

When the "rebellious" manager spoke, he had already rehearsed the words in his mind and, in a sense, asserted them; he reacted to the community of which he was a part. When the situation arose, he spoke something already in his mind, although novel to himself, which constituted the "I/me". The "me", always there as a habitual conventional individual (otherwise he could not have been a part of the community), reacted to the organised community by expressing himself, becoming himself differently. The attitudes are gathered from the group, but the individual has the opportunity to give them a novel expression, one perhaps never taken place before. Novelty is thus always happening in self-expressive processes, reality emerges; the reorganising brings in something that was not there before and reforms the norms of the community. This created movement and made us all change in different ways.

For Mead the outline of the conflict is thought of as explaining *the moral development of the individual and society*; there is a tension between the internalised collective will and the claims of an individual that leads to a moral conflict. For one needs (in principle) the approval of all other members of one's community – since their collective will control one's own action as an internalised norm – to be able to act upon the demands surging from

within. So this forces one to fight in the interest of one's "I/me" for new or different forms of social recognition. Mead pointed to our tendency to idealise a collective and treat it as if it had overriding values or motives, amounting to a process in which the collective constitutes a "cult". These idealisations, or "cult values", are maintained when leaders present to our imaginations an idealised future for the "whole", free from conflicts and constraints and evoking in individuals belonging to it a sense of enlarged personality in which anything can be accomplished simply through belonging to the idealised group in which they participate and derive their value from. Cult values are not necessary good or bad; however, if applied to action directly, without allowing for variations in specific situations, there may be exclusion of everybody that does not comply (Stacey, 2011, p. 376, drawing on Mead). Of course, we cannot do the things others would condemn without consequences. Although the community is the basis for us entering into the experience of others, our being able to imagine a future society in which individual claims could be accepted, freedom in expanding one's "I/me" may be an act of creativity necessary for human beings. The capacity to reply to the community and insist on the gesture of the community changing, through making "new" gestures, making standards better or different, can reform order of things. This is the way in which society gets ahead, "in which the individual has not only the right but the *duty of talking* to the community of which he is part, and bringing about those changes which takes place through the interaction of individuals" (Mead, 1934, p. 168, my italics).

*Third argument*: If people are being shut down, not allowed to express themselves in organisations, if the social control or cult values are too tight, demands of niceness and harmony too high, if people are appreciated for not rocking the boat or causing strange surprises, this may cause more (hidden) frustration and resistance and slow down moral and ethical development.

The seemingly rebellious act by the manager may have come about due to internal felt pressures (time, resources) and/or moral issues, ethical considerations due to having to surveil employees that might or might not be breaching security. The sensation I experienced, the other managers being about to applaud when he spoke his mind, may have been a sign that they were in agreement with his thoughts and acting. He extended the "generalised other" in the social environment they were in and became their spokesperson in the matter. We cannot be without idealisations; we would only have reality then and not the tension between them. However, being part of a community that one considers to be doing

"dirty business" may cause uncomfortable feelings and activities aimed at releasing those. Thus, the individual, the manager, will affect the norms of the community he is a part of whether they agree with this or not. In this case they did, even to the point of nearly applauding. The group seemed to recognise something in themselves; they resonated with what was being spelled out.

What is being recognised or not may be in the constant tension between the social and the individual. For Mead it was self-realisation as social and the solution to egotism as "engaging in socially useful work" whereas Hegel pursued an "ethical life". For Honneth it is love, as in being recognised as an individual, as having rights, as a rational, free, equal being and solidarity, a form of social esteem (1995).

**Dealing with conflict and disturbances in general in organisations**

Although there have been exceptions in history regarding conflicts, both Plato and Aristotle assigned conflict a pathological status that should be kept to a minimum, and it is still in modern times largely looked upon as dysfunctional in a stable, functional society and needing to be minimised, preferably through organisational structures in the form of *control systems* according toTaylor, Weber, Fayol and Gulick, (Rahim, 2001 p. 35). There is a preference for "bridging gaps", reconciling different paradigms (Van de Ven, 1999, p. 119) and adhering to consensus as a vital component for the advancement of knowledge in a field. Themes of unification and "correct" interpretation are strong when it comes to dealing with conflict, as Czarniawska points out:

> While both integration and separation are attractive as separate discourses (they both allow one to live in peace and talk only to those who agree), I shall insist on the hardship of the paradoxical road in suggesting that talk to the Other we must, although we need not agree. (2001, p. 19)

Galtung (1969, 2004) extended the understanding of conflict as not purely relational, symmetrical or psychological but equally as having structural and cultural roots and being a dynamic process in which the different components are constantly changing and influencing each other. A conflict escalation process is unpredictable and complex, new conflict parties can emerge, different issues arise and tactics and goals can change due to power struggles, according to Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011, p. 11). The same goes for processes of de-escalation, with advances in one area being offset by relapses in others. These authors conclude that conflict is an inevitable and intrinsic aspect of social change coming up against

inherited constraints and concludes: "But the way we deal with conflict is a matter of habit and choice. It is possible to change habitual responses and exercise intelligent choices." (Ibid p. 17) Habitual responses may indeed be possible to change, but the choices we have in doing so may be severely constrained by the social and thus limited from within the contingencies and contexts we are in due to relations of power. It may also be problematic knowing what an "intelligent" choice may be; it could be an informed choice with good intentions at the time but turn out to be highly unintelligent in the long term as the future is not possible to predict.

The choices made in the context of the workshop were limited within a certain cultural setting – that of the Star organisation – where social control was exerted amongst all the individuals caught up in the organisational game. If these choices were felt as "intelligent" in the short term, as they reduced some tension in the situation, they may not be perceived as intelligent in the long term; it is nothing we will necessarily come to know.

When looking into how organisations in general deal with disturbances and conflicts, one finds that methods are usually geared towards dealing with one or two individuals having or causing disturbances or conflict. This approach may have deep roots in the Enlightenment period with its turn towards the autonomous and rational, an ideology of people needing improving, and later in in a "solutionism"[3] movement. There is a movement towards the positive and singular in the literature surrounding the subject: "whatever is being said in the conflict management process should be stable enough to build on" and "you will learn four skills that will give you good or bad communication" (and thus be able to "manage" conflicts better). You need to learn a "new" language, you need to work on it, it is about *you*, but it is good for everybody and will stand the test of time etc. – these phrases are frequently used in conflict resolution training on HR blogs and homepages selling conflict management programmes. Safeguarding your organisation against conflicts can be done through building conflict management systems, according to SPIDR, the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution, which has prepared guidelines for designing and implementing such systems (imimediation.org). Though developing the said systems is high up on SPIDR's wish list, not many organisations seem to take it up.

In fact, when speaking to numerous HR practitioners in my different client organisations, they all confess to not having a specific approach, model or method for dealing with

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[3] Morozov, an American journalist, points to the "solutionist mind-set" manifesting itself in specific projects aimed at ameliorating the human condition, without sufficient account for the complex world of traditions and practices we are in (2013, intro).

disturbances or conflicts. On reflection they testify to approaches of sending - directly if they are unexperienced - the 'person having the problem' to health care specialists. More experienced HR practitioners will first have a conversation with the person and/or the manager to figure out what it is about and perhaps recommend (apart from health care solutions) personal coaching or counselling

None of the organisations I spoke to looked at or approached disturbances or conflicts as being located in the social: amongst many persons in specific situations, in the working environment, the culture or in teams. They would all readily admit that it was probably the case that disturbances were located in a far wider setting than "simply" in one or two persons. However, as resources (such as time) were limited, it seemed easier and quicker to go the health service route and deal with the problem there rather than involve everybody else in the conflict. This suggested they did not really feel or consider other people to be involved, only the particular persons having the issue. They felt that the health care approach sometimes helped and sometimes not. A few of them suggested that dealing with disturbances in a wider context was what they perceived process consultancy to do; they felt that tensions between managers decreased when having conversations with me and each other in those situations.

The average worker-citizen is supposed to be ready and able to take responsibility for his or her own productivity, well-being and health today. Internalised conflicts – people feeling that they are not good enough in doing what is expected of them – that may come about when people are divorced from situations and social contexts is what process consultants (if not therapists) frequently deal with. We may very well usually be dealing with them out of the same strategic management discourse – that employees should/could understand the game they are in, shape up and play it, and then they will be fine – without reflecting on the wider and deeper implications, moral and ethical issues this may bring about.

**My argument**

Conflict is a universal feature of human society. It may not be enough to understand it as a mediating process between two (or more) parties, but rather it should be seen as deeply socially embedded in our societies. What we do on a daily basis seems to be inherently conflictual and takes its origins in culture, ideological and political differences, economic differentiation and psychological development.

The conclusions of my arguments as laid out in the text earlier are as follows:

-   Disturbing, uncomfortable and conflictual *states* are normal in process consultancy work when issues are at stake and people with different ideologies and intentions are trying to create results together.

-   Disturbances and conflicts could be necessities for movement and creativity to occur and also for moral and ethics to emerge and the forming of new and/or different norms.

-   Too restricted (cult-like) social control may release anxiety and resistance and cause unpredictable, surprising and disruptive situations to further require (instruments of) control, causing further anxiety and resistance and further control.

Neither conflict nor harmony (nor any emotion in between) is a stable state; they are ever-changing states of normality, always temporary, changing and fluctuating constantly depending on specific issues, situations and agents involved.

We may try to maintain or regain *harmonious* or *nice* ways of working together through avoidance or annihilation of disturbances to seek to reduce the tension and uncomfortableness these may cause. The ideas coming from rational and idealised management thinking may actually cause the same conflicts and disturbances that we are trying to avoid in management as they simplify the lives of human beings in organisations through not taking issues of our social location or power relations sufficiently into account. Attempts to implement certain steps or procedures into organisations, as advocated in these idealisations, may cause resistance and more social conflicts owing to our feeling coerced and unfree.

**Conclusion and contribution**

Through illuminating and increasing awareness of the current emphasis on futuristic idealisations in management, process consultancy can stress how this may be based in an ideology of improvement and located within a discourse with traditions in a scientific rational view of human beings that do not always take sufficient account of human traits, our thoroughly social nature and emotions. Managers expected to manufacture extensive and abstracted mission statements, visions and strategy plans and implement the same often find themselves bewildered and anxious when they are not able to deliver the anticipated outcome. This tension is usually internalised, with managers believing they are not good enough or competent enough in doing their jobs and fulfilling their promises in the organisation, which

then creates more anxieties, giving rise to new instruments of control in the organisation, creating more pressure and ultimately stress, burnout and long (and expensive) sick leaves, as in the case of Susan. Awareness of manufactured abstracted strategy plans as being idealistic and sometimes even evangelical and of people as being radically social, interdependent and interactive may help us in understanding ourselves as constrained and enabled at the same time, and this as being the normal state when we are working together.

- Process consultancy practice can illuminate and deepen an understanding of conflictual processes as necessary to form norms (through moral development) in society, organisations and groups. According to Tajfel (1972), in-group and out-group attitudes may be seen as a result of emerging social norms due to an explicit intergroup conflict of goals.

- Thinking of and approaching conflictual situations as overall normal states may contribute to a relaxation of attitudes for managers towards the eternal quest for prescriptions, recipes, solutions and perceived needs for fixing things.

- The actual *process* itself in process consultancy (acts of conversations) may be one key contributing towards dissolution of bothersome situations through different understanding and sense-making of particulars.

Planning and idealising a desired future makes tension hold up in the face of reality. This is how society gets on and develops. Tensions and disturbances in organisations today may, however, be too high (causing burnout syndromes, long-term sick leaves etc.), as the rationalist and solutionist discourse is strong and our attempting to deal with them and manage them out of the same discourse aimed at improving people may make the tensed situations more tensed, rather than illuminating them as issues to explore together. This "will to improve" (Murray Li, 2007) may make us recast complex situations as defined problems to which there are solutions, if only the "right" things are said and done and/or implemented in the organisation.

Viewing disturbances and harmony and all emotions in between as temporary states – all normal – may take some of the pressure off individual managers and contribute to an

understanding of the importance of paying attention to what we are actually doing together, thus gaining more realistic expectations of working together and accepting and exploring contradictions and ambiguity.

Disorder, the possibility to sin and imperfection are all constitutive of human freedom; rooting these undesirable traits out, will root out freedom, spontaneity and creativity as well. There can be no prediction of the outcome of complex human practices; tiny changes can lead to profound long-term changes as the future is radically unknown and uncertain (Mowles, 2011). Susan can never be entirely "right" or "enough" – everybody has his or her own take on what that is. There is no solution that will not be an irritant to somebody, only negotiating around issues of importance.

I have come to think of the actual *process* in process consultancy as a solution in a sense disguised as dissolutions. Regarding the difference between solutions, resolutions and dissolutions, it seems to me as if the first two are aiming for something better, a future desired state (to solve or resolve something), whilst dissolution is a felt effect, not aiming at anything. The process of conversation dissolves many of the issues at stake when addressed differently or explored in wider and deeper contexts. Conversations are moving minds (mind as an activity of the body), increasing awareness of disputed issues and their interrelatedness and providing a sense of solution when we actively participate in the "conversational processes of human organising" (Shaw, 2002). This *sense of solution*, rethinking and feeling differently on an issue (it being pushed, contested, challenged, supported) when socially involved, is what I like to refer to as a felt dissolution; the problem is gone.

In the process of making conversations, we are trying to make sense of how we can contain these different opinions in the organisational melting pot and move anyway although we may not fully agree with the perceived outcome. We do not always make sense of situations either and have to leave them with a feeling of unfinishedness, incompleteness and confusion. We settle for relative disharmony, with harmonious disharmony. Processes like these are inevitably identity formative. However, here lies a dilemma for the consultant: encouraging a level of maintaining the paradoxical and contradictory in our thinking whilst avoid collapsing into finding solutions to problems, not being too disliked *or* too liked or comfortable as senses of movements may occur only if there is an identity movement, and as we are guarded when it comes to our sense of self, this may not occur without a certain amount of uncomfortableness. The social setting is important, of course; one does not say the same thing in epistemology no matter what time or place. One develops more or less this or that principle

of epistemology according to the state of the unconsciousness in the given society. For example, in a society dominated by positivism, it is necessary to accentuate constructivism.

