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DOCTORAATSPROEFSCHRIFT

It is all in the relationship. Capacity building for organizing, change and learning from a relational perspective

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van doctor in de toegepaste economische wetenschappen te verdedigen door:

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SUMMARY

The common thread running within this article-based PhD thesis is the application and further development of a relational perspective on organizing, change and learning—a perspective which is grounded in social/relational constructionism. This perspective provides both insightful and actionable new knowledge to help understand and develop effective leadership, change and learning within organizational contexts. The main body of the PhD consists of six original articles published in international peer-reviewed journals. A concise introduction draws the readers' attention to the origin and main contributions of the articles. The concluding chapter addresses evolving thoughts, implications, contributions and challenges in an effort to build bridges towards the future.

The first article focuses on how actors generate high-quality relating co-creating a generative learning process in a family-owned manufacturing firm. Based on a collaborative action research project, it offers actionable knowledge on the relational "how" of change or learning, taking into account the importance of contextual elements. The second article questions the taken for granted rhetoric on the virtual "boundaryless" organization as the most effective organizing form of the future. From a relational perspective, this form of organizing creates particular challenges and dilemmas for high-quality relationship building, careers and leadership, creating a new research agenda. The third article develops a relational practice perspective as a new way to help understand what really works in process consultation (Schein) and ongoing interactions for change. Two in-depth case studies of facilitating organizational change in a consulting firm and a health-care organization ground the perspective. The two case studies reported in the article are the result of high-quality relating between researchers and organizational members as co-inquirers of the organizational change. A separate section ("Methodological underpinnings") details how to do research consistent with a relational perspective. The fourth article focuses on how Volvo Cars Gent and its suppliers co-create joint learning and performance on important HRM issues through the effective functioning of a shared HRM collaborative. The article offers important lessons on the concrete activities members engage in and the quality of relational practices shaping trust, common ground, leadership, shared responsibility and representative-constituency dynamics. The fifth article is the result of a good conversation with Edgar Schein on his key formative learning experiences and book on helping which generalizes the process consultation approach. Schein centers humble inquiry, both an attitude and behavior of the helper, as the key process activity in building and maintaining the helping relationship in a diversity of interactive settings. Based on the concept of humble inquiry, the article offers provocative and concrete ideas on how to make management research and education more practice-close and thus relevant. By synthesizing a variety of literatures and disciplines, the sixth article offers a cyclical process framework aimed at understanding how multiple supply chain actors can successfully develop in-depth supply chain learning in-between them. The model shows the interdependent working of leading facilitative actors establishing interaction boundary conditions, high-quality relating between the actors, and system-level generative outcomes.

The final chapter contains ongoing thoughts on (a) building a relational theory of organizing, change and learning, (b) implications for theory building efforts on system-level learning in family business research, (c) the distinctive nature of a relational theory as compared to agency theory and stewardship theory, (d) conditions for a scholar-practitioner to thrive, and (e) a particular challenge/opportunity when writing future articles.

SAMENVATTING

De rode draad doorheen dit op artikelen gebaseerd doctoraatsproefschrift is de toepassing en verdere ontwikkeling van een relationeel perspectief op organiseren, veranderen en leren—een perspectief dat zijn oorsprong kent in het social/relationeel constructionisme. Dit perspectief levert zowel inzichtelijke als actiegerichte nieuwe kennis op die helpt om effectief leiderschap, verandering en leren in een organisatiecontext beter te begrijpen en te ontwikkelen. Het hoofdaandeel van dit doctoraat bestaat uit zes originele artikelen gepubliceerd in internationale peer-reviewed tijdschriften. Een bondige inleiding richt de aandacht van de lezer op de oorsprong en belangrijkste bijdragen van de artikelen. Het slothoofdstuk behandelt ideeën in ontwikkeling, implicaties, bijdragen en uitdagingen met als doel bruggen te bouwen naar de toekomst.

Het eerste artikel focust op hoe actoren doorheen het opbouwen van kwaliteitsvolle relaties samen een generatief leerproces creëren binnen een familiaal productiebedrijf. Gebaseerd op een participatief actieonderzoek biedt dit artikel actiegerichte kennis over het relationele "hoe" van verandering of leren waarbij het belang van contextelementen wordt meegenomen. Het tweede artikel stelt de als vanzelfsprekend beschouwde retoriek over de virtuele "grenzeloze" organisatie als de meest efficiënte organisatievorm van de toekomst in vraag. Gezien vanuit een relationeel perspectief creëert deze vorm van organiseren bijzondere uitdagingen en dilemma's betreffende het bouwen van kwaliteitsvolle relaties, carrières en leiderschap. Een nieuwe onderzoeksagenda wordt geboden. Het derde artikel ontwikkelt een "relationeel praktijk"-perspectief als een nieuwe manier om dat wat werkt binnen procesadvisering en interacties voor verandering beter te begrijpen. Twee diepgaande gevalstudies betreffende het faciliteren van organisatieverandering in een consultancybedrijf en een gezondheidsinstelling illustreren het perspectief. De twee gevalstudies die gerapporteerd worden in het artikel zijn het resultaat van hoog kwalitatieve relatiepraktijken tussen onderzoekers en organisatieleden waarin beide als mede-onderzoekers van het veranderingsproces optreden. Een apart deel ("Methodological underpinnings") detailleert hoe onderzoek te doen dat consistent is met een relationeel perspectief. Het vierde artikel focust op hoe Volvo Cars Gent en haar toeleveranciers gezamenlijk vormgeven aan collectief leren en presteren op vlak van belangrijke HRM thematieken doorheen het effectief functioneren van een gezamenlijk HRM samenwerkingsverband. Dit artikel biedt belangrijke lessen aangaande de concrete activiteiten die samenwerkingspartners opzetten en de kwaliteit van de relationele praktijken waarin vertrouwen, gemeenschappelijkheid, leiderschap, gedeelde verantwoordelijkheid en vertegenwoordiger-achterban dynamieken vormgeven wordt. Het vijfde artikel is het resultaat van een goed gesprek met Edgar Schein over zijn belangrijkste leerervaringen en boek over helpen waarin de benadering van procesadvisering wordt veralgemeend. Schein schuift "humble inquiry" of "nederig onderzoeken" naar voor als belangrijkste procesactiviteit bij het opbouwen en onderhouden van de helpende relatie in een diversiteit aan interactieve settings. Gebaseerd op het concept van nederig onderzoeken biedt het artikel uitdagende en concrete ideeën over het meer praktijknabij, en dus relevant, maken van managementonderzoek en –opleiding. Door een synthese te maken van een variëteit van literaturen en disciplines biedt het zesde artikel een cyclisch procesmodel aan dat gericht is op het begrijpen van hoe meerdere actoren in de keten van toeleveranciers op een succesvolle manier diepgaand "supply chain learning" kunnen ontwikkelen. Het model toont de onderlinge afhankelijke werking aan van leidinggevende faciliterende actoren die grenscondities

zetten voor interacties, hoog kwalitatieve relationele praktijken tussen de actoren, en generatieve uitkomsten op systeemniveau.

Het slothoofdstuk gaat in op ideeën in ontwikkeling betreffende (a) het bouwen van een relationele theorie van organiseren, veranderen en leren, (b) implicaties voor theorieontwikkeling over leren op systeemniveau in onderzoek naar familiebedrijven, (c) de eigenheid van een relationele theorie vergeleken met agency theorie en stewardship theorie, (d) de condities waarin een "scholar-practitioner" zich ten volle kan ontwikkelen, en (e) een specifieke uitdaging/opportuniteit bij het schrijven van toekomstige artikelen.

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Edgar H. Schein

FOREWORD Background and research motive

In 2000, I received my master degree in Organizational Psychology at the Catholic University of Leuven. My master thesis focused on temporary network forms of organizing enabled by information and communication technology (ICT) (Lambrechts, 2000). Soon after I graduated from Leuven University, I got the chance to come to Hasselt University, Faculty of Business Economics, and start an external PhD in Social Sciences at Tilburg University (the Netherlands). Together with a colleague, Styn Grieten, I wrote a monograph based on two qualitative in-depth case studies of organizations in transition. In March 2007, I received my PhD in Social Sciences (Lambrechts & Grieten, 2007). The overall topic was organization-wide change processes, and how organizational members construct these change processes through their ongoing interactions and relationships. Relational constructionism (Shotter, 1993; Gergen, 1994, 1999; Hosking, 2011) has always been a guiding principle to develop actionable knowledge.

During the period 2000–2007, I started learning how to both conduct methodologically rigorous case study research and assist practitioners to improve the effectiveness of their own groups and organizations (see also Chapter 8). Intervention and research became intimately linked as two sides of the same coin. My process consultant friends and significant mentors have been important partners in this learning process: they have always stimulated me to go outside academia to seek out learning opportunities in the world of practice, and they have been acting as important behavioral role models of process consultation (Schein, 1969, 1999) in action. After one year of spending most of my time reading scholarly books and articles, Prof.dr.em. Felix Corthouts said: “Frank, maybe now it is time to leave your ‘box’ at the university and immerse yourself more in the world of practice so that you *really* know what you are talking about.” So I did. From that point on, I gradually started to learn how to become a scholar-practitioner, someone who is dedicated to generate new knowledge and help human systems to improve (Schein, 2009a, b; Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011)—a learning journey that will never stop.

At the end of 2007, I joined the KIZOK Research Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Hasselt University—an interdisciplinary center with a prime focus on family firm dynamics. Soon after, I switched from the Behavioral Science to the Business Economics group. There I found an interdisciplinary work climate that has been stimulating me greatly. I continued learning how to write articles that my peers could appreciate and became more productive in publishing in international, peer-reviewed journals. At the end of 2009, I became assistant professor Organizational Change and Learning in a 5-year tenure-track; a position that I occupy to date.

In September 2008, I undertook, together with Felix Corthouts and Roland Vermeylen (senior executive program HR Leadership, Hasselt University), a Finland study visit to the School of Business and Economics at Jyväskylä University, Helsinki School of Economics (formerly known with that name, nowadays the Aalto University), the JTO School of Management (since July 2012: MIF or Management Institute of Finland) and some companies including Nokia. The main objective of the visit was to explore and concretize international collaboration opportunities, both on research and executive training. When preparing for the visit, Prof.dr. Wim Voordeckers suggested to me to visit Prof.dr. Matti Koiranen, an important scholar in family business and entrepreneurship research, so we made an appointment to meet each other.

I remember vividly the first meeting with Matti Koiranen. The four of us had agreed to have lunch at Hotelli Alba, a nice family-owned hotel situated close to the campus of Jyväskylä University near the lake. We started to converse and after a couple of minutes, Felix said to Matti: “we, Roland and I, are really on a holiday Matti; Frank is the one that is doing the hard work here, he is the one to arrange things with for the future.” This intervention broke the ice and we had a very productive couple of hours talking about mutual research interests (e.g., qualitative research, co-ownership, creation processes) and opportunities to collaborate (e.g., setting up a Joint Doctoral Program promoting joint PhDs, increasing researcher mobility through mutual visits, invited presentations and joint publications). In the months that followed Matti and I, with the help of our respective research coordination offices, negotiated and developed a Cooperative Agreement on a Joint Doctoral Program in Business Studies between the School of Business and Economics, Jyväskylä University, and the Faculty of Business Economics, Hasselt University (signed by all parties in October 2009). Up to now, five PhD students have been in the program, three from Jyväskylä and two from Hasselt, including myself.

After the 5th EIASM Workshop on Family Firms Management Research at Hasselt University, June 7-9, 2009, Matti called me from Brussels Airport asking me the question: “Frank, why not engage in a second article-based PhD in Business Economics within the framework of the Joint Doctoral Program we have been developing together?” To be honest, I did not expect that question. However, it took me about two seconds to say “yes!” This is why.

First, it is simply a matter of “walking the talk” and keep legitimacy as a (co)promoter. At the moment, I (co)promote six PhD students. As promoters, we increasingly expect our PhD students to be internationally mobile. We expect them to go abroad for a foreign stay of several months to gain international experience and learn from other research cultures and approaches. Moreover, we like them to be good ambassadors of our universities on a global scale. With this PhD, I want to give our PhD students a positive signal in the sense of “I do not only ask you to take initiative to be internationally mobile, to engage in a foreign stay, I do it myself in the form of a second Joint PhD.”

Second, I strongly believe that academics best stay in a continuous life-long learning mode, taking a humble learning stance. This will enable them to become better helpers or partners (Schein, 2009b; Lambrechts et al., 2011) in the learning processes they facilitate and make worthwhile contributions to society—contributions that go beyond merely publishing articles in journals that only other academics read. For me, making a second PhD is about creating a learning opportunity. It is about investing in continuous personal development; and most importantly, it keeps me grounded and humble. Moreover, I am convinced that this experience will make me a better (co)promoter of my own PhD students.

CHAPTER 1 Introduction – Overall goal, common thread and overview of the articles

The overall goal of this PhD thesis is to work with, apply and further develop a relational perspective on organizing, change, and learning. Such a relational perspective draws the attention of study and intervention on the relational quality of practices (Bouwen, 2001; Shotter, 1993, 2004), or micro-moments of inter-acting and relating (Gergen & Zandee, 2012), verbal and non-verbal, through which actors co-create their emergent contexts of organizing, change and learning. By engaging in a relational reading of organizational realities, this PhD aims to generate new possibilities for conversations and knowledge production in the world of academics and practitioners. This PhD has also been an exercise in developing a new language; a relational language that offers words to name what we have up till now felt but have been unable to discuss in-depth: the production of organization-in-the-making by actors who do things together and to each other through the relational quality they develop in-between them. The organization and management literature, often from a strategic management perspective, does name the relational processes that are important for generative organizing, change and learning—for example "social capital", "community", "trust", and similar concepts. However, it fails to theorize the nature of the relational processes themselves. Processes are typically treated as static human and social resources that firms "have" and can "use" to create sustainable advantage, rather than dynamic relational states that actors continually develop in-between them depending on the quality of relationship formation (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004).

The main body of this PhD manuscript consists of six original articles published in international peer-reviewed journals:

I. Lambrechts, F., Martens, H., & Grieten, S. 2008. Building high quality relationships during organizational change: Transcending differences in a generative learning process. ***The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities & Nations,*** 8(3): 93–102.

II. Lambrechts, F., Sips, K., Taillieu, T., & Grieten, S. 2009. Virtual organizations as temporary organizational networks: Boundary blurring, dilemmas, career characteristics and leadership. ***Argumenta Oeconomica,*** 22(1): 55–81.

III. Lambrechts, F., Grieten, S., Bouwen, R., & Corthouts, F. 2009. Process consultation revisited: Taking a relational practice perspective. ***Journal of Applied Behavioral Science (Special Issue in honor of E.H. Schein),*** 45(1): 39–58.

Methodological underpinnings—Doing research consistent with a relational perspective
Enacting a collaborative action-oriented method through fostering high-quality researcher–practitioner relational practices: The organization as co-researcher in organizational change

IV. Lambrechts, F., Taillieu, T., & Sips, K. 2010. Learning to work with interdependencies effectively: The case of the HRM forum of the suppliers teams at Volvo Cars Gent. ***Supply Chain Management: An International Journal,*** 15: 95–100.

V. Lambrechts, F., Bouwen, R., Grieten, S., Huybrechts, J., & Schein, E.H. 2011. Learning to help through humble inquiry and implications for management research, practice, and education: An Interview with Edgar H. Schein. ***Academy of Management Learning & Education***, 10: 131–147.

VI. Lambrechts, F., Taillieu, T., Grieten, S., & Poisquet, J. 2012. In-depth joint supply chain learning: Towards a framework. ***Supply Chain Management: An International Journal,*** 17: 627 – 637.

I have always been interested in how actors shape organizational life within (Article I, III) and between organizations (Article II, IV, VI), and how they are, through their relationships, able to create cooperative and learning capacity (Senge, 1990; Barrett & Fry, 2005). All the articles in this PhD manuscript are products of learning. Essentially, they each have resulted out of a variety of conversations and interactions with practitioners, consultants and colleague-academics. And, perhaps most importantly, they are the products of a strong passion to seek out and co-create new and exciting learning opportunities with others always staying close to practice. Table 1 gives an overview.

Table 1 Overview of the articles: Common thread and some characteristics

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Organizing, change and learning</td><td colspan="4">Relational perspective</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intra-organizational</td><td colspan="2">Article I
- IJDOCN 2008
- Action research/case study
- Not SSCI listed</td><td>Article III
- JABS 2009 (Special Issue Edgar Schein)
- Action research/case study
- Impact factor 2010: 1.682, Management: 57/144 (re-activated in 2010)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inter-organizational</td><td>Article II
- AO 2009
- Conceptual
- Impact factor 2010: 0.067 (newly activated in 2010)</td><td>Article IV
- SCM 2010
- Case study
- Impact factor 2010: 2.484; Management: 35/144; Business: 19/103 (2011 5-year IF: 2.404)</td><td>Article VI
- SCM 2012
- Conceptual
- Impact factor 2012: not known yet (2011 5-year IF: 2.404)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Overarching</td><td colspan="3">Article V
- AMLE 2011(with Edgar Schein)
- Overview – state of the art
- Impact factor 2011: 4,800; Management: 3/166; Education & educational research: 1/203 (2011 5-year IF: 4,053)</td></tr>
</table>

The common thread that binds the articles is the application and further development of a relational perspective on organizing, change and learning—a perspective which is grounded in social/relational constructionism (Shotter, 1993; Gergen, 1994, 1999; Bouwen, 1998; Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2011). The key premise of relational constructionism is that all social realities are constructed through ongoing relationships and interactions between people. Therefore, the quality of relating is seen as the most active carrier of the quality of organizing, change and learning (Shotter, 1993; Bouwen, 1998; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000). While engaging in some form of organizing and collaborating, actors create knowledge in-between them through their situated interaction and joint activities (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). Doing research, then, as an activity of learning and knowledge creation, is mainly about setting up a joint learning journey between

researchers and practitioners through interactionist, conversation-based, action-oriented methods. And most importantly, "its success is based on the quality of relationships developed during the research" (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000, p. 558).

By writing international, peer-reviewed articles I have been trying to capture the essentials of these learning journeys and conversations in a language and format that is seen as valid and trustworthy within a particular academic community. In this PhD manuscript, the articles are presented in chronological order of publication showing my evolution in thinking, approach and writing. I will now introduce the articles.

Article I (Chapter 2) is published in *The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations*. The article starts from the observation that roughly two-thirds of all organizational change efforts fail, carrying with them immense human and economic costs. These failures can often be traced back to the quality of relationships that a diversity of actors enact while co-creating the change process. Surprisingly, there is a dearth of research about handling differences constructively in change processes. The extant literature focuses mainly on developing explanatory knowledge about the "what" of change (e.g., the conditions or building blocks of successful change); however, this approach is unable to provide actionable knowledge on the relational "how" of change—that what goes on in-between the actors while creating the change together—taking seriously the importance of contextual elements. To overcome these challenges in the current literature, the article introduces a relational practice perspective. A collaborative action research project within a family-owned manufacturing firm illustrates the perspective. Specifically, the case portrays how actors are able to transcend their individual differences by focusing on building high-quality relationships within a generative learning process. The concrete (quality of the) relational practices shaping the learning process are featured prominently and theoretical reflections frame the action research story. This way of knowledge production allows for evoking new ways of thinking and action possibilities (actionable knowledge) about handling differences constructively during episodes of organizational change.

Article II (Chapter 3). Since I did my master's thesis on virtual organizations as temporary network forms of organizing enabled by ICT (promoter: Prof.dr.em. Tharsi Taillieu), I have been following closely the evolution of ICT based forms of organization—forms of organization characterized by a relative absence of standard location and time bounded interaction between persons and organizations. In 2009, this interest resulted in the *Argumenta Oeconomica* publication of "Virtual organizations as temporary organizational networks: Boundary blurring, dilemmas, career characteristics and leadership."

Since the early nineties, the model of the virtual organization is advanced as the most economically efficient organizational design to tackle the challenges of an ever-increasing global competition and environmental complexity. However, when examined from a relational constructionist perspective, this model becomes riddled with all sorts of challenges and dilemmas that heretofore have not been featured in the literature. Particularly, this article inquires into the processes and effects of boundary blurring; dilemmas and challenges concerning trust, loyalty and identity/identification; critical career elements and inclusion/exclusion mechanisms; and the role of the leader/facilitator as convener. The questions, challenges and dilemmas that emerge outline a new and exciting research agenda on the relational dynamics of virtual organizing and related new forms of organizing.

Article III (Chapter 4). On August 16, 2007, I received an e-mail from Prof.dr.em. René Bouwen. In that e-mail, he pointed me to a call for papers for a Special Issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* in honor of Edgar H. Schein (MIT): "The Challenges of the Scholar-Practitioner." The day before, Felix Corthouts and I had been talking about the opportunity too. The purpose of the Special Issue was "to celebrate and critically engage with Schein's contributions to organizational scholarship and practice while advancing his thinking into new contexts and integrating recent developments in the themes, issues, and problems that have preoccupied Edgar Schein in his 50 years of scholarship" (Coghlan & Shani, 2009, p. 5). Because Schein's work on *Process Consultation* (Schein, 1969, 1999) has been consequential for me as a learning scholar-practitioner (see also Chapter 8), I did not hesitate. Neither did Felix Corthouts, Styn Grieten and René Bouwen. The four of us began to frame our contribution and write. We submitted a first version of the article in December 2007, got very critical review comments, and resubmitted in August 2008 after very thorough revision work and a lot of in-depth discussions. In September 2008, the article was accepted with minor revisions. In March 2009, this process resulted in the publication of the article "Process consultation revisited: Taking a relational practice perspective". Given it was a Special Issue honoring Edgar Schein, to be one of the eight accepted contributions was a great honor.

The article introduces and builds a relational practice perspective to overcome the lack of vocabulary and proper theorizing of that what really works in process consultation (Schein, 1969, 1999) and ongoing interactions for change. A relational constructionist theoretical lens, an emphasis on co-constructed consultant–client practices and a proper contextual embedding constitute a relational practice perspective that embodies in a new form and language Schein's foundational principles and practices of process consultation. Relational practice work, and its relationship to process consultation, is illustrated using an in-depth comparative case of a change process in a consulting firm CONSULT and a health care organization CARE. The article makes clear how a relational practice perspective goes beyond and actualizes Schein's work on process consultation.

The **methodological underpinnings of the article** also deserve the greatest attention. Because there is little attention for method in the published article due to space limitations, I have written a **separate section** on it directly following the original article. My main goal here is to concretely demonstrate how to actually carry out research consistent with a relational perspective in the context of organizational change and development. Indeed, the CARE case is the result of an intensive year and a half process of joint learning between researchers—Styn Grieten and I—and practitioners. Under the mentorship of Felix Corthouts, we enacted a collaborative action-oriented method that enables generating actionable knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is simultaneously usable for practitioners in their learning process towards improvement and useful for academic theory building efforts (Schein, 2009a; Cassell & Lee, 2011). There is an ever-louder call for such methods in management and organization science; however, illustrative knowledge about their workings in terms of simultaneously advancing theoretical knowledge, practical relevance and scientific rigor is mostly lacking (Radaelli, Guerci, Cirella, & Shani, in press). The heart of the method we propose is a continuous concern to keep the quality of the relational practices between researchers and practitioners as high as possible fostering co-ownership of the research project. This learning principle is also used while collaborating with and learning from the CONSULT organization.

Article IV (Chapter 5). I am always on the lookout for new and powerful ways of organizing and learning in the world of practice. Prof.dr.em. Tharsi Taillieu pointed me to an exciting example of

joint learning between Volvo Cars Gent (VCG) Belgium and its suppliers. In-depth interviews with some key players had already been conducted by Koen Sips, researcher and consultant, and were available, together with some Volvo documents, for further analysis and theorizing. We decided to join forces. Together with Styn Grieten, we chose *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* as an appropriate publication outlet because of its multi-disciplinary approach and important interest in latest industry developments and/or best practice. Mid 2008, I contacted Andrew Fearne and Beverly Wagner, co-editors of the journal, by e-mail. I introduced my co-authors and I as organizational psychologists working in the domain of inter-organizational collaboration with a focus on how relationships shape collaboration and enclosed a short abstract of the work-in-progress. I asked them a very straightforward question: Is this a sort of study that might be considered for publication in Supply Chain Management? They encouraged us to submit a paper. This process led, after three hard review rounds, to the 2010 publication of "Learning to work with interdependencies effectively: The case of the HRM forum of the suppliers teams at Volvo Cars Gent."

By presenting a case study, the article profiles how VCG and its suppliers succeed in managing their interdependencies on important HRM issues through a shared HRM collaborative, called the Suppliers Team Volvo Cars HRM forum (STVC-HRM). Building deep and lasting manufacturer-supplier relationships is regarded as one of the elements that contribute to Toyota's competitive advantage in supply chain management. However, many organizations struggle, and eventually fail, to mimic Toyota's way of relating with suppliers, despite applying seemingly similar principles. The STVC-HRM case shows that not the principles in themselves, but the enacted quality of relationships that shape trust, common ground, leadership, shared responsibility, and representative-constituency dynamics are decisive. Particularly, the role of a process-sensitive, facilitative leader, who—through his way of relating—makes the sharing of leadership among the supply chain partners possible, is identified as a powerful way to enhance joint learning. Moreover, asymmetric giving by VCG seems to function as the most important trigger to get the relationship going, because it encourages the partners to engage in reciprocal behavior and develop trust through initiative and authentic engagement. Through uncovering and depicting the quality of the relational practices of the VCG-suppliers collaboration, the paper aims to develop actionable knowledge about how to build and maintain deep mutually beneficial manufacturer-supplier relationships. Other organizations eager to develop those much-needed relationships may learn from the successful VCG-suppliers way of relating and doing things.

Article V (Chapter 6). In the run-up to the publication of the Special Issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* celebrating Schein's 50 years of contributing to the field, we were invited by the Special Issue Editors (25/11/2008), David Coghlan and A. B. (Rami) Shani, to co-organize an interactive Showcase Symposium in honor of Edgar Schein at the 2009 Academy of Management (AoM) Conference in Chicago (August 7-11, 2009). The symposium theme would be "The Challenges of the Scholar-Practitioner." Five of the contributions of the upcoming JABS Special Issue were chosen to be featured, including our article on "Process consultation revisited: Taking a relational practice perspective." Edgar Schein had agreed to attend and engage in dialogue with the authors and the audience.

When this invitation came, the idea of interviewing Edgar Schein immediately came to mind. I talked about it with my co-authors and all reacted enthusiastically. On June 11 2009 I e-mailed Edgar Schein with the request for an interview. On that very day I got an answer back: "I would be delighted to

talk with you and be interviewed, especially since I have a new book out, HELPING, which generalizes the process consultation approach. I am also becoming convinced that the leader of the future will have to be above all a helper, so there is much to talk about. I will be at the academy aug. 8-12 staying at the HYATT so we should be able to get together" (Schein, e-mail communication, 11/06/2009). I was very thrilled about meeting Edgar Schein.

I searched for an appropriate publication outlet for an interview-based article and *The Academy of Management Learning & Education* (AMLE) was a logical choice. As one of The Academy of Management journals it had an excellent reputation, broad readership and a tradition in publishing articles based on essays, dialogues and interviews. Approximately one month (14/07/2009) before the AoM conference I contacted Myrtle Bell, Associate Editor AMLE, by e-mail about our plans to interview Edgar Schein at the upcoming 2009 AoM conference. I basically asked her two questions: would you be interested in an article based on an interview with Edgar Schein and what would make it an interview that you would consider publishing in AMLE? Professor Bell responded soon, encouraged us to send it to AMLE, and gave the advice to make a clear link with management learning and education.

On Monday morning, August 10 2009, we met Edgar Schein in the lobby of the Hyatt. We went to a meeting room and, after a slight hiccup[1], spend a very productive couple of hours together; hours that later, after three very critical review rounds, would result in the publication of "Learning to help through humble inquiry and implications for management research, practice, and education: An interview with Edgar H. Schein."

In the interview, Schein moves on from his key formative learning experiences to focusing on humble inquiry as the key to building and maintaining the helping relationship. Humble inquiry encompasses both an attitude and a behavior of a helper (e.g., researcher, consultant, therapist, parent, caregiver, leader, etc.). It embodies accessing one's ignorance and becoming open to what the helper and the helped may learn from each other through observation, genuine empathic questioning, careful listening, and suspension of judgment. Based on his broad experience as a researcher, consultant, and teacher, Schein offers concrete and provocative ideas on what could be new in management research, practice, and education. The epilogue further draws out the implications for the management field, and positions Schein's words in the current debate among scholars on the crisis and future viability of management research and education. It recognizes that moving in the direction of a more practice-close, relevant, impactful management research and education field will not be easy due to current institutionalized practices blocking change (e.g., the current incentive and promotion system only endorsing discipline-based "practice-distant" scholarship). However, in introducing our article, Bell (2011, p. 130) points out that "if we fail to try to change, we (continue to) neglect our responsibilities to our students and stakeholders, and continue toward a place where none of us want (or can afford) to be." I couldn't agree more.

After its publication, Edgar e-mailed (16/03/2011): "Dear Frank and colleagues – I just read the final version of our paper and am very excited about it. It says what I want to say better there than anywhere else that I have spoken or written about it. I congratulate you on your efforts, your editing, and your persistence in the face of critical reviews. The result was worth it. I think a lot of people will

[1] We had to switch meeting rooms because of the noise of a drill – I remember that this disruption made me very nervous at the time…

take notice and begin to debate these matters. Thank you for the interview and the final paper product." I cherish this e-mail for reasons you will understand.

Article VI (Chapter 7). The idea of this article mainly came from two sources: it emerged from the process of writing Article IV and conversations with Edgar Schein and Amy Edmondson (Harvard Business School) inspiring me to focus on in-depth joint learning in a complex and interdependent setting of multiple organizations working together. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal* was again chosen as the most appropriate outlet. After four tough review rounds, the article was published.

The article builds a framework for understanding how in-depth joint supply chain learning can be successfully developed. The focus is on "what goes on between the actors" while co-creating in-depth joint learning. This issue has been left underexplored in the extant literature of both strategic management and supply chain management. Using a "synthesizing" or "bricolage" approach, key insights, now dispersed over a variety of literatures and disciplines, are integrated to develop the framework. In our framework, we propose that the leading facilitative actor's orientations, competencies and behavior play a significant role in enhancing the relationships between the actors shaping in-depth joint learning. Starting with establishing interaction boundary conditions by the leading actor, this process is likely to lead to system-level generative outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, serve the process cycle of in-depth joint learning as inputs for the relationship building process among all the actors. The paper identifies several implications for research, practice, and education. Instead of focusing predominantly on the content, procedure, levers, or outcomes of learning, the relational construction of the learning process itself is clarified. The paper thereby responds to the call for more research on the relational issues of supply chain learning: the interpersonal constraint for learning, the development of co-ownership and shared direction setting, and leadership.

For the readers already familiar with all my articles, **Chapter 8** might yet surprise you as it is not the typical concluding chapter. Instead, it contains my present "interim struggles" (Weick, 1995, p. 389)—my evolving thoughts, that what occupies me most at the moment and the implications and contributions I envision, as a bridge between past and future. The reader can find ongoing thoughts on (a) building a relational theory of organizing, change and learning, (b) implications for theory building efforts on system-level learning in family business research, (c) the distinctive nature of a relational theory as compared to agency theory and stewardship theory, (d) conditions for a scholar-practitioner to thrive, and (e) a particular challenge/opportunity when writing future articles.

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CHAPTER 2

BUILDING HIGH QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS DURING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: TRANSCENDING DIFFERENCES IN A GENERATIVE LEARNING PROCESS

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Building High Quality Relationships during Organizational Change: Transcending Differences in a Generative Learning Process

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Abstract: More than two thirds of all change processes in organizations fail to achieve their intended results. This has enormous social and economic consequences. The cause of failure is usually ascribed to the manner in which a diversity of actors with different perspectives co-generate the change process. When people in organizations do things as usual, when they do more of the same, handling differences is often taken for granted, a non-issue. There seems to be enough alignment among a diversity of actors working together for minimizing costs and maximizing profits. However, when people are challenged to change and learn as a collective, because they are confronted with rapid and complex environmental changes and/or they want to improve continuously as a system, the way they handle their differences often becomes very tangible and crucial in bringing about a successful change process. Searching for mutual understanding and appreciation is a more productive path than mutual problematization, blaming and complaining. A successful generative learning process in a manufacturing company is described in which individual differences between actors are transcended by focusing on building high quality learning relationships. The focus is on the concrete relational practices, i.e., task-oriented interactions with relational qualities that bring about the learning process. Theoretical reflections frame the action research story. The goal is to stimulate new ways of thinking and to evoke new action possibilities about handling differences constructively during episodes of organizational change. Key words: Change management, co-generation, relational practices, organizational change

Keywords: Change Process, Generative Learning, High Quality Learning Relationships, Transcending Differences, Diversity Management

Problem Statement

MOST ORGANIZATIONS HAVE great difficulty in bringing change processes to a successful conclusion (e.g., Beer & Nohria, 2000; Boonstra, 2004). Empirical evidence from U.S.A., British and Dutch studies shows that the rate of success in organizational change efforts varies between 25% and 35% (e.g., Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990a, 1990b; Bashein, Marcus & Riley, 1994; Pettigrew, 1997; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Boonstra, 2004). This low success rate has enormous social and economic consequences (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

The cause of failure is often ascribed to the manner in which a diversity of actors with different perspectives co-generate the change process (e.g., Schein, 1996; Bouwen, 1998, 2001, 2007). In episodes of organizational change each person in the organization is ultimately challenged to change his/her behavior in relation to others. Hence, in every change process the creation of situations in which people and groups can learn is crucial (Schein, 1999a; Beer, 2000). When people in organizations do things as usual, handling differences often is taken for granted: a non-issue. There seems to be enough alignment among a diversity of actors working together for minimizing costs and maximizing profits (Schein, 1996). However, when people are challenged to change and learn as a collective, because they are confronted with complex environmental changes and/or they want to improve continuously as a system, the way they handle their differences often becomes very crucial in bringing about a successful change process (e.g., Schein, 1996, 2003a; Bouwen, 1998, 2001, 2007).

Surprisingly, the link between working with differences constructively and (managing) successful change processes isn't often made in research. Nevertheless, there are some authors that touch the issue through focusing on building high quality learning relationships during change processes. Bouwen and Hosking (2000) emphasized in the context of organizational learning that "the quality of coordination opens or closes possibilities, constructs exclusion or inclusion, enables reflexivity, or limits learning" (p. 273). With his concept of process consultation, Schein (1999a) tried to explain 'what really works' in intervention efforts during organization development: being involved, becoming aware and reflecting

on the ongoing interaction and relationships so that the self steering capacity and ownership of the client (system) can be enhanced. In this sense, Rijsman (1997, 2008) stated that 'resistance to change' is not really resistance to change but resistance against the loss of identity, and thus, loss of distinctiveness (difference). In most change management approaches changing seems synonymous to changing towards the ideal image of the Other. Often, this means giving up distinctiveness resulting in a corroded identity and a very 'difficult' change process. Sustainable change management means generating a framework in which people can maintain and strengthen one's positive Self and can build complementary relationships while doing new things. Mutual appreciation and care are seen as the driving forces of this process (Rijsman, 1997, 2008). Similarly, the change approach of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003) gives an alternative to the dominant discourse of problematizing in which individuals tend to be identified with often larger system problems. Differences are emphasized and tend to be blown up into problematic differences that block the conversation and that bring about a negative spiral of energy and defensive reactions. An appreciative approach focuses more on 'energy giving forces' in the organization through a process of mutual searching, discovery and appreciating (e.g., Powley, Fry, Barrett & Bright, 2004). By giving attention to the 'life giving forces', a positive energy spiral is triggered in which the potential of differences is recognized, used and strengthened. 'Resistance to change' rarely occurs within such an appreciative approach because people can maintain and strengthen their distinctiveness and competency while relating with others in a way which is linked with increasing energy (Quinn & Dutton, 2005).

There are two main reasons for the lack of research about handling differences constructively in change processes. Firstly, change literature is still largely dominated by the 'normal science' approach from a rationalist-positivist perspective. This approach focuses on the 'what' of change (Beer, 2000) and leads to explanatory and predictive knowledge of the building blocks (e.g., early involvement, ownership, trust, etc.) of successful change processes. However, hardly anything is said about the *way* actors implement these building blocks in practice *with each other* while taking into account the work *context* (e.g., Argyris, 2000). Hence, there is an immense demand for more 'actionable knowledge' regarding processes of organizational change (e.g., Argyris, 2000). This is knowledge with a high 'action' content, knowledge which evokes concrete actions and opportunities to develop an organization effectively. Secondly, there seems to have been a lack of conceptualization of the relational processes that are at work when actors bring their differences into conversation for change.

A 'relational practice' perspective can help to catch the 'dynamics of differences' in change processes and can help to develop more actionable knowledge (e.g., Gergen, 1994; Shotter & Katz, 1996; McNamee, 1998; Bouwen, 1998, 2001, 2007; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Shotter, 2004).

A 'Relational Practice' Perspective

A 'relational practice' perspective focuses mainly on four aspects of organizational change processes: (i) on the ongoing interaction of a diversity of actors involved, (ii) on how people bring their differences into conversation, i.e., the quality of interacting and relationships, (iii) on the relational context in which the ongoing interaction is continuously embedded, and (iv) on how, by handling differences in a particular way, actors involved bring about change.

Seen from a 'relational practice' perspective, in essence, organizational change processes are practical accomplishments that take place among a diversity of actors. A 'relational practice' is any communicative or task-oriented interaction, characterized by a certain quality of interacting, among at least two actors; it has a consequence for the relationship and some perceivable outcome (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). With this concept the attention is shifted from the content of the interaction to the process of interacting; i.e., how people handle differences, who is included/excluded and how this is done.

Some relational practices seem 'to work better' than others. 'Working' relational practices are described and cherished as 'peak moments' of cooperation, learning from each other, collective progression, 'movement', energy and enthusiasm. And every one of us is familiar with relational practices that 'do not work'; these are qualified as low points, stagnation, blockage, 'problems' and loss of energy.

In relational practices actors position themselves and others in a specific way; they define each other and build relationships with a certain quality. This quality, as it emerges during interaction, is seen as the most active carrier of the quality of change processes (Shotter, 1993; Bouwen, 1998). Learning and changing become possible if one keeps a sharp eye on the way differences are handled in the here-and-now conversation (e.g., McNamee, 1998; Bouwen, 1998; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000).

To characterize the quality of relational practices, one can describe to what extent the following concrete qualities are present: (a) reciprocity in relationship (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004), (b) joint 'authorship' (Shotter, 1993, 2004) and 'co-ownership' of the task or project (Schein, 1999a, 1999b); (c) dialogic 'talking with' each other instead of monologic

'talking about' (Shotter, 2004); (d) mutually open and illustrated communication, the possibility of mutual testing and contradicting leading to more mutual understanding (Senge, 1990; Isaacs, 1993, 1999; Schein, 1999a, 2003b) and allowing for double loop learning to occur (Argyris & Schön, 1978); (e) mutually energizing activity and joint appreciation instead of mutual problematization, blaming and complaining (Schein, 1996; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003; Quinn & Dutton, 2005).

Relational practices are continuously embedded in a specific historical-relational context which is always partly actualized in the interactions actors engage in. Interaction and context are co-produced (Lave, 1993; Hosking, 2006). This relational embeddedness is the source of new possibilities, but also constrains what can follow (Hosking, 2004). Other concepts used to indicate this relational context are "broader networks of relationships" (McNamee, 1998), "organizational culture" (Schein, 2004) and "the smell of the place" (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1999).

In the third part of the article this perspective is illustrated using a successful generative learning process in a manufacturing company, in which individual differences between actors are transcended by focusing on building high-quality learning relationships.

Case Illustration: Generative Learning at Veldeman

The Veldeman family firm is a Belgian manufacturer of mattresses and sleeping furniture. The organization had 111 factory workers and 49 staff members (administration, sales, etc.) at the start of 2006. Firm aspects most characteristic are the central role of the family executive management, craftsmanship, short communication lines, low staff turnover, average age 49 years ('inverse age pyramid'), strong on-the-job training and family hierarchical structure.

Since the middle of 2005 the company has paid extra attention to knowledge sharing and transfer. The main reason is that a large number of personnel will leave in the next few years because they will have reached pensionable age. A lot of craft knowledge, which accumulates over the years and is to a large extent experiential and tacit by nature (e.g., Nonaka, 1994), will disappear as a result.

In the operator group the problem is most challenging: 72 of the 111 production workers will leave the company in the next ten years. To meet the challenge sound Human Resource policy and practices have to be developed that go beyond the existing personnel administration. The first author and a consultant are involved in the development process as change facilitators. Two Flemish government agencies have provided subsidies. The second author has promoted the project as part of the 'Working on work energy' project funded by the European Social Fund.

The Generative Learning Process: Relational Practices

The relational practices which constituted the generative learning process at Veldeman are described in chronological order.

Initial Explorative Conversations: Contacting, Exploring and Developing First Action Steps

In two initial conversations the emphasis was on contacting and mutual exploration of the issues. The change facilitators, executives and the personnel manager of Veldeman were present. It quickly became clear that there was a need to initiate a company-wide organization development project concerning knowledge sharing and transfer, and to urgently start a more focused project as regards knowledge sharing/transfer, succession and retention of the master upholsterer. The focus in this article is on the latter project.

The master upholsterer is a critical function in product development in which creativity, experimentation and 'feel' are extremely important. The master was 60 years old in 2005, worked 4/5 time and wished to go halftime until his 62nd birthday and then take early retirement. He is a master craftsman, proud of his job with profound experiential, tacit knowledge which is not documented within the company (e.g., Nonaka, 1994). He is viewed as being 'indispensable'. The challenge of the project was seen as "to develop his function in such a way that (1) he is stimulated to share his craft knowledge with his successor in the role of a coach and (2) he may still wish to stay on longer in a changed role".

The facilitators strongly emphasized, as process consultants (e.g., Schein, 1999a, 1999b), that their role primarily consisted in helping the personnel manager in *her* approach to the project, instead of taking on content parts of the project themselves. This way they intend to develop internal competences gradually, so that the organization does not need to call in external consultants for future projects. The process of knowledge sharing/transfer is also viewed by the personnel manager and facilitators as a lever to initiate the movement from a mere personnel *administration* into a mature HR *policy*. Critical conditions for successful project implementation by the personnel manager were voiced as 'space and time', 'sufficient autonomy' and 'support from the top'.

Appreciative Conversation with the Master Upholsterer: Appreciating Strengths and Stimulating Ownership

The personnel manager and the facilitators held an appreciative conversation with the master upholsterer that lasted 3 hours (e.g., Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003). The most important goal was to involve the master in an informal, appreciative way in his own knowledge sharing and succession process. The project was framed ("why are we doing this, what are the reasons") with an appreciation of the person concerned: "You have an important function, we hear from within the company that you are 'not easy to replace', 'we greatly appreciate that man'; that's why we want to maximize your involvement, you are the expert".

The master upholsterer was asked what he thought about the project. Both the 'energy giving' and 'energy removing' factors in the job were inquired into. A joint search process was started concerning the best approach to knowledge sharing and succession: "What do you believe is most helpful in sharing knowledge, which steps should we definitely consider as being important". The changing role of the master upholsterer towards more coaching and the associated success conditions were explored together: "How do you envisage the role of a coach, what support would you need"? This step was taken to make optimum use of the knowledge and experience of the master and make him co-author and co-owner of the knowledge sharing and succession project (e.g., Shotter, 1993, 2004; Schein, 1999a, 1999b).

The master upholsterer was open and maintained a very high enthusiasm during the process. Partly, this can be ascribed to the way he was approached: he felt that his qualities were valued by the appreciative and informal way of relating. He was especially stimulated to be himself, to think along and to do what he was good at resulting in high energy and commitment. The importance of engaging in a meaningful conversation involving genuine listening out of an authentic position is crucial; as opposed to a strict, pre-structured and instrumental conversation (e.g., Rijsman, 1997, 2008; Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003; Dutton, 2003).

Job Study through a Group Conversation: Appreciating the Job by a Diversity of Actors and Experiencing a Positive Cultural Breakthrough

After the appreciative dialogue with the master an in-depth job study was carried out using a group conversation involving, next to the master, a diversity of actors with a view on the master upholsterer's job. One aim was producing a job description and competence profile of the function. These could be used to create clarity and support the recruitment of the successor as well as help setting out a learning path between the master and novice. A second goal was to have a diversity of actors with different perspectives working together to generate co-ownership, mutual understanding and a wider support base for the project (e.g., Schein, 1999a, 1999b). Working across boundaries of hierarchy and departments was relatively new for this family firm. It was felt as threatening because of differences in opinion and style that were framed to the change facilitators as being 'problematic'. Instead of going into these apparent problematic differences which could block the project, it was decided to 'just do' the job study together (e.g., Bouwen, 2002).

During the job study meeting the participants were encouraged to take the 'ideal' job of the master-upholsterer as a starting point. The job was subsequently appreciated from six different viewpoints (see Figure 1).

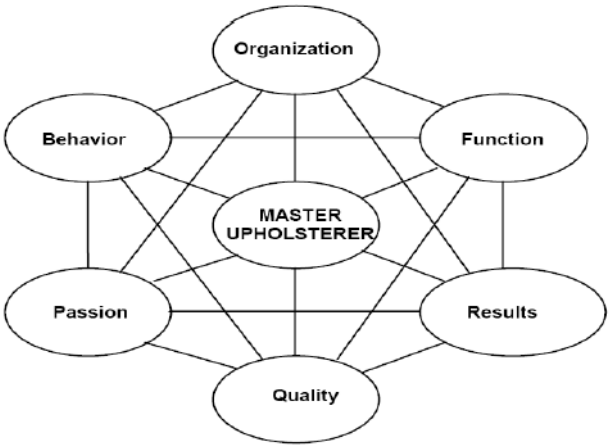

Figure 1: Appreciating the Job of Master Upholsterer from Six different Viewpoints

The group conversation started off generally from the *organizational* viewpoint: "In what areas should the firm excel and what qualities should all employees have consequently"? From the point of view of the *function*, attention was given to all responsibilities and tasks of the master. Looking from the *results* viewpoint, there was an exploration of what sorts of results needed to be achieved. From the *qualities* perspective, there was in-depth discussion concerning the question: "When the master leaves, what will you miss the most"? Taking the *passion* approach, the joint inquiry focused mainly on the energy-giving factors in the job. From the angle of actual *behavior*, an answer was sought to the questions: "What is the actual behavior we expect from someone who fulfils this function ideally"; "go step-by-step through a day with the master, what actual conduct do you most appreciate from him"? The final content result of the group conversation was a combination of ingredients that would make up the ideal job of master upholsterer.

The group conversation was a constructive exercise. Although management took the floor often and the facilitators had to ensure that everybody had a chance to speak, there was great mutual respect. People let each other finish, they genuinely listened, they thought and explored out loud, the atmosphere was relaxed and the conversation built on what was said before. Everyone contributed actively and took a constructive stance. The conversation was further characterized by mutual testing and contradicting (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990; Isaacs, 1999; Schein, 1999a, 2003b). Participants contradicted management, moving away from the hierarchical way of doing things together. A variety of improvement ideas surfaced, of which some were quite confrontational. For instance the question was raised: "Who manages the master upholsterer"? The master's official line manager responded with: "I actually don't know much about that job"; "we have to make an improvement on that issue". All agreed. Shortly after the meeting executive management solved the problem by appointing a new leader of the master, with the approval of his line-manager. The group conversation was seen by all present as a positive, culturally groundbreaking experience. At the end of the discussion several people said: "Goodness, I can't believe what comes out when we all sit around the table like this" and "It's amazing that we can arrive at such a conclusion in three hours, we must do this more often".

A Critical Point in the Process

A point at which the project could have been stranded, was the quick appointment of the new leader of the master upholsterer. The action was well intended but was done without consulting all parties involved. Nevertheless, the master upholsterer accepted his new leader but, at the same time, this could have misfired if the master had reacted negatively, which would have put a heavy burden on the whole project. A little later an executive director carried out selection interviews with candidate successors of the master together with the new leader, but without involving the master upholsterer and the personnel manager. These 'incidents' showed a few blanks in communication. It also showed that roles were not clearly enough negotiated; for instance, the role of the personnel manager as the driver of the change process. Informal arrangements were made, but these were not enacted in a formal mandate by the management board. These events didn't block the project because they were handled explicitly as critical

learning events by the facilitators about which conversation took place.

Co-creating the Learning Path between Master and Newcomer

Based on the competences profile and job description of the master, a concept of the future learning path between master and newcomer was co-created. Actors involved were the facilitators, personnel manager, master upholsterer and his new leader. The process was characterized by mutual exploration of different options and their anticipated results. Although the process was seen as chaotic, the experience of ambiguity stimulated the creation of new meaning (Weick, 1995).

In an ideal world the newcomer would have been involved immediately in the development of the learning path concept; after all it was about him and the master, but the final selection of the successor was yet to be made. If he was already at work, he would have the chance to co-generate the learning path concept which would make him more a co-author and co-owner of the process (e.g., Shotter, 1993, 2004; Schein, 1999a, 1999b). Three weeks after the completion of the concept, the newcomer (22 years of age) started to work. The learning project was proposed to him in an informal, appreciative way (e.g., Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003). He was asked what he thought about it and if he had complementary ideas.

The function of the master upholsterer proved to consist of a complex mixture of qualities and practices which did not make the learning path self-evident. This is why there was a need for a varied and differentiated learning process between master and newcomer. Four coherent lines of learning were developed.

Learning line 1: Learning through on the job coaching and weekly assignments. The newcomer was given new tasks by the master regarding the development of specific products. These tasks became increasingly more challenging. Variation in the tasks was ensured at the same time, so that the newcomer could gradually grow into all technical aspects of the job.

Learning line 2: Learning through broader projects. A number of aspects in the competency profile were taken up. The newcomer worked out projects methodically, independently or with the support of colleagues/leaders (e.g., training for upholsterers on the production floor). The critical factual, experiential and 'the way around the firm' knowledge required for the implementation of a particular project was documented by the newcomer in a learning report. 'Learning profit' was shared and discussed with the master. Not only could the newcomer gradually grow into the technical aspects of the job, but also into the relational ones. The learning report also had the potential to be used in future projects.

Learning line 3: Learning through specific training modules. A number of aspects of the job were so specific to the organization that they would best be taught in the form of training modules (e.g., an overview of the machinery). Other knowledge could be taught by external teachers (e.g., ICT skills). The newcomer indicated by means of his learning report what was needed to do a good job.

Learning line 4: Learning from the learning process through regular moments of reflection and evaluation. There were informal learning contacts on a daily basis. The master and newcomer sat down on a weekly basis to learn together from the accumulated experience. The master asked reflective questions ("how did you approach this, what went well, what presented problems ...") and gave feedback ("I saw you do this …"). The newcomer also asked questions; positive and negative issues were discussed. They talked about how they learned, and by doing this, they learned how to learn better from each other (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schein, 1999a, 1999b). There was a monthly review meeting between master and newcomer. The competences profile was used as a guide in this discussion. The newcomer, the master upholsterer, his leader and the personnel manager met quarterly for a comprehensive discussion concerning progress and next steps.

Learning from experience was strongly encouraged by the master (e.g., Kolb, 1984). For instance the newcomer asked "If I do it this way, is that OK", to which the master replied: "Go on and try, then we'll see together whether it works and how it can be improved". As part of a project the master and the newcomer visited a trade fair to 'feel' fabrics so that they could assess fabric qualities together. Each step taken was reviewed and, depending on the stage in the learning path, was speeded up, slowed down or the emphasis was shifted. A side effect was that the newcomer had to cross departmental and hierarchical boundaries to implement projects successfully: operating across boundaries was seen within the company as a culture breakthrough.