> To conflate the politics of science (knowledge) with that of society (power) is to make short shrift of the historically instituted autonomy of the scientific field and to throw the baby of sociology out with the bathwater of positivism. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 47)

The society I am involved in, the "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 52), the discourse of business and consultancy, would be regarded as positive. Staying within this tradition without being positive or negative or without collapsing into an ideology of improvement is an act of balance and harbouring of a multitude of emotions.

One task then of process consultancy – apart from being in the process and thus make a difference (Mowles, 2011, p. 8) – may also be captured in the words of Deetz:

> The conflictual field out of which objects are formed is recovered for creative redetermination – constant dedifferentiation and redifferentiation. Given the power of common sense and organisational routines, such rereads require rigor and imagination. The rereading are formed out of a keen sense of irony, a serious playfulness, and are often guided by the pleasure one has in being freed from the dull compulsions of a world made too easy and too constraining. The point of research in this sense is not to get it right but to challenge the guiding assumptions, fixed meanings and relations, and reopen the formative capacity of human beings in relation to others and the world. (2001, p. 37)

"Reopen the formative capacity" is often what I find myself doing (I am there for a reason) as a process is geared towards a common investigative exploration of the bothersome and the stressful in trying to achieve results together in highly complex environments. Without providing ready-made answers, giving wanted or unwanted advice or recommendations to soon, but rather accepting there being no solutions means inconclusive confusion may lead to other and further inquiry.

This is how our identities are being felt to be reformed – by engaging in thinking at the same time as we are thinking about how we are thinking (reflection and reflexivity in action) (Stacey, 2012, p. 108), activities which differentiate man from animal: "What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing" (Arendt, 1958,

prologue), thinking "the basis and consequences of beliefs" (Dewey, 1910, p. 5) as it is always a "question of what governs statements" (Foucault, 1994, p. 114) as we are enabled but also constrained in and by the social. So the social evolves from thinking of what we are doing, and we evolve from the social.

## Synopsis and discussion

### Introduction

In the process of reading, writing, researching, reflecting, being reflexive, and receiving responses, comments, and feedback from the DMan community—and, in particular, my smaller learning set—and rewriting over and over again, my understanding of what I do in my process consultancy practice has changed significantly.

In this synopsis, I am scheduling my movements from a relative unawareness of what I was 'caught up in' and actually *doing* into an awareness of the same. Located in a managerial discourse of abstractions (strategy, visions, missions, goals) aiming at stability and predictability dominating my practice, I became aware of a more pragmatic approach. This approach draws on ideas that inform a complex responsive process' perspective in organisations that suggest taking experience seriously. This means paying attention not only to dominant managerial discourses but also to marginal ones that acknowledge instability, uncertainty, and unpredictability of the paradoxically "known unknown". I am widening and deepening my understanding of people as being radically social and cooperative but also competitive, enabled, and constrained in inevitable and inescapable relationships of power. This led into the area of complexity—the science of uncertainty.

### Background— 'a stone in my shoe'

Having had a faint feeling of walking around with a 'stone-in-my-shoe' whilst working in consultancy processes over the last years, a sense of missing something obvious in my practice that I could not pin down, I wearily searched the internet a day in June four years ago in hope of finding something interesting going on in my field. Thus I by chance came across a leadership conference due to start the following day in Copenhagen. On a flight the next morning from Stockholm, my hopes were mostly to network with practioners in my field and pick up some new ideas. I did not harbour very high hopes of getting any major returns from the speakers—presumptious perhaps—but being fairly seasoned after working with people for thirty years, I had heard of and read countless theories and used many tools available. I picked and choosed between those in a 'taking the best and leaving the rest' approach, knowing that each situation was different and a 'general' tool or technique usually did not apply. The conference basically confirmed my bias, but the setting and the people were nice

and Copenhagen warm and welcoming. I had been working with a few rather challenging groups during spring, and it had taken its toll—I felt drained of energy and a bit disillusioned—this was a worry as I knew this would not serve me well when continuing working in groups. After all, clients would inevitably notice my disinterest, it would affect them, and they would act accordingly (stop paying for my services). Reflecting on this now, this is what I was *thinking*—but in *practice*, this was never the case as I was always drawn into conversations that were unfolding in my programmes, becoming immediately present and interested. That is why I still so much enjoyed what I was doing.

The situations that had been bothering me for a while involved what position to take when groups were particularly challenging: when disturbing, uncomfortable, and sometimes outright conflictual situations occurred. Everybody would pose their (conflicting) views and then turn to me in order to gain support, and I would try to neutralise the polarisations that had occurred. I would become as tense and uncomfortable as everybody else, unsure of how to proceed, whether I did it in the 'right' way or whether it would become worse and how—in that case—to act in the situation. Situations like these were highly unsatisfying and filled with anxiety. Sometimes the anger would be projected on me as representing the organisational interest, often brought in by the top management or the HR (Human Resources) department to solve whatever problems that came about. I would be accused of knowing more than I did, withholding information, or of not simply telling who or what was 'right', or who would have the last say in these contested situations. Related to this were also worries concerning the increasing tensions felt by managers (that I dealt with in individual coaching sessions), them being expected to 'implement' change and 'motivate' employees. When failing to live up to these expectations, managers would often 'internalise' their worries and form assumptions and eventually beliefs of not being 'able' enough to be a manager and consequently give up their position or even seek health care solutions if the tension had become too high.

One of the lectures that came up in the conference in Copenhagen regarded issues of 'complexity', and as I felt my querie—that slowly had started to form in the back of my mind the last months—was of a complex kind, I looked forward to hearing more about it and hoped to gain some ideas about how to proceed in my practice.

The rest is history. To 'keep things simple' had always been a common denominator between managers and consultants when working in groups. This meant—at the time—that feelings of doubt, incongruance, ambiguity, uncertainty, and contradictions were rendered as

unnecessary. These sentiments were complicating things with the clean cut schedules and agendas we had to keep to in order to make sure that things kept 'moving' towards our set visions and goals. 'Keeping things simple' did eventually take on new meanings, starting with attending Christopher Mowles seminar about complexity that time at the conference in Copenhagen and consequently coming onto the DMan programme. I was struck by and worried about the critique he offered of largely taken-for-granted ways of working used in management processes. I was also elated and relieved at the same time, intuitively sensing that herein laid the stone-in-the-shoe that was becoming increasingly bothersome in my practice. 'Keeping things simple' came to mean coming to trust my experience and taking it seriously.

**I was thinking...**

...of rational tools, techniques, and models as holding answers to questions and situations arising in process consultancy practice. Although this rarely turned out to be my practical experience, it left me with few or no alternatives regarding how to proceed when the 'method' only partially worked or even failed. I did think of people as autonomous individuals who *should* be self-sufficient and of 'identity' as a stable core inside of us. My thinking was in a sense compartmentalised. This meant thinking of different 'systems' for instance organisations, schools and societies, with clear and sometimes blurred borders, connected and disconnected from each other, possible to tell apart and thus objects of control and design that one could 'implement' visions, values, and change 'into'. I found it important to approach situations and problemsolving with a 'positive' and appreciative attitude and believed everything could, more or less, be solved if we were able to find the right tool, technique, or approach to the specific situation. In order to have and implement the same goals and values in organisations, I would advocate the importance of encouraging people, motivating, and even manipulating (if the first two methods did not work) as the tasks of leadership and management. This, I felt, was how it should be in order for us to move the 'system' forward towards ideal future goals and fulfil *its* vision and mission. I emphasised how things *should* be in my practice, rarely stopping to encounter how they actually *were*. I was thinking that reflecting on the present too extensively would have slowed the (rational) proceedings down and made organisations miss out on important marketshares. This approach worked very well, in general, as clients appreciated my work and found many of the tools I provided them with as useful. However, there would also be uncomfortable and

disturbing moments we would attempt to rush past or play down as they were being viewed as distractions from delivery.

**Today I think...**

...of there being alternatives, of more knowledge of and insights into marginal (rather than the dominant) ways of perceiving what and how we do things together as valuable to explore. I think of people as radically social and interdependent rather than autonomous. And I think of identity as always changing as in *becoming* in each relation/situation rather than solely *being*. I have come to understand more of the difficulties in designing idealised value statements and 'implementing' these or other change programmes into an organisation since whatever we may try to implement are often not taken up the way we intended. This is because agendas differ due to multiple intentions and ideologies. I have come to think of human interaction as unavoidable and political. I see people as constrained and enabeled in figurations of *power*, which the sociologist Norbert Elias refers to as '...a structural characteristic of human relationships – of *all* human relationships' (1970, p. 74). I have found power to be overlooked and usually unaccounted for in process consultancy.

Meanwhile, I have come to understand 'systems-thinking' as problematic and possibly leading to the notion of there being an *outside* and an *inside* (implicitly with borders) of organisations, schools, and societies that accordingly may be observed, designed, and controlled. This may ostensibly be done whilst in reality 'the designer' (a manager or a consultant) may have limited control over the outcome no matter how much he/she intended for a certain outcome. I have come to think of the idealisations and fantasies existing around management and leadership as contributing to managers' feelings of anxiety and worry: when internalised, these feelings are forming assumptions and/or beliefs of not being 'good or competent enough' in what they are doing or contributing. These enhanced emotions are a likely source of stress and burnout. I do not think of strategies, planning, and goalsetting (manufactured and abstract) to be in any way abandoned but rather explored and even more particularised in conversations.

I have left my overly positive take on things—not in order to become negative—but in order to become more critical and reflective. It may be tempting to bypass or avoid differences as they can be felt as irritating and uncomfortable and perceived as slowing the rational process down. But I think our encountering differences also hold the potential for movements and novelty. As I think of 'organisation' as social relationships, not systems, leaders and managers make for only *one* player, albeit a powerful one in this game we all are

caught up in and conducting together. I have come to think in there being no *solution* (as a pragmatic secularist). There are—however—felt *dissolutions,* consistent movements (expanded on later) with people constantly re-identifying in complex responsive processes of relating.

## How I came to think differently

These last years' process with being involved in the DMan as paralleled to working in my practice is an example of the very method the programme advocates. Regular meetings in the DMan residential and extensive 'new' reading have sent me into reflection and reflexivity regarding my thinking and my praxis. As I have continued to work full-time, I have been *practicing* a gradually different way of thinking. This has, at times, been a tough process, 'disturbed' and uncomfortable, and peaked as exemplified in Project 3 where I found myself caught in between old and new thinking and practice. I have been trying to encourage more conversation and meaning making and attempting to stay away from habitually providing too many abstracted tools and models. Eventually, I became more comfortable working with an understanding of both perspectives—creating a sense of meaning regarding a seemingly abstracted model by understanding our need for them. My personal process in going through the DMan has informed my work—reflection, reflexivity, conversation, a range of different responses to my writings and rewritings, enquiries, and probes into my thinking. This process has caused yet more reflexivity—making me re-form my identity and out of this 'new' and/or different ways of practising have emerged.

## How I will come to think differently yet again

As the intense process of interacting with the other DMan participants during the course of three years is a relational and social process, I have been 'under due influence' and taken up and discarded thoughts, ideas, and concepts. Had the influences been different to what they actually were, I would have presented a different thesis today rather than the one I am about to introduce. At this moment in time, I have come to another and different understanding of how to proceed in my practice when disturbing and uncomfortable situations arise. However, this is yet another 'temporary' understanding of my sense of self and what I am currently involved in: 'The reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of any action is simply that action has no end' (Arendt 1958, p. 233). I will continue to act (How could I not?) and change activity and practice due to the responses I get (as I did in the DMan—and onwards without the DMan participants) as speech is an activity, and the self is

'constituted through exchange in language...' according to Taylor and Habermas (1989, p. 509). This constant, transitory, provisional thinking and rethinking can be regarded as a felt *dissolving* (stable/unstable) process, something I will be describing later.

An experience of going through the DMan process has been in the emphasis on *thinking and talking* of what we are doing together in our daily practice and as a community becoming more reflective and critical.  Thus I am able to present more *informed* opinions and take the complexity of human relating into proper account. I am becoming more reflexive—humans being *reflexive* entities who bend back upon themselves means that any explanation we produce is the product of who we are, our histories, and the history and traditions of our communities (Stacey 2011, p. 33)—and thus different emotional responsiveness emerges in ongoing communicative exchanges that process is what consultancy is all about.

**Revisiting the projects**

Revisiting my four projects for the synopsis of the animated question—*exploring disturbing and uncomfortable situations in process consultancy*—has remained the same, but my understanding of what I needed to know in order to understand it better has been fluctuating, shifting, and taking turns into different areas. I will in the upcoming discourse do the following:

- Include the summarised projects and what sense I make of them now with regard to my overall theme in order to illustrate how my thinking has moved
- discuss the research method and how it is related to changes in my practice
- critically evaluate the research in light of the themes that have arisen
- conclude with my contribution to knowledge and practice.

**Project 1**

Project 1 gives an account of my upbringing and background in a small community to the north of Sweden and how I came to do what I currently do. This first project is being written in order to focus attention on the ability to reflect and be reflexive—to think about how I have come to think and act the way I do—what kind of ideological influences I have been exposed to and how this has formed my identity, my sense of self.

Sweden, a country with secular beliefs albeit with a strong Protestant work ethic, was an idyllic and secure place to grow up in as it was affluent (we did not participate *actively* in

either of the World Wars) and characterized by a growing sense of meritocracy. This led me to think of the world as a pretty secure and predictable place that you were able to control, all depending on the choices you made and the effort you put into things.

After finishing school, I worked in various places before a life-defining moment occurred. I had a baby who suddenly and unexpectedly died. This affected my identity as I was trying to cope with the unexpected. I felt as if I coped with the loss entirely by myself. When starting the DMan programme, I came to think differently of this experience. I immersed myself in studying (law and pedagogics) and went travelling the world. In Jamaica, I worked in legal aid services, which made me attentive to adult education, "learning organisations" (Senge 1990), and brain research. I came to think that corporations and organisations could train and educate people more—that it would not be the sole responsibility of the schools.