The way in which a combination of diverse learning modes was given shape ensured that the newcomer was able to learn quickly and adequately, which means settling into the practical activities of the master and his work community (e.g., Wenger, 1998). The newcomer was offered the opportunity to take part in fully mature professional practice as embodied by the master; he was given full access to the various activities of the organization; he was stimulated to enter into a multitude of relationships; to experience many modes of conduct; and, to go

through a gradual learning process (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Figure 2 shows the novice and master at work.

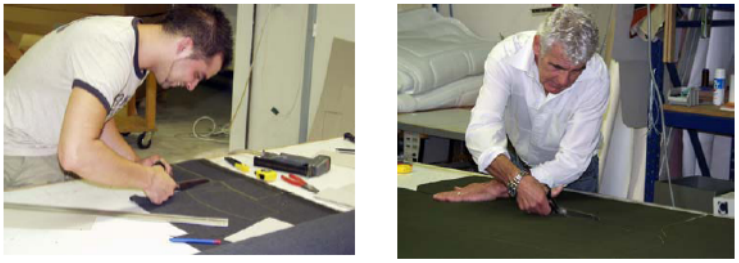

Figure 2*:* Newcomer and Master at Work

In a next step the personnel manager drew up a broader plan in which (1) the problems of the inverse age pyramid challenges of recruitment and retention were brought into focus, (2) the successful experience of the learning path between master and newcomer was made transparent, and (3) the future role of the personnel department was looked at in depth. This plan was presented to the executive management and approved because "the learning path and all developmental activities leading up to it have worked and create a new dynamic that needs to be strengthened company-wide" (CEO).

Joint Learning for HR Anchoring

During the process, the facilitators frequently gave feedback to the personnel manager about her way of doing things and they jointly learned about the effects of various interventions. This way the competences of the personnel manager were gradually developed through joint reflection and exercise (e.g., Schein, 1999a, 1999b). At the end of the project, the whole change and learning process was reviewed to draw learning lessons. It turned out from this review that there was still some distance to go: giving more time and space to HR is crucial and this was lacking at times; there is the need to define roles sharply and improve communication. The agreement was made that the change facilitators monitored the process at a distance and would only be involved on request.

The personnel manager now facilitates various similar projects by herself and her role as a real HR manager is acknowledged by the executive management. The master upholsterer was still working at the company in June 2008. Only recently he indicated that he wouldn't mind staying on longer because "I am comfortable in my new role and I'm very proud of my work".

Role of the Change Facilitators

The change facilitators gradually made themselves superfluous by letting various actors involved take on as much as possible of the project themselves. Thereby, the facilitators stimulated the actors in the company to become co-authors and owners of the project (e.g., Schein, 1999a, 1999b). This significantly increased the possibility that they could take responsibility over the process jointly (e.g., Lambrechts & Grieten, 2007). In this context McNamee (1998) speaks of stimulating 'relational responsibility'. The newcomer could grow into the job gradually, the master could expand his repertoire with coaching practices, and the personnel manager could develop her competences to implement HR policies and practices. Her position became more visible and stronger this way. The Veldeman culture was gradually beginning to change from the bottom up, and becoming a more learning culture (e.g., Senge, 1990; Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990b; Schein, 2004).

Conclusions

Reciprocal learning becomes increasingly important in organizations. The complexity of organizing keeps on increasing. People are expected to handle ambiguity and uncertainty well, handle differences constructively, act as an entrepreneur, be maximally employable and flexible to handle continuous change successfully. People are expected to have or develop the capacity to integrate these various ingredients in their professional lives. In view of the increasing complexity a real challenge exists in developing richer and more varied learning approaches. Not only are these approaches more complex as regards the contents of learning, they also ask for high quality joint learning practices in which interdependence is handled fruitfully (e.g., Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). The action research has illustrated how those learning practices can take shape in a generative learning process within a family firm and what the generative potential of those practices actually is.

The research also demonstrated a major task for scholars that work from a relational perspective; inquiring into the quality of relating and designing in-

terventions for high-quality relational practices that facilitate and open space for joint learning. The contribution of the researcher in this learning journey has been identified as stimulating joint reflection and mutual understanding (e.g., Schön, 1994; Schein, 1999a, 1999b; Bradbury &Lichtenstein, 2000; Bouwen, 2007).

Important learning principles which underlie building helping relationships were identified. Each organization member is co-responsible for the learning process that determines the learning capability of the whole system. By involving people as early as possible, parties are stimulated to become co-authors and co-owners of their own future. Learning is essentially a relational process; that's why the emphasis is put on creating and maintaining conditions that open up space for joint learning through differences and interdependence. The accent is on dialogue and positive values, reciprocal trust and respect, psychological safety, straightforwardness, opening communication, feedback and discretion. The experiential learning cycle of Kolb (1984) is an important guiding principle in designing learning situations. New situations are created; new 'ways of going on' are tried out and reflected upon. This results in new insights that change or enrich concepts and theories. New inter-action alternatives flow from the process. These can be experimented with resulting in new experiences and insights. The basic attitude and approach is appreciative (e.g., Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003). The focus is on recognizing qualities, on 'that which gives energy', on encouraging and supporting instead of emphasizing problems and deficits.

A generative learning approach doesn't accentuate individual differences between people (e.g., age, gender, generation, experience, inexperience, etc.). Generative learning doesn't call in an older master in the learning process of a younger apprentice in the course of which the older master 'downloads' his/her knowledge and experience on the younger novice from a one-sided expert position. Instead, a generative learning approach emphasizes building a genuine learning relationship characterized by equality, reciprocity and space for mutual appreciation and contradiction.

The research had the goal to open the research and practice conversation, stimulate new ways of thinking and evoke new action possibilities concerning handling differences constructively during change episodes by focusing on building high quality learning relationships. An inclusive approach in which (1) time, space and attention is created for learning from multiple voices, (2) involvement, appreciation, reciprocity, authorship, ownership and relational responsibility is stimulated, and (3) various types of learning are assembled (e.g., Lambrechts & Grieten, 2007), creates the possibility of generative learning. Taking this approach increases the chance that apparent 'problematic' differences are felt as reciprocal learning opportunities that are worthwhile to work with. The readers are invited to join the conversation and to co-develop knowledge about a topic that has not received the attention it deserves.

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CHAPTER 3

VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS AS TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS: BOUNDARY BLURRING, DILEMMAS, CAREER CHARACTERISTICS AND LEADERSHIP

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VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS AS TEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS: BOUNDARY BLURRING, DILEMMAS, CAREER CHARACTERISTICS AND LEADERSHIP

The present study investigated the virtual organization model from a relational constructionist perspective. Since the beginning of the nineties, virtual organizations are applauded as the most economically efficient organizational structure to confront the challenges of increasing global competition and environmental complexity. However, when looking at this new organizational activity from a relational constructionist perspective, several critical questions and dilemmas emerge that go unnoticed in the literature. At the same time, in real life 'Open Innovation' cases, the possibilities and boundaries of virtual organizing are also becoming clearer. Compared to classical organizing, virtual organizing makes different demands on managing interdependencies, collaboration, communication, leadership and evaluation, decision making, loyalty and identification with the company. This article inquires into the processes and effects of boundary blurring; dilemmas and challenges concerning trust, loyalty and identity/identification; critical career elements and inclusion/exclusion mechanisms; and the role of the leader/facilitator as convener. The main purpose is to develop a new research agenda by raising specific questions concerning the relational side of virtual organizing and related new forms of organization.

Keywords: virtual organizations, temporary ICT mediated networks, relational constructionism, boundary blurring, dilemmas, career characteristics, leadership

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years a lot of books and articles have been written about the rise of virtual organizations as temporary organizational networks facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT) (e.g.,

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Davidow & Malone, 1992; Byrne et al., 1993; Goldman et al., 1995; Ashkenas et al., 1995; Chesbrough & Teece, 1996; Mowshowitz, 1997, 2002; Loebbecke & Jelassi, 1997; Venkatraman & Henderson, 1998; Warner & Witzel, 2003; Anand & Daft, 2007; Ahmed & Sharma, 2008; Pedersen & Nagengast, 2008). The main factors that explain the birth of such network forms are changing environmental and market conditions and innovative technology applications (e.g., Chesbrough & Teece, 1996; Mowshowitz, 1997, 2002; Anand & Daft, 2007). At the end of the nineties, it was rather difficult to find real life published cases of virtual organizing. What prevailed was business and management rhetoric, based on some spectacular high tech situations or Silicon Valley practices, in which the virtual organization was pushed forward as the organizational concept of the future. In project driven organizations, people could apparently enact a series of career ideals such as far-reaching flexibility, employability, temporariness, empowerment and autonomy (Taillieu, 2002). This way, market and innovation opportunities could be met.

A new constellation of the organization of the future becomes visible: an organization characterized by a relative absence of standard location and time bounded interaction between persons, groups and other organizations; a shift from internal towards inter-organizational processes; and a continuous switching of inclusion and exclusion of persons and resources that blurs the boundaries between separate organizations (e.g., Ashkenas et al., 1995; Chesbrough & Teece, 1996; Mowshowitz, 2002; Pedersen & Nagengast, 2008). This new organizational reality becomes technically possible through ICT. However, soon the question arises: how far stretching are the relational human possibilities and boundaries? From a relational constructionist perspective (e.g., Gergen, 1994; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2006; Lambrechts et al., 2009) – which considers social reality as continually in the making through mutual negotiation of meaning, and mutual enactment of relationships between actors – several questions and dilemmas emerge that go unnoticed in the literature.

At the same time, in real life cases the relational possibilities and boundaries of virtual organizing also become clearer. Especially experiences with 'Open Innovation' (Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough et al., 2006), where internal and external resources are combined both for the development (and launching) of new technologies and products, are illustrative. Compared to classical organizing, virtual organizing makes different demands on managing interdependencies, collaboration, communication, leadership and evaluation, decision making, loyalty and identification with the company.

This article addresses these issues and especially focuses on (1) processes and effects of boundary blurring, (2) dilemmas and challenges concerning trust,

loyalty and identity/identification, (3) critical career elements, and (4) the role of the leader/facilitator of a virtual organization. The main purpose of the authors is to develop a new research agenda by raising specific questions concerning the relational side of virtual organizing and related new forms of organizing.

1. A DIFFERENT KIND OF ORGANIZING: TEMPORARY NETWORKS FACILITATED BY ICT

Through increasing pressure of global competition a lot of organizations change their structure. They become flatter and cooperate more and more in value chains (Taillieu et al., 2007). They outsource their non-core activities and evolve towards smaller, more agile companies. Decisions are made locally in result oriented units (Anand & Daft, 2007). Increasingly, companies (suppliers, customers and even competitors) join together in temporary networks facilitated by ICT. ICT lowers transaction costs. By sharing competencies, knowledge and costs in a competency network (Zimmerman, 1997), companies can get to new markets and exploit innovation opportunities which they cannot realize as individual players. The collaborative network disintegrates when the collective ambition and goals are realized. Coupling and decoupling is a continuous process. Figure 1 depicts such a competency network formed by various companies.

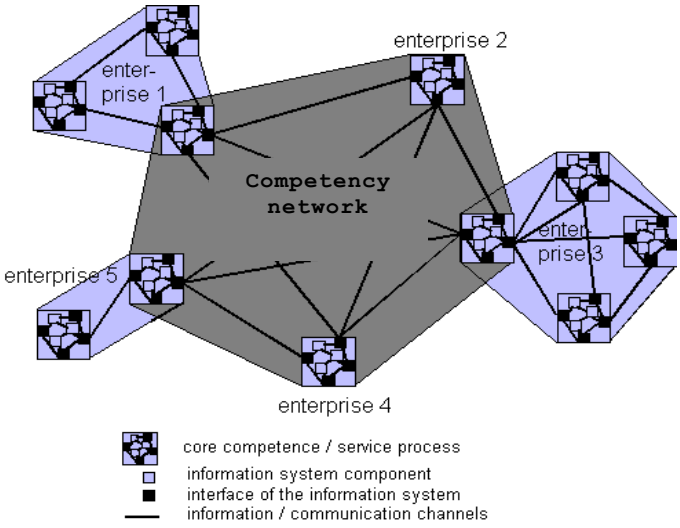

Figure 1. Competency network as an integration of core competences

Source: adapted from Zimmermann, 1997

Compared with more traditional ways of organizing, collaboration in networks offers several advantages in a turbulent and complex environment that is characterized by high uncertainty and ambiguity. Networks possess higher adaptation capabilities (e.g., Weick, 1979, 1995; Goldman et al., 1995; Anand & Daft, 2007). Through increased competition and globalization, there are more alternatives to choose from to enact a particular business relationship. In terms of the lowest transaction costs in a given situation, the most efficient relationship is selected and retained. The standards of the internet enlarge variation because companies can technically collaborate more easily. The more parties in the network, the more variation and the higher the capacity to adapt. Through ICT companies can select partners more easily, often and faster, and thus 'switch' relationships with higher flexibility (Mowshowitz, 1997). To realize a shared ambition and common goals, some relationships are temporary reinforced and others are put on a stand-by. Several relational issues arise: what is the organizing principle of these virtual collaborative forms? How is it possible to make switches in human relationships in a high quality way? Which mechanisms are involved in this switching activity?

These collaborative forms in networks imply that it is not sufficient anymore to think in terms of 'inside' and 'outside', or 'suppliers' and 'buyers'. A classical organization chart is not helpful anymore. Boundaries become blurred which makes this form of organizing hard to imagine in traditional terms. The capability to reframe existing organizational realities (Watzlawick et al., 1974) is therefore of crucial importance to find and develop new (virtual) forms of organizing. Our imagination is called upon to envision new images of organizing (Morgan, 1997). How these new organizational realities are called – virtual organizations, imaginary organizations or boundaryless organizations – is not the real issue. Essentially the focus is on how people collaborate on a temporary basis in networks to reach a common goal, and on the underlying relational processes of organizing that characterize these temporary 'interlocks' (e.g., Weick, 1979).

2. EXAMPLES OF VIRTUAL ORGANIZATIONS FROM 'OPEN INNOVATION'

Compared to ten years ago, concrete examples of virtual organizations are now available. These examples touch upon a variety of relational and

psychological themes and challenges. Especially experiences in settings of 'Open Innovation' are illustrative (e.g., Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough et al., 2006; MacCormack et al., 2007), and there is currently a lot of management and scholarly attention for this concept. Chesbrough (2006, p. 1), who coined the concept, defines Open Innovation as "the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation respectively". Chesbrough (2003) emphasizes that a shift is occurring from a closed towards an open innovation model. This shift is illustrated in Figure 2.

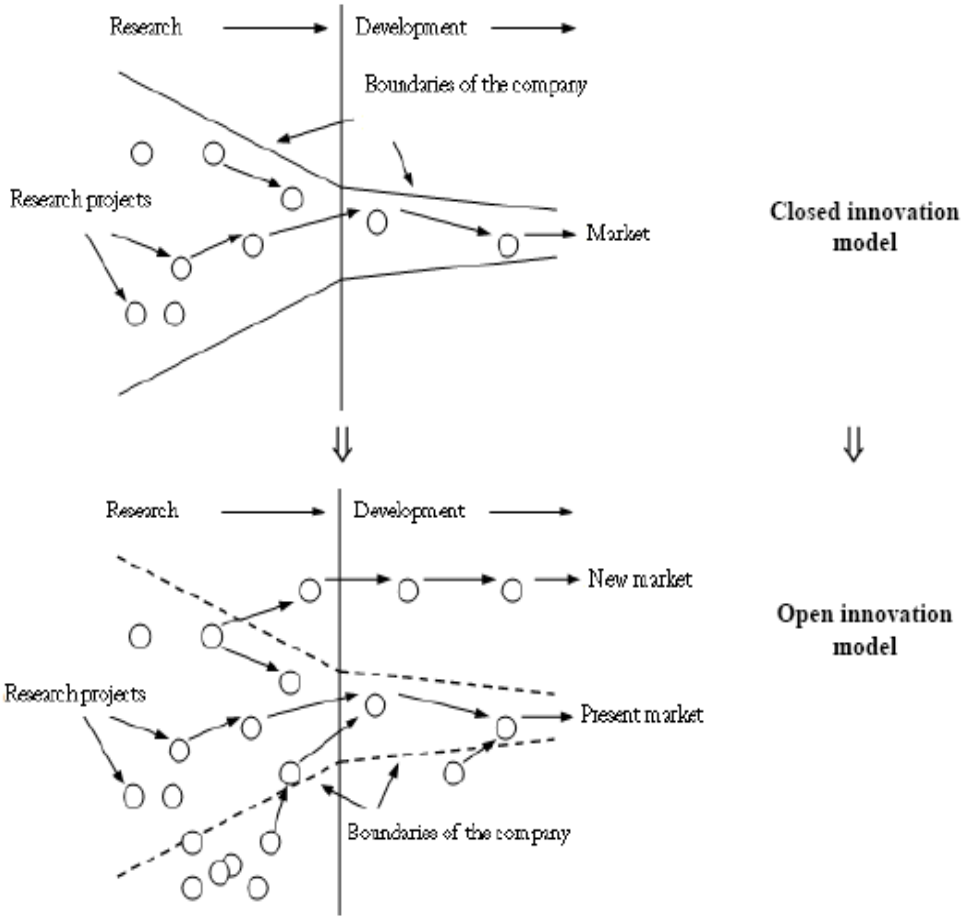

Figure 2. Shift from a closed towards an open innovation model

Source: based on Chesbrough, 2003

In the past, a company did research mainly in its own laboratories. It developed a product on its own and produced this product in the factory. The sales force of the company took care of distribution. At present, these functions are more outsourced through joint ventures, alliances and subcontracting. Enterprises evolve towards virtual organizations that are open for innovation outside the classical niche (Chesbrough in Brockmans, 2006, p. 69). Organizational boundaries thus become blurred.

In a recent interview in the influential Belgian economic magazine *Trends*, Chesbrough quotes William Joy, the Organization & Development manager of Sun Microsystems, to answer the question 'what can open innovation be?' (Chesbrough in Brockmans, 2006, p. 71, translated from Dutch):

"Not all smart people in Sun's sector are working at Sun. Sun coordinates a part of his activities through the market, where free actors convene to purchase and sell each other's goods. Such a virtual network of enterprises and individuals around the core company offers the possibility to answer swiftly to new tendencies, because external co-workers are stimulated differently. A virtual organization uses market oriented stimuli such as bonuses or options in shares and finds more quickly technical adaptations or sale channels. This way, each individual in the process has an incentive to act as an entrepreneur within the network and to give 100%. It is often a case of trial and error before the best solutions emerge, but by all means, that hasn't got to harm the own organization. This way the organization combines the efficiency of the market in the development, production, commercializing, distributing, supporting and maintaining of goods and services in a way that can not be duplicated by a fully integrated company".

Apparently this way of working has proven very effective for Sun Microsystems as it is still practiced and promoted many years after it was introduced (Quinn, 1992).

A well-known example of Open Innovation resulted from the collaboration between Philips and Douwe Egberts. Both companies chose the structure of a virtual organization, resulting in the development and marketing of the Philips Senseo coffee machine. A more recent example is the development of the Beertender achieved through collaboration between Heineken and Krups. From experiences with 'Open Innovation' however, it has also become clear that a virtual organizational form is not suitable for every type of innovation. Scholars make a distinction between autonomous and systemic innovations (Chresbrough & Teece, 1996; Chesbrough in Brockmans, 2006).

Autonomous innovations are innovations that can be implemented independently from other innovations. An example is a new type of cylinder

or turbo charger for an engine (Chesbrough & Teece, 1996). This innovation can be developed without developing an entirely new engine. If the innovation is autonomous, a decentralized virtual organization can pretty well manage product development and commercialization. The information needed to implement an autonomous innovation is mostly publicly known and in some cases even codable in industrial standards. Given so, information can be easily copied and passed on across organizational boundaries (Teece, 2003; Chesbrough in Brockmans, 2006).

In contrast, other innovations are systemic by nature. The advantages of the innovation can only be realized in concordance with other, complementary innovations. Senseo and Beertender are already mentioned as examples. Another good example of a systemic innovation is the instant photography of Polaroid (Chesbrough & Teece, 1996; Teece, 2003). For this product, both new film technology and new camera technology had to be developed. Other examples of systemic innovations are electronic funds transfer, front wheel drive, and the jet airliner which required new stress-resistant airframes (Teece, 2003, p. 161).

Systemic innovations require a lot of coordination and then it seems that the model of virtual organizing is much less applicable. A well-documented example of a failed attempt to enact a systemic innovation is the extension of the A380 by Airbus (MacCormack et al., 2007, p. 15, italics added):

"Airbus German and French partners chose to work with different versions of Dassault Systems' CATIA design software. But design information in the older system was not translated accurately into the new one, which held the 'master' version. Without a physical mock-up, these problems remained hidden throughout the project. The result: 300 miles of wiring, 100.000 wires and 40.000 connectors that did not fit, leading to a 2-year production delay at a cost of $6bn. Yet the cause of Airbus problems was *not* in choosing different software versions; rather it lay in *the lack of an effective process for dealing with the problems* this created".

A hidden software problem resulted in serious coordination problems between the various parties. The parts that were produced in France did not fit with those from Germany, and the virtual organization failed.

A systemic innovation implies that during the whole realization, from idea till final deliverable, information is shared and mutual adaptations are implemented in a very closely coordinated manner. This is inherent to systemic innovations; for autonomous innovations this close interdependence is not necessary. Thus, the major distinction between the two innovation types relates to the amount and quality of coordination that is

required (Teece, 2003). To implement a systemic innovation, open information exchange is vital. Possibly, this is easier to accomplish within the boundaries of one organization instead of in a virtual collaborative network. Moreover, in the case of systemic innovations, the knowledge is often implicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). By implicit knowledge we mean knowledge that is embedded in the individuals, community of practices and enterprises and is only passed on adequately by means of high quality participation and socialization processes (Wenger, 1998).

From the experiences with systemic innovation it seems that virtual organizations fail if there is a need for a lot of high quality coordination between the different parties in the organization network. At such a moment, various psychological and relational aspects that play an important part in virtual organizing emerge more clearly: (1) processes and effects of boundary blurring, (2) dilemmas and challenges concerning trust, loyalty and identity/identification, (3) critical career elements and (4) the role of the leader/facilitator. These aspects are discussed successively.

3. PROCESSES AND EFFECTS OF BOUNDARY BLURRING

Boundaries are necessary: they set people, processes and production apart in a healthy manner. They keep things clear and distinguished. Without boundaries, an organization would cease to exist (Ashkenas et al., 1995). Hence, when moving to ICT facilitated networks, boundaries cannot simply be removed. Instead, Ashkenas et al. (1995) suggest that boundaries can be made more permeable in a virtual organization. However, an important management and research question then becomes: how can managers determine how permeable boundaries should be and where to put them?

Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992) argue that virtual organizations or ‘boundaryless organizations’ are far from being boundaryless. Especially, four boundaries are important in a virtual organizing setting: the authority boundary, the task boundary, the political boundary and the identity boundary. These are boundaries that are not visible in an organization chart but are ‘situated’ in the heads of managers and employees (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992). They constantly have to be actualized in the relationships that are being developed between a manager and his superiors, subordinates and equals. Each relational boundary can be recognized by the feelings it evokes. In every work experience, these four boundaries are interwoven and

interact dynamically. Table 1 portrays the boundaries in terms of core questions, necessary tensions and characterizing feelings.

Table 1

The four relational boundaries of the virtual organization

Core questions	Necessary tensions	Characterizing feelings
"Who is in charge of what?" AUTHORITY BOUNDARY	How to lead and stay open for criticism? How to follow and challenge your leader?	Trust Openness Rigidity Rebellion Passiveness
"Who does what?" TASK BOUNDARY	How to be dependent on others who you do not control? How to specialize and understand the job of others?	Trust Competency Pride Anxiety Incompetence Shame
"What's in it for us?" POLITICAL BOUNDARY	How to defend one's own interests without undermining the larger organization? How to differentiate between win-win and win-lose situations?	Empowerment Honesty Powerlessness Exploitation
"Who is, and who isn't, us?" IDENTITY BOUNDARY	How to feel pride without devaluating others? How to stay loyal without undermining outsiders?	Pride Loyalty Tolerance Distrust Denigration

Source: after Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992

Firstly, the authority boundary psychologically establishes *who's in charge of what*. Necessary tensions are: "How to lead but still be open to criticism?", "How to follow but still challenge your superior?" When people effectively work together on this boundary, feelings of openness and trust dominate. Subordinates have space to take initiative whereas leaders feel supported and challenged. Feelings of distrust, rigidity, passivity and rebellion take over when collaboration on the authority boundary isn't working.

Secondly, the task boundary psychologically determines *who does what*. Tensions are: "How to be dependent on others you do not control?", "How to specialize but still understand other people's job and respect it?" When task relationships with co-workers are good, people feel proud of their job and are comfortable with their dependency on others. They trust their own

and others' competencies. When a work group encounters problems in defining the task, in distributing responsibilities, and in assigning resources, individual members begin to feel uncertain, anxious and incompetent. They are no longer able to perform their work and sometimes even feel ashamed of their job.

Thirdly, the political boundary psychologically determines territories of power: *what's in it for us and what's not.* Necessary tensions are: "How to defend your interests without undermining the whole?", "How to differentiate between win-win and win-lose situations?" At their political boundary, people are confronted with the challenge to protect their own interests without damaging the efficiency and coherence of the organization as a whole. When groups in an organization do this effectively, people will most of the time feel empowered. Employees believe they are treated fairly and rewarded according to their contribution. But when political relationships are becoming sour, feelings of powerlessness dominate. Members of a work group can feel not appreciated, underrepresented in important decisions, or can even experience a feeling of exploitation: "We are only pawns in a game of which we don't know the rules".