Returning to Sweden, I started consulting, which at the time meant leading training workshops with different themes—stress management, how to influence people at work, etc. Influential within the area of business and management at the time were discourses of rational thinking, efficiency, and effectiveness based on an ideology of economics, predictability, and control. Concepts dominating our work had in general been imported from the US. We "performed" them without much questioning or reflecting. Occasionally, there were disturbing moments and uncomfortable situations when concepts were being questioned or criticized, but disturbers were generally silenced or silenced themselves on grounds of time issues or 'it-is-in-the-concept'. I found it reassuring that things could be compartmentalised; people were basically a big brain. And if you practiced the activities that corresponded and were associated with the different centres in the brain, you could become more "whole". The notion that we are fragmented parts of a wholeness towards which we strive to unite was strong in our ideology and thinking and may still be. I wrote four published management books at the time, and the messages now come across as prescriptive and slightly evangelical: leave your old, bad ways of working and join the new, better way of working by following these easy steps (and be thus happier and healthier and more successful).

**Conclusion Project 1**

***Sub themes that emerged***: context, social, ideology, 'the ought and the is', relationships. In reflecting and rewriting Project 1 several times, I came to think differently regarding a multitude of situations in my past and in my present life and work. I had not been reflexive regarding how my upbringing had come to reflect my identity. I came to understand—in a

broader context—how we are all 'products' of our specific contexts; our choices will thus be made from within these. This concept brought me to my first understanding of disturbing situations in my practice as being located in my own and the participants' *contexts* as well when we responded to situations. Arriving at opposing and conflicting views when working with teams is not unusual. Process consultancy work as predictable had never been my *practical* experience, and I had always felt a gap between what we were trying to achieve—a predictable 'buy-in' from everybody involved in a development process, an overall consensus preferably in an optimistic, engaged, and positive way—and what we finally did achieve. I felt people were leaving a process with a multitude of emotions not at all necessary the 'desired' ones we (the management and the consultant) had in mind.

I came to think of choices—as my 'choice' in the life-defining moment when losing my firstborn—as constrained due to the contingencies we are in due to various influences and the relationships of power we always were/are in (Elias 1970, p. 15). This was a step in awareness: it enabled me to think of myself in contingencies in a much broader sense than earlier. I now saw webs of interdependencies, and in hindsight I can see that it lifted some of the guilt and shame of not being able to care for my baby. I unknowingly and knowingly at the same time blamed myself for his death and had considered myself as 'failing' in parenthood. I also blamed (silently) people in my surrounding for not having the courage to talk about it, bringing the issue up with me, without acknowledging the anxiety this must have brought about in them.

### Relation to overall theme:

Today I consider all formative experiences of interest for explorative conversations contrary to what I believed at the time of writing Project 1 as I hardly go into the Protestant work ethic at all. The belief that 'the world as secure, predictable, and controlable, depending on our choices and efforts' highlights my then view of people as groups made up by individuals who are independent and self-sufficient. There is an underlying assumption here: this is also how it *should* be—people *should* be independent thinkers and actors — being caught in an individual-centered perspective, I considered being dependent and needy a sign of weakness. This included the necessity of people being in control and sums up my ignorance of how societies emerge and of us being born into them, coloured by their contingencies. At the time, we would have been posing such questions in groups as 'What came first; individuals or groups? This signals unawareness of other options and a third could have been;

*relationships...*one must start from the structure of the relations *between* individuals in order to understand the psyche of the individual person' (Elias 2001, p. 37).

Thus, I had understood every situation as unique in terms of its specific components earlier, but at that time, I still saw it as autonomous activity without grasping the broader meaning of 'location in context' as 'location in the social'.  I was still thinking about it as *my* context, not as *ours.* I developed a rudimentary understanding of the sub-themes described but found it hard to 'translate' their usability into my practice.  I was still on the lookout for more 'useful tools'. I started to see opposing and conflicting views as possible means to explore and understand differently and also the importance of *particulars*—how generalisable ideas and plans needed to be made particular depending on relation, situation, and context and how particulars of a situation form patterns over time and give rise to 'rules', 'regulations', and 'policies'.

In the meaning of Mead (1934) one can think of the particular —as in much contemporary management literature where specific situations (as experienced by American or European business leaders)—as being generalised and condensed into recipes: 'Do A, and B will follow' in a linear and predictable manner.

## Project 2

In Project 2, I explored how I and my clients made sense of disturbances in consultancy processes and our attempts at coping with the anxiety they provoked. The approach was the layout of two narratives in order to exemplify what may happen in a daily practice of working in the "living present" (Shaw 2002, p. 46). The two narratives occurred in the same organisation.

## The 'Bra' story

The mayor of the community of Bra invited me to spend two days with her newly formed management team. Amongst other things, she wished to downsize the group from twenty-two persons to half of that.

## Narrative one—the management team

On day two, as I suggested that we explore this issue of the 'size of the group'—who should be in this management team and why—the room basically exploded, led by one of the managers, who stood up from her chair and screamed, 'I will not talk about this! I will not listen to this nonsense. I will leave immediately and [towards me] you have destroyed this

conference for me now'. She did not leave, however, but sat down again and folded her arms demonstratively. Other participants mumbled approvingly, some appeared uncomfortable, and one carried on: 'Yes, I agree. I will not *tolerate* any talk of this. I will also leave. This is quite enough of this and you are seriously disturbing me, he said in my direction.

Enquiring into this situation and my own reactions (fear and surprise) have helped me gain a sense of what was at stake and what might have been going on for us. As multiple figurations of power and intentions intersected and were being played out, I tried to—in the midst of the disturbing situation—pretend that this was 'normal' and part of a designed plan (in order to protect myself) while simultaneously trying to find ways to respond. As tensions died down, I was able to invite them into reflexivity-in-action (Stacey 2012, p. 108) and making sense of what had happened, thus trying to enhance our capacity for practical judgment. We then noticed ourselves talking differently, sharing feelings of doubt and fear of being excluded from the group (as the question I had posed had given rise to).

## Narrative 2—the manager

Sometime later, I was invited to deal with a situation where a yearly 'employment survey' had come out with highly doubtful results regarding the leadership of a manager. I was to give him support and work with him and his team. There were implications from top management that the managers were not to be blamed for the situation as the team consisted of 'seasoned people', highly skilled at game-playing (Elias 1970, p. 71). In interviews, however, I found them tired and resigned. I wanted to bring the conflict into the open in order to transform it from polarised to 'explorative' in the sense Stacey makes of it (2011, p. 358).

## Improvising

I attempted an open approach without alienating the manager that had caused many of the disturbances (according to the employees), from the group. They *all* appeared uninterested and almost sedated. During the course of the process, one of the participants came in late (again) after a break. Another participant got some heavy feedback from a colleague regarding an issue that had happened earlier in the morning and got up to 'get some water', visibly sad and disturbed. I decided to risk it and address these visible issues head on by asking the group: 'How do you feel about xx being late again after break? What about xx getting water? We can all see that she is crying. What do you think or feel about that?' I immediately got their attention and they responded well, trying to be as open as they could

without risking being fired then and there by the manager. They were specific in their feedback regarding issues that had occurred in relation to him, but he aggressively argued every case. I sensed that he might have some psychological issues.

It eventually turned out that the recruiting officer had not called his references or checked up on his background, he turned out to have a psychiatric history that was being played out in the circumstances above. He was made to leave the organisation immediately.

**Conclusion Project 2**

***Sub-themes that emerged:*** anxiety, tensions, game-playing, exclusion, explorative conflict, improvisation

The uprising in the management team of Bra was unexpected and highly anxiety provoking. I had expected a smooth process but found myself struggling. Attempts at halting the process and exploring what we were actually doing slowed the proceedings down considerably, and I frequently found the participants looking perplexed and confused: what do you want us to do? And I really did not have any clear idea what I was trying to do at the same time since I struggled to *not do* too much of what I *had* been doing. I wanted a difference and belived that an alternative approach could be an interesting way forward in process.

But I ended up in limbo yet at the same time mindful of not enticing a psychodynamic approach that would render me insecure, not having the training to work in such a way. Acknowledging my political power and functionality in processes raised questions regarding whether this 'new' approach called out for different competencies in consultants than when we 'delivered' ready-made concepts. I also acknowledged more fully that what I do deal with is the 'messy' stuff⎯the unpredictability of emotions, worries, insecurities, and anxieties as they were being played out in the two narratives.

***Relation to overall theme:***

Today, I recognize how challenging this question of 'downsizing the management team' must have been for the present managers⎯how every small talk of 'change' usually sends everyone concerned into anxiety. People will engage themselves in a range of political behaviour and panic at what may come or not. A study by Aram (2001 cited by Stacey 2011, p. 394) says that panic may be thought of as a response to anxiety, fearing the fear, waiting for something to happen, the phase before a change, and the actual experience of a *waiting* period. Visibly disturbing behaviours (people coming in late, getting water whilst displaying sadness, etc.) in the second narrative had the effect of enabeling me to talk directly into the

group. Had these disturbances not occurred as they did, it may have been difficult to find ways into conversations. These disturbances provided me with an opportunity to encourage *trusting experiences* regarding what was going on as we could physically *see* what was taking place in the room. Leaning too much on abstractions as in talking about disturbances rather than encountering them in a direct way (when the opportunity arises), may have been to continue a covert game, thinking that it would not make a difference, rather than engaging ourselves.

Becoming more aware of power provided a new meaning of the 'functionality' issue that I had been struggling with in project one. One event that took place in a DMan residential at the same time impacted my thinking: A new participant had joined the community. Trying to get to know him and build a relationship proved difficult; he was strongly caught up in habitual ways of acting and was preaching his own convictions, even more on the lookout for functional tools and methods than I myself had been (although I had played the game more wisely—by being quiet). This preachy approach paired with an inability to listen or show any sense of recognition for other people made one of the supervisers give him feedback in saying, 'I feel as if you are only trying to figure out what kind of *use* you may have for me, not to try to build a relationship. Am I useful enough for you?' This event made me think differently about anxiety and tension, fear of not being included, and the pretense we may feel obliged to keep up in order not to lose our standing in the games of power. It dawned on me how protective we are of our own images of our sense of self and the self portrait I had been painting of the 'knowing, in-control process consultant' pretending that the disturbance that occurred was 'normal' and according to what I had planned all along. As an analogy to Goffman (1959, p. 58), drawing on Simone de Beauvoir regarding women´s dressing, 'It is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect as the hero of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendour.'
During this period, I attempted to transform polarised conflicts into explorative ones although without using any new 'tools or techniques' but simply by further enquiring and thereby supporting more thinking and reflection. The improvisational stance and nature of the process of 'being in processes together and becoming different' caused some novelty to emerge and different meaning making to occur.

**Project 3**

In Project 3, I continued to explore disturbing and uncomfortable situations with particular emphasis on making practical judgments in action and how this affects identity.

The approach was the layout of a narrative that took place in the Star organisation.

**The Star organisation**

The HR department invited me to be in charge of a development programme with the management team and the new md in the Star organisation. The management team was perceived as 'anonymous' and secretive in the organisation, in particular one manager, Petra, who was considered to be intimidating and not able to communicate well. Her staff responsibility had been removed, but there were concerns that she would cause problems in the management team as two new members had taken a seat there, and in this (she) was not being dealt with. Due to my helping HR solve a similarly difficult situation earlier, they now harboured hopes of me repeating the same performance. As this was flattering for my professional identity, I had a momentary sensation that I was not going to let them down by showing them how it was done. I was aiming at helping HR 'solve' this problem.

As I met with the team, I did indeed find Petra defensive and disturbing when we were negotiating power, but the whole team appeared overly cautious and suspicious of each other and of me and of the process. I found it uncomfortable and hard to move; the process frequently 'froze', and I improvised, enabled and constrained movements. They were polite but curiously motionless physically. I found the 'motionlessness', as an embodied experience, to be a very powerful response to my gestures. It was highly anxiety provoking. I described emergence and how we were co-creators in this game, and whatever we talked about, we talked about. I was talking to them, yet I was talking to myself simultaneously (Mead, 1934, p. 141-142).

One of my normal ways of approaching situations like these would have been to abort the struggle and challenge the game, act into it with a 'political' sense, and perhaps ask them if they could see the point of this process or if they wanted me to stay or not. But circumstances did not at all feel right or ripe for such a challenge. I had to muster all of my patience and not move into 'solving' anything that may not have needed solving. I very gradually won their trust. I came to think of them as 'anonymous' to each other, apprehensive and even fearful. They told me the previous management team had made a decision many years ago to be 'anonymous', looked upon only as a 'team' in the organisation, not as individuals. They had succeeded in planting this idea, obviously, but it had turned on them

too—they had become anonymous to each other. The low-intensity disturbances became less feverish in the process but nonetheless identity changing; we eventually all settled into our new, temporary identities and learned to be more skilful players in the games we were engaged in together.