Fourthly, the identity boundary psychologically establishes *who does and who does not belong to our group.* Necessary tensions are: "How to feel pride without devaluating others?", "How to be loyal without excluding outsiders?" People can be loyal to their own group, be proud to belong to it and still show healthy respect for others. But when this 'team spirit' is accompanied by contempt and distrust for others who do not share the same values or experiences, the identity boundary can tear relationships apart.

In these four psychological boundaries, the constructs of trust, loyalty and identity appear manifold. Exactly these constructs can explain why people, who work together in temporary collaborative networks facilitated by ICT, are confronted with and struggle with different relational dilemmas. These dilemmas are the subject of the following discussion.

4. EXPLICATING DILEMMAS CONCERNING TRUST, LOYALTY AND IDENTITY

New technologies create a lot of possibilities. However, people have to make the temporary network into a coherent and meaningful whole. This cohesion can be described more accurately with concepts such as trust, loyalty and identity.

Successful collaborating in networks strongly depends on the presence or absence of trust among the participants from different organizations. After all, trust seems to be a crucial building block for parties who have little common history and want to start to collaborate. Immediately, the paradox becomes very clear: to trust each other with a minimum amount of information. Through ICT, it is possible to exchange information quickly, but people have to be motivated to share relevant, and sometimes delicate or even painful information.

Loyalty and trust are two concepts often associated with each other. However, there is an important difference between the two. Loyalty has to be understood as being faithful to an engagement or commitment: "Because I have made an engagement to do something (not to do something), I do (don't do) it". But being loyal to someone does not mean I trust him/her. In network-like structures the complexity of collaboration can be partly reduced by making use of juridical contracts in which everyone's responsibilities and qualifications are clearly established. The question is whether such a contract offers, apart from the reduction of complexity, a basis for creating loyalty and trust, too. Surely, one might say that building in certainty by means of a contract is exactly an indication of distrust.

There are mainly two complementary forms of trust that can be enacted in temporary collaborative networks: swift trust and institutional trust.

Swift trust is an impersonal or depersonalized form of trust associated with temporary systems. Examples are movie and theatre crews, cockpit crews, surgeons, a quick combination of actors for an emergency intervention. Swift trust is for the most part based on action, competence, education and training as a professional (Meyerson et al., 1996). Every professional is expected to have the competencies needed and to take on responsibility in his/her functional area. This forms the basis upon which professionals can trust each other without shared experience. Indeed, there is less time in temporary systems for a more gradual development of interpersonal trust based on cognition, and later, on affection. Swift trust does not develop but rather exists immediately in a temporary group or totally doesn't. It is a form of trust that is imported into a temporary group out of different contexts and is moderated by the culture and personality of the participating parties. This type of trust is maintained by pro-active, enthusiastic and stimulating behavior around a common goal. Yet, the participants continually question this image of trust for its validity and legitimacy.

A second form of trust, institutional trust, can facilitate the formation and the evolution of temporary collaboration networks. Partners trust each other because they trust an institution (e.g., well-respected company, university, government body) that brought them together: "I trust X who told me Y is to be trusted". That's why the reputation of this institution is important. The parties involved suppose there has been an intense selection to come to collaboration: they assume that reputations and organizational cultures have been checked and compared by the institution to obtain a working whole. Institutional trust can facilitate the development of other forms of trust (among which swift trust) because there already is a base (of trust) to start from. But institutional trust can also work inhibiting because of the ability of the institution to sanction and because of contracts that have to be met rigorously (Rousseau et al., 1998). However, to date it is not clear how trust formation (swift/institutional) actually works in contexts of virtual organizing. Therefore, an interesting research topic might be to study the concrete relational practices (Lambrechts et al., 2009) – i.e., task-oriented interactions with relational qualities – that people enact to facilitate the trust developing process in virtual collaborative organization networks.

Having introduced the concepts of trust, identity and loyalty, we will now address three relational dilemmas that people have to (learn to) manage when they collaborate in temporary networks facilitated by ICT.

Managing interdependencies: Tightly coupled versus loosely coupled

In a network where constant reconfigurations are manifold according to the project, the development and maintenance of good relationships with (potential) collaboration partners is becoming ever more important. Consequently, an important organizational skill concerns finding common ground between the different (interests of the) parties (e.g., Gray, 1989; Schruijer et al., 1998). An interesting management and research topic that emerges is how parties of a temporary collaboration network can generate just enough cohesion to function as a meaningful whole. Which minimal criteria must be in place to insure that the network does not fall apart all together?

Schein (1985) describes a few criteria a group (of individuals or organizations) has to meet to be able to function as a meaningful, coherent social system. The process of becoming a group is characterized by the growth and the maintenance of the relationships between collaborating individuals or organizations and the actual realization of their goal(s).

According to Schein (1985), the culture of a group will emerge from the shared processing of two sorts of problems: external adaptation and internal integration problems. External adaptation problems have to do with the primary task and mission of the group: "What is the reason to be for our group?" Internal integration problems deal with the (in)ability to work as a group: "Which processes facilitate cohesion, how can a group build and maintain itself?" Both kind of problems and the mechanisms to solve them are very closely linked (see also Sips & Bouwen, 1999).

To deal with external adaptation and internal integration problems, networks can be "tightly coupled *versus* loosely coupled". Tightly coupled systems are characterized by responsiveness among components without distinctiveness. If there is both distinctiveness and responsiveness, the system is loosely coupled (Orton & Weick, 1990, p. 205). Hence, a first dilemma emerges: how tight does the network have to become in order to reach common ground to work cooperatively as a social system? The difficulty is that by the time the necessary cohesion is reached, the "reason to be" of the temporary network can be over. The essence of a temporary collaborative network precisely exists in forming quickly using the market opportunity, disbanding and recombining in a new temporary constellation. Because the individual organizations (cultures) collaborate in a network, they will continually adapt to each other. In a collaborative network, people have to co-create a shared culture very quickly.

In order to come to crucial information exchange and reach enough depth to develop specific network competencies for the project at hand, the amount of interdependence between the parties needs to be carefully chosen and managed. An important question then becomes: how can parties manage their interdependencies successfully, taken into account the necessary relational processing that takes time and maintenance?

Opportunistic shallow interaction without engagement versus open, deepening interaction with commitment

Relational constructionists do not consider organizations as 'entities' but rather as ongoing joint projects of relational negotiation (Hosking, 2004, Lambrechts et al., 2009). Consequently, the quality of the interactions and relationships among the network participants is constitutive for the quality of the resulting network, and will determine its innovative and learning capacities. This relational quality can be assessed in terms of the extent to which open, two-sided, testable and contradictable communication is present

(Argyris, 2002; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Bouwen, 1998; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Lambrechts et al., 2009). Hence, the relational quality has to be evaluated reciprocally by all parties involved on a permanent basis. A second dilemma emerges: how can a high quality of interactions and relationships, which is necessary for learning to take place, be enacted and maintained in a network characterized by high temporariness and 'swift' switching of parties? An additional challenge is the geographical dispersion of the participating parties. Parties are compelled to communicate mainly electronically, and in some cases they never meet each other face-to-face. Handy (1995, p. 46) informs us that trust implies personal contact: "Trust needs touch". How can a mutual basis for trust be created without 'touching'?

Continuity and stability versus dynamics of multiple memberships

According to the relational constructionist perspective (Gergen, 1994; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2006), changing means questioning and reframing the mutually created meaning construction and developed relationships. The continuously changing composition of temporary collaborative networks implies a permanent social re-construction through a negotiation process. A third dilemma that emerges is: continuity and stability in network membership versus frequent entrance and exit of multiple memberships. How can this social re-construction be sufficiently negotiated when parties so easily and frequently switch? The negotiation of different parties to arrive at a shared perspective costs a lot of time. This does not seem to be in line with the temporary nature and dynamism of a network. New constructions can easily be created in technical terms. However, the issue arises if the underlying negotiation process and social repositions can be enacted with the same swiftness without losing the quality of interacting and relationships.

The three dilemmas discussed are closely linked and call for relational construction rules concerning the construction of a temporary collaboration network. We suggest that a network leader/convener can support and facilitate these processes. A possible competency profile of such a convener will be developed later. First, important identity and identification issues are addressed as they are a recurrent theme in the identified dilemmas.

5. IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION

In a temporary collaborative network many boundaries are crossed. This always implies identity changes. Four issues arise and are dealt with in succession.

Conditions nurturing the emergence of a temporary network identity

Albert and Whetten (1985 in Gioia, 1998) discuss three essential conditions that have to be fulfilled to be able to speak of an organization identity: centrality, distinctness and continuity. Applied to a temporary collaborative network this means that a network identity is that what organization members see as central to the network. In most collaborative network settings this is the "reason to be" – often defined as a shared opportunity or a problem: "Alone we cannot use the market opportunity/solve the problem, together we can". The distinguishing feature of a network is the specific collection of competencies of the partners that can be linked. As a result, the potential to react fast to opportunities is much higher than in a traditional organization.

Concerning the continuity there is a clear problem with ICT mediated networks. The network is quickly formed to disappear again when the objectives are reached, and reconfigures easily to make the most out of a new opportunity. Hence, usually the connection between past and future is weak or even non-existent. The question then becomes whether the two first elements of organization identity – centrality and distinctness – are sufficient conditions to build a network identity that is strong enough to handle conflicts and to stress interdependencies simultaneously: a network identity which members can minimally identify with. If the identity appears not strong enough, we suggest that one or more network conveners can help manage the conflicts and interdependencies, and provide a frame to co-create a more shared perspective.

The influence of network membership on the individual organizations' identities

The individual organizations that are a part of the network open their boundaries to other companies (to a certain extent). According to Kanter et al. (1992), changes at the boundaries of an organization – by relating to

external parties – are always linked to internal changes in coordination, structure, role patterns, power dynamics and behaviour.

Shifts in power by participating in a network cannot be underestimated. Subtle identity changes and role shifts can appear. Representatives of the individual organizations in a network often receive more power in their own home organization because of their additional role. Participating organizations are continuously challenged to manage their mutual interdependencies successfully. This is not evident considering the specific culture and identity of every organization (Roose, Taillieu & Sips, 2001). Maybe, an important role of the network leader/convener is the creation of conditions so that people can co-create a shared script to deal with this diversity of cultures and identities?

Identifying with the network: Mechanisms

Because network members have to commit themselves to a common goal, a motivational problem may occur. Collaborating members generally identify with their home organizations, which can reduce the effort and motivation towards the common goal of the network (Van Aken, 1998). If the network identity is not strong enough, it will become very hard for members to identify with the network and, consequently, to feel motivated to make an effort for the whole. The same phenomenon also arises within an organization where members identify more with their own division (for example, production, R&D, marketing) than with the whole of the organization.

A form of identification that can emerge in a network is called apathetic identification (Ducherich et al., 1998). This implies the risk that individuals cannot define themselves in terms of the network identity (low identification), nor in terms of their distinctiveness from the network (low de-identification). The motivation to be a part of a network can be very low indeed because there is always the home organization identity to fall back on. Yet, it is important to note that low performance in the network can also harm the reputation of the home organization (and the person representing the company). Hence, member organizations may change their representation or correct a representative's behaviour. Accordingly, an interesting hypothesis is that the degree of membership to the home organization can be a function of performance in the network.

However, motivation can also be very high when the temporary network is seen as an opportunity to undertake action that one would not dare to take

alone because of the risk. Therefore, it may be important to make the temporary offer both challenging and safe enough for potential participants. The question then becomes: how to make the temporary collaboration opportunity at the same time safe ànd challenging enough?

Together with apathetic identification, also under-identification can occur (Ducherich et al., 1998). The member knows that the membership to the network is only temporary. In a way, it can happen that he/she protects him-/herself psychologically by not committing to or identifying strongly with the temporary constellation. This can have negative effects on the results of the network.

Simultaneous inclusion in different networks: Effects on the identity of an individual

Boundary blurring constantly raises a question: "Who am I, and where do I belong to?" Searching the answer for this question is an extra source of stress. Careers are no longer characterized by job certainty or lifelong work engagements linked to one organization. The present-day psychological contract between employer and employee shifts – because of the temporary nature of assignments and the increase of project-like work – from a relational towards a transactional contract. In a relational contract, co-workers identify with the organization through internal promotion, mentoring and socialization. They link a part of their identity to 'their' organization by internalizing the organization values (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). People with a "we"-feeling towards their organization will answer the question: "What do you do?" with: "I work for company X".

However, in a transactional contract, identity develops more around competencies of the person (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). The answer to "What do you do?" will be "I do Y".

Because people build their identity throughout the whole of their lives, and will probably start taking part in several temporary networks, more and more people will give the latter answer. In the contemporary knowledge society, companies will increasingly make a shift to becoming professional organizations where professionals are loyal to their own competencies. People will ask themselves the following question: "Where can I best use and develop my competencies?" In response to this question people choose their networks. The binding factors between the network and the network participant could very well be relational process characteristics: "I always do interesting and challenging things in an environment full of variation". The

permeability of boundaries (as discussed above) can give people the psychological liberty to explore new identities and thus to construct a richer ego.

But for some people (e.g., those who do not have the choice), periodic and unpredictable changes in their job status and degree of membership will create confusion and uncertainty. In addition, constantly changing assignments, and working in different or changing teams can build up even more stress. Fragmentation and a loss of identity can be the consequence. Where is the "breaking point"? When will the answer to the question "What do you do?" turn from "I do all kinds of things" into "I do so many things that I don't know anymore what I'm really doing".

This phenomenon is similar to what Gergen (2000) states in *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. In post-modern society, people are becoming increasingly fragmented. In a documentary about Silicon Valley, it became clear how many people used their competencies in simultaneous networks. Apart from success stories – associated with career ideals such as high flexibility, employability, empowerment, self-steering and more autonomy – there were huge problems with stress and burnout, often because of unidirectional transactional contracts. The question that emerges is: how can people still find their 'core' in an increasingly fragmented way of organizing where switching and simultaneity is the rule? This leads us to a closer examination of the various elements required for career within virtual collaborative networks, and the possible effects of these career ideals on the people involved.

6. CRITICAL CAREER ELEMENTS IN ICT ENABLED TEMPORARY COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

In a review of various publications, Taillieu (2002) portrays an image of the (ideal) critical career ingredients within virtual organizations. High flexibility, more autonomy, temporariness and the ad-hoc character are revealed in the following dimensions of work in collaborative networks.

Discrete exchange versus reciprocal loyalty contract

With discrete exchange the company obtains certain productivity and the employee receives work experience. It is a short-term exchange: the reward is explicitly linked to performance, based on market prizes, for the duration of the project, with the possibility of revision depending on internal and

external circumstances. This is clearly different from the traditional exchange of work certainty for employee loyalty.

Focus on professional development versus focus on the employer

Growth in professional development implies that the enterprise invests in efficient performance while the employee acquires additional skills and competencies. Performance in the current job leads to new expertise. The focus is mainly on evolution in the profession. Development of professional capability and knowledge goes beyond the needs of the company. Training determines increasingly the choice of projects. Since professionals change network constellations swiftly, externally appreciated professional capability becomes more important than internal organizational knowledge.

Organization-empowerment versus top-down steering

The empowerment principle implies dropping corporate strategic dictates towards organizational units. Co-workers are stimulated to participate in strategic activities. They are personally responsible for value creation and get the freedom to develop their own markets. Renewal, alliances, spin-offs are encouraged.

Regional interest versus the bastion concept

The regional advantage model assumes a shared understanding and acceptance of collaborative advantage in clusters of cooperating companies, founding and switching of alliances in regional market processes, exchange of information and coaching across the boundaries of the own organization, swiftly foregrounding and backgrounding project teams and organizations. This is clearly in contrast with the reticence and discouragement of contact with other companies in the old organization paradigm.

Project commitment versus organization commitment

This principle entails the shared commitment of the employee and employer concerning the successful fulfillment of projects. The company wishes projects succeeded on time and up to standard; the co-worker searches for the experience and the visible reputation of successful work. Good results predominate keeping the team together, which is dissolved as

the project is concluded. Financial rewards and acknowledgement depend on the achieved result.

Taillieu (2002) justly states that this career model makes very high demands on both organization and co-worker. Employability seems only reserved for co-workers with a lot of self-confidence, or born entrepreneurs (see the quote of William Joy, Sun Microsystems), who are young and ambitious and are working in a strong market domain.

But what about those who cannot follow? The virtual organization model seems to be a model that is highly selective and can possibly exclude a lot of people from employment and can lead to less well-being. Hence, the questions "who is included and who is excluded" in this organizing model, and "how do these including/excluding mechanisms work", are very crucial for the management and research of ICT enabled temporary collaborative networks.

Taillieu (2002) warns of a destructive self-reinforcing cycle. Especially with older, less schooled, and more dependency-minded co-workers, employability can lead to a feeling of job uncertainty (see also the identity section). This feeling can cause less well-being, more burn-out and stress symptoms, an increased feeling of anxiety and frustration, less work enthusiasm, a weakened tie with the organization and more dependency on the manager's judgment.

If organizations want to work within a virtual organization model, they have to take up responsibility accordingly. They need to invest, as part of their psychological contract with their employees, in (1) developing the professional maturity level of co-workers, (2) working on certainty through relationship networks aiming at raising self-confidence, (3) developing the capacity to be self-steering and self-controlling, (4) offering internal and external job information systems, and (5) the development of transparent evaluation systems.

Also, the company has to take measures to counteract potential problems concerning (1) conflicting interests between company goals and individual employability, (2) decreasing loyalty resulting in loss of clients, (3) losing organizational learning capacity and decreasing quality and development of core competencies, and (4) the emergence of a class distinction between more permanent and temporary co-workers. These problems make high demands on managers. They are challenged to foresee content changes in work and at the same time give their co-workers opportunities to retrain, develop or adapt (Taillieu, 2002).

7. THE COMPETENCY PROFILE OF THE NETWORK LEADER/CONVENER

In the preceding paragraphs, the role of the leader of a temporary network has repeatedly been touched upon. As there is a producer in the theatre and movie world, and as there is a head contractor in the building industry, there is a person or organization that brings the parties together and facilitates the process to reach a common goal in the network. This is the role of a convener (Schein, 1985, p.70) – mostly a facilitating and moderating leader – to create conditions that allow the involved parties not to lose sight of their "reason to be" and to collaborate on a shared task. Another term used for this convener role is a transaction or net broker (e.g., Franke & Hickmann, 1999). He/she acts as a facilitator and catalyst that helps enterprises to set up strategic partnerships, to organize network activities and to identify new business opportunities. Whatever the name may be, the leader of a temporary collaborative network ideally possesses a number of competencies that are specific to a convener. These competencies are more clearly identified in the multi-party literature (Gray, 1989; Schruijer et al., 1998; Sips, 2007). The relational boundaries which have to be co-managed by the convener are indicated.

The convener has to make the parties aware of their 'scripts' – for an important part determined by their own organizational culture and identity. These can then be openly discussed, accepted or rejected by the parties (e.g., managing the task boundary). On the one hand he/she can create conditions that allow parties to swiftly co-create a new script together without having to give up their home values and identities in the process. An intuitively easy but hard to realize solution could be that the convener brings together similar organizational cultures. On the other hand, the convener can – through his/her experience – suggest a 'basic script' of how the collaboration must take place. This can then be deliberated by the potential collaboration parties. The parties can then fill in this basic script with more detail and the convener can facilitate this process if necessary.

This way of working partly meets the danger and consequences of under-identification. Jazz musicians brought together by coincidence can play magnificent music in the nick of time. At first sight, it seems as if they operate in complete freedom and can see each other even blindfolded. However, there are minimal rules (script) in this freedom on which they can count and fall back while playing (Kamoche & Pina e Cunha, 2001). And when they play, there is a lot of interaction too, they constantly look at each

other. In this way they can produce several variations on themes already played before, and organize for new sounds and combinations in an automatically created but carefully designed space to improvise.

The convener also sees to it that the inevitable power differences between the collaborating parties are neutralized so they cannot dominate the problem formulation and solution process (e.g., managing the political and authority boundary). Creating process conditions can facilitate this (e.g., Schruijer et al., 1998; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). Parties have to acknowledge each other reciprocally, realize that there is more needed than only the pursuit of their own interests and show mutual respect (e.g., managing the identity boundary). The convener can help them in this endeavor.

If coalitions are formed, they may not interfere with the interests of the whole network. Therefore, the convener is best viewed as someone neutral or as someone who is serving an overarching interest that transcends the interests of the parties. Often, the easiest way to arrive at the so necessary trust is when the convener is connected to the reputation of an institution (e.g., institutional trust). Anxieties, uncertainties and tensions partly caused by the frequent shift of enterprises in the network can be contained by the convener and can be passed on in an acceptable and workable format to the parties involved. Once this kind of buffering has taken place, the partners in the network can process information about the new situation by themselves and act upon it in a suitable manner.

The convener also facilitates the co-creation of a minimal structure (e.g., Kamoche & Pina e Cunha, 2001) in which organizational learning – two-sided and open communication, mutual testing of information, bilateral definition of the task, open confrontation and tolerance for mistakes – becomes possible (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1996; Argyris, 2002). In doing so, regression of the ego is limited in the service of the group. Lowering capacities or holding back competencies can be useful for a party to integrate in a network but is best restricted because the best competencies have to be used in the short term.

It is important that the parties stay focused on the collaboration goal (e.g., managing the task boundary). The convener can see to it that not one party dominates (e.g., managing the political boundary). That is why communication and conflict handling competencies are so important. The convener typically calls attention to the construction of ground rules that are to be used when the parties interact (Gray, 1989; Schruijer et al., 1998; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). Formulating such ground rules is a shared task for the whole of the network when they first start working, but it is the

convener who makes sure that this topic is discussed and that the rules become somehow formalized.

Classical concepts of leadership do not apply to the convener role. As there is no clear organizational chart, position power becomes less important. Typical for the temporary network is that it is based on voluntary collaboration, which implies that there are no hierarchical relations through which authority can be used. Also technical expertise will not necessarily contribute to the convener's function or may even be counterproductive for acceptance by the network members. Input on the content is often not valued or is seen as a political move to the advantage of some parties over others (Schruijer et al., 1998). Process directivity however, is likely to be beneficial to the advancement of the collaboration in the network. Therefore, the role of the convener is more that of the process consultant (Schein, 1999), who works on the conditions in which the different stakeholders can work together.

The question still remains if this competence profile of the convener of a virtual organization, which is developed mainly from multi-party literature, is extensive enough to deal with the very complex processes and issues identified. Therefore, further empirical study is needed in which the proposed competence profile is further tested and extended.

CONCLUSIONS

The ambition of this contribution was to evoke management and research questions concerning the inter-human or relational side of virtual organizing – questions that have not been raised clearly in existing literature. Since the beginning of the nineties till the present, virtual organizations – as temporary organizational networks facilitated by ICT – have been pushed forward with a lot of enthusiasm as the most economically efficient organizational structure to handle the challenges associated with the ever-increasing pressure of global competition and environmental complexity.

This excitement clearly needs to be tempered because a lot of questions and dilemmas arise when looking at this new organizational activity from a relational perspective. It is made clear that choosing a virtual organization model cannot be a quick and obvious choice. It is an option with possibly far-reaching consequences, both for the organization and the co-worker. After all, in this model people are confronted with the management of various boundaries concerning authority, task, politics and identity.

Co-workers participating in collaborative networks are confronted with diverse dilemmas regarding trust, loyalty and identity/identification, and they are challenged to handle these tensions in a healthy manner. The psychological contract between organization and co-worker changes drastically. People are expected to incorporate in a 'problem free' way a number of career ideals such as far-stretching flexibility, employability, more autonomy, empowerment and entrepreneurial drive. Accordingly, a main finding is that the virtual organization model can possibly exclude a lot of people. The older, less schooled, and more dependency minded co-workers seem especially very vulnerable in this model. Therefore, it is argued that the including and excluding mechanisms that are at play deserve much more research, management and policy attention.

The kind of leadership that these networks ask for, is not the classical 'manager type' leader but rather a process facilitator. This convener supports people in co-creating the network together by stimulating 'shared leadership' and high quality interactions so that the parties experience enough psychological ownership of the network. In this way a virtual organization can become a real 'learning network'.

During this contribution a lot of questions have emerged. Taken together, these questions form a new and exciting research agenda on the relational dynamics and challenges concerning virtual organizations and associated new forms of organizing. The readers are invited to join the research and practice conversation and to co-develop knowledge about a topic that has not received the attention it deserves. There seems to be an underdeveloped research area for those who feel addressed.

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CHAPTER 4

PROCESS CONSULTATION REVISITED: TAKING A RELATIONAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

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Methodological underpinnings—Doing research consistent with a relational perspective

Enacting a collaborative action-oriented method through fostering high-quality researcher–practitioner relational practices: The organization as co-researcher in organizational change

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Process Consultation Revisited

Taking a Relational Practice Perspective

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Process consultation as conceived and reformulated several times by Edgar Schein constitutes a seminal contribution to the process of organization development in general and to the definition of the helping role of the consultant in particular. Under the pressure of a pragmatic turn in organizational change work, the practice of process consultation was fading away during the eighties and nineties. In some particular training and organizational consulting contexts nevertheless, the foundational principles and practices of process consultation are experienced to be more relevant than ever before. A relational constructionist theoretical lens, an emphasis on joint consultant–client practices, and a proper contextual embedding constitute a relational practice perspective that embodies in a new form and language those foundational ideas.

Keywords: *process consultation; relational practice perspective; organization development; relational constructionism; quality of relational practices; contextual embeddedness*

This article acknowledges the pioneering contribution of Edgar Schein in the development of the laboratory training methodology. Schein was indeed among the founders of the "laboratory training" learning method, later called T-group, together with pioneers such as Kurt Lewin, Kenneth Benne, Leland Bradford, Warren Bennis, Ronald Lippitt, and also Chris Argyris (Marrow, 1969). Stimulating reflection on joint here-and-now group experiences was considered as one of the core processes that made the T-group an innovative educational approach. In an autobiographical essay, Schein (1993a) describes his first T-group experience as "an incredibly potent experience for me that forever changed my view of the field" (p. 8). From that moment on till the present, Schein has been focusing on how to build helping relationships between consultant and client (system). This focus is clearly present in his work on process consultation (Schein, 1969b, 1999a) and his more recent work on dialogue (Schein, 1993b, 2003).

In his seminal work on social change processes, Schein conceptualized the unfreezing phase in the Lewin change cycle as the outcome of disconfirming experiences or lack of confirming experiences among the actors involved. Throughout their interaction, actors confirm or disconfirm the balance in the triangle "self-image–perception by others–perception of the context" (Schein, 1969a, 1999b, 2002). Interaction process reflection is considered to be at the heart of the change process. Beyond the interpersonal and group level, Schein extended this discovery into the "invention" of organizational psychology as a research and practice field. Indeed, Bernie Bass and Edgar Schein wrote the first two textbooks with the title *Organizational Psychology* (Bass, 1965; Schein, 1965).

Making interventions that foster this process learning (e.g., Probst & Büchel, 1997) in interactive contexts can be considered as the essence of what Schein called process consultation, in training intervention as well as in mere management contexts. Schein made the first formulation of process consultation in the first Addison Wesley series on organization development (OD; Schein, 1969b). He was coeditor with the late Richard Beckhard of the OD series, which has published more than 30 volumes thus far. With the concept of process consultation, Schein tries to explain what really works in intervention efforts during change processes (in interaction, in groups, in organizations). And this "What works?" can be circumscribed as being involved and engaging, observing, becoming aware, and reflecting on the ongoing interaction, relationships, and experiential processes so that the self-steering capacity and ownership of the client (system) can be enhanced. Process consultation means working in the present reality, in the ongoing interaction (Schein, 1987), and understanding "the ebb and flow of that reality moment to moment, shifting roles as necessary" (Schein, 1999b, p. 70).

The concept of process consultation remained strongly linked with the contribution of Schein (revisited edition in 1999) and faded away elsewhere. Developed during the sixties, when memories about T-groups were still vivid, it hardly survived the new orientations in organization development during the seventies and eighties, when the emphasis on problem solving and structural and strategic approaches were considered more important than the mere processual or micro approach. Process consultation was substituted during the nineties by eclectic coaching and facilitating approaches from very diverse perspectives. The original process emphasis, originated in the T-groups, got merely lost in the functional and instrumental approaches demanded by the business schools' students and alumni. Indeed, today process consultation is predominantly conceived as one type of OD intervention method (Cummings & Worley, 2005) or as a family of OD interventions (French & Bell, 1998) alongside many others that is especially suitable when dealing with socioemotional processes and problems in work groups and organizations (e.g., dysfunctional conflict, deficient group processes, poor communication, and ineffective behaviors and norms). Defined this way, process consultation has become just one of the intervention techniques or instruments in the OD consultant's tool bag instead of a general philosophy or action principle that underlies *each* intervention effort during change processes.

Although there is a lot of material available on "good" and "bad" process, the concept and practice of process consultation itself has always been and still is difficult to grasp. Schein himself stresses this point in the preface of the revisited edition of process consultation (Schein, 1999a) contemplating that colleague advisors and managers still do not understand the essence of process consultation: it is not a technique or a collection of interventions for working with groups, it is not a model for nondirective counseling, and it is not an occupation or full-time job. Process consultation is essentially about building a helping (client–consultant) relationship through a continuous effort of "jointly deciphering what is going on" (Schein, 1999a, p. 6) in the ongoing interaction, relationship, and situation to make coauthored choices about how to go on. In the concluding chapter of *Process Consultation Revisited*, Schein underlines the importance of keeping a sharp eye on the helping nature of the relationship: "When all is said and done, I measure my success in every contact by whether or not I feel the relationship has been helpful and whether or not the client feels helped" (Schein, 1999a, pp. 242-243).

Several reasons can be identified why process consultation is often misunderstood and why it had difficulty surviving the various developments in OD thinking. First, the concept of process consultation is used in two different meanings by Schein (1987, 1999a). It refers to both the continuous process of building a helping (client–consultant) relationship and to a specific consultation role (doctor–patient model, expert model, and process consultancy model) that is enacted during the process, depending on the joint assessment of which role is most helpful at present. Second, empirical research on process consultation is rather scarce (e.g., Cummings & Worley, 2005; Kaplan, 1979). And third, although Schein is championing clinical and qualitative approaches (1995) and is using a symbolic–interactionist approach (Schein, 1999a), there seems to have been a lack of vocabulary and conceptualization of the relational processes that are at work. Maybe this lack of proper theorizing of what really works in ongoing interactions for change makes the survival and diffusion of process consultation hard. A relational practice perspective on intervention and change processes can offer this kind of theorizing and can help catch the dynamics going on in process consultation. This perspective is introduced in the second part of the article. Subsequently the concept of relational practice, and its relationship to process consultation, is illustrated using an in-depth comparative case of a change process in a consulting firm and a health care organization. We conclude by discussing the added value of a relational practice perspective by arguing how our findings go beyond and actualize Schein's work on process consultation.

Taking a Relational Practice Perspective

At the end of his book *Process Consultation Revisited* (Schein, 1999a), Schein wonders about his stubbornness about writing again and again about the value of

process consultation. Organizational consultants keep telling him that they have to make formal diagnoses, write extensive reports, and make sound recommendations. "Why don't we apply in organizational consulting the learning we have acquired in other helping professions: about client involvement, about people having to learn at their own pace, about helping clients to have insights and solve their own problems?" (Schein, 1999a, p. 247). Building a relationship with the client—Schein calls it "a helping relationship"—is for him the first and absolutely necessary condition for any help or learning to take place. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the factual and successful application of these principles in the other helping professions. Here we want to focus on the conditions and possibilities to enhance the actual practice of those principles in organizational consulting work. Beyond framing it as a helping relationship, we want to deepen further the question, "What makes those principles work?" By substituting the concept process consultation with the vocabulary *relational practice*, we want to stress mainly three additional accents in the process: introducing the theoretical lens of relational constructionism, focusing on (the quality of) enacted practices, and bounding the context characteristics. Our intention is to actualize the process consultation philosophy and practice in new thinking about organizing and changing organizational processes.

Since the seminal work of Kenneth Gergen (1982, 1st ed.) on human sciences as a social construction, a number of authors have joined in to develop their perspective on social constructionism (among others, Gergen, 1994; Hosking, 2006; McNamee, 1998; Shotter, 1993, 2004; Shotter & Katz, 1996). Social reality is considered as a mutual negotiation of meaning among all actors involved by sharing understanding of contexts. Not only shared cognitions (Weick, 1995) but also a mutual enactment of relationships creates the social reality (Gergen, 1994). Recent authors therefore prefer the concept of relational constructionism to emphasize the relational essence of social reality construction. The quality of the relational processes—one-sidedness or reciprocity—is constitutive for the inclusion or exclusion of social actors in the resulting social network. This paradigm underscores precisely Schein's emphasis on the relational work during consulting and learning activities. Schein is yet stressing the role of feedback and reflection as a mechanism to reconstruct self and others' perception as intrapsychic processes. A relational constructionist perspective puts the mutual relational work right in the center of attention. Schein could probably give a better answer to consultants who want to measure and write reports instead of engaging in relationship building when he considers organizations no longer as entities or objects but rather as ongoing joint projects of relational negotiation. It is an entative view versus a dynamic view on organizing (Hosking, 2004). But changing is essentially relational work. Therefore we want to propose relational constructionism as a proper theoretical approach to ground the essence of process consultation.

The second aspect we want to stress in substituting process consultation with the language of relational practice is a return-to-practice perspective. A group of scholars in organization theory, inspired by philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Bourdieu,

sees the essence of organizing in the enacted collective practices of knowledge and relationships (Gherardi, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002). Joint practices are considered as the carriers of knowledge, learning, and change rather than the reflection or mere "talking about" getting organized. In the relational constructionist approach, Shotter (2004) stresses the turn to practice in our language practices of talking and writing: "withness (dialogical)" talk versus "aboutness (monological)" talk. It is the difference between talk that moves and talk that leaves us unmoved. Language is considered as action rather than representation. He distinguishes a relationally responsive language practice from a representational–referential form. In consulting behavior, it means that an intervention gets its effective meaning from the actual reciprocal practice between consultant and client rather than from the cognitive reflection. A relational practice is positioning and moving the interacting partners. Change is enacted in the intervention and not some kind of output or result of it. The here-and-now approach concerns the actual "doing things to each other" and not just the reflection on the here and now. What works in consultation is the quality of this reciprocal interaction. Schein has not made the quality features of practices explicitly clear in his work on process consultation; a relational practice perspective does.

In Table 1, the most typical concrete and observable characteristics of high-versus low-quality relational practices are listed. Most of the aspects are self-explanatory and are discussed throughout the text. The mutual creation of energy or continuing motivation and the development of the experience of co-ownership is particularly important. The best examples of high-quality relational practices stem from daily live activities, maybe especially in the sphere of art, recreation, and sport activities: a free dance, a good conversation, an improvisation theatre, a ball game, a celebration.

A third aspect we want to emphasize is the importance of a proper contextual bounding. As mentioned above, the T-group approach and the related process consultation could not survive in a lot of training and organization consulting settings during the eighties and nineties. Often, there seemed to be too large a gap between the largely functional and instrumental context already in place and process consultation. Schein does not stress the importance of a proper contextual embedding; a relational practice perspective puts it in the center of attention, as will be illustrated in the comparative case. However, even in a learning setting inspired by sensitivity training principles and process consultation, we have noticed the importance of this contextual embeddedness. The authors of this article are associated with a 2-year advanced OD professional development program, Consultancy in Groups and Organizations (CIGO), a collaboration between Hasselt University (Belgium), University of Leuven (Belgium), and Case Western Reserve University (United States), where process-oriented practices constitute the core activities since the early seventies up to today, especially the intensive group training experience during the opening week. We have always been watching carefully the boundaries of this program as a cultural island: intake of candidates, group composition, group learning norms and appreciative support, attendance over a long time span, continuous

Table 1
Concrete and Observable Characteristics Defining Low- and High-Quality Relational Practice

Low-Quality Relational Practice	High-Quality Relational Practice	Inspiring Authors
One-sidedness in relationship	Reciprocity between the actors' contributions	Bouwen, 2001; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004
Talking about: distant, disengaged, or uninvolved, unresponsive interaction that leaves speakers unmoved and possibly evokes generalizable understanding	Talking with: sensitive, engaged, or involved, reflective, and responsive interaction that moves speakers and possibly evokes actionable knowledge	Beer, 2000; Shotter, 1993, 2004
Statements are vague and not illustrated	Mutually open, concrete, and illustrated communication	Argyris & Schön, 1978
Mutual questioning, testing, and contradicting of statements is not possible or avoided	Mutual questioning, testing, and contradicting of statements is possible and stimulated, allowing for deep or double-loop learning	Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schön & Rein, 1994
Mutual blaming, defending, and complaining	Jointly talking in terms of possibilities and energy-giving forces	Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003; Quinn & Dutton, 2005
No possibility of jointly becoming author and owner of a task or project	Joint authorship and co-ownership of a task or project	Schein, 1999a, 1999b; Shotter, 1993, 2004
Dominant voices control the interaction; other voices are kept silent and are excluded	Multiple voices can be raised, heard, and are included	Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2004, 2006
Talking from outside the here-and-now interaction	Talking from within the here-and-now interaction	McNamee, 1998; McNamee & Gergen, 1998

open mutual confrontation and authenticity, coaching of field experiences, parallel emphasis on group maturity and personal growth, and a high-quality learning community. The setup of this program reflects a careful and continuous boundary management and renegotiation of development goals. The development of a "mature learning group" during the 1st week is an important condition for the success of the rest of the program. During this 1st week a relational context of learning relationships is built, in which all relational practices that follow are embedded. The cultural values of this way of working are quite different from the pragmatic or functional values practiced in a lot of social and business organizations. Argyris' distinction of a model II (two-sided reciprocity) versus a model I (one-sided control) world may apply here (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978). In change consulting work in organizations, as illustrated later in this article, it is also important to consider the fit with the relational context of any particular organization.

Our reformulation of process consultation as relational practice work may constitute a more tangible and progressive approach to start the change work of bridging the gap between client and consultant and between the actual and desired state. The art is the designing, in a given context, of high-quality relational practices that can carry the change process. The cognitive–reflective and confrontational–emotional demands of process consultation can be a difficult threshold. Within a relational practice perspective, the emphasis is more on doing the relationship than reflecting on it.

Beyond Process Consultation Toward Engaging in Relational Practices

Most characteristics of high-quality relational practices apply also to process consultation, when we focus on the openness of communication, the development of mutual trust, and the actual building of a relationship. However, there are differences both in the position actors take and in the orientation and goal of the collaborative interaction. Both perspectives are discussed, showing how relational practice work fits with and goes beyond Schein's process consultation.

Process consultation is first of all a professional role perspective from the position of the helper consultant. In process consultation it is explicitly a meeting of a consultant or some officer and a client or follower. It is the encounter of some kind of professional or educator with the intention to bring some support or service or contribution. Typical for process consultation is the framing of the relationship as a helping relationship. The attention of the helper consultant is on deciphering observable events that guide intervention possibilities (Schein, 1999a). Schein's view on consultation is mainly cognitive–psychological. Carefully observing and feeding back to the client are seen as important mechanisms to offer help. Stimulating talking about and reflecting on joint here-and-now group experiences, on the relationships being developed, and on how to do things differently is seen as the core working principle of a good consultation session. Reflectively talking about the frames of the client (system) and offering more appropriate frames to help the client reframe the situation (to help himself) are central. A good intervention simultaneously allows both the helper and the client to diagnose what is going on. The consultant is involved in the client's inquiry process as a clinical inquirer and the process is primarily driven by the client's needs (Schein, 1995). Basically, this comes down to "the helper help[ing] the person, group or organization that needs help." Process consultation also has a strong problem-solving orientation (Schein, 1999a, 1999b). Change is seen as a result of joint consultant–client analyzing, diagnosing, and remediating.

The relational practice view is above all a practical performance perspective from the position of all actors involved. The emphasis is on engaging in a joint activity, where both sides have a contribution and a proper stake in the encounter. It is a more inclusive perspective. It stresses the importance of enacting reciprocal relationships

between mutually responsive coactors. Attention centers on jointly produced activity or co-constructed events that are strongly embedded in context. The view underlines that relational practices are continuously embedded in a specific historical–relational context that is always partly actualized in the interactions actors engage in. Interaction and context are coproduced (e.g., Bourdieu, 1980; Hosking, 2006; Lave, 1993). This contextual embeddedness is the source of new possibilities, but it also constrains what can follow (Hosking, 2004). Other concepts used to indicate this relational context are "broader networks of relationships" (McNamee, 1998), "organizational culture" (Schein, 2004), and "the smell of the place" (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1999). Coactors are jointly involved in each other's inquiry process as partners. The process is driven by mutually acknowledging and supporting each other's needs. "Simultaneously helping yourself and others" is considered as a core working principle. Within process consultation the shaping of the reciprocity is more imbalanced. It is the consultant helper who engages in the inquiry process of the client as a clinical inquirer; they are not equal partners. Similarly to process consultation, a relational practice perspective works with the here-and-now interacting but stresses more the embedded nature of practices in a particular relational context. Simultaneous enactment of engaging, experiencing, and reflecting within joint practice is central. A consultation session is considered good if partners are not only reflecting on how to do things differently but really do things differently, that is, more jointly and generatively, enacting more relational quality (see Table 1). There is more emphasis on doing things together than on reflecting or diagnosing. Framing and reframing is jointly done. Within a relational practice perspective, the quality of interaction and relationships is seen as the most active carrier of the quality of organizing and change processes (e.g., Bouwen, 1998; Shotter, 1993). This way, relational practice work has a more solution-focused appreciative orientation (e.g., Cooperrider et al., 2003). Changing is coengaging in generative practices. The focus is on possibilities and new opportunities. The joint action is going where the energy is. The context is involved mainly through the joint activity in which the actors engage. The essence of good relational practice work is doing things together in such a quality way that all actors involved benefit from the practice. In Table 2 the different accents of process consultation and relational practice work are summarized.

In the fourth part of the article the relational practice lens, and its relationship to process consultation, is illustrated by an in-depth comparative case of a successful and unsuccessful change process, respectively, in a health care organization (CARE) and a consulting firm (CONSULT).

Illustrating a Relational Practice Perspective: an In-Depth Comparative Case

Both cases concern a fundamental change process that is intensively facilitated by consultants during a time period of approximately 2 years. Similar high-quality

Table 2
Comparison Between Process Consultation and Relational Practice Perspective

Process Consultation Perspective	Relational Practice Perspective
Professional role perspective from the position of helper consultant	Practical performance perspective from the position of coactor
Core focus: building helping relationships	Core focus: enacting reciprocal relationships
"Helping" metaphor: being helpful as consultant, teacher, parent, spouse, etc.	"Responsiveness" metaphor: being mutually responsive as coactors
Consultant's attention is on observing and giving back to the client	Attention is on jointly produced activity or co-constructed events embedded in context
Clinical inquiry of the client: "the helper helps the person or entity that needs help"	Coactors are jointly involved in each other's inquiry process: "simultaneously helping yourself and others"
Working with here-and-now interaction	Working with here-and-now interacting embedded in context
Stimulating talking about and reflecting on joint group experiences and on the relationships being developed	Simultaneous enactment of engaging, experiencing, and reflecting; doing things differently together
Problem-solving orientation	Solution-focused appreciative orientation
Mainly cognitive-psychological view on consultation	Interactionist view on consultation
Essence of good process consultancy: helping the client help himself	Essence of good relational practice work: doing things together in such a quality way (see Table 1) that all actors involved benefit from the practice

relational practices, when looking at the here-and-now concrete interventions and interaction characteristics (see Table 1), were set up to shape the change process toward a new organizational structure and functioning. However, the concrete context-bounded actualization and assembling of the relational practices, and consequently the effects of the relational practices on the change process, is very different in both cases. In CARE the change process is successful according to the actors involved, in CONSULT the change process is rather seen as a failure. First, the two organizations and their respective change processes are portrayed concisely. Next, a number of working relational practices and the importance of a proper contextual boundedness are illustrated.

Change in CARE and CONSULT

CARE is a Dutch health care organization that provides care and support to adults and children with mental handicaps (clients). The organization consists of 450 coworkers who work in several regional divisions. CARE is a value-driven organization with an explicit and shared mission that accentuates the welfare, involvement,

and participation of both clients and coworkers. The change process is an in-depth internal team-oriented transformation to face up to the external pressure of scale enlargement in the health sector. CARE works on organization development and in doing so tries to preserve and even to strengthen its mission and identity. Most visible nevertheless are the structural changes. First, a management team was formed to support the managing director, who participated in the 2-year advanced OD professional development program CIGO mentioned above. Second, team coaches, who merely supported social workers, became team leaders with more coordinating and supervising responsibilities. Third, the central administration was consolidated and improved. To enact these changes, a number of relational practices interventions were set up: for example, implementing of learning groups; organizing large group interventions to inform, involve, and align coworkers and to make them the coauthor and co-owner of the change process; codesigning an evaluation of the change process toward further continuous organizational development.

CONSULT is a Belgian consultancy firm that supports organizations in the field of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the broad sense. Apart from 10 permanent coworkers, CONSULT works with a network of freelance consultants. Similarly to CARE, the change process is profound. It concerns a transformation of the vision, team working, and internal organization to reposition the organization to deal with the increasing pressure of the consultancy market. Formerly, expert training through open training programs in the CONSULT facilities was given primary attention. Because of market changes, and associated changes in the professional aspirations of the CONSULT members, the current organization mainly offers in-company consultancy and training. Another important parallel with CARE is that the managing director of CONSULT participated in the same process-oriented development program CIGO as the director of CARE. As in the CARE case, different relational practices can be distinguished: for example, having meetings to (re)formulate the mission, vision, and strategy; creating new forms of leadership and task distribution; and evaluating the open training programs and introducing a more client-centered view on TQM.

Designing and Assembling Relational Practices Within the CARE and CONSULT Change Process

A number of high-quality relational practices, with observable working effects in the here and now, can be illustrated for each case. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all relational practices that have shaped both change processes. Some of the above-mentioned high-quality relational practices of CARE are discussed, followed by those of CONSULT. Next, the quality of the overall relational practices of CARE and CONSULT are compared in detail.

The implementation of learning groups within CARE. During the change process of CARE, learning groups were designed within and between various hierarchical

levels: the team leader with his or her team, team leaders from different divisions, the manager with his or her team leaders, and the management team. These learning groups were set up at a monthly basis and lasted 3 hr per session. Process consultants facilitated these learning groups until this practice became self-steering and fully owned by the participants themselves.

From the beginning, these learning groups were jointly negotiated as legitimate spaces, where learning through sharing experiences constituted the most important and explicit goal. Participants met, reflected, and experimented actively with their daily work issues, (here-and-now) interactions, mutual relationships, emotions, how they were functioning as a group, and the organizational change process. The learning was around the here-and-now ongoing relational practice, the jointly created role-plays, and the joint practicing of new, more generative ways of relating and enacting the change process. The learning experience was directly connected to actual organizational practices. Participants worked directly on the improvement of recent real-life cases. Hence, the classical problem of transfer was strongly reduced through the richness and context boundedness of the learning practice itself. Enacting, experiencing, and reflecting on common relational practices was the permanent learning ground. Participants exchanged concrete and personal experiences in the group and experimented with new forms of interacting that were more supporting of the joint learning goals. Continuously keeping a sharp eye on the level of authenticity, transparency, and reciprocity enacted in the ongoing interactions is an important working principle of the learning groups. This can be illustrated by the open way a conflict episode between the managing director and a member of the management team was dealt with in the learning group. All participants, including the consultant, reflected on each other's perspectives and framed and reframed their understandings of the ongoing situation. Gradually they developed a more differentiated and shared image of the situation that opened up new space to continue in a constructive way.

Over time, learning group participants developed a strong sense of co-ownership of the new learning form. The facilitating consultants stimulated participants to become increasingly engaged and relationally responsive in the joint practice of the learning group. This way they made themselves gradually superfluous. The consultant remained "low key" (Schein, 1999b), by putting aside own judgments, and intervened only if he felt he could stimulate more enacting of reciprocal and generative relationships. The team leaders and the team members gradually incorporated this consultation behavior. They expanded their (inter)action repertoire to enhance the interactivity and reflexivity and thus the quality of the ongoing process. One team leader expressed "what works" in the learning groups as "now we are talking directly *to* each other, and we are really testing new possibilities, instead of talking *about* each other behind each other's back" (e.g., Shotter, 2004).

The organization of large-group interventions within CARE. As mentioned earlier, the process of including and excluding voices in relational practices is a central

concern when taking a relational practice perspective. It was also a central concern in the organizational change process of the health organization CARE, in which various actors were involved gradually using large group interventions. After a first report was made by an external audit agency, in which several recommendations for improving the organization were proposed and discussed, consultants facilitated a first 2-day-long large-group intervention for all leading staff, that is, the managing director, the management team, and the team leaders. Here the recommendations of the report were jointly discussed: "Can we agree on the directions of the proposed change and if so, how do we proceed?" All actors involved agreed with the proposed changes, and decisions were made to translate the changes into concrete actions. A mixed coordination and design group, in which a diversity of perspectives was involved (managing director, two members of the management team, two team leaders, an external consultant, and two caregivers), was set up to monitor and coordinate the change process and design subsequent large-group interventions to enact the change process. Three workgroups were set up and a joint practice between team leaders and the management team was initiated to make new job descriptions for both groups. By involving actors this way, withness (dialogical) talk (Shotter, 2004), coauthorship, and joint ownership are stimulated.

Six months later, a second large-group intervention was set up in which all relevant stakeholders (caregivers, parents, and relatives, supporting staff, clients, team leaders, management team, and director) were brought together in 2 days (200 persons a day). The days were cofacilitated by several consultants. The goal of this relational practice was to create involvement and ownership of the change process, to energize and engage participants, and to celebrate and strengthen a sense of solidarity and unity. Participants enacted energizing and reciprocal practices through appreciative interviews and group reflection about the life-giving forces of their work and CARE. Participants were also invited in groups to actively and creatively design the basic values of CARE with the help of applied improvisation theatre. The creatively "doing together" resulted in a lot of energy to go forward. The large-group intervention ended with jointly formulating priority action points to enact the desired change process. The design group collected the main results, which were fed back shortly after the event. To consolidate the change process, an evaluation meeting was planned a few months later.

The organization of a 2-day-long revitalization and strategy intervention within CONSULT. Similar to CARE, CONSULT also engaged in relational practices in which the whole organization was involved. The director had developed a strategic model in advance and wanted to test whether his model was seen as feasible and could be accepted by all organizational actors. However, together with an external process consultant, the decision was made to set a few steps back. All CONSULT members were invited to a 2-day-long strategic weekend, allowing creation of coownership and relational responsibility about strategic issues and about the vision of

CONSULT. Participants were the director, three board members, six consultants, a freelancer, a client, five supporting staff members, the external process consultant, and PhD researchers. Typical illustrations for the relational practices being set up can be identified. First, participants engaged in appreciative interviews in pairs about recent high points in daily work experience. This proved to be a mutually energizing and rewarding activity. Participants were really involved and moved by each other's stories. Their question to each other was, "What exactly gave you energy concerning this high point?" Next, three groups were formed. Concrete experiences and associated energy-giving factors were discussed and written down on a flip chart for plenary presentations. Starting from the identified energizers, participants jointly generated an ideal dream image of CONSULT in small groups: "Picture CONSULT in 10 years; it is the perfect organization to work in; the collaboration among coworkers is very good; we are the market leader and the benchmark for other companies. What characteristics (structures, way of interacting, internal organization) would be in place?" The dream images were drawn on a flip chart and presented plenary. A lot of energy was generated. The images were questioned, contradicted, and complemented with other views. The meeting ended with jointly discussing priority action points to make the desired future come true in joint actual practice. The decision was made to do an evaluation in 6 months.