**Conclusions Project 3**

***Sub-themes that emerged:*** practical judgment, identity, 'frozen/stuck' process, competing and cooperating

I entered that particular situation with preconceptions and presumptions, reaffirming my professional (pretence) identity as the expert, supported and encouraged by HR, and idealising my ability of being able to 'solve' the problem—the problem being Petra. How do we 'solve' people... this was one of the hardest processes I had ever conducted; it constantly froze; I felt lost, unable to move in any direction. The parallell process that went on in my writing received considerate responses to my predicament from the DMan learning set. Reflecting and rewriting turned out to be helpful: 'Acts of reflection,...imply acts of self-distancing—distancing from the objects of their own thought' (Elias 1970, p. 122). I was eventually able to detach myself more in order to be able to think about my thinking. My approach had originally been 'patient-centered', in talking things through during coaching sessions with the individual group members, they told on Petra. They confessed how uncomfortable they felt with her around and in particular how she ignored much of what was being said and did her own thing without regard to what the team was thinking. Hence, Petra became the patient in need of a 'cure'. Gradually, a different pattern emerged; I found them not at all interested in confronting this behaviour (although they had individually talked to HR and to me about wanting that). Indeed, they were in a sense protecting her, not exposing any of the behaviour they had found disturbing individually. Different figurations of power emerged; Petra was a powerful player and the md clearly depended on her function. The newcomers in the team were anxious to negotiate their way into the group. The older members were not powerful enough to challenge Petra and politicked covertly through the HR department in order to try to get them to act. HR had done so by bringing me in. I went in with the 'expert-status' trying to help prove HR right, by helping them 'solve a problem'. This was a role I strongly identified with. The team was stuck in a repetitive pattern of conversation. It was instrumental and tedious, but the attempts I made at talking more reflexively—how do you find yourself thinking about this issue—they immediately (Petra and the md) attempted at closing down. The newcomers curiously asked questions that

politely were answered as long as they were seemingly functional; however, gradually, they stopped asking questions.

***Relation to overall theme:***

I did not acknowledge the strength of the power figuration that existed between Petra and the new md—a careful team player—and other players too. I realise now that they were not helping the process (me) at all. Although we were co-creating it was not in the sense I had hoped for. Half of them did not want the process and those who did had different intentions—mostly, they seemed to want me to tell Petra off. I felt alone and exposed in this process; hence, I eventually brought an ally in, a philosopher collegue. I did not challenge the games going on as I felt I would totally lose control of the process if I did. This was a transitional period in my practice—one in which I was trying to avoid collapsing into my 'ordinary' older ways of working but not quite grasping alternatives. This left me anxious, trying to hold onto my political sense. In retrospect, I recognise that I harboured very high tension and longed to get out of the process.

The encounters I have had in working with management teams formed and influenced my sense of self, including experiences I brought with me into the management team of the Star organisation. They, in turn, came to influence my identity as I influenced theirs. The conclusion I make of this situation now is that it *is* important to maintain good relationships whilst still challenging thinking. But challenging can be problematic when power ratios appear highly uneven, a few having the final say in all matters, and the rest very little. Not taking power sufficiently into account, I co-created a situation of enhanced anxiety. In retrospect, I realised that this highly anxiety provoking and conflictual process did, however, move things (although this is not what it *felt* like *at the time*). In a brief conversation with the md a few weeks after closing the programme, he talked about rethinking keeping Petra on the team: 'She would be better off on a higher level. I will recommend her to the European team.' I was thinking that the HR department would be getting what they believed they wanted, and the Star organisation would still maintain their pattern of rewarding people not prepared or able to communicate by promoting them in ranks.

**Project 4**

Project 4 continued to explore disturbing and uncomfortable situations from my process consultancy practice, illuminated with a specific case: a tumultuous workshop that took place in the Star organisation, a long-term client of mine. I was to hold process consultancy

sessions with managers in a 'development team' that was aimed at creating more effective ways of working in order to meet future expectations of the government.


**The workshop**

The workshop became a turbulent affair where a contested situation came up and a manager was brave and spoke his opinion on a situation that he—and the others as it turned out—perceived as unbearable. The HR department was trapped in the heat by siding with 'the management' regarding a surveillance procedure (that the government had proposed) that had to be carried out; there was no choice in the matter. Eventually, we were able to make sense of the situation together by making the tension around the issue decrease. It did, nonetheless, raise questions about disciplinary power and a way of talking and thinking about matters that *have* to be done more like a mock democracy. Hence, we may attempt to provide people with a feeling of having choices in the matter—when in reality the choices were limited.

I encountered contradictory messages—the brief from HR had been to 'stir things up' on this team and create more movement since it appeared too complacent whilst the team members wanted to 'avoid destroying the harmony' of the group. Other issues that were explored in Project 4 were systems thinking, social selves, and traditional conflict management verses an alternative way of thinking around conflict 'as a rule rather than exception' in process consultancy and as necessary for the forming and reforming of norms.

In 'systems-thinking', I go into the notion of HR trying to stay outside the discussion in the workshop initially as 'observers' although they were eventually drawn into the conversation. This led us—the small HR team and I—into exploring the differences this approach would make on the team and how we could think of everyone becoming more 'detached in our involvement'.  As Elias suggests, the task of sociological research is to make '...*uncontrolled processes more accessible to human understanding* by explaining them, and to enable people to orientate themselves within the interwowen social web' (1970, p. 154). Sitting outside a group (yet in the room) did not make much sense. I am contrasting the idea of organisation as a 'system' with organisations as processes of gesturing and responding. *Organising* is what we do/are involved in as we make things together along with understandings, meanings, patterns that emerge over time, and changes. These forces moves all of us in ongoing, improvised conversations. We cannot know were we will 'end up' in conversations because meanings change due to the responses we get to gestures we make. Gesturing can thus not be separated from responding; they consitute one act, and this results in the '...basis of meaning' (Mead 1934, p. 80).

Burkitt proposes the term 'social selves' as identities are forged in such struggle (relationships) and 'are not formed prior to it, but in it' (2008, p. 4). The sense of self (identity) then is nothing that can be found inside of us, but rather a social activity, something that is created in joint activities with other people. It is thus a case of us *being* and *becoming* at the same time, paradoxically. A manager voicing a refusal to carry out what he considered as surveilling employee activities —thus *became* in the workshop, the meaning emerged in the process of negotiating that occurred in the social acts of gesturing and responding. The gestures of Susan from HR had not been taken up in the way she had intended—the HR department were supportive of the governmental view—meaning had thus been renegotiated in the process, Susan backing off the 'official' organisational HR-stance, and confessing to feeling uneasy about it all as well.

I bring in Foucault's '*Discipline and punish'* (1977, p. 217) that focuses on modern forms of social control (over mind rather than body) and 'panopticism'(McHoul & Grace 1998) as an example of how disciplinary power functions and how surveillance is being internalised—we discipline ourselves —in order to stay included in our social environments. However, it is the 'covering over' of the (also necessary) forms of disciplinary power that may make our experience confusing, contradictory, and alienating and cause us to mistrust our own experience—thus risking a loss of awareness of the ethical dimension—what is the morally responsible thing to do.

There is risk involved in bringing differences up—talking in the teeth of power—the manager had taken a risk, as did I, in trying to entice more engagement. It is not necessarily leading to 'positive' or 'negative' outcomes, but it may help us in encountering our differences. It was due to the conformity and the unengagement I experienced in response to my first questions that other questions were created that may have come across as challenging or uncomfortable. Had there already been a certain level of disagreement, the need would not have arisen. Twelve people in a room, hardly talking, created bodily sensations of something being at stake.

The workshop shed light on these issues eventually; the traditional way may have been to make the rebellious manager into a 'patient' in need of a cure or doing what we actually did: trying to make the situation 'ours' to explore by attempting to address the emotional attachments to the situation, rethinking, still remaining involved but making an effort in self-distancing 'as …every person is one among others, and all the consequences of that idea' (Elias 1970, p. 122).

I then go into a critique of 'conflict management' in general that advocates these disturbances as 'manageble' in the dominant discourse and I dwell particurlary on M. Afzalur Rahims book, *Managing Conflict in Organisations* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 2001), as a representative example of the litterature around managing conflict building on a science of certainty rather than complexity. I explore my clients' ways and methods of managing conflicts and find that they are being dealt with mainly on an individuated basis—sending the culprit to health care specialists if it becomes a highly tensed situation or to a coach in order to entice people into dealing with it themselves. The alternatives clients said, were to *not* deal with conflicts at all, feeling as lost as I did before coming to the DMan programme. I then look into the origins of disturbances and conflicts moving from the general Machiavellian and Hobbesian sense—fearful mistrust, as us being coerced in disciplining power—into an *eternal struggle for recognition* in the traditions of Hegel, Mead, and Honneth. This then points to how we may not be able to see new dimensions of ourselves without conflict and achieving the recognition of a 'more demanding form of individuality' (Honneth 1995, p. 17). The conversation did gradually swing into what constituted to be the 'right' thing to do morally verses 'pretending' to comply—which led to further talk regarding ethics.

**Conclusion Project 4**

***Sub-themes emerging***: speaking up (co-creating), disciplinary power, conflict as norm-forming, conflict management, recognition

I am by now concluding that conflict, as in disturbing and uncomfortable states, is 'normal' in process consultancy work. Differences are deeply socially embedded in our societies, and disturbances that occur due to this may be necessary for movement and for novelty. As conflict/disturbances are identity re-forming, this idea will challenge and change the current norms, and 'new' different ethics may thus emerge. I am also thinking that emotions that cause uncomfortable and disturbing situations may be viewed as *temporary* states. We seem to be constantly reidentifying and there is, as Arendt pointed to, no end to action and thus no end to new meanings emerging in social acts of conversations. By increasing awareness of manufactured abstracted strategy plans as idealistic and imaginary, sometimes even evangelical and people as radically social, needy, and interdependent may help in understanding our struggling and this as being 'normal', tensed, temporary states when we are working together.

Disagreements and disturbances could be perceived as threatening the very cores of our existence as we struggle for recognition, love, and rights in the sense Axel Honneth

(1995) is making of our strivings. I now think of aggression and even oppression as being our ways of trying to maintain a sense of freedom and recognition for ourselves—this, in turn, may come about as an effect of us feeling excluded or 'pushed out' of our social context, not recognised enough, unrecognised, or misrecognised. We may paradoxically want to be free and unfree at the same time. The desire for freedom and independence implies responsibility for individual choices and shame if we are not successful in making the 'right' choices—choices that may bring us wealth, health, and happiness—according to the norms in our communities and dominant norms in process consultancy. This desire may not, to a large extent, encourage acknowledging our needy natures.

For Mead, the outline of a conflict is thought of as explaining *the moral development of the individual and society*. It is the capacity to reply to the community and insist on the gesture of the community changing by making 'new' gestures, making standards better, or making them different to reform the order of things. This is the way in which society gets ahead, 'in which the individual has not only the right but the *duty of talking* to the community of which he is part, and bringing about those changes which take place through the interaction of individuals' (Mead 1934, p. 168, *my italics*). The risk-taking manager in the workshop (dutifully) spoke into his community. However, a powerful gesture like this may be very risky and even fatal depending on the contingencies and is usually something out of the ordinary.

### Relation to overall theme:

This last project drew together many of the issues previously explored. What came to mind was the difference an individual makes in proceedings. The seen bravery—or political carelessness, unguarded talk in the face of power—the individual manager portrayed in the tumultuous workshop, whatever the intentions, led us into a deeper exploration of disciplinary power and of ethics. A single individual may, at the right time and in the right context, have a powerful impact on proceedings in organisations. But this is risky—he might as well have been 'left cold' and made to leave the organisation. I found myself having tilted into paying attention to *the social* almost at the expense of the individual in this project; several rewritings of my narrative enabled me to better hold the paradox of the individual/social as arising at the same time.

I can see how this more ontological question, 'How do individuals make a difference, constrained by the times and settings we are in?', had been bothersome for a while. However, when the managers were expected to carry out a 'simple administrative

task' (in truth, invasive and coercive), somebody did speak up and negotiated power relations; he reacted to the organisational community of which he was a part and seemed to make a difference, but the situation held potential for disaster as well.


**Methodology and literature**

In taking my experience of thirty years in business process consulting seriously, I follow in the tradition of Aristotle and concern myself with *phronesis,* practical wisdom or practical judgment (Stacey 2011, p. 56). The research method presents itself as a series of narratives in which I am transparent regarding the movement of my thoughts. The narrative projects chronicle movements and practice over time. Making these movements visible is a quality of my method and helps in developing a thesis on management practice in organisations. Reading and researching into areas such as sociology, philosophy, and psychology, amongst other fields, due to reflecting and being reflexive—thinking about my thinking—and rethinking, yet again, writing, receiving responses/feedback, rethinking, etc., means this intense three-year-long process has, over and over again, 'moved' my mind in several directions. It has provided me with wider and deeper insights and knowledge of the complex field in which I am practising.

A literature review in the traditional sense is not applicable in the DMan as the subjects of the different projects, the 'animated questions' we come to explore, *emerges* in the process; so does the literature. It emerges through the practice explored in the projects. Therefore, a literature review is in every project. I have thus been drawing on different authors depending on the specific contingencies I have been immersed in whilst living in, exploring, and writing the projects.

In the following discourse is a brief synopsis of the literature I explored: I am drawing on Stacey for an overall understanding of what complexity sciences is and how it has developed historically through traditions and roots in philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Foucault, Bourdieu), sociology, social theory (Elias, Mead), pragmatism (Pierce, Dewey, Hoas), psychology and anthropology, amongst others disciplines. More particularly, I came to find the writings of Norbert Elias valuable in order to understand our radical sociality, and I found G. H. Mead's ideas about how meaning arises in relationships (not beforehand) in continous gesturing and responding difficult but eventually helpful in Project 2.

Foucault as well as Elias and Scott contributed to my deepening understanding of power relations, in particular, in Project 3. Christopher Mowles' writings have also resonated

with me throughout as he thoughtfully writes from a consultancy perspective, and Douglas Griffins, whos thinking regarding ethics and conflict, made me come to view these areas very differently. Hanna Arendts' writing was excellent in understanding the 'public realm' and the dangers of 'overbeurocratization' and my first supervisor, Nicholas Sarra's recommendations of literature such as Jackall, Hirschhorn, and Nitsun amongst others and his knowledge of psychology helped me form an understanding of why we do it.

In Projects 3 and 4, issues of recognition and identity came alive to me through Honneth and Bauman, and Damasio and Burkitt contributed to my thinking regarding feelings and emotions. I have quite an extensive list of literature, and although I have not *directly* drawn on all of the authors mentioned, I have left them to stand as they have served as influencers at the time and contributed to a broader understanding of what I am involved in and how my practice is located in wider contexts in management and in life.