Although there was a lot of energy in the here and now, and participants engaged in reciprocal interactions, this energy declined later in the process mainly because of one-sided interactions from the chairman of the board of directors. Issues concerning vision and strategy temporarily ebbed away. However, in the course of the change process, the need was felt again to explicitly continue developing a shared vision that could be supported by all organizational members.

Designing a group meeting for formulating a new vision. After one of the actors had introduced the idea of working on the question "What does quality mean for each of us?" a consultant was involved to help in the cocreation of a common vision based on the individual quality stories. Similar to the strategy weekend, the appreciative nature of the question can be seen as a generative metaphor that made an important opening for engaged and reflective interactions moving all actors. It stimulated a generative way of engaging in relation with each other.

For example, the management assistant said that for her, quality comes to life when she is surrounded by people who respect and trust her. Her story became more tangible when her colleagues and the consultant reformulated her idea, supported what she said, and in fact engaged in interactions so important for this management assistant's daily work.

Another example is the story of the director who equaled quality with discovering possibilities for standing "between" people instead of "above" them. When he indicated that he had the feeling of losing the connection with coworkers, mutual testing of assumptions was induced, allowing for deep learning to take place.

The appreciative relational practice of sharing stories about quality was furthermore characterized by interventions (from consultant and coworkers) such as self-reflection, reciprocity between contributions, and open and concrete communication. The consultant stimulated these interventions but kept a low profile to let the group members take their process more in their own hands.

In the next step, the group formulated the idea to visualize the separate quality stories in the image of a sun. Common values were placed in the heart of the sun, where personal accents were placed in the sunbeams. Using the metaphor of the sun, pasting Post-its on the image, and discussing it allowed all actors to do things together, beyond merely reflecting on quality. This joint relational practice in which all actors experienced coauthorship and co-ownership was associated with a high energy level that was created right on the spot. Finally, arrangements were made to follow up the meeting to further concretize the organizational vision.

Comparing the quality of the overall relational practices of CARE and CONSULT. When observing the relational practices within the CARE change process, various concrete high-quality relationship characteristics are prominent. In most relational practices, there is a high responsiveness and reciprocity. Actors build on each other's contributions and take joint responsibility for the here-and-now process and outcomes: they experience coauthorship and co-ownership of the task, process, and outcome. They take a reflective stance and decipher what is going on and what should improve but do not stay (too) long in this reflective or talking about mode. Mostly, they are really doing and *practicing* new interaction alternatives and working methods in the here and now: "Let's try it out now and learn from it instead of staying so 'cognitive' about it, so we can build on it further." They experiment; there is mutual questioning and contradicting going on about enacting new tangible possibilities for improvement.

In contrast to CARE, the relational practices of the CONSULT change process are strongly dominated by observing and reflecting on here-and-now interactions and relationships and giving feedback to each other about personal and group functioning. Seen from a process consultation point of view, actors develop high interactional quality in terms of observable interaction characteristics. They question each other; mutually contradicting and testing is possible and emotions are openly discussed. They stay in a reflective mode and talk most of the time about how to solve the problems at hand. In comparison with CARE, we observe that the actual *practicing* of new ways of relating and new work approaches and building mutually on each other's contributions occurs less frequently. Within CONSULT, it seems that actors are reproducing with each other process consultation interventions. There is a lot of cognitive–psychological inquiry work going on. However, creating new alternatives and experimenting with concrete new work forms—actually "doing things to each other"—is often missing. Although there are some differences in the concrete way that the relational practices of CARE and CONSULT are enacted, these quality

differences are not sufficient to explain the very different effects of the relational practices in the change process. It is only through in-depth interviews with all actors involved that the importance of the context-bounded actualization of relational practices becomes clear.

Contextual Features in Relational Practices for Change

In this paragraph, we illustrate how relational practices are always embedded in contextual features. When comparing relational practices from CARE to those from CONSULT only by examining observable characteristics as summarized in Table 1, we could conclude that both cases engage in some similar high-quality relational practices. Moreover, the managing directors of both organizations participated in the same advanced professional development program for group and organizational consultants that is inspired by Schein's process consultation principles. Consequently, they are very sensitive to the quality of the relational practices in their organization as an indication of the overall organizational health and vitality.

By using decontextualized discourse analyses of conversational episodes during both change processes, one would have concluded that both change processes were similarly successful because they share so many high-quality relational practices. However, in-depth interviews with the actors revealed that in CARE, people unanimously perceived the change process as being successful. In CONSULT, however, people tended to have a general lack of energy and a negative perception about the whole change process. Even if we asked them about relational practices that were—according to what we had observed—of high quality, actors were very skeptical and did not give us the impression that these practices were very helpful for the change process.

What is going on here? Different historical–relational contexts "do" different things to the same kind of observable interactional quality of relational practices. Even high-quality relational practices will not improve group or organizational functioning when embedded in a relational context that does not support collaboration. Table 3 gives an extensive overview of the constraining contextual features of CONSULT and the supporting contextual features of CARE.

First, the managing director in both organizations is perceived quite differently. In the change process of CARE, the managing director is seen as a legitimate authority figure. He is appreciated and accepted by nearly all members of the organization. When interviewed, one caregiver expressed this common feeling: "He is a warm-hearted managing director. Do you know that he knows every person's first name? We are an organization of approximately 450 people. Amazing, isn't it?" In the change process of CONSULT, the mutual perception of the relationship among the managing director and a large number of the organizational members is characterized by no real contact and by distrust, defensive reactions, lack of acceptance, mutual blaming, and complaining. Over time, this feeling has spread over the entire organization.

Table 3
Embeddedness of Relational Practices in a Historical–Relational Context: Constraining Contextual Features of CONSULT and Supporting Contextual Features of CARE

Contextual Factors of CONSULT Constraining High-Quality Relational Practices	Contextual Factors of CARE Supporting High-Quality Relational Practices
Distrust toward managing director, no real contact, no acceptance, mutual blaming, and complaining	Managing director perceived as a legitimate authority figure, accepted leadership on all levels
Managing director only speaks a process language and merely translates this to all coworkers	Managing director and management team are able to wear different hats: formal, informal, and juridical
Culture of reflecting without putting it into joint practice	Culture of doing (new) things; making the future together instead of talking about the past
No clear mission, vision, and strategy to guide (inter)actions	Strong and inspiring mission (values) and vision that is understood, subscribed to, and enacted in daily work
Culture of unbounded autonomy and freedom, of not keeping one's commitments to each other, no consequences	Freedom is embedded in principles, goals, and agreements (e.g., mission statement)
Financial problems making future insecure	Bright (financial) future
Atmosphere of ad hoc coping with problems	Emerging problems are consequently translated into possibilities and actions for improvement
Culture of stressing differences between persons and groups	Focus is on searching for similarities: bridges are continuously built between groups
No history of learning and development	Shared practices of learning and development on all levels
Lack of energy and a negative perception about the change process	Basic enthusiasm and energy among critical mass of coworkers
No perceived legitimate space to engage in deeper conversations; lack of formal job evaluation conversations and coaching	Mutually accepted learning space by means of learning groups, anchored in the organizational structure; individual and group coaching and job evaluation conversations are installed
Lack of (or low quality of) assembling relational practices, no follow-up	High-quality assembling of relational practices

A second important contextual feature is very much connected with process consultation. The director of CONSULT speaks a process language without being able to translate this to all coworkers. He emphasizes the process of jointly deciphering what is going on by mainly focusing on continuous reflection and feedback. In CARE, the director is able to speak different languages, depending on the specific situation. Moreover, emphasis in CARE is primarily on the practice of doing new things together, rather than on feedback and reflection. This is a clear example of the difference between a process consultation logic and a relational practice logic.

The context of CONSULT, in which relational practices are embedded, is furthermore characterized by uncertainty about the future of the company, a lack of a clear vision, and a culture of ad hoc coping with problems, of unbounded autonomy and freedom, and of no consequences for not keeping mutual commitments. The overall mutual perception of relationships and intentions is, "She [he] wants to make progress at the expense of me, I cannot trust her [him]."

The relational context of CARE is characterized by quite different features. There is a "basic enthusiasm and energy" and high job satisfaction. A strong inspiring mission and vision is understood, subscribed to, and enacted in the daily work practices by the critical mass of the organizational members ("the talk is walked"). Leadership is accepted on all levels. Problems that emerge are consequently translated into possibilities and actions for improvement. CARE has a history of setting up shared learning and developmental practices on all organizational levels as enactment of a strong organizational value, stressed continuously: "Personal development is organizational development and vice versa." The overall mutual perception of relationships and intentions is, "We are here to help each other to develop and in doing so, we simultaneously develop our organization." Finally, in CARE, explicit attention is given to assembling relational practices, whereas in CONSULT, the relational practices are set up, stand alone, and fade away.

The embeddedness of the relational practices in these different contextual features explains why the change processes of CARE and CONSULT are experienced so differently and seen by the actors as being respectively successful and unsuccessful. Similar observable interpersonal interaction qualities can thus have very different consequences on the change efforts, depending on the specific organizational context. A relational practice intervention therefore will simultaneously enact these contextual features into the ongoing change processes.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this article is to reconceptualize and to reframe the seminal work of Schein on process consultation by introducing a relational practice perspective. Although Schein kept working on a revisited version, emphasizing the development of a helping relationship as the necessary condition for in-depth organizational change, process consultation had a hard time surviving the instrumental turn of organization development during the seventies and eighties. The authors of this article nevertheless kept practicing the process consultation principles in intensive experiential group training sessions and organizational change work.

A new theoretical foundation in social constructionism and a practical turn to relational work in context can constitute a new grounding in the concept of relational practice. Social–relational constructionism goes beyond an objectified view on organizations and considers embodied relationships as the building blocks of all organizing work. The

emphasis is on "the doing" and the enacting simultaneously of meaning and membership in a community of practice. Through stressing practices among the actors, the context is also involved in the interaction. The consultant as an active practitioner is engaging and inviting other actors in high-quality relational practices to reconstruct or to re-create jointly a new social reality. A relational practice perspective goes beyond the mainly cognitive–interpretative work of negotiating a helping relationship, toward the mutual engagement of participating actors in high-quality relationships.

These particular qualities of relational practices are discussed, illustrated, and distinguished from process consultation as practices for creating co-ownership and testable transparency of ongoing joint developmental activities.

Two organizational change case studies have illustrated the relational practice perspective throughout the interventions in a health care organization and a consulting firm. Interventions as relational practices were introduced in both contexts and were reported based on participant observations. Similar high-quality relational practices, when looking at the here-and-now concrete interventions and interaction characteristics, were set up to enact the change processes of the two organizations. However, the concrete context-bounded actualization and assembling of the relational practices and consequently the longer term outcomes on the change processes were very different in both cases as reported during debriefing interviews. Although a high interactional quality of relational practices constituted the essence of key interventions in both contexts, the effects on the change process were quite different. In the health care organization, the relational practices for change were congruent with existing organizational practices. In the consulting organization, the relational practice interventions had difficulties connecting with the dominant way of working. The context specificity was not embodied enough in the change practices of the consulting firm, resulting in an unsuccessful change process.

The contribution of this article is to offer a new theoretical and practical grounding of Schein's seminal ideas on process consultation. There is, in present-day organizations, a high need for relational work internally with collaborating units and externally with a variety of stakeholders. A relational practice perspective may open new possibilities to connect consulting interventions with a turbulent and complex organizational context. The contextual demands and specificities have to be integrated adequately in the design and enactment of the relational practice interventions. The boundary management of a change project or a training program may be a critical task to connect the changing part of a system with the broader environment. This bounding among internal and critical external stakeholders may be designed and enacted in proper relational practices among the interfacing agents. If organizational consultation work can take the practical turn and the relational turn that we concretized in the relational practice perspective, then there may be a future for process consultation in the highly interactive and interdependent world of present-day organizations.

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METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS – DOING RESEARCH CONSISTENT WITH A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Enacting a collaborative action-oriented method through fostering high-quality researcher–practitioner relational practices: The organization as co-researcher in organizational change[1]

Because there is little attention for methodology in the published article "Process consultation revisited: Taking a relational practice perspective" (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009), I have written a separate section on it here. My main goal is to concretely demonstrate how to actually carry out research consistent with a relational perspective in the context of organizational change and development. I find it important to stress that the CARE case is the result of an intensive year and a half process of joint learning between researchers—Styn Grieten and I—and practitioners. We developed a collaborative action-oriented method that fosters the production of actionable knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is simultaneously usable for practitioners in their change and learning process and useful for academic theory building efforts (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Blood, 2006; Coghlan, 2007; Schein, 2009a). A continuous concern to keep the quality of the relational practices between researchers and practitioners as high as possible encouraging co-ownership of the research project is the heart of the method. The same principle is also used while collaborating with and learning from the CONSULT organization.

1 Introduction

The main goal of this section is to profile in chronological order the main activities of the research method that we have co-created during the company-wide change process of CARE, continuously keeping an eye on the quality of relational practices being developed (see Figure 1). The main goals of the method are (1) to help organizational members to reflect on and learn from their experiences (individually and collectively) in co-generating organizational change (creating knowledge that is usable for those involved) and (2) to simultaneously collect quality data allowing for theory building using an in-depth qualitative case study approach (creating knowledge that is useful for the academic community) (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). It is illustrated how the client organization is encouraged to become co-author and co-owner of the research/learning process on the road to self-steering in a continuous improvement process.

[1] Adapted from: Lambrechts, S., & Grieten, S. (2009). *Building generative theory from participatory action-oriented research: The organization as co-researcher in organizational change.* Proceedings of the IIE Annual Industrial Engineering Research Conference, May 30-June 3, Miami, USA.

Table 1 The main activities of the collaborative action-oriented method enacted during organizational change

1 Contacting and contracting with the client organization
2 Formation of a co-inquiry group of scholars and organizational members – Organization-wide communication
3 Engaging in organization-wide appreciative in-depth learning conversations with a variety of perspectives
4 Providing open unfinished feedback of the results to the co-inquiry group: Co-creating a learning report
5 Translating the learning report into an actionable evaluation report and organization-wide dissemination
6 Dynamic use of the learning and evaluation report in a large group meeting
7 Extended analysis and reframing of the results for academic purposes: Talking another language

2 Setting the stage: Change in a Dutch health care organization

The research method was enacted in the change process of the Dutch health care organization CARE as a learning effort towards enhanced systemic learning capabilities and new actions for improvement. CARE provides support and care to people with mental handicaps ('clients'). The organization consists of 450 co-workers who work in several regional divisions. CARE is value-driven with an explicit and shared mission accentuating the welfare, involvement and participation of both clients and co-workers. The change process is an in-depth internal team-oriented transformation to face up to the external pressure of scale enlargement in the health sector. Most visible are the structural changes. First, a management team was formed to support the managing director. Second, team coaches, who merely supported social workers, became team leaders with more coordinating and supervising responsibilities. Third, the central administration was consolidated and improved. Up till our arrival, numerous change efforts had already been taken: e.g., implementing of learning groups; organizing large group interventions to inform, involve, and align coworkers and to make them co-author and co-owner of the change process.

2.1 Contacting and contracting with the client organization

We were invited as co-facilitators of a two day-long large group intervention (LGI) "Developing further: the common thread." The goal of the LGI was to involve nearly every organizational member in the change process as co-creators of the ongoing change. During the preparatory meeting and the two day long LGI, which was set-up according to the principles of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider, 1990; Barrett, 1995; Powley, Fry, Barrett, & Bright, 2004; Barrett & Fry, 2005; Cooperrider, 2012), we had the chance to meet a diversity of actors with different perspectives. In one of the follow-up sessions of the LGI with the director, the idea of a profound evaluation of the change process emerged. Simultaneously, this offered interesting opportunities for us to inquire into relational practices during organizational change. By engaging in high-quality exploratory relational practices with top management (and other perspectives), and by jointly framing the research as an evaluation of the change process in order to support the organization, the

necessary legitimacy and credibility to deeply inquire into the organization was obtained. Mutual expectations, commitments and roles were clarified explicitly.

2.2 Formation of a co-inquiry group of scholars and organizational members—Organization-wide communication

As a next crucial step, a co-inquiry group was set up in such a way that a "microcosm of the organization" was present: the director, a lead consultant, two members of the management team, two team leaders, two caregivers and we, as scholars, made up the co-inquiry group. The goal of this co-inquiry group was not only to support us in our inquiry, but also to become co-author and co-owner of the research/learning process and results on the road to self-steering. This work form allowed us and the other participants to become peers, jointly going through cycles of action and reflection, jointly discussing each new step in the inquiry process. During the first meetings we jointly defined the issues, concerns and questions to learn about. We explored and clarified the research principles and approach to be taken together and we co-created a research plan: whom to go into conversation with, when, how to relate to them. By not placing our own research agenda central, by asking open questions and by genuinely listening to the different stories of those involved, taking a humble and appreciative stance—Schein (1996) calls this "doing low key inquiries" or engaging in "humble inquiry" (Schein, 2009b; see chapter 6: Lambrechts et al., 2011)—we opened space for a dialogue resulting in a jointly agreed on research project, incorporating organizational, academic, practical and methodological issues. Important to stress is that the co-inquiry group defined itself as a learning group which co-authors and co-owns the research. This way ownership (Schein, 1999; Shotter, 2004; Pierce & Jussila, 2010) and relational responsibility (McNamee & Gergen, 1998) is broadened from "it is the research of two scholars" towards "it is the research of our group, it is OUR research." The likelihood that the organization was really going to do something with the results of the research increased significantly by this approach: "it was THEIRS now."

The research was communicated organization-wide in the monthly newsletter of the organization in name of the co-inquiry group. We, Styn and I, were introduced as the interviewers from Hasselt University in the form of a double interview with us. The research purpose and procedure was made clear (among others: an anonymity guarantee when using quotes from the interviews in public reports) and a clarification was given why not everybody could participate in the conversations ("not possible for practical reasons"). The practical arrangements (interview date, place, composition of the groups) were communicated by the team leaders and contact persons. This organization-wide communication facilitated legitimacy and acceptance of the goals, procedure and content of the research activities.

2.3 Engaging in organization-wide appreciative in-depth learning conversations with a variety of perspectives

Besides participant observation and document analysis, data collection mainly consisted of more than 60 narrative individual and focus-group learning conversations with members of all organizational levels. Inclusiveness and representativeness were the main criteria to invite participants. The conversations lasted on average two hours, and more than 100 organizational members were involved, resulting in more than 1.200 pages of conversation transcripts.

We engaged in individual learning conversations with persons in leading functions (CEO, management team and team leaders) and external consultants facilitating the change process thus far. For practical reasons, we did group conversations with persons in a more operational role helping the clients cope and develop on a daily basis, the board and the clients and parents. Members of the co-inquiry team invited team leaders to make representative small groups (4 till 7 persons) based upon the criterion of maximal diversity concerning (1) age, (2) experience and involvement in the organization, and (3) both "followers" and "critical minds."

During the interviews, we stimulated high-quality relational practices through an open, humble inquiry approach to get status equilibrium, and by being as informal, spontaneous, and empathizing as possible. We introduced ourselves: who are we, how do we work, where are we interested in as co-inquiry group and scholars—"your experiences and stories are of our concern, we want to learn from them both for developing new knowledge about change processes and for helping your organization and you to take new steps forward, we want to make this a reflective learning moment." We guaranteed anonymity. Then, we asked them to introduce themselves in a nutshell: who are you, where do you work (in which facility), what do you do in the organization, for how long are you doing that work. We then proceeded by jointly clarifying the conditions for a meaningful learning conversation: what are your expectations and wishes, what are ours—openness: saying things "as they are" without hiding, talking in concrete terms.

This created a psychological contract that sets the tone and the boundaries of the conversation. We experienced that this way of working stimulates openness.

For the group conversations, we stressed that the goal was not to go into discussion but trying to inquire into each others' stories in order to heighten mutual understanding and learn from each other on the spot. We always started with probing questions about the "here-and-now", from those we went on to open questions about how they experienced the change process, the management of it, their role in it, critical issues/concerns/opportunities, helping and inhibiting factors. At the end of each conversation, we inquired into what our conversation partner(s) thought of the conversation. Generally, the conversations were experienced as pleasant and learning-full, "we should do this more often, i.e., take the time to look back, reflect and learn in such an in-depth way." Several indicated that the conversations already were helping in reflecting on and learning from the change process. Research and intervention became two sides of the same medal.

We always tried to create a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere through our own way of relating: appreciative humble stance; spirit of inquiry, discovery and enthusiasm; open questions; focusing on events, illustrations, their story; using paraphrasing to check our understanding and interpretations. They became co-owner of the learning conversation and the subsequent steps in the change process based on all conversations. Storytelling by the conversation partners was central and questions were mainly considered as means of clarifying, concretizing or elaborating certain topics. The conversations not only generated high-quality data, but also created curiosity, commitment and enthusiasm for the results of the research.

2.4 Providing open unfinished feedback of the results to the co-inquiry group: Co-creation of a learning report

Based on our conversations, we made an unfinished learning report. We identified emergent themes and inserted literal conversation fragments illustrative for the themes. We made clear which organizational perspective made what comment (e.g., experiences and perceptions by the director, team leaders, … about theme X).

Our goal was to capture the learnings from all the conversations in an orderly format. By underscoring similarities and differences among a variety of perspectives, and indicating the weight that was given to some experiences and perceptions by one or more perspectives, we tried, as it were, to bring the perspectives "into conversation on paper."

We used this unfinished learning report as the starting point of further meaning making in the co-inquiry group in two meetings which lasted 2,5 hours each. We choose to give open feedback to the co-inquiry group: we presented our findings without handing over our preliminary learning report on paper. The goal was to make meaning of our findings together through an open dialogue: "The ambition today is co-inquiring into the themes and the related experiences and perceptions given by a variety of perspectives, clarifying our findings as a group. We invite you to ask us and each other questions concerning the themes; we would like to finish the story together; the ambition today is to create a joint story, a group story so that it is more than the story of two scholars. In a second movement we would like to ask the question: how to take this a step further?"

The goal of this way of working was to make the co-inquiry group co-author and co-owner of the eventual finished learning report through involving the group actively in the construction of it. We did not provide a finished story; on the contrary, we made a new story with the members of the co-inquiry group who brought in their own interpretations, observations, questions and nuances. We also stimulated the co-inquiry group to take an inquiry stance and develop a shared sense of relational responsibility.

One member of the co-inquiry group didn't agree initially: she wanted us to take on the expert role and say what is important. By engaging in further conversation, and more importantly action ("let us just try it, if it doesn't work, we can always stop and take another approach"), she went along with our way of working and later in the process became a strong proponent of the method.

The process in the co-inquiry group was characterized by open inquiry; there rarely was a defensive reaction. Instead, there was a serene sphere of trying to understand each other deeply and to make meaning together. This resulted in the themes being clarified and elaborated further. We frequently inquired into how the process was going: "is this way of doing things OK for everybody?"

At the end of the second meeting the director asked us to finish the learning report taking explicitly into account the comments, nuances, clarifications given by the co-inquiry group (so also our own thoughts as scholars); everybody agreed. Because the goal of the learning report was also to stimulate further action, we identified some issues that might need attention in the further development of the organization. The learning report was primarily intended to stimulate further learning from each other through actionable knowledge.

Note that our way of giving feedback on the basis of an unfinished, preliminary learning report after our research project is very much contrasted with a traditional closed and finished expert research report, characterized by graphics, tables and recommendations. We stimulated high-quality relational practice characteristics such as reciprocity in contributions (elaborating the findings with everybody's own experiences/perspectives); mutually open and illustrated communication; mutual questioning, testing and contradicting of statements. This way, we encouraged the co-inquiry group to become co-author and co-owner of the research/learning process and results. Of course, this way of doing things takes time and energy: two meetings, 2,5 hours each, were needed to go through all the issues. However, the learning report now belonged as much to us as the co-inquiry group. Co-ownership is created through co-authorship (Shotter, 2004), enacted through high-quality relational practices.

2.5 Translating the learning report in an actionable evaluation report and organization-wide dissemination

In a following meeting with the co-inquiry-group, the main point of the agenda was: "How do we proceed with the report and how to inform the rest of the organization about what we learned?" A common observation by the co-inquiry-group was that the report in the present format was too elaborate (66 pages) and too personal to disseminate organization-wide. The idea surfaced to make a summary of it highlighting conclusions and action points.

This was again a critical point in the process. Who was going to make this summary? One member of the co-inquiry group wanted us to make the summary. But we were not inclined to take that role because we wanted that the co-inquiry group remained co-author and co-owner of the report and took on shared relational responsibility for it. After all, it was the whole organization represented by the co-inquiry group that had to manage the learning and development process, take further actions and integrate those actions in the day-to-day activities and context. Other group members followed our reasoning and the director took the initiative to make the summary. The director made an initial summary with the possibility of feedback from all the group members. After about two weeks the director sent everybody the summary. We were somewhat disappointed because a lot of nuances, differences in opinion and more negative messages were filtered out. Also, a lot of context information was gone which made it harder to situate the action points.

In the next co-inquiry group meeting, we made our concerns explicit, and other group members supported our position. In his attempts to summarize the report, we noticed, together with him and the other group members, that the act of summarizing leads to a higher abstraction level: less concrete and evocative, less context, less actionable. Two rounds of feedback to the director followed: some critical context elements were brought back in, critical comments were again added. The "language of the organization" was used now. It was a very difficult exercise to find the right balance between creating a higher level of abstraction and still being concrete enough to be recognizable and to inspire actions. It took three versions and a lot of mutual feedback within the co-inquiry group, but eventually the learning report had been turned into a concise and appealing evaluation report situated very clearly in the change process of CARE: a lively document was created and accepted by the co-inquiry group as a whole. It counted 19 pages and was high in readability.

A critical moment followed. The director had a meeting with the board and the board had expected a different kind of evaluation with hard figures and more expert knowledge about how to go on. We made a mistake by not inviting one of the board members to be part of the co-inquiry group: they didn't feel involved and they didn't own the learning process and result, although we spoke to them as one of the interesting perspectives to converse with. The director had a hard time legitimizing the use of the report as a learning tool to them but eventually succeeded.