*Quantitative and Qualitative research*

When I ask managers I work with about what they *do* when they work, they will come up with suggestions such as 'planning, implementing, participating in (endless) meetings, strategising…' etc. When inquiring further by asking, "What do you actually *do* when you are planning or implementing?", answers will shift into concrete matters such as 'talking, sitting, walking, thinking… Gary Thomas talks about '*changing our landscape of inquiry for a new science of education'*, drawing on Schön and noticing that the more theoretical and general knowledge is, the higher it seems to be valued. Being 'socialised to an institution where, tacitly and automatically, we believe that the only thing that really counts and the only thing that's really of value is *theory,* and the higher and the more abstract and the more general the theory, the higher the status it is' (2012, p. 36). This may be one reason for our tendency of expressing ourselves in quite abstract terms at work—this generalised management language being so 'normalised' and integrated that we hardly notice it anymore.

In using practical reasoning (*phronesis)*, I am drawing on an Aristotelian tradition were many kinds of knowledge only progress through practice, tacit knowing, and craft knowledge (*techné*). This is what we learn at work and in life, in practising, and it is only researchable in the particular context were it is located. The idea of *phronesis* developed as a critique of the theoretical ideal of life (*sophia,* 'wisdom') as another kind of knowledge directed towards the concrete situation. 'Thus it must grasp the "circumstances" in their infinite variety' (Gadamer 2012, p. 19).

Bent Flyvbjerg coined the term 'phronetic social science' (2001, 2012) and argues that social sciences are better situated to conduct research that can inform and thereby enhance phronesis. Meanwhile, natural sciences are better at testing hypotheses and demonstrating abstract principles and law-like relationships, but fall short when producing situated knowledge about how to act and understand contextualised settings. He is, in the tradition of Bourdieu and Foucault, taking power into account and thinks that social science research should provide answers to four questions: 1. Where are we going? 2. Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power? 3. Is it desirable? 4. What should be done? I find these questions valuable in reflecting upon research situations; however, underlying the two last ones, I detect an ideology of improvement (...desirable, what should be done...), for the statement ends with '....in ways that promote positive social change' (2012, p. 25). As the future is uncertain and unpredictable, we cannot know what will contribute to this, searching for or paying attention to only the 'desirable' could potentially have the opposite effect of what we intended.

I found Gary Thomas' writing about education an interesting analogue to process consultancy; it is about human beings, in all our contingencies, interacting in order to learn and/or understand things differently. Research in education, according to Thomas, 'happens at a different epistemic stratum' (2012, p. 30). Drawing on Canguilhem, Thomas goes on to state that it may not produce cumulative knowledge in the traditional quantitative sense of 'elimination of the false by the true' (2012, p. 29) as is possible in natural sciences such as physics, plant science, etc. It rather comes from immersion at local levels and informed reflection. I will argue that this is the kind of knowledge and accumulation from which process consultancy (as well as education) operates.

'Know-that' knowledge is of facts; progressive, collectable, cumulative, and demonstrable in the natural sciences; whilst 'know-how' can be found in the practicing consultants' use of experience, quality of reflection, and reflexivity and in the process of applied inquiry and guided use of experience by weighing in others' experiences and being submerged in a guiding community (similar to what is being done in the DMan). Science does take different forms with the form that is appropriate for process consultancy being different from others. As it builds a great deal on a *landscape of inquiry*, it needs to be concerned with the present—its interstices and vagaries—and less concerned with prediction and procedures. Scientific value of interviews, quantification, and measuring as is common in quantitative methods, may be problematic in these particular settings 'due to difficulty in

capacity to reflect reality "out there" as well as the subjective world of the interviewee'
(Alvesson, 2009, p. 157).

Hence, I have chosen a more eclectic and qualitative approach. Qualitative methods
have at least two traditions in themselves, positivist and interpretivist (Lin, 1998), and
encompass case studies, action research, collaborative or participative enquiry, auto-
ethnography, etc. They take, in various degrees, the participants' own emotions and impact
on what is being researched into account. The methods I have been using links to
phenomenological, pragmatic, and hermeneutic stances and is close to what is termed as
auto-ethnography: understanding cultural experience (ethno) through analysing and
describing (graphy) personal experience (auto) (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). There are
several approaches, such as evocative, analytical, critical, interpretive, all having in common
the research being based on personal experiences, an epiphany in their lives (Denzin, 2013)
or something strange and confusing (Brinkmann, 2012). One is 'studying one's own setting
… rather than a group of other people' (Alvesson, 2009, p. 156), and it may actually offer
good research economy (Alvesson, 2003; Brinkmann, 2012).

As there exists an intimate relation between power and truths (Foucault 1980),
ideology is behind every interpretation we do; we cannot separate ourselves from who we
are, but we can attempt, time after time, to reflect and take reflexive turns, which research
methodologies increasingly have been doing the last years according to Silverman (2011
introduction). A carefully chosen case study may actually contribute to scientific
development better than a random one as these may be the richest sources of information in
clarifying deeper causes and thus increase generalisability, according to Flyvbjerg. Flyvbjerg
also urges us to see that statistical methods (that may be more quantitative in approach) and
case studies are complementary, not conflictual (2011, p. 313).

One difference between my way of understanding an eclectic tradition of complex
responsive processes and auto-ethnography may be that the latter calls for pedagogical action
whilst the first invites humility, according to Frits Simon (2014, p. 23), drawing on Homan.
Thinking in terms of 'pedagogical action' as a possible outcome of an ideology of
improvement may thus be weighed against an ideology of realism (the difference between the
'ought' and the 'is') because complexity is the science of uncertainty and
unpredictability—we cannot know what results emerge from certain activities. Participatory
or practical 'action research', a term coined by Kurt Lewin in 1944, involves active
participants in a change situation. This approach can also be likened to my way of
understanding what we do together, apart from the purpose, as that of action research is to

solve a particular problem and to produce guidelines for best practice according to Denscombe (2010, p. 6). Drawing on complex responsive processes (a meta-theory), I aim to elucidate and illuminate, and alternatives may or may not emerge.

*Pragmatism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics*

Taking experience seriously, 'coming to know' involves methods of 'operating on the world', according to American pragmatist John Dewey (1984, *The Later Works 1924–1953,* intro xi) and thus places practical judgment in praxis or action. Out of praxis, we may refine practical judgment and come to know how to act in a certain situation, placing research as near as possible to what we actually are experiencing in working together and all of the murky waters of emotions. The uncertainty and anxiety that this involves, rather than a too-abstracted 'hindsight' account, may be valuable for understanding how workable situations and senses of movement occur in the processes that consultants are involved in. We are not able to step outside 'the game' (Elias 1970, p. 71). Even though we are able to think and think about our thinking, we are nevertheless restricted from doing this from within the game. A pragmatic tradition of Dewey and Mead (1934) resonates well with my way of understanding interaction as we 'pick' bits that resonate with us from the world in 'a forked-road situation' (Dewey 1910, p. 11) where one's activity is stuck and we need to go on somehow. This 'stuckness' is often what forms the DMan student's animated question in the research, a fleshed-out sense of lived experience. The narratives we choose are those that resonate the most with us—in my case it came to be 'disturbing and uncomfortable situations' in my practice; those situations made me start the DMan process; they were the felt 'pebble-in-my-shoe'. Dewey defined thinking as such:

> Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends (1910, p. 6).

It is when our usual, habitual background understanding has broken down, and the situation appears to be lacking in meaning that a need for clarifying as much as possible the nature of the problem and our habitual modes of understanding the same emerge. This is close to an everyday life approach (Dewey 1910, p. 106), *taking experience seriously* and thinking about the same.

The social is what is being done by people every day when we act and lead our lives. We consistently interpret this 'life-world' in a phenomenological (pre-reflective) stance as we seek to describe our experience in the qualitative researcher role. This has been made through

a process that can be likened to terms Brinkmann is using: making the *obvious obvious*, the *hidden obvious*, and the *hidden dubious* (2012 p. 22). Reflecting upon the fuller and richer context of my specific narratives and their contingencies with the help of my learning set made issues regarding my different management situations much more obvious. Further inquiry and responses from my learning set made the *hidden obvious* through uncovering and illuminating power structures between me and clients, between management colleagues, etc. Making the *hidden dubious* came about through critiquing and deconstructing my own and client's assumptions including the assumptions of my learning set, through rethinking and inquiring into what we took for granted, being mindful regarding habitual ways of reaffirming the already 'known'.

This ongoing interpretation, in a hermeneutic stance, concerns *local* hermeneutics—craft knowledge—which is weaving the fabric of the different processes within management I am involved in. It is fashioned out of the practitioner's tacit knowledge of what works, what changes, and what is functional in each process.

*Narrative as method*

The four narratives, progression report, and synopsis that were written during the course of three years became increasingly reflected and located both in the individual and in the social. This was done with the help of my smaller learning set, consisting of between five and six people, and the larger community, consisting of more than twenty people and between four and six supervisors / faculty members that make up the DMan cohorts.

There has been a burgeoning of literature on narrative since 1991 (e.g., Boje 2001; Czarniawska 1999; Gabriel 2000). Rhodes and Brown refer to the 'ongoing tension between stories and science' in narrative research (2005, p. 167) and articulate that their story is a *quest for meaning* rather than scientific truth. They conclude that if we are to take the lives of others seriously and engage with lived experience, then 'the turn to narrative needs to be continued' (2005, p. 182, my italics). The goal of qualitative analysis is to understand the world better, find appropriate ways of acting there, and enable meaning in uncomfortable and disturbing situations that appear 'stuck'. Otherwise, there would be no point of research. When 'forked-road' situations or breakdowns are experienced, good analysis may be helpful and enable us to regain an understanding of different and/or 'new' meaning-making (that I like to refer to as *dissolutions*, extended in the 'conclusion & contribution' section) and cope with the situation.

Narratives are thus used in many ways to draw attention to the themes emerging in the research. Some examples include representing the 'raw material', incidents, bothersome, puzzling or challenging situations, epiphanies. Moreover, in the formation of arguments, we can assert a position and build theory through critique of other authors. *Phronesis* is characterized by a narrative approach, incorporating changes of mind and shifts of view. This is 'exemplary' knowledge used thoughtfully in the context of one's own and other's practical experiences.

*How the different themes emerged in the process*

The themes in this thesis has emerged in the process of working and writing in *praxis*. Out of what was going on in the various teams and processes I was working in at the time, and due to receiving feedback and reflecting, when I wrote the different projects, various themes emerged; In project 1 it came to be reflection and ideology as I was encouraged to more deeply explore and look into my own upbringing and my early formative experiences. I explored issues of 'game-playing´, explorative conflict and improvisation in project 2 and in project 3 it came to be practical judgment and identity. In project 4 the theme of 'power' arose as a consequence of reflecting on project 3 and the new situations that arose in that particular setting as relationships of power are constitutive for identity.

*Community meetings and resonance*

Advocated both in natural and social sciences are 'neutrality', notably the percieved *original* Freudian idea of the cold analyst, dutifully observing and avoiding emotional contact. Trying to stay neutral and observational in relations may be negating the benefit of therapy which is relatedness.[4] However, this does not necessarily negate felt detachment/neutrality from the *situation*. People, whether in therapeutic settings or in management settings can never *not* be involved with each other as we are social through and through (Elias 1990). In thinking of the 'generalised other' in the sense Mead (1934) makes of relatedness, the 'data' I select from situations will resonate with me. I am thus actively constructing meaning; nevertheless, there need to be *resonance* with a 'general audience' in what I am writing about. People have to be able to find themselves in my writing, and make sense of it, and then it thus becomes generalisable. This *general audience* has been represented in the regular *community meetings* as well as in the smaller learning sets in the DMan—with some people I have found my ideas

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[4] Psychoanalytic practitioners have come a long way since; intensely engaged and reflexive regarding their own participating, this apparent 'neutrality' is a highly trained performance.

resonating well and with others less well, thus providing me with further reflections and comments. As such, I have come to understand how my writing could be taken up (sometimes as I intended and sometimes not) by a much wider community and context, not closely related to my own specific contingencies.

As an analogy, 'limbic *resonance*' addressed within brain/body research comes to mind: Lewis, Amini, and Lannon refer to the capacity for non-verbal communication. Our nervous systems are attuned to those around us with whom we share a close connection whereby people (they refer to mammals) become attuned to each others' inner states in a symphony of internal adaption and mutual exchange (2000).

*Reflection and reflexivity*

I have come to understand organisations as continuously ongoing patterns of relating between people and *activity*—what we find ourselves doing together—our *praxis*, as organising our actions in different ways. In paying attention to local activity, to the sometimes disturbing and uncomfortable situations we encounter, we are able to enter into deeper reflection and reflexivity, in live action, in order to become more aware of how we are negotiating our ways forward.

We act in the present on the basis of what we tell ourselves happened in the past and on the basis of what we expect for the future. This is happening in narrative forms; in asking people who they are or what they do, they will tell a story. We also have the capacity of *reflecting* on the stories we tell ourselves whilst preoccupied with them as a 'whole', as a unity of experience. As we cannot talk of *all* these experiences at once, we have to be able to abstract or make representations of our direct experience, simplify, and stereotype from our fuller life experiences. In reflecting over these unities of experience, we form intentions and desires that will motivate our local actions. However, human beings can go further and be reflexive regarding our reflections. Humans being *reflexive*—entities that bend back upon themselves—mean that any explanation we produce is the product of who we are, our histories, and the history and traditions of our communities (Stacey, 2011, p. 33, as cited in Steier). Reflexivity, in its essence, constantly assesses the relationship between knowledge and all the different ways of *doing* knowledge. Consequently, attention can be paid to the way diverse linguistic, social, political, and theoretical elements that are all acknowledged in the process of interpretation.