Under the title "Organization change: evaluation report" the final learning report was disseminated organization-wide. In the introduction, the process that led up to the report is described in some detail. 12 themes are discussed, and with each theme several conclusions and work fields are formulated. Moreover, each theme is accompanied by the opinions of the management team. They too consequently choose for a conversational/dialogical approach: what did we already do, how are we going to take up the issues that need further attention, when are we going to do this and who is involved? The full version of the learning report was a basis for further reflection and learning in the management team.

2.6 Dynamic use of the learning and evaluation report in a large group meeting

The learning and evaluation report had not only become an action instrument for management that fully integrated proposed conclusions and actions into the pre-research organization's action plans, but it also was a basis for dialogue during a new two day-long meeting in which the leading staff was present (management team and team leaders). They considered the evaluation report as a legitimate instrument for action and reflection. During the meeting, actors referred constantly to the report. An enormous sense of involvement had been induced.

2.7 Extended analysis and reframing of the results for academic purposes: Talking another language

But what about our contribution on change management to the academic community? *Because of the high-quality relational practices we engaged in, we obtained valid and rich data for both organizational and academic research aims.* However, because the learning report was written in a language for practitioners-in-their-context, a reframing of the findings was required. Interview fragments, conclusions and action opportunities had to be assembled to theories, frameworks and research questions for academic theory building purposes. The same data were used, but a different language was spoken, a language you have experienced while reading article III, the academic paper product of our efforts.

3 Conclusion

The main goal was to portray a collaborative action-oriented method that enables generating actionable knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is simultaneously usable for practitioners in their learning process towards improvement and useful for academic theory building efforts (e.g., Ferguson, 1966; Aram & Salipante, 2003; Blood, 2006; Coghlan, 2007). The heart of the method is a continuous concern to keep the quality of relational practices, enacted between researchers and practitioners,

as high as possible. Further research in new generative co-operative methods, that are reciprocally beneficial for both practitioners and academics, is required.

We are not suggesting that our actionable form of research is more important than normal science approaches. Rather, the actionable form of research is an important addition to normal science and deserves equal attention. Both have to be used as complementary ways of inquiry, generating different but equally valid knowledge bases that can build on each other rather than oppose each other. Further research in new co-operative methods that engage normal science researchers and participatory action researchers together in a joint learning journey is necessary (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

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CHAPTER 5

LEARNING TO WORK WITH INTERDEPENDENCIES EFFECTIVELY: THE CASE OF THE HRM FORUM OF THE SUPPLIERS TEAMS AT VOLVO CARS GENT

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Learning to work with interdependencies effectively: the case of the HRM forum of the suppliers teams at Volvo Cars Gent

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to profile the way in which Volvo Cars Gent (VCG) Belgium and its suppliers succeed in managing their interdependencies on HRM issues through a shared HRM collaborative, called the Suppliers Team Volvo Cars HRM forum (STVC-HRM).
Design/methodology/approach – A case study approach is used to develop understanding of the critical factors that contribute to the forum's success.
Findings – It was found that the critical success factors concern the way STVC-HRM members enacted trust, common ground, leadership, shared responsibility, and representative-constituency dynamics.
Research limitations/implications – To understand the Toyota system of successful collaboration and learning with suppliers, it is necessary to look into the actual assembler-supplier relationships and practices developed.
Practical implications – Building lasting manufacturer-supplier relationships is considered to be one of the elements that contribute to Toyota's competitive advantage in supply chain management. However, other organisations struggle to improve manufacturer-supplier relationships despite applying seemingly similar principles. The paper helps in recognising and managing the main collaboration issues at hand.
Originality/value – The work suggests how to build and maintain deep mutually beneficial manufacturer-supplier relationships through the VCG-suppliers case. Other organisations that want to develop those much-needed relationships may learn from the successful VCG-suppliers way of doing things.

Keywords Supply chain management, Suppliers, Automotive industry, Case studies, Critical success factors, Belgium

Paper type Case study

1. Background

The automobile industry today is characterised by customer ordered production (COP), meaning that production planning is based upon the wishes of the customer ("pull", build-to-order) instead of the possibilities of the car maker ("push", build-to-stock) (Miemczyk and Howard, 2008). COP created for VCG an explosion of car variants, for which it was both physically and financially impossible to keep all components in stock. Taking the customer as the starting point implied also low cost manufacturing, high quality products, technological complexity, short product life cycles, quick delivery times and small buffers of assets or time lags. This demanded from VCG flexible ordering systems, quicker and more direct communication with suppliers and customers, a flexible attitude, innovativeness, retraction on core business and outsourcing to reliable suppliers (VCG, 2006). Other original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) that have gone through a similar evolution all experience increased interdependencies with suppliers that have to be managed effectively (Morris *et al.*, 2004).

The automobile industry is one of the more active in developing supply chains and manufacturer-supplier networks (Pérez and Sánchez, 2001). By 1980, the role of supplier relations in the superior quality of Japanese products had been noted all over the world (Womack *et al.*, 1991). It has been widely acknowledged that the competitive advantage of Toyota over its biggest three US competitors (Ford, General Motors and Chrysler) is for a large part the result of Toyota's competence to develop and manage mutually beneficial supplier relationships (Dyer and Hatch, 2004). Inspired by the Japanese model, car manufacturers all over the world have

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refocused their supply chain activities towards developing closer and more long-term relationships with fewer suppliers (Cousins and Menguc, 2006). However, Toyota's competitors seem as yet unable to duplicate and implement the way that Toyota has been collaborating with its suppliers (Dyer and Hatch, 2004; Wee and Wu, 2009).

Why is it so hard for most organisations to create those much-needed relationships with suppliers? To deal with strengthening interdependencies between assemblers and suppliers (Morris *et al.*, 2004), most western firms have been reacting with increased formal commitment with suppliers, i.e. commitment enforceable through the legal system, and more management control systems. Mudambi and Helper (1998) showed that this increase in heavy formalised contractual relationships has little value because it has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in informal commitment and mutual trust. Likewise, Liker and Choi (2004, 106, italics added) have proposed that:

> American companies created supply chains that superficially resembled those of their Japanese competitors, [but] they didn't alter the *fundamental nature* of their relationships with suppliers.

These authors see the key answer to be found in the unusual way Toyota and its suppliers develop and manage their relationships in a network form. Learning to work effectively with increased interdependencies requires a new way of non-hierarchical organising, either to solve existing problems, to take opportunities or to structure new developments (Vansina and Taillieu, 1997). By presenting a case study, we describe how VCG and its suppliers succeed in managing their interdependencies on important HRM issues through a shared HRM collaborative, called STVC-HRM.

VCG is located in the industrial area of the city of Gent (Belgium). The plant was inaugurated in 1965 as the first Volvo plant outside Sweden. Today Volvo, a Fortune Global 500 company, constructs more than 50 per cent of its passenger cars in Belgium. About 4,500 people, working in shifts, assemble about 240,000 cars yearly, consisting of different models: C30, S40, S60, V50 and V70 (VCG, 2008). The different models provide flexibility for the company and stability for the workforce, by making the plant less dependent on the life cycle of a single model.

2. STVC-HRM

STVC-HRM is an outgrowth of the Suppliers Team Volvo Cars (STVC). It is an inter-organisational workgroup between VCG and some 20 suppliers, situated on and off the operational site, all of them linked together by the JIT method of operating. It functions as an information, advice, and coordination taskforce with regard to issues such as recruitment, selection, evaluation, promotion and dismissal, work and vacation planning, wage comparisons, training and quality management, dealing with industrial relations, grievances and strikes, and other interdependencies between the network partners.

Up till about 2000, STVC used a few on site suppliers and regulated the interdependencies by strictly adhering to contracts concerning sequential delivery and quality. Whenever one of the partners failed with regard to delivery or quality, a contractually defined penalty was imposed. There was a system of plant manager meetings on an irregular basis (1-3 times a year). As the JIT system became more prevalent with more suppliers, the VCG management realised that this state of affairs, could hardly be called a partnership. Gradually the plant manager meetings were complemented by a number of coordination workgroups (HRM, quality, logistics, finances and IT).

Our study focuses on the HRM platform because manpower issues affect the whole network, its unique style of working together in a collaborative, and the platform became exemplary in the network and is envied by competitor car makers.

The following elements led the plant managers to install STVC-HRM. The initial platform, which operated with contractual rules, was perceived as insufficient to handle the partnership between VCG and its suppliers. In 1999, the production from a Dutch plant was transferred to Gent. As a consequence, the scale of operations increased and the number of JIT suppliers went from 6 to 14, involving 22 products, components or modules. Around 2000, for the first time since 1965, strikes with the suppliers halted the assembly line at VCG, putting 3,000 people out of work. This dramatically showed the JIT system to be the Achilles heel of the production line.

One of the production line HR managers (the convenor) was assigned to take action and initiated what became STVC-HRM. Reducing the vulnerability of the total network (experienced strongly in the strikes of 2000) and improving joint learning were crucial elements to establish the forum. The convenor invited the HR managers of each of the JIT suppliers. Whenever new suppliers became operative, the HR managers were personally approached, introduced to the site and invited to take part in the network. Very soon all the JIT suppliers became and remained member of the forum.

2.1 Activities and identity of STVC-HRM

Over the years, there was a growing stream of daily bilateral operational information generated between individuals in the network by using telephone, mobiles and e-mails. The collective activities of STVC-HRM which materialised, can be grouped into some categories. Since a couple of years external speakers are invited about pressing issues: youth employment and training, the Belgian generation pact (keeping people longer employed), systems of time-credit, bottle-neck jobs, policy of the governmental employment agency and of the interim employment offices in the region.

A second set of activities concern taking stock of each other's practices and share the learning, e.g. dealing with absenteeism, training of first line supervisors, turnover of personnel, job-fairs. Very often a sub-group is formed of partners willing to explore and discuss these issues. There is no obligation to participate in these special projects.

A third set of activities are project-oriented: an annual overview of wages and benefits among the partners (voluntary participation), a system of price reduction for all workers of the companies, a common protected parking, a joint child care centre, a benchmark of interim employment offices in the network, the job centre for collective recruitment. These project activities are open for everybody, but nobody is obliged or pressured to take part. Developing the projects often involve subgroups with separate meetings, organised and chaired by one of the partners.

As to the common activities, about every six weeks a forum session is planned. The Volvo convenor and all the JIT supplier HR managers attend. There is an annual theme

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which is followed through and evaluated. For each session there is an agenda and an open "varia" at the end. Any subject can be brought in. If something is too sensitive, that will be made clear at the table by the participants: "Is this something we should discuss here?" Attendance is and stays high over the years. One of the HR managers told that "the first year I needed permission from my plant manager to attend the forum", now "I have to ask permission not to go to the forum, for example when urgent operational matters need my attention." Attendance is experienced as important because of the "'learning harvest', in terms of knowledge, expertise and relationships." The meetings are task-oriented but informal, starting at about 9 am with coffee and cake in the facilities of one of the partners who take turns at hosting the meeting. Either the convenor or the host HR manager chairs the meeting. Quite often the host conducts a visit to the installations, gives a presentation or has invited an external person, related to a particular project or event in his plant (e.g. managing self-steering teams, training on the job, youth employment). At the end of the meeting the acting chairperson proposes some agenda points for the next meeting, and asks who will host the next meeting.

An event which had a critical formative impact on STVC-HRM was the creation of the automotive job centre (AJC), a temporary organisation to deal with an acute need to recruit 2,400 people for the whole network. Setting up this initiative to deal with a distributive recruitment task was the first real test for the emerging trust in STVC-HRM.

In 2004, the volume of work increased rapidly at VCG (new models, night shift). It became clear that VCG needed about 1,600 extra persons, and the partners about 800 to follow the pace. Managers at VCG realised that unless the supply network got appropriately staffed in time, the final car assembly would fail to materialise. There was a problem finding suitable employees in the area. Usually large recruitment campaigns draw people from adjacent companies (Harbour, Volvo Trucks, Sidmar Steel). Moreover the suppliers (who on average pay 15 per cent less than VCG) were suspicious that VCG might take their best workers, and asked for guarantees.

After reflection and debate, the forum members agreed to set up a joint AJC, responsible for the recruitment of personnel for the whole network. To avoid the suspicion that VCG would take the best recruits for its own needs, it would be an open book system: each of the partners would specify what profiles they needed for their jobs, and the testing system would then match people according to the requirements of the specific company. VCG assigned almost two full time equivalents for a period of 18 months to the project. Joint work was done to specify criteria and worker profiles that were realistic for each of the nine participating companies. About 12,000 persons were tested over a period of 18 months, on a single location. The recruitment and selection staff involved some VCG personnel and two consultants of the VDAB, the employment office of the government. As this was a multiple company operation, the VDAB could legitimately join in to set up a job fair, and to supply personnel. After the recruitment phase, some subsidies for training on the job were obtained as well.

The project was a boost for confidence and trust in the supplier's network. It strengthened the identity of STVC-HRM in the national automotive world and the forum gained visibility in the whole country. Through the joint AJC activities the suppliers experienced real co-authorship and joint psychological ownership (Pierce and Jussila, 2009) of the project content, process and outcomes: "We have made AJC together, it is OURS." We witnessed "asymmetric giving" (Browning *et al.*, 1995) by VCG, in terms of sharing resources and expertise, as trigger to get the relationship going, reciprocated by more symmetrical behaviour between the partners, each contributing to the task at hand, leading to strong feelings of interdependency and shared fate.

The partner companies could verify that candidates were properly tested and matched; they had real time overview of what happened. The testing system provided a quality which few could have afforded by themselves. The collaborative task force could handle peaks of personnel influx ranging from 10 to 200 a week. The potential workers were given choices and possibilities in companies they otherwise would not be aware of.

2.2 Critical success factors

In this section we focus on the critical success factors of STVC-HRM. They concern the way STVC-HRM members enacted trust, common ground, leadership, shared responsibility, and representative-constituency dynamics.

2.2.1 Developing trust and common ground: respectful and authentic engagement

In the perception of several STVC-HRM members, the joint project of the AJC generated a dividend in trust which made it possible "to openly deal with other difficult personnel issues". Remember that they succeeded in agreeing upon a number of rules which regulated the essentially distributive nature of the recruitment task at hand.

As observed by Browning et al. (1995, p. 128) in the case of Sematech, the US semiconductor cooperation, the joint activity turned the forum into a "moral community" (see also Sabel, 1993, p. 1135) in which interdependence, as motive for cooperation, became more evident, and led to a willingness to attend to the wellbeing of all the members. Important factors are:

- *Inclusiveness*. Nobody is excluded, structuring relationships as peer relationships makes them cooperative.
- *Transparency.* A common agenda allows each member to participate and redirect activities.
- *Asymmetric giving as trigger and reciprocity.* Induces everybody to make its contribution to the level that they wish others should make.

In a similar way the annual project of reviewing pay and benefits among the network members fosters openness and trust. The members are free to participate; the project is coordinated by a volunteering forum member, often stimulated by the convenor. The results are distributed and discussed, and the members are free to use that information in their HRM practices.

The acquired degree of openness and trust has led to a situation in which turnover and career switches are acceptable issues to deal with among the suppliers. When somebody of the network applies for another job in the supply network, they will call each other, have a talk to see whether or not the choice of moving is definitive. If that is the case, the person will be advised and can look for another career step in the network: "we try to keep the competence in our own automotive community, we consider that a positive thing."

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Because of the ongoing outsourcing, several persons have been employed by different suppliers on the site.

There is a strong feeling of reciprocity between the partners of the network. Developing reciprocity informally in the absence of given rules is one of the most important collaboration issues (Gray, 1989). The automotive world is small. Integrity and transparency as a partner is a necessity: "We don't put each other for a fait accompli, if you observe something, you proactively take action for the partner of the network." An unusual combination of self-interest and care for the interests of the collaborative system speaks from this quote (Huxham, 1996).

In all interviews, two basic factors holding the parties together were frequently mentioned. The first is a common identity characteristic, which is often seen as a natural basis for network formation (Powell, 1990): "We are all HRM professionals eager to learn from each others practice." The second aspect is the recognition and acceptance of interdependency (Gray, 1989): "HRM issues are highly interwoven, we are in the same boat, if something goes wrong, within 90 minutes the line stops at VCG."

The above illustrates what Zucker (1986) has described as processes of institutionalisation of trust:

- a part of trust based on a record of respectful interactions in the past;
- a part of person-based trust based on some form of similarity (HRM profession); and
- a part of institution-based trust linked to formal mechanisms due to third parties (plant managers forum).

2.2.2 Leadership: the convener as stand-back facilitator and shared leadership

According to Browning *et al.* (1995), in order to create collaboration, leaders have to behave as members of a community with the superordinate goal of preserving the common industrial activity. Pro-activity as well as indirectness, i.e. inducing and stimulating others to play a prominent role, were observed to be equally important.

The HR manager of the VCG production line took the initiative to set up STVC-HRM. He was mandated formally by the plant managers forum to take up the leadership role of the network. However, in practice, leadership activities and behaviours are largely shared among the partners.

The VCG convenor makes personal contact to invite and introduce the network to potentially new members. When members repeatedly fail to attend, he inquires for difficulties and offers support. He often makes phone calls and visits to the sites of the member suppliers. He considers contact and information cues for added value that links the partners to the forum. The daily and interim contacts are unique for receiving information to which the HR managers (and even their plant managers) otherwise have no access.

Special attention is given by the convenor to turn incidents into learning material for the group. When in the dyadic contacts, he learns about difficulties related to personnel issues (e.g. turnover, recruitment, absenteeism) "I will try to convince my colleague to debate these events in the forum for the purpose of joint learning." By stimulating discussion on difficult, and often sensitive, topics he not only creates the conditions for joint learning but he also avoids that the group becomes collusive ("we know what is happening but we don't say anything about it") – leading to feelings of inauthenticity (Schruijer, 2008). Over time most participants gained trust in the partners, enough autonomy in their own organisation and enough personal confidence to present such issues in the forum. Chairing the periodical meetings is a part of the shared leading role. Formally, the chair coordinates the priorities of the partners, derives the annual theme, and finds a host place for the forum. He sets and updates the agenda for the meetings and introduces the theme and the speakers. Interestingly, in the interviews the role of the chair is described as "task oriented, but for at least 50 per cent stimulating and motivating" the members and their constituencies.

The above observations are in line with what Vansina (1999, p. 48) described as the essence of leading in multiparty collaboration:

> Helping to create and to maintain conditions for getting most out of the diversity of perceptions, competencies and resources, while enabling the different parties to realise their objectives.

The periodical meetings clearly allow observing the sharing of the leadership role. These meetings start with a coffee and some informal talk. The host mostly chairs the session, gives his contribution or introduces a speaker, guides an occasional visit to the operations of his site, facilitates the open-ended question session at the end, collects agenda points for the next session and finds a meeting place. After the forum meeting, the members are invited but free to join for a lunch somewhere around. When the forum has finished a more substantial work or project (e.g. annual wages and benefits overview) "we organise a social event in a leisure resort." This way they balance work and affection issues; a characteristic of mature groups (Mills, 1967).

The convener and the partners watch for a good balance between individual freedom and submission to collective authority (Mills, 1967). Personal choice and responsibility is highlighted. Contractual obligations are kept minimal; each party can determine its own effort and engagement, can draw its own conclusions from meetings and projects and can freely transform and apply what it has learned. Yet, the members conform to the needs of the group: chosen tasks are completed and worked through, issues are followed up, timings of meetings and projects are respected, new types of projects are started. This visibly shows that the task dimension to get valuable output is of absolute importance for the platform.

The VCG convener very much fulfils the "stand-back facilitator role" described by Vansina (1999, p. 48):

> Leading collaborative processes is not an up-front role but a kind of stand-back role in which one remains attentive to what is said in terms of the needs, anxieties and hindrances that stand in the way of collaboration.

2.2.3 Representative-constituency dynamics: shared relational responsibility

Representatives in collaboratives experience the "dual conflict" (Vansina *et al.*, 1998). On the one side they have to represent the interest of their constituency, and as such they can be in conflict with the other representatives, on the other hand they are closely watched by their constituency, and eventual concessions to other parties raise conflict with their own constituency. So they have an interpersonal problem to solve around the table, and to deal with an intergroup issue with their constituencies. The forum was able to overcome this "dual conflict".

STVC-HRM is composed of the current HR managers of the suppliers. Not the procedural aspects but rather the style

of working together became the instrument of managing the boundary between constituency and HRM forum. Drawing attention, inspiring, suggesting, persuading, avoiding to create obligatory situations, seem part of the mechanism to keep the responsibilities shared among the partners and to gain commitment for action on the basis of personal choice. Although the HR managers in the forum are representatives of their organisation, they act on the basis of personal initiative and choice. They approach each other to act as their own men, and the convenor plays an important role in that dynamic, being an example of relational contracting in his behaviour. The informal and personal way the convenor approaches the members of the network is recognised to be "crucial" in building commitment and willingness to take personal responsibility for action. The effect shows in intensive bilateral contacts, and almost full attendance of collective activities. The same style also applies to the forum members dealing with diversity in interests and constraints. Members are invited to take part, "there is never pressure and obligation", they have a real choice to participate in special projects, and their choice is respected by all.

The interviews reflect a shared responsibility (McNamee, 1998) for the HRM forum. The members actively stimulate contact, call upon their own or other plant managers to get initiatives or mandate for action, they demonstrate a real concern for the partners, they know how to handle the personal and company style differences in terms of tendencies to control, centralise, delegate, etc.

By inviting their coworkers and outsiders they keep the network open. This way ownership is extended into the network, which stimulates broader shared responsibility. The motto is that "the more dispersed the whole network becomes, the better for the community."

3. Lessons learned

This study shows how VCG and its suppliers succeed in managing their interdependencies on important HRM issues through a shared collaborative, called STVC-HRM. Building and sustaining deep assembler-suppliers relationships is underlined as the core of the Toyota system of collaboration and learning with suppliers. This paper provides insight in the activities and main success factors of STVC-HRM. The success factors are not "technical" but "relational" by nature, involving developing trust, common ground, leadership, shared responsibility, and representative-constituency dynamics.

Some very explicit lessons can be learned from the case. The VCG management experienced that the high levels of interdependency, and associated system vulnerability, could not be managed by formal contracts and procedures. In order to turn a mere transactional contract into a relational one, the VCG convenor intervenes by inviting, addressing, encouraging, stimulating; but never ordering or imposing what to do, but always focusing on the task of attending individual partner interests while realising the common goal. What seems to be important is that the convenor accomplishes that STVC-HRM members work on largely self-constructed tasks and keep the responsibility shared in order to realise one's own and joint interests/aims.

A power position is not striven for. The way that the convenor relates to the partners makes it possible that leadership activities become largely shared among the partners. They themselves co-create the fruitful conditions that they experience and talk about so enthusiastically in the interviews.

The convener focuses on the system-level of the network. He induces the partners to do the same by going beyond the operational level by focusing on general HRM themes, developing aspects of a shared HRM policy and stimulating joint learning as the main priority of the network.

Probably the most important lesson has to do with the "asymmetric giving – reciprocity dynamic" that we observed. "Asymmetric giving" (Browning *et al.*, 1995) by VCG seems to function as a trigger to get the relationship going, in that it stimulates the partners to engage in reciprocal behaviour and develop trust through initiative and authentic engagement. Each partner contributes to the task at hand, leading to strong feelings of interdependency, shared fate and joint outcomes.

Given the above, future supply chain management research may consider studying the actual assembler-suppliers relationships and practices in terms of relational collaboration processes going on. At the same time, this paper informs other organisations that wish to develop fruitful assembler-suppliers relationships in their supply chain by showing the main collaboration issues at hand.

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CHAPTER 6

LEARNING TO HELP THROUGH HUMBLE INQUIRY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND EDUCATION: AN INTERVIEW WITH EDGAR H. SCHEIN

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Learning to Help Through Humble Inquiry and Implications for Management Research, Practice, and Education: An Interview With Edgar H. Schein

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For more than 50 years, Edgar H. Schein, the Sloan Fellows Professor of Management Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management, has creatively shaped management and organizational scholarship and practice. He is the author of 15 books, including* Process Consultation Revisited, Organizational Culture and Leadership, Career Anchors, Organizational Psychology, Career Dynamics, *and* Helping, *as well as numerous articles in academic and professional journals. Novelty, clarity, and relevance have always been the guiding principles of his work. In this interview, Schein moves on from his key formative learning experiences to focusing on humble inquiry as the key to building and maintaining the helping relationship. Comprised of both a helper's attitude and behavior, humble inquiry embodies "accessing one's ignorance" and becoming open to what the helper and the helped may learn from each other through observation, genuine empathic questioning, careful listening, and suspension of judgment. Schein not only identifies several challenges within management research, practice, and education, but also offers provocative recommendations to those involved.

INTRODUCTION

We interviewed Edgar H. Schein at the Academy of Management Meeting 2009 in Chicago, Illinois. The occasion of the interview was his receiving the Academy's Lifetime Achievement Award for Scholar–Practitioner, the publication of his latest book *Helping* (Schein, 2009a), which synthesizes the process consultation approach (Schein, 1969), and the publication of a Special Issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* celebrating both his 80th birthday and his 50 years of contributing to the field (Coghlan & Shani, 2009).

Our primary focus is to learn from Schein's main contributions to organizational scholarship and practice in order to become better scholar–practi-

We would like to thank Edgar Schein for the interview and the close collaboration in making the revisions leading to this article. We also would like to thank *AMLE* Associate Editor Professor Myrtle Bell for encouraging us to interview Edgar Schein with a focus on management learning and education. We thank the three anonymous reviewers for their comments and assistance in developing this manuscript. We especially acknowledge Professor Felix Corthouts for his continuous support.

tioners, whose essential task is to generate new knowledge and to help human systems to improve (Schein, 2009b). In Schein's vision, these scholar–practitioners know how to collaborate with practitioners in a joint inquiry and learning process aiming at formulating joint problem definitions and developing new and meaningful knowledge to the benefit of *both* academic and practitioner communities (see also Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Coghlan & Shani, 2009).