The practice of process consultancy can be seen as continuously reiterative, bringing back my version of 'the story' regarding what was taking place for us the last time we met

and why—the management teams I work with and me. It also invites a recall and reflection around our understandings. The practice will then further reiterate the narrative(s), making different sense, yet again, of what was/is going on for us. My re-formed self that emerged in the process of the tumultuous workshop (as described in Project 4) in the Star organisation invited the participants into reflexivity-in-action: 'what did just happen (and why do you think this happened)?', thus trying to enhance our capacity for practical judgment:

> Supervision and mentoring are at their most effective in sustaining and enhancing capacities for practical judgment when they take the form of reflexive inquiry into what they and those they are supervising and mentoring are doing together and why they are doing it the way they are (Stacey 2012, p. 108).

This particular approach can be likened to what Buchanan and Dawson (2007) refer to as multi-story or polyvocality. This approach is exploratory, emergent, and reflexive as we address how we were thinking of the games (Elias 1970, p. 71) that were being played out then and how we are thinking around our thinking regarding the same now, or reflexivity-in-action (Stacey 2012, p. 108).

*Validity and generalisability*

As the research is a subjective account on what it is that I find myself doing, the narratives must, nonetheless, make sense to a wider community and the reflection and reflexivity they entail around disturbing and uncomfortable events may be felt to be applicable in similar settings; Validity is achieved by locating immediate experience in the local and in the social and simultaneously in the researcher's own contingencies and context. This process makes the obvious obvious than in a wider community of the DMan programme in our regular meetings and in between through e-mailing and Skype calls; through a diversity of responses and critique, in settings of everyday politics, power, and culture, we come to see and are able to make the hidden obvious and the obvious dubious (Brinkmann 2012, p. 22). Presenting ourselves as objects of research implies taking up different reflexive stands and trying out alternative approaches. Traditional quantitative research will, nevertheless, always involve 'us/the researcher' in more or less explicit ways in the *selection* of research questions and interviewees. Fictional stories, just as non-fictional, may be as much about the researcher (as there will be *resonance* with the selection of story) as are narratives that are being actively intersected by others and re-iterated. The learning set and the faculty consistently critique each narrative several times, sometimes as many as seven or eight iterations of each project.

Then our arguments are tested, contested, and disposed of or strengthened, causing new iterations and themes to occur. Each individual's work is iterated until shared meaning is made of the narrative and the analysis. There is another validity check made by other members of the faculty who also provide a critique of the work after a number of iterations have been made.

The community meetings have an intense and sensitising effect as we all 'represent' different communities, greatly increasing and testing our awareness of how our gestures and responses could be taken up in general in other management settings. This is the way and the approach by which my claims are being thoroughly questioned and tested for plausibility and generalisability. This social process also helps in locating the research into a wider community of thought, historical traditions, and literature of thinking about matters regarding human experiences. As Brinkmann (2012, p. 47) notes, 'A core idea that follows from the philosophies of pragmatism and hermeneutics is that our everyday life analyses are valid when they enable us to understand and act.' Brinkmann advocates this idea as a reason to leave the representational idiom behind and stop thinking of representation and correspondence as truth and validity. In combining a narrative approach with a deeper and far more extensive analysis of process and context than in my work settings, through informed reflection, rethinking and rewriting, with the larger DMan community and our immediate learning-set, it becomes much more informed, and *generalisability* emerges.

*Limitations to the methodology and the thesis*

As I am drawing on practical reasoning (*phronesis)*, in the Aristotelian tradition developed as a critique of the theoretical ideal of life (*sophia,* 'wisdom') as another kind of knowledge directed towards the concrete situation it must 'Thus grasp the "circumstances" in their infinite variety', according to Gadamar (2012, p. 19) and of course nothing can really do that as varieties are indeed - infinite. Although the richness of varieties in experience, causing tensions, may be necessary in order not to collapse into 'right/wrong' dichotomies (as the future is unpredictable), this inability to grasp all the infinite varities is causing limitations to my methodology.

Flyvbjerg (2001, 2012) is arguing that natural sciences are better at testing hypotheses and demonstrating abstract principles and law-like relationships, but fall short when producing situated knowledge about how to act and understand contextualised settings. One can argue that the opposite goes for social sciences as a second limitation of the methodology; it falling short of producing 'unsituated' ie more generalised knowledge. There is a danger of situated

knowledge becoming too introspect and only produce/select themes that may give the 'desired', normative answers. This ongoing interpretation of *local* hermeneutics—craft knowledge—which is at the centre of my used methodology is fashioned out of the tacit knowledge of what works, what changes and what is functional in each process and the limitation in this is in my habitual ways of reaffirming what I already 'know'.

Those answers that we seek to find must be within our reach, we must be able to see them and we may only be able to see those that falls within certain 'frames of mind' as we are submerged in guiding communities, (as in the DMan) and are influenced by and influencing each other in how to ask questions and what kind of questions to ask -  constraining and enabeling. A limitation of the methodology is thus also the question of to what extent a guiding community, with similar norms, can be described as a 'general' audience although this is taken into account with great care in the DMan community.

'Action research' (Lewin 1944) is to solve a particular problem and to produce guidelines for best practice according to Denscombe (2010, p. 6). Drawing on complex responsive processes (a meta-theory), I aim to elucidate and illuminate, and alternatives may or may not emerge. This, however, is also a third limitation of the methodology; that it does not produce guidelines or 'advise' regarding the best practice or ways forward.

It is possible to use findings and insights from this thesis as an *analogy* in other and/or similar areas, education, coaching and/or politics comes to mind. However, the limitations of the thesis are that it addresses process consultancy specifically.

*Further research*

As I am closing this particular inquiry down other areas of interest are opening up; those that I have come to think of as interesting for further research are in particular group dynamics and group analysis; how may, for instance, *critique* be worked with in groups in order to illuminate groupthink and address the same. Other interesting areas may be politics, how we are able to and unable to (at the same time) to talk into the 'public realm' that, for instance, Hanna Arendt writes about.

**Critical evaluation of the research in light of the overarching theme**

The overarching theme for my thesis has throughout been 'exploring uncomfortable and disturbing situations in process consultancy'. This has come to mean some fundamental

rethinking; what it is that we find ourselves doing in process consultancy practice and how we go about doing it. What we do and what we are, I have come to think of as inseparable processes—relational activity.

My arguments are as follows:

- I am arguing of disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual 'states' as the norm in process consultancy work when issues are at stake and people with different ideologies and intentions are trying to create results together.

- I argue of the above—disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual states—as changing our sense of self, identity, and thus inherently involved in the emerging of norms, novelty, and ethics.

- I am arguing for the potentiality of acknowledging and exploring disturbances when we encounter differences.

**I will here draw the themes that have emerged together and critically reflect over the changes that have led me to form the above arguments:**

1. Idealisations and reality
2. Ideology and identity
3. Social relationships
4. Power and politics (the game and infrapolitics)
5. Thinking and reflexivity
6. Conflict and ethics.

## 1. Idealisation and reality

The ideology I had been working out of was what we *ought* to be doing in process consultancy situations/management. These idealisations have roots in the time and place I grew up, in turn influenced by larger movements and patterning. Ideas regarding individuals as independent and self-sufficient rose during the Enlightment era as a reaction to earlier ideologies and promoted an autonomous take. This formed a base for an individualised psychology (meritocracy) rather than previous estate/tribal/community psychology. Both myself and my clients using 'self-help' books in the last decades have reinforced this

autonomous view and ideology of improvement: it was/is entirely up to myself if I exercised my own 'free' willpower and changed my old (bad) habits or not.

In consultancy processes, this normally meant a relentless eye towards 'the future'—visioning, strategic planning and scenario planning (where do we see ourselves ideally in three years' time). The conversations we carried out together tended to be fairly idealised, generalised, and abstract and revolved around goals and performance measurements in a 'positive' way with an optimistic take. Hence, when disturbances occurred, they were generally uncomfortably felt and tended to be downplayed as there was always anxiety in us getting 'stuck'and not moving forward (fast) enough. This autonomous take seemed to enhance emotions of loneliness and fed internal feelings of urgency and anxiety of not being capable enough to secure the idealised goals and visions for their department and organisation. There have been countless discussions regarding the need for improvements of teamwork and cooperation, but in reality, it has often been felt as a waste of time and is rarely rewarded. People tended to go on working in a solitary manner as reward systems in organisations normally are set up to promote individual achievements. Tilting the perspective from what we *ought* to be doing and more into paying attention to what we actually *were* doing together enabled us to slow down and attempt to reflect more in conversations. This meant a more curious, inquiring, and probing approach into situations at hand, which provided us with information that enabled different understandings and movements. When we encountered differences and disturbances, and conflicts occurred, it was more of a challenge to hold that particular approach and stay in the situation as anxiety and tensions grew.

## 2.  Ideology and identity

What we ought and ought not to do (norms) and voluntary compulsions, what we are judging what is good to do (values), are obligatory criteria for the evaluation of actions. These are being formed by human interaction and are forming us at the same time, constituting ideology. Ideology can be thought of as an imaginative 'whole'—unconciouss processes of self and the social simultaneously and largely habitual (Stacey 2011, p. 382).

Elias (1970) and Mead (1934) thought of conflict as an inevitable aspect of all human relationships arising from the need to interpret generalised norms and idealised values in particular contigent situations. They also argued from the fact that human interdependence means all human relationships are power relationships through cooperating and competing. Thinking of diversity (different ideologies, intentions) as the source of conflict and novelty

(both creative and destructive) has changed my approach in practice. Relations were seen as less strained and more innovative if we shared certain rules and values when we communicated. This was an ideal take on how things *ought* to have been and not a look at the how they actually *were*. Taking my experience seriously, I admitted to encountering differences in process consultancy processes more as a rule than an exception. These were/are normal states, and they may be felt as risky to pay attention to⸺hence avoidance or downplaying⸺holding possibilities both for destruction and novelty. Paying attention and talking (and thinking about how we are thinking) about what is going on involves exercising moral judgments and struggle. In this process, I argue that ethics and 'new' or different norms as well as identities emerge.

In negotiating around issues of importance *identity*⸺who am I/we, my/our sense of self⸺can be thought of as stable and unstable at the same time. Identities are formed in local interactions and population-wide patterns emerge out of these (management teams and organisations) re-forming identities yet again in on-going movements. Identity is often referred to as both uniqueness and sameness and whatever makes us recognisable and definable or different from others. If identity is more of a label, identification is the process by which it may be acquired. Identification as an 'ongoing social process' (Honneth 1995, p. 96) implies fluid and unstable/stable processes of re-forming identities, ones that are social through and through albeit unique in the genetic blueprint. Identification, identity formation, and identity are all being co-created and emergent, simultaneously in individuals and the teams I am working with in processes.

In working with the Star organisation (Project 3), I found this process to be particularly enhanced; we found ourselves struggling, constantly renegotiating, and trying to establish a sense of who we were and what we were to do. Individual identities with different ideologies and intentions changed in relationships of power and emerged differently in the identification process as there were many disturbing and uncomfortable moments that were enabling, constraining, and re-forming us. These identity changes, coming out of disturbances and struggle, created senses of movement and caused different norms and ethics to emerge.

Management education (as anlogy to process consultancy processes) provides an important space for managers' identity work according to Hay (as cited in Petriglieri, Petriglieri, & Warhurst). It is also, however, recognised that much of what is currently on offer constrains rather than enables managers' identity work since it presents a sanitised perspective that avoids the complexities of the lived *experiences* of managers. And in doing so, the author argues that an idealised image of management work is elevated (2014, "'I don't

know what I am doing!'"': Surfacing struggles of managerial identity work,' p. 1, *my italics*) I agree with it being problematic if managers cannot find themselves in what is being 'educated' and what they are supposed to 'learn'; this may possibly contribute to anxiety and feelings of alienation.

### 3.  Social relationships

In Project 1, I came to an initial understanding of disturbing situations in my practice as being located in my own and the participants' *contingencies and contexts* as well as individuals when we responded to situations. The autonomous idea as encountered in individual psychology, can be contrasted by movements in the opposite direction, people in dynamic, ongoing processes of socially constructing reality together and language as a means of this in a tradition of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann 1966) and later Kenneth Gergen, particularly concerned with a 'relational' view of the self and replacing the individual mind with relational processes from which morality and rationality emerge (2009).

I have gradually come to think of us as both; as 'individuals in society', as radically social and interdependent in the meaning the sociologist Norbert Elias (1970, 1991, 1994) makes of it—how we are born into *societies* that are formative of our ideologies and intentions as we are forming and re-forming each other (identities) in processes of conversations. I was originally caught in the idea of the individual as *primary* and groups and societies as *secondary*: 'each individual is really tied; he is tied by living in permanent functional dependence on other people...' (1991, p. 16). Thus, we are paradoxically free and unfree at the same time, constrained and enabled in relationships of power. Elias maintained that figurations of human interdependence could not be reduced to the actions of individual people. On the contrary, the actions of individuals could only be understood in terms of their patterns of interdependence, that is, in terms of the figurations (of power) they form with each other. This can also be expressed in the words of George Herbert Mead, the social psychologist:

> While minds and selves are essentially social products ….the physiological mechanism underlying experience is far from irrelevant—indeed it is indispensible—to their genesis and existence; for individual experience and behavior is, of course, physiologically basic to social experience and behavior (1934, p. 2).

Behaviour is thus dependent on experience, and the social functioning of this we cannot get by ourselves; we are needy and always in relationships—whether in physical relationships or

whether we interally 'hear' and react to each others 'voices' (or our own) when we gesture and respond to each other. As we communicate continually, differences and meaning making continually change and emerge. Disturbances or conflictual states arise when differences are encountered that are not necessarily intentional from anybody but based on cross sections of ideologies and interpretations.

Although I base my arguments on people always being in social contexts and contingencies in the disturbing situations that I am exploring in my practice, I nevertheless recognize the vast field of individual psychology and psychoanalysis as written about in Project 4. Group analytics, in particular, have significantly contributed to bringing *the social* in and are influential in the DMan due to several of the supervisors having a background in the field. Moreover, there are *unorthodox* aspects of group analytic theory. Farhad Dalal, in *Taking the Group Seriously*, examined a more radical side of SH Foulkes, the founder of group analysis. This is a form of psychotherapy that values relationships, communication, and dynamics within a group as a focus for the work—as trying to bridge the nature/nurture dichotomy (*nature* as our true selves and *nurture* as the process of living with others) in a move away from individualism and prioritising the cultural and the social in group settings (Dalal 1998).