Schein's central focus has always been to help client systems improve themselves by taking a clinical inquiry stance. By focusing on the needs of the *client* (instead of the needs of the *researcher*) and by participating in the client's issues and inquiry process as a helper or partner (Schein, 1995), he has been able to develop actionable knowledge that is having a high impact on both practice and academia (Coutu, 2002; Schein, 2006; Quick & Gavin, 2000). In his recent book *Helping* (Schein, 2009a), Schein introduces the notion of "humble inquiry" as the key process activity in building and maintaining the helping relationship. *Humble inquiry*, which encompasses both an attitude and a behavior of the helper, embodies "accessing your ignorance" and becoming open to what may be learned from each other in the actual situation through observing, genuine open empathic questioning, careful listening, self-inquiry, not judging but suspending judgment, and shifting helping roles as necessary (Schein, 1996, 1999, 2009a).

Based on his broad experience as a researcher, consultant, and teacher, Schein offers concrete ideas on what could be new in management research, practice, and education. The epilogue further draws out the implications for our field, and positions Schein's words in the current debate among scholars on the crisis and future viability of management research and education (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Detrick, 2002; Mintzberg, 2005; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, 2004; Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004, 2009; Starkey & Tempest, 2009).

Key Learning Moments: Experiences of *Real* Help

To begin, we would like to hear about your personal learning history. What are the key learning experiences that led up to your current view on helping?

The critical learning experience about helping was when I was invited by Doug McGregor, in 1957, to go to Bethel to experience the T-group and learn about the group dynamics workshops going on there. I had come from a very traditional PhD program with experimental psychologists who were working in a laboratory setting. Soon after my arrival at MIT, which was a more applied area, McGregor sensed that maybe there was a need for me to learn some new things about what *really* went on in groups. So he "invited" me to go to a T-group and learn what that was all about. It was a totally new and a very powerful experience for me that forever changed my view of the management field. Instead of the leader of the group laying out the learning goals, the trainer of the group said: "We are here to learn together" and then kept silent. Not only was this a new experience for me but it forced me to examine the question, "Are there other ways of doing things than what I had been used to?" As I observed more and more of the group struggling and learning, I saw that what the trainer was really doing was a kind of facilitation, helping, stimulating but *never* telling—always asking, observing, encouraging. So this idea of a leader as a helper rather than as a director goes way back to those 1957 T-groups and learning how the group trainer in the T-group worked. I became very involved with National Training Laboratories (NTL), and began to run T-groups in the various NTL management programs (Schein & Bennis, 1965). It was then that I began to learn something about managers, management, and management education.

Later, when I learned how to be a consultant, the same issue came up: I would first try to give advice and found that it didn't work very well. It really worked better if I acted more like the T-group trainer, observing what was going on and then encouraging people to talk about their own observations. I happened to have clients, particularly Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), who were very, very self-determined people. The last thing they wanted was advice. They wanted help, and so I had to learn how to be helpful in that context.

When I was first invited to work with Digital in 1965, my explicit mandate was "to help the top management team, called the operations committee, improve their communication and to make them more effective as a team." Kenneth Olsen, cofounder of DEC in 1957, invited me just to sit with the group and help them in whatever way I could. He was a very interesting client because most clients wouldn't just invite you in to join the group and just see what you can do.

What I observed was very unruly behavior. The managers constantly interrupted each other; there was high emotionality in that they often shouted at each other; there was a lot of mutual blaming going on; "negative" information about each other

was shared; and other ineffective interpersonal behavior went on. You will recognize this story because I tell about it in almost all of my books and some articles (e.g., Schein, 1990, 2003). To get back to my story, I tried to make them into a better group by my mental model of what an effective group should be. People shouldn't interrupt each other; they should listen to each other and so on. And every time I tried to point out that "When you interrupt somebody, you cut off information" they would say "Oh, we are so sorry, we understand you, you are absolutely right" but . . . nothing changed. They would apologize, and then continue to do exactly what they were doing until I finally kind of gave up and asked myself "Why don't they change?" They seemed to recognize that "this is not the best way to be" but they still continued to do it.

What I observed was very unruly behavior.—Schein

So I began to take a more *humble inquiry* approach and realized that they were young, academic, passionate, electrical engineers fighting for the future of their company. I began to understand that it was the passion and the energy and the academic background that made them interact like they did. Professors interrupt each other all the time; it is part of the academic game to fight for your ideas. I realized that "as long as they are so passionate, they are not going to pay attention to some simple rule that I might impose on them."

I also noticed that their real problem was that they never got their information very well documented and shared. Somebody would start an idea and get interrupted. So, one day, I decided just to go up to the flip chart and if someone started an idea, I would start to write it down. If another member interrupted the person giving the idea, instead of saying, "you have interrupted; you have cut off information" with my new insight, I would say "I didn't get your whole idea here, could you give me the rest of it." That, of course, stopped the process because I was at the board, I was writing things down, and it was in their interest. Pretty soon they were using the ideas on the board, saying, "yes, we want to do more of this, less of that, and so on." Ideas got elaborated. And at the end of those kinds of meetings they would say, "You know Ed, now you were *really* helping."

[T]heir real problem was that they never got their information very well documented and shared. Somebody would start an idea and get interrupted.—Schein

What was the difference? The difference was that I was finally getting into what the *client* wanted. I couldn't be helpful until I gave up my own notion of what the management team as a group should be according to my own assumptions. Only when I began to focus on what the group was actually trying to do, could I be helpful. I began to intervene in the "real process" of the group, that is, its *task process* of creating a future for their company. They didn't want to be a good group; they wanted to make good decisions. So until I got into their world by observing what they were trying to do, I did not really understand *how to help*. That was a huge lesson to me—you have to figure out what the client really wants to do instead of assuming that you see something wrong and have to fix it. What I see traditional consultants do is that they hear what the client *says* is wrong and then immediately put all their diagnostic machinery into motion. But I realized that taking that first presentation of the problem may not be what the client really needs or wants. First, you have to engage in a certain amount of humble inquiry to make sure that you end up working on the right problem. Every therapist knows this. The client comes in with some statement of his or her problem but after a few hours you discover that the problem is something entirely different.

So the origins of helping were many. Another influence was the concept of experiential learning that became popular. At MIT, we had the first book written on organizational psychology that took an experiential learning approach to management teaching (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1971). This book was a set of experiential learning exercises that student groups could administer to themselves. But until I wrote this current book on helping (Schein, 2009a), we took the word "helping" for granted as if we understood exactly what helping is. But if some person said, "What exactly do you mean by being helpful?" you couldn't find good definitions anywhere in print. We assume that everybody knows what helping means and we often confuse efforts to be helpful with actual help delivered. Of course, when you deconstruct "helping," it is really a very complicated concept, hence, a whole book about it.

THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF HUMBLE INQUIRY: MULTICULTURAL GROUPS AND DIALOGUE

The core working mechanism you mention is humble inquiry. What really works in humble inquiry? What is its essence?

The essence of it is to create a situation, a relationship, where the other person will trust you enough to tell you what is really on his or her mind. In simple situations that may not be a problem. When somebody asks you for directions, you don't necessarily have to worry about that. But the example I use in the book on helping (Schein, 2009a) is very meaningful because even when somebody asks you for directions you have *a choice of how to help*. Outside my house one day, a woman pulled up and asked how to get to Massachusetts Avenue. When I asked her where she was trying to go she said, "I'm trying to go to Boston," and she was in effect already on the road to Boston. I could have sent her in the wrong direction if I had literally answered her question. When someone, a friend, asks you for some advice, what should you do? Humble inquiry would initially be a moment or two of silence. Maybe he has something more to say. And if silence does not produce anything, you could say, "Tell me a little more," "What is going on?" "What is prompting you to ask this right now?" Only when you feel the person has finally laid out what is really bothering him can you try to proceed. I use the example of kids coming to their parents with specific questions like "can you help me with my homework?" Often, they really want to talk about something else, but they don't know how to ask except through some specific, concrete question. Humble inquiry gives them a chance to tell what may really be on their minds.

Since the sixties you have been a pioneer in conceptualizing change as being constructed in the interaction (Schein, 1961). Reality is not just a given but is constructed in the interaction between people. Change is a reconstruction, a redefinition or a reframing. Symbolic interactionism was a major inspiration for this idea. We were wondering how you would look upon this idea now.

Symbolic interactionism is, right now, my main interest. I want to bring Erving Goffman back into people's thinking (Goffman, 1967). This is of the highest importance because I now realize that if the world goes global, as it is going to, we are going to have more and more groups and organizations that are multicultural. Each culture has its own rules of interaction; its own social order. Different cultures have different rules about the appropriate way to interact with each other and with authority figures. So when multicultural groups get together, the big question is "*how will they find a modus operandi?*"

First of all, we need to show managers that culture operates through the day-to-day rules of interaction; through face work; through all the ideas that Erving Goffman talks about. From the field of group dynamics, we know that those rules are different across cultures in two critical areas. That is, specifically, in the management of *authority* and in the management of *intimacy*. The rules of how to behave up and down are very different across cultures. Hofstede (1980) might call this "power distance" but power distance is just an abstraction. What I really think is important, inspired by Erving Goffman, are the rules of *deference* and *demeanor*. How should the boss present himself—proper look, proper dress, uniform, bearing—and how should the subordinate be properly deferent—eye contact or no eye contact, interrupting the boss is okay or is not done, orders are to be obeyed or challenged if they seem wrong, and so on. These rules are obviously very different in different cultures.

What might be a powerful approach when a multicultural team is supposed to get to work is to start with a *dialogue* format in a *cultural island* setting. Sitting around the "campfire," each person just tells to the campfire, "In my world, if I disagree with the boss, this is the kind of thing I do." As a leader you then say, "Leave it there, and now, the next person, tell what you do." As they each tell their stories, they will begin to have some level of mutual understanding. "You know, I never tell my boss anything and this guy, he tells his boss everything; we clearly have a different outlook on things." That's the kind of information they need to have in order to identify how they might begin to work together. Then, the second question would be "How do you know when you can really trust somebody?", "What do you mean by a good intimate relationship?" Again have everybody talk in order to the campfire and slowly build up mutual understanding around those questions. What is original about this is to say, "Don't discuss your culture generally, don't try to cover everything, just focus on a couple of things that are most likely to be very important in getting any work done." Authority—cross-status communication—and intimacy—building trusting relationships—always surfaced in the group dynamics movement as the two critical issues that every group has to solve. I assume that these will be the biggest problems in a multicultural group.

I have only begun to write about that but that's the direction I'd like to go; to focus on "What is a cultural island? How do we manage the dialogue process? Will we need more and more cultural islands?" And so on. If a surgical team has to get to work and have the doctor, the nurse, and the anesthesiologist really become a team, the only way they can do that is to go off into a cultural island, go through some team training and team work, and then come back and do the job. I doubt that they can do it "on the job" because the culture of nursing and the culture of the doctors is so different. So when I say "multicultural," I don't just mean different in nationality, I mean different in occupation, function, expertise, any area.

"TALKING TO THE CAMPFIRE": SUSPENSION IS THE KEY

You stress "talking to the campfire." What is the working principle behind that? When we compare it with the T-group, where feedback is always very personal and directed, we see a difference. Is "talking to the campfire" related to a kind of mechanism that makes mutual understanding and reframing possible?

In an article that I wrote for *Organizational Dynamics* (Schein, 1993b), I tried to compare the T-group with dialogue. The T-group focused on how to deal with the emotions of self-presentation, and therefore, how to give and receive "feedback." Dialogue, especially how William Isaacs structures it (Isaacs, 1993), is not about emotions and feedback. It is essentially about the *thought* process of a group. If I'm to really understand your thought process, I need to develop a different listening style and I need to get acquainted with my own filters. That's difficult to do even now in this conversation. If I really focus on you, I get preoccupied with all sorts of other things besides what you actually said. So the power of dialogue is that, by "talking to the campfire," I not only abstract myself, but I'm also not trying to impress you. I am really trying just to get my thought out and lay it out there. If I do it that way and don't maintain eye contact, maybe you have a better chance of hearing what I am actually saying because I'm not directing it at anyone. When I'm finished, I hand you the "talking stick" and say "it is your turn." Then I just go into a listening mode. I may close my eyes, I don't have to look at you because you're not looking at me: You are looking at the "campfire."

So I found the dialogue method profoundly different from the T-groups. It is a totally different process: It is oriented toward thought, toward listening, toward building a collective consciousness. The T-group was really working on interpersonal dynamics, feedback, and emotions. The two are almost not overlapping in my mind. For purposes of *building a multicultural unit, you need dialogue*; you do not need T-groups. In fact, T-groups would be horrible because the kind of feedback that might be appropriate in one culture would be totally offensive in another.

That's true. For example, if you give feedback in the Japanese culture, the receiver loses a lot of face.

Exactly, so it has got to be the dialogue style. This style makes the process *culturally neutral* and allows different thoughts to merge slowly. You have the challenge now with your students. You have a group of students who come from different countries. What's the right way to get them going? They all speak a little bit of English, so you have to assume that there is at least a minimum of some language. The best way to get them going is to give them a task of the sort that I just described. Sit in a circle, pretend there is a campfire there, and talk about how each of you relate to your bosses. Maybe even more concretely, say, "What happens if you see the boss doing something that is wrong, that is going to hurt the project, what do you do?" They go in order of each person telling about it. When you are completely finished, then maybe they talk to each other about it. But use that as a breaking-in device. What do you think about that? Could that work or could there be a better way?

It could work. The idea of the campfire is intriguing. When people sit around the campfire, like the Boy Scouts do, a kind of neutral transition zone is created. Everything is possible over there as long as it is going on and things can be done in a sequence. What exactly makes this method so strong?

The key working mechanism is not to worry about eye contact, a specific relationship. Our whole human resources idea in the West has distorted the relational process and acted as if the way we do it is the only way. And yet, think of all the cultures in which looking at the boss is disrespectful. "You must not look the boss in the eye, you must keep your head down," be deferent. So where do we get the idea that the best relationship is the one where I really look at you and say we are going to talk face-to-face intimately? These theories would say "that's the only good way to communicate. Pay attention to body language, look how he is sitting, is he mentally conflicted or not, etc." *That is all*

nonsense in a cross-cultural context. It may be very relevant in some very specific situation, but if you're dealing cross-culturally, I think *we have to find a much more neutral way to converse*. The campfire dialogue setting creates the cultural island even if it is done at the place of work. Have you ever been in a dialogue group where somebody set it up under those rules?

Not exactly in that format but we have been working with multiactor stakeholder projects where groups of actors with very different perspectives meet. There the rule is also that people speak up but don't respond to each other directly. They just take what the other actor is saying for a given and try to understand what is being said.

That's the core rule of dialogue. To add the campfire as a metaphor just makes it a little easier to do that. *The key is to suspend instead of respond*. If you say something and I violently disagree with it, I have to make a choice. Do I blurt out my disagreement or do I suspend it and say to myself: "Why do I think so differently from what he just said?", "What's going on in me that makes me feel so differently?" That begins then to build what Isaacs (Isaacs, 1993) would call "group consciousness" rather than a debate about which of us is right. Suspension is a central idea in dialogue. Let everybody's thoughts just sit there. Don't debate it, don't argue with it. Add your own thoughts; maybe your own thoughts are different. It goes way back to older cultures where the tribal councils worked that way. The elders sat around the campfire, and they each spoke their opinion. They never argued with each other, they just kept speaking, and pretty soon it was clear where they agreed and where they didn't agree. The senior person then could say, "Well, this is what we have decided." But it was merely decided by just laying opinions and ideas out there without discussion, debate, or disagreement.

Is the dialogue method that you are describing also related to the organizational learning approach of Chris Argyris with, at its core, the idea of making assumptions explicit (e.g., Argyris, 1985)?

Argyris makes the assumption that we can and will state our unconscious assumptions. However, if you believe in Goffman (1967) and symbolic interactionism, you realize that the reason I withhold these assumptions is very profound. It is not just a mechanical problem. It is a problem that if I really, really told you what I think, I might be disrupting the social order. So Argyris' "left-hand right-hand column" helps people to look at the consequences of how what they say and what they think leads to faulty communication. This is very valuable but to get people to confront some of what they think and actually to make it explicit requires the elaborate kinds of training that Argyris requires of his clients. Chris is always fighting an uphill battle. He wants things to be more explicit, but often this goes against the rule-driven nature of communication. Once a group has learned to do what Chris suggests, it is very effective, but it is a lot of upfront investment to get to that point.

You are saying that not everything can be made explicit. Open communication as such is not the absolute truth. Communication is always contextual and relational?

Exactly, and very much rule-driven in a culture. Every culture has its own rules about what you can be open about and in what setting this is allowed. For example, the Japanese have the rule that when you go out and get drunk together you can be more open. I asked a colleague of mine, who really understands Japan, "Can you pretend to be drunk if you have an alcohol problem or allergy?" She said, "No, you can't pretend, people would realize that you are sober and then it would have a different meaning." She was arguing that if you can't drink, you can't do certain kinds of jobs in Japanese organizations; that actually getting drunk is essential for some kinds of work.

LEADERSHIP AS ACTS OF HUMILITY

You have been speaking of dialogue and being reflective in a cultural island in order to learn from each other. The problem often stated is this: "How can you bring what is learned to the daily work context?" Don't you think this transfer problem is an important pitfall? People say things such as, "Well, there I can talk to the campfire but the next day when I'm back in the routines, I behave totally differently or I haven't got the space to do that again."

You are assuming the T-group mentality. You're assuming that the interpersonal openness is the issue, and it may very well be that what goes on in that cultural island has nothing to do with that. It has to do with trying to understand each other's culture a little better so that we can work together. It's like when the military does these after-action reviews where they say, "Well, let's have everybody tell what they did and what worked and what didn't." It's very task-focused. It's not "how I feel about you" but it's "how we did what."

Do you know the author Amy Edmondson? She

has written a lot about surgical teams. She has one article that was in *Administrative Science Quarterly* that is very important (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001). She compares eight hospitals that successfully adopted a very new sophisticated open-heart procedure and eight other hospitals that tried it and abandoned it. She got curious: Why did some hospitals use it and others abandon it? She found that in the hospitals that continue to use it, the senior surgeon had said, "This is going to be complicated; the key nurse, anesthesiologist, perfusionist and I are going to have to go off and train together." So they went off for 3–4 days and practiced this new technique. In that process they established signals and communication. The surgeon said, "Look, if I am doing this, you have got to tell me this and this." In the other group of hospitals that never adopted the new procedure, the senior surgeon said, "This is a matter of professionalism; we are going to go in and put the best key nurse, the best anesthesiologist, the best perfusionist in." They also went to the training program on the technique but apparently were not mindful of the need to learn to work together as a team. For them the new procedure did not work. They kept failing. So they said, "This procedure is too complicated." But what they hadn't done is gone off to a cultural island to establish communication channels and ways of working that would enable them to quickly communicate under the crisis of the actual operation.

It had nothing to do with T-groups or feedback. So, when I say *cultural island*, I'm saying more task-related culturally oriented communication and building new norms of dealing with authority and trust. Such norms can be brought back to the workplace. "The doctor has a new relationship with this nurse now." That will carry over, not only into that operation, but maybe into other tasks as well. Because now, "even if I'm the doctor and she is the nurse, we now have learned how to communicate with each other without there being a status problem." And the nurse may feel confident enough that if the doctor is doing something wrong, she will speak up. Whereas in these other groups that never became mindful of the need for new communication norms, the nurse would still be scared, would keep silent, and would let the doctor make the mistake. These surgical teams illustrate the issue of what has to be new in management education, particularly for potential leaders, like leaders of surgical teams. I think during the training period, somewhere they have *to learn how to be temporarily humble in the interest of building relationships with the people on whom they are dependent*.

How can we do that? How can we educate people, particularly leaders or future leaders, how to be temporarily humble?

It is going to be very tricky because, as Goffman would tell you, the whole point of being a leader is that you now "know everything." Leaders are supposed to know what to do, so people below the leader are going to defer to him or her—let them be the deciders even if they don't know enough to make good decisions. But in a world where leaders do not know everything, where the subordinates are highly skilled technicians, how are we going to get leaders to admit that they don't know everything and actually ask for help? What is it about these cardiac surgeons that made them say, "Oh, oh. This is going to be difficult, I'd better join this group and we'd better train together." What an *act of humility* by the doctors to go off and train with these others who are below them in status. If we don't train leaders to accept help and ask for it, organizations are going to have trouble because the reality is that the subordinates will be from different cultures, have different occupations, are much more expert. In that situation, the leader will have to accept that "I may be the coordinator and the facilitator but I'm not the decision maker."

The leader has to learn to accept and manage a high level of interdependence?

That's right and you, the researcher–educators, have to begin to insert this mentality into the students early so that they don't say, "OK, I'm a student now, so now I have to be humble but when I get to be the boss then I can tell everybody what to do."

How you train leaders in humble inquiry is the 64-dollar question. I don't know how to do that but I think it is going to be essential. Maybe you start out by giving them helping theory (Schein, 2009a) and get them thinking in terms of *nonhierarchical helping relationships* so that they get trained in humble inquiry in normal day-to-day situations with spouses, friends, and children. I think the most important idea I want to push in the next years is this idea of the leader having the insight and the skill to create cultural islands for themselves and their subordinates. The idea of "on-the-job" training will not work in a multicultural context. People have very different experiences and live in different social orders so they will not be able on-line to suddenly blend with each other. But cultural islands may not be very long, it may be only an hour, it may be several days, but the key is temporary *dialogue and suspension* of the normal

cultural rules, so that we can begin to see how each other really thinks.

MANAGEMENT LEARNING AND EDUCATION IN 2020: A "HAPPY" FUTURE?

Now that you've made the shift to the future and have talked about training/education and what needs to happen, another question emerges. Take a moment to imagine the field of management learning and education in 2020. It embodies all that you really mean by "helping." You already mentioned the importance of managers learning to work in cultural islands, to set up dialogues, to be humble inquirers. What would the field look like? How is research and teaching done? How are PhD students trained?

Training programs will have to build in some kind of *internship at every level*, undergraduate or graduate, that puts students for a time into a helping situation where they are out there to give help. That is very important. The mistake we make in management learning and education is that we send people out into organizations to do research. We say "gain entry and gather data." But from the organization's point of view that is a waste. They don't really get anything out of it. We promise them feedback but we rarely *really* help them.

Students as future leaders will have to learn to say to a company: "I am in this university program and I'd like to spend 6 months in your organization doing whatever you think needs doing." Let them have the experience of even finding their own organizations and begging for a job. If the faculty provides all the organizations as research sites and says, "this student goes here, this student goes there," the students are not learning how to be humble. But to say, "Every student must find during their 2-year program an organization to which they apply for 6 months or a year of work trying to be helpful to that organization," or some version of that, then they have a chance to learn humility. During this internship students can do field notes, write a journal, document what that it felt like, and use that material for an important paper on *learning how to help*. Then they will be better researchers because they will know how to interact with an organization to create the climate for producing high-quality data that isn't just check marks on a survey instrument.

We see that PhD students are experiencing more and more time pressure because they have to do their PhDs in a limited time span. When we read your book on helping, we notice that engaging in helping, and learning from this experience, is a process that needs a lot of time. But we couldn't help thinking, "Universities usually don't give a PhD student enough time to actually go into an organization for, say, 6 months." Maybe you have some advice for PhD students about how to deal with this time pressure and increasing pressure to write articles?

A PhD student in that situation hasn't got much choice. If you really want that PhD degree and the faculty says, "You have to do it in this way," you only have the choice to do what they say or go to some other university. I don't think there is some magic way of creating time in a situation that does not allow it. It is a tough choice, you know, "Do you really want the degree enough to play by the rules of the institution?" My advice then would be "Get through it as fast as you can and then, afterward, do what you feel is more appropriate."

If you look at who is running all these doctoral consortia that have been going on here (Academy of Management Meeting 2009), it is mostly the tenured professors who are telling the students, "If you want to get your doctorate, better do this and this." I'm fortunate that I am through that. I had to go through it as well. Publish and get things done. I was fortunate because Harvard Social Relations did have a required 1-year internship. *The trend in many universities and business schools isn't necessarily a very happy one.* Many of the business schools I have talked to lately are all going toward more traditional academic research with a strong quantitative orientation with little emphasis on learning how to be helpful.

We can rebel, protest?

You can do what I do and just criticize it from the outside and say, "Look, clinical real-life research is more important, all students should have an internship," or work in shorter experiences that have a similar broadening effect. We used to do an exercise, "The Empathy Walk," (Schein, 1996) that went like this. You have a group of say 20 students. You give them the following instructions. "As part of your homework next week you are going to pair up, preferably with someone you do not already know. Your first task will be to get acquainted with each other sufficiently to decide on what kind of person is most different from the two of you concerning occupation, social structure, status, nationality, and so on. Once the two of you have figured that out, find such a person, and interview them about their world. Next week in class we will have each pair report on whom they picked, how they established contact, and what they learned from their get-together." People at first throw in all kinds of examples to see whether or not you ap-

prove, and I just say, "I have given you all the instructions." Then they get creative and begin to think of beggars, street musicians, a famous actor, a union leader, and so on. They know what you mean: someone who is "very different." They have a week to do this exercise. When you say "you really have to do this" people at first want help, but if you don't give them any help, they figure it out themselves and people go to Trappist monks, prisons to find a prisoner, and so on.

They always come up with something interesting. They bring back incredible stories and often find out that the person "wasn't as different as we thought." "Their life was different but they have the same dreams and aspirations." More important from a cultural training point of view is that they sometimes discover that the difference between the two was greater than between them and the other person. The exercise forces them to confront the rules of the social order—how to make contact with someone from another culture and establish a relationship. The ability to empathize, learning to see and experience the world through someone else's eyes and to establish relationships across boundaries, is a crucial ability for everyone