Ian Burkitt (as cited in Bateson) is also making the case for our registering emotions and feelings first in our bodies and then thinking of them as private entities. But what we refer to when expressing emotions is our *relationship* to other people (2014, p. 2). Trying to create 'results' together in process consultancy is thus highly dependent on the emotional (power) in relationships.

## 4. Power and politics (the game and infrapolitics)

Making the connection of disturbances from avoidable to possibly necessary in order to cause a sense of movement, of novelty and different norms to arise in processes, starts making more sense in Project 3. We are paying more attention to how the particulars of situations form patterns over time and give rise to unwritten and written 'norms', rules, regulations, and policies (this is how we do things in this organisation) and how these as taken up in different ways by other and new agents. Such agents are employed and made into particulars yet again in 'new' and specific situations, thus creating 'new' and different norms, etc.

Although aware of politics and power in personal relationships, I initially found it hard to make more sense of these entities in a management setting. In a community meeting

at the DMan, I once talked about my son's idea to write a book about 'How to pick up girls' (he was eighteen at the time). The tactics were to 'give a really nice compliment and then ignoring ...they will become really interested then', he concluded. When I enquired about the ethics in doing so, he replied, 'But it *works*.' One of the supervisors on the DMan, Douglas Griffin, pointed to this reply when I retold the story in a community meeting once: 'He was pointing to *functionality*'. Thinking of political action as *functional*—how functional are you to my projects—created a new understanding of power: the person with the 'least interest' in a relationship or a project dominates/controls it as we are needy and always in relationships. Bourdieu talks about our practical sense as an analogy from the field of sports, a 'feel for the game', the '...encounter between the *habitus* and a field...' (1980, p. 66) and Elias introduces 'the game' as a way of pointing to the interdependency of people and how power is a relational phenomenon, "...a structural characteristic of human relationships—of *all* human relationships" (1970, p. 74).

Power ratios are temporary; they change and move. Thinking about what kind of power figurations people may be caught in, I find very useful for understanding activity in processes. That is, what or whom is informing us, what kind of organisational games are we caught up in, how do we together construct the generalised pattern of the business 'when the "…pursuit of personal agendas detrimental to the organisation are regarded as an *unfortunate distraction* (Stacey, 2011, p. 191 my *italics)* from successful functioning..." This is done in a discourse on organisation and management dominated by a 'taken-for-granted assumption that successful performance depends upon harmonious relationships between members of an organisation' (ibid). I have come to pay more attention to these 'unfortunate distractions' and disharmonious relationships in my practice since they are indeed functional and interesting prerequisites for change.

Power and politics are both a part of everyday relationships in local activity and in general patterning in what James Scott refers to as *infrapolitics* among the subordinated groups. These social structures are being enacted and enhanced in process situations simply with consultants being brought in. There will be expectations and risks in 'ruptures' occuring regarding what is being said or not when we negotiate power. Sometimes 'safe' expressions of aggression against domination or misrecognition may serve as a substitute for the real thing, direct aggression. Process consultancy situations could, in a sense, be seen as game playing with specified rules and rituals proposed by the situation. They can be preventive of more disruptive forms of emotions in the organisation as we often are being brought in to prevent anxiety and disruptions when large 'changes' (lay-offs, fusions, etc.) are about to

occur. However, the consultancy process may also in itself be anxiety provoking—precisely doing that which it seeks to avoid (1990, p. 185-187). Consequently, not only does process consultancy deal with disturbing situations, but also, there is potential for them to create these as well. In some cases, there may be mutual interest in keeping appearances up, both in the powerful and the subordinated in groups in order to help sustain what the process proposes to change (1990, p. 70). 'Rocking the boat', or challenging the status quo on management teams, can go either way. This is something I experienced in the Star organisation where the process frequently 'froze'.

We have power opportunities, and I have come to think of us as always being anxious of exposing ourselves too much, for in overexposing we may experience a sense of decline in status/power—when we are (allowing ourselves) being influenced (or intimate) in a relationship. In the struggle of independence/interdependency, there are many facets of contradictory and ambigious emotions that may have to be harboured.

Exploring 'disciplinary power' (Foucault 1994) in Project 4 made me think of how strategic talking by the powerful about how people should take the chance (implying they do not) to 'influence the content of the work and how it is being conducted' can have the opposite effect; it may be felt as a mock democracy and cause resistance and alienation, eventually forcing managers and consultants to pursue quests on 'how to motivate people'. Organisational life is a fairly tense affair due to power relations and struggles between autonomy and interdependency. Political practices in management—power, conflict, and autonomy as well as coercive persuasion ( the topic of managerialism)—are in general not readily addressed. I believe now that this avoidance of what work may mean to us or not does not really address this coercive approach as a part of my felt "stone in the shoe". Recognising a reality of what work may constitute for a large number of people and not glossing it over in an overly positive or idealised way, is how it *ought* to be and may make us become less alienated.

The idealisation is not only for us to 'align' with the organisational goals (an abstraction) but also to 'feel' aligned—securing our emotional fit in. In reality, organisations are made of people and what we do—and it is impossible to know whether we 'align' in the way it was intended or indeed what may make us 'feel' aligned. We may be seen (and claim) to be 'aligned' in order to avoid repression. According to Scott (1990, p. 45), 'Relations of domination are, at the same time, relations of resistance', and with too tight restrictions or social control, '[t]he practice of domination... *creates* the hidden transcript' (1990, p. 27). The *public transcripts*—what is in the open interaction between those who dominate and those

who are subordinates—and *hidden transcripts* as the public transcript are unlikely to tell the whole story about what happens in power relations (1990, p.14).

## 5.  Thinking and reflexivity

I have come to think of thinking, reflecting, and paying attention to how everybody else and I are involved in and are co-creating what is being played out in consultancy processes as one of the key elements of a more meaningful and thoughtful approach in disturbing and contested situations.

Paying attention to and thinking about what we are doing is not being encouraged in process consultancy practices in general. Reflecting is often perceived to 'slow things down' as it requires *time* to think, and time is of the essence in processes ridden by a sense of urgency or a sense of falling behind competitors if we are not 'out there' acting and *doing* something. Simply participating in a process may be perceived as a waste of time by some managers. Understanding *conversations* as meaning making activities or as the actual work itself, as well as spending (much) time attending meetings where co-creative conversations hold possibilities, is a different way of looking at activity.

Taking thinking to the next level—thinking about how we are thinking—is an unusual and sometimes uncomfortable process for groups to stay in. Reflexive inquiry into what we are doing and why we are doing it the way we are (Stacey 2012, p. 108) is usually 'halting' speedy (and unreflected) opinions in favour of more informed and considerate opinions and can cause movement and novelty to emerge as I experienced in the workshop in Star (as described in Project 4). This is how identities were felt to be re-formed—by engaging in thinking at the same time we are thinking about how we are thinking (reflection and reflexivity in action) (Stacey 2012, p. 108)

These are activities that differentiate man from animal: 'What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing' (Arendt 1958, Prologue). Thinking is also in its best sense that which considers 'the basis and consequences of beliefs' as Dewey points out (1910, p. 5) as it is always a 'question of what governs statements' (Foucault 1994, p. 114) when enabled but also constrained in and by the social. So the social evolves from thinking of what we are doing, and we evolve from the social.

Identifying myself as the 'skilful consultant' aiming at helping my clients to 'solve problems' (Project 3) for many years and catching myself in thinking this way was a strong reminder of the powerful strings attached to the past and how dominant this linear thinking was and still is. I was able to take a more detached turn through self-distancing (Elias, 1970,

p. 122) and inhibit my first impulses to act on only a fragment of information (Petra as the curable patient). This was the expectation of the HR department, and the particular circumstances that brought me into that particular game with them was the above—the assumption of my being able to solve their problem. This led me into thinking even more about what I was doing when I was doing it: I knew that coaching (as I had a background in) in the way Stacey takes it up (2012, p. 109) had been a way forward in my practice: '...the development of more fluid and complex conversation involves *curbing* the widespread pattern in organisations where leaders and managers focus on the future and move immediately to planning and solving problems' (*my italics*). I became more comfortable in curbing the solutionist quest and found that increasing complexity through further inquiry made something unexpected to occur, a sense of *dissolution* (further developed in the 'Contribution' section).

## 6.  Conflict and ethics

I did not neglect conflicts and disturbances in my practice earlier, but I would try to steer away from them with a sense of dissatisfaction and insecurity in what would come out as I thought of the unnecessity of taking up too much time with only a few people involved in the specific situation. I did not see the full extent of disturbances as perhaps located in wider contexts.

A 'patient-centered' psychologic view, common in traditional conflict management, makes us readily diagnose people outside of the particulars, the context, the situation, and the specific relationships.

We can rotate in a 'hopelessly ideal' and empty shell of identity in avoiding conflict, according to Douglas Griffin or *'...seek through conflict the active recognition* of difference and thus *at the same time* recreate and possibly transform our identity' (2002, p. 198).

A central feature of disturbances and conflicts are emotions. As feelings and emotions are registered first by our bodies, we speak and think as if their source was our own individual minds and bodies existing inside us that we struggle to express, but 'what we refer to when we express feelings and emotions is our *relationship* to other people' (Burkitt 2014, p. 1-2). There are therefore *relational* reasons for emotions, and those are also power relations; they cannot be separated from the emotional responses or judgments in which they are located. The difference between emotions and feelings, according to Antonio Damasio, is of a primary and secondary kind with emotions as primary automated responses. *Fear*, for example, is an automated response and feelings arise as we become conscious or aware of

what we fear. 'Feeling' our emotional reactions mean (evolutionary) advantages; we may generalize knowledge and thus get an enlarged protection policy when escaping predators. It offers greater flexibility of response. There is, however, not any *real* division between emotions and feelings, although our acquired emotional/feeling dispositions embody our unique experiences. They are nevertheless obtained under the influence of dispositions that are innate: 'that experience of what your body is doing *while* thoughts about specific contents roll by, is the essence of what I call feeling' (1994, p. 145).

Encountering differences when our autobiographies intersect and being belittled or misrecognised in relationships may be felt as a loss of power, and an eagerness to restore status may cause us to retaliate, particularly in a group situation were emotions are enhanced. Rationally, there was talk of *unnecessary* emotions (Project 3) in a contested situation, but these are expressions of what was going on in the complex patterns of relating. Whether we think of an existence of 'universal' *ethics* or not, the specific patterns that have arisen in our community will serve as guidelines in the form of social norms, rules, and regulations and their limitations. These will be decisive for how we will be 'able' to behave, to what extent we can exercise our freedom without being constrained or 'corrected' by the society we are in. Our activities (and people are activity—an active, constantly moving and reshaping social/biological process) do make a difference in co-creating processes. It is impossible to know *what* difference, though, and if it will come out and be judged as 'good' or 'bad' in hindsight. Humans *become* somebody in the social act of meaning making together with others by speaking into the 'public realm' and thus finding our voice.

Coming from a secular background—secular meaning from a non-practising Protestant background—I came to recognise my nevertheless slightly evangelical ways of working in a discourse dominated by the belief in the application of natural science in management. The term 'evangelical' has roots in the Greek word for 'gospel' or 'good news'and has expanded semantically to include the re-forming or redeeming impulse or purpose. As issues of beliefs and meaning are fundamentally important for people, I had largely replaced my Protestant ethic with a mish-mash of 'new age' beliefs. Although I found myself as secular, I still maintained a sense of 'you-have-to-believe'. Otherwise, I would have a tough time maintaining 'hope' for the future. But even a 'non-believing' stance could be considered a belief as we are never without an ideology. I may even be seen as entering an organisation as a provider of hope for future communication and conversations. 'What role does religion have in business?' was a headline on Twitter the other day. I found it interesting in the sense that the headline places 'religion' outside of us, as if it would be disconnected

from human life. The question could equally be posed as, 'What role do human beings have in business?' We can hardly separate our beliefs, thinking, and ideology from ourselves—it is us and what we do together:

> [T]he interweaving of innumerable individual interests and intentions—be they compatible, or opposed and inimical—something eventually emerges that, as it turns out, has neither been planned nor intended by any single individual. And yet it has been brought about by the intentions and actions of many individuals (Elias 1970, p. 12).

## Conclusion and contribution

Working in process consultancy for a long time, I had, over the last years noticed managers and leaders feeling increasingly anxious and stressed due to what they felt were growing demands in implementing wishful and strategic 'manufactured' plans and dealing with mounting administration. This gave them no time or knowledge in understanding or dealing with complexity filled situations at work, with employees, collegues, the top management team and/or the board. In dealing with these demands, they sought (typically) new management tools and techniques, often covered in a few bulletpoints that would simplify working relationships and provide a sense of control. These simplifications were often idealised and instrumentalised, over-promising delivery and built on assumptions (and ideologies) of people as being tidy and predictable rather than messy, needy, and unpredictable.

I was often instrumental in helping them to deal with the above, trying to supply new and different prescriptions, yet disturbing situations were being played out in the process consultancy sessions—reflecting reality in the organisation—when managers would resist, filled with uncertainty and anxiety in how to act. Eventually they would 'internalise' these demands and conclude, 'I cannot cope with this, I am probably not cut out to be a manager'. With the help of a narrative methodology, extensive and new reading, and the ongoing support from the DMan community, I have now come to think of these disturbing and uncomfortable situations differently and have a wider and deeper understanding of the need for paying attention to them.

Below are my contributions to knowledge and practice and generalisations for practitioners in my field when I have been rethinking process consultancy situations:
*My contribution is to deepen an understanding of the centrality of disturbance in process consultancy. This has been done by drawing attention to and illuminating the following*:

1. an understanding of disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual states as the norm in process consultancy

2. an understanding of the above as identity changing, identity as stable/unstable, shifting and changing when encountering differences and disturbances

3. the potentiality of acknowledging and exploring disturbances and uncomfortable situations in process consultancy.

I have come to think of the actual *process* in process consultancy as having dissolving qualities and inherently changing identities when stuckness and/or anxieties have occurred or are perceived as being about to occur in the organisation (when *talk* of 'change' is prevalent, for instance).

***Contribution to knowledge and practice and generalisations for practitioners in the field:***
1. Knowledge: *a fuller understanding of disturbing, uncomfortable, and conflictual states as the rule rather than exception in process consultancy;* Issues are always at stake when people with different intentions, ideologies, and power ratios are to 'work together' and create 'results' in unpredictable circumstances (Elias, Stacey, Mowles). I have been drawing attention to being observant to the details, *the local context* in contested situations when the consultant is present as situations with proposed 'change programmes' (which is often the case) in particular, will be filled with anxiety and infrapolitics (Scott 1990, p. 183).

Disturbances are inevitable and ineluctably in order for a sense of movement to occur, and one can also think of conflict as generative (Griffin 2002) although not necessarily positively felt (more likely negatively). They are even, in some instances, fatal, as we are in relationships of power (Elias, Foucault). Power holds, however, also the potential for progress:

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produce things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (Foucault 1994, p. 120).

*Contribution to practice and generalisations for practitioners in my field:* illuminating the above information contributes to a deeper understanding of disturbing situations (when differences are encountered or tensions occur) as 'normal', inevitable, and inescapable. It is the rule rather than the exception in tensed situations that processual situations often give rise to these reactions. I have been encouraging placing our attention on the actual process

consultancy intervention itself as it may be felt as disturbing and cause anxiousness and resistance but also, at the same time, curiosity and expectations.


2. Knowledge: *an understanding of the above as identity changing; identity as stable/unstable, constantly shifting and changing when encountering differences and disturbances;* There is often a felt gap between idealisations, what we *ought* to be doing at work and perceived reality, what we actually *are* doing, and this gives rise to tensions. When breakdowns in these idealisations occurs in contested situations, identity shifts and present thinkings are felt as 'loosening up' or breaking apart, moving into different thinking (in ongoing processes). This is something I refer to as felt *dissolutions* (in contrast to finding *the* solution or resolution and 'fixing' the situation). The *process* in process consultancy is, in a sense, a mass of 'dissolutions'. I distinguish solution/resolution, which both aim at 'fixing' something from dissolution, and I think of this as an *emergent* quality present in the social act of conversing.

When different and/or new meaning occurs, the old meaning, or chain of meanings, dissolves/disappears into the 'new' one, and identity changes. Hence, 'solutions' whilst working in consultancy processes, may often be felt as dissolutions when old meanings 'loosen up'—thinking having moved in several directions whilst in conversation—and we exit the exchanges with different identities than when we entered. We have been influenced and affected (as we are social and interdependent). Interacting and relating means that meaning and identity change constantly. Emotions and feelings only come into existence and take on a meaning in processes *between* people; they are not 'substances' that we *have.* One can think of relationships as specific figurations of power that people form with each other in the sense that Elias is making of them (1970, p.13). As such, our emotional habits are fluid and 'political' in the sense that we cannot escape playing 'the game' (1970, p. 71). Thus, we are in and reorient by adjusting ourselves to new and different contexts. We are affected, being moved, *in movement,* from one state (of mind/body) to another state when we are relating; people affect us as we affect them.

Burkitt is citing Wetherell when he argues that '...affect has to do with embodied meaning-making that has both pattern and order, while also being capable of creating conditions which open us up to fluid, indeterminate and radically shifting possibilities' (2014, p.14). We cannot *feel* without being embodied, but without the social meaning of situations and relations, emotions and feelings would be meaningless as they are always related to specific contexts and contingencies. It is emotions/feelings that are felt to be *dissolved* in the

process of re-identifying as new meanings emerge in new contexts and relations. One can think of the effects of reflexive inquiries as felt *dissolutions* due to the variability in human thinking; tentativeness, transitoriness, and provisional processes are characterised by constant change and involve new iterations, recursions, and revisions, and repeated reviewing and rethinking in a highly fluid manner. This 'practical knowledge', the outcome of inquiries, is thus *functional*: 'what works for me/us right now in this specific context'.

*Contribution to practice and generalisations for practitioners in my field*: From a practioner's point of view, there has been a seemingly slight but important shift in my way of working in consultancy processes for the above reasons; if I earlier was intent on 'helping' my clients to solve and resolve problems—stuckness, conflicts, or 'paving the road' for 'major changes' ahead of them—I am today no longer *directly* aiming at 'solving' something. But something may be felt as having been 'solved' by being dissolved—evolved into different thinking in the process of conversation were issues at stake have been addressed differently or explored in wider and deeper contexts. Conversations are moving minds (mind as an activity of the body), and increasing awareness around disputed issues and their interrelatedness can provide a sense of solution when we actively participate in the "conversational processes of human organising" (Shaw 2002).

Thinking of people in processes as re-thinking and re-feeling means for practitioners that practising reflexive inquiries into contested situations is exercising the potentiality for dissolving issues when stuckness occur. This *sense of solution* (*dissolution*), rethinking, and feeling differently around an issue —it being 'pushed', contested, challenged, supported, etc.—when socially involved, is a felt *effect*, not aiming anywhere in particular but rather exploring and inquiring into complex situations. The problem is in itself evolving, and this means leaving an emotional state for another (temporary) emotional state. Thus, the original issue is 'gone'; it is no more. Influences and reflexiveness causes crises in identity, and in this process, when defensive idealisations break down, 'newer' thinking and different identities evolve. What the 'newer' thinking evolves *into* is highly unpredictable though, as it can be trivial; it can be better or worse felt, and it can improve or worsen relationships.

3. Knowledge: *the potentiality of acknowledging and exploring disturbances and uncomfortable situations in process consultancy*: There is a tension between the 'ought' and the 'is' in organisations—what managers and consultants think they *should* be doing—predicting and planning, motivating, controlling procedures and what they actually are experiencing, masses of conversations (meetings) filled with ambiguity, contradictions, emotions and powergames. This phenomenon has a profound effect on our sense of self and

movements in identity. There is potentiality in bringing contested issues up for reflexive inquiry, but there is also a danger in doing so as the outcome is uncertain and unpredictable.

Moreover, strategic talk about 'implementation and design' as being possible to 'perform' in a rational and linear way (do A and B will follow), may be felt as insensitive and cause resistance and alienation when people are searching for meaning about what is going on. I think this may be a reason for increasing numbers of mental health issues and 'burnout' syndroms in organisations today when pressures are felt to be mounting without enough space/forum/chances for sense making. The aim of process consultancy varies—from top management wishing to create 'buy-ins' of coming change processes ahead of the actual changes, to processes of facilitating conversations in situations where issues already are contested, disturbed, or conflictual. And there is a need for finding ways forward. If the level of trust in the organisation is low and/or underpinned by overly idealistic statements as 'people are our greatest assets and they always come first', and people may be led to believe that they have a choice in the matter—to take the proposed change up or not with coerciveness covered up—it may be felt as a mock democracy and cause disillusion and cynicism. People may feel as if they are being 'worked' upon and 'designed' in specific ways according to how they should think and behave in certain situations, for instance.

*Contribution to practice and generalisations for practitioners in my field:* Consultants and managers deal with change very much in a matter-of-fact way and sometimes without properly acknowledging the ontological anxieties emerging in themselves and others. They do this when encountering and facing the prospect of changing relationships in the organisation due to change programmes or making people redundant, losing collegues, managers, and/or their jobs. Forcing movement (let us 'move on', there is no time...) too soon or simplifying, closing down enquiries too early or paying attention only to 'the positive' (leading to singularity) means avoiding or neglecting alternatives. This is often the habitual way of dealing with uncomfortable situations in process consultancy in general, avoiding, suppressing, or moving out of tension-filled situations. I argue that consultants could explore alternatives; slow down or halt a process when contested situations occur, acknowledge them, and call for explorative approaches (without aiming at 'solutions').

I further suggest that it might be *felt* as unethical as a consultant, to *avoid* addressing and making conversations around disturbances and conflicts while they hold potential for the emergence of different norms and ethics in co-creative processes of relating. Consultants might avoid addressing them due to the anxiousness they give rise to in us; thus, we encounter a variety of feelings at the same time: anxiousness, shame, and guilt both in

addressing disturbing situations and in avoiding addressing them. In drawing attention to people as radically social and always located in relational contexts, it may contribute in relaxing the attitude of consultants and managers slightly when becoming more aware of location in rich social contexts. Here is where willingness and wishes, wanting and trying to make certain things happen and/or 'happen in a certain way' may be limited. The limitation is due to our being in relationships of power where we constrain and enable each other with limitations for acting outside of the 'social norms': what is accepted in our specific contingencies.Thinking of Hanna Arendt's writings of people involved in thinking or non-thinking: in being thoughtful we will only be able to be so within the limitations of our 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1980, p. 52) of what is considered as 'being thoughtful' in our specific context and what to be 'thoughtful' about. We are thus enabled in constrained ways albeit there is potentiality for engaging with our critics, if it is politically 'possible' to do so and to speak in the 'public realm' (Arendt 1958).

***Overall conclusion and contribution to practice and generalisations for practitioners in my field:*** changes overall in society and organisations also present different demands on consultancy and the process consultant—an ability to mediate and some robustness in order to 'bear' the tension of hearing different stories and not being able to act on the information is one thing, as well as 'staying in' situations and encouraging paying attention to potential (conflictual and/or meaning making) processes, and halting situations when tensions become too high while there are risks of abandonment or freezing. Paying attention to different narratives—as 'reality' emerges out of particular situations—means we can never draw (other than very general) conclusions out of context. Bringing provoking or threatening disturbances to a halt is not to *really* halt them at all (they will still be with us); rather, we should acknowledge and bring them into further explorations in political practice.

Illuminating the potential disturbances (for movement, different meaning making good and/or bad depending on how it is valued in the specific context), emphasising the importance of paying attention to conversations, encouraging reflection around fraught and tensed situations, and allowing for multi-focal and polyvocal stories—comfortable *and* uncomfortable—all make up part of the process when exploring intense situations and acknowledging doubt as much as certainty. Even when 'work' is running seemingly smoothly and harmoniously felt, there is always the potential *for* disturbancies and *in* disturbancies—I argue for consultants to pay more attention to how we, as 'political tools' and human beings,

either avoid or take these situations into account in our planning and improvisational live work.

I suggest that consultants and managers take experience in relating, using practical judgment, seriously. Practical judgment or practical *sense* means trusting experience, a '...long dialectical process, often described as 'vocation', through which the various fields provide themselves with agents equipped with the *habitus* needed to make them work, is to the learning of a game very much as the acquisition of the mother tounge...' (Bourdieu 1980, p. 67). Thus, it takes *practice* in order to become more confident in situations with a multitude of interests. Taking experience seriously or 'coming to know' involves methods of 'operating on the world' according to Dewey (1984, *The Later Works 1924–1953,* intro xi) and thus places practical judgment in praxis or action. Out of praxis, we refine practical judgment and come to know how to act into a certain situation. If the 'oughts' in an organisation are taken too far, they could, I argue, be somewhat 'pruned' through illumination, elucidation, and conversations allowing space for doubt, ambiguity, and uncertainty. This will subsequently *dissolve* contested issues, making different (new and various) meanings.

Idealising wordings such as 'openess' as a value (often as an outcome of a wish for 'transparency') is common in organisations today where the ideal may be to *openly* address and speak into bothersome and tense situations. This stance can be highly anxiety provoking and even dangerous, and there is always the risk of losing our 'political' status/stance. Hence, we may resort to rationalising our actions and avoid personal engagement in relationships. As a rationalist and solutionistic discourse is dominant in process consultancy, and we attempt to deal with disturbances and manage them out of the same discourse (aimed at improving people), the tense situations may become more tense rather than illuminating them as complex issues to explore together. This "will to improve" (Murray Li 2007) may make us recast complex situations as defined problems to which there are solutions if only the 'right' things are being said and done and/or 'implemented' in the organisation.

Part of the struggle is in finding an adequate and appropriate way of describing what it is that we may attempt to do and why – to find a voice and a language. As the narratives indicate, the "body of working tools" consultants have, the use of senses through bodies, experiences and various management techniques, is applied very differently in each novel situation, the language and voice must thus allow for new and specific context; finding what is functional and seemingly helpful at the time.

Illuminating an enhanced understanding of disturbing and conflictual processes as potentially both destructive/generative, could contribute to a relaxation of consulting and managerial attitudes in the eternal quest for prescriptions, recipies, tools, and methods based on a perceived need for 'solving' issues (that may not require solutions) and a possibility of more realistic expectations of working together, accepting, and exploring contradictions and ambiguity. Planning desired futures is not to be disregarded but rather understood for what it is: a fantasy for a hopeful future and an imagination necessary in order to cope with the (anxious) unknown by creating a sense of control. This is how society gets on and develops, by harbouring these tensions, holding both paradoxically—the present (and through the present the past) and expectations for the future. We cannot *not* fantasise—there will always be ideas, visions, and expectations of a tomorrow. Consultants may bring differences to 'help staff in organisations gain greater detachment from their habitual patterns of behaviour even as they are caught up in them' (Mowles, 2011, p.  32) as we move in between organisations.

As we are caught up in cultures (formed by ourselves) and habits, consultants may, as temporary leaders in processes, bring in *difference*, we can gesture but never control or know the response in the meaning Mead makes of it (1934). After all, the potential for spontaneity and novelty will be generated through variety— sometimes of disturbing qualities—when small differences amplify in their particularisations. Herein lays the possibility of transformation of social objects' (identities, organisations, etc.) (Stacey 2011, p. 361). Consultants '...are themselves participants in the ongoing patterning of relations that they seek to change' (Mowles 2011, p. 8). Simply being in the process will thus create a difference. Without providing ready-made answers and giving wanted or unwanted advice or recommendations too soon, consultants may be accepting about there being no one 'solution' rather inconclusiveness that may lead to another further inquiry.

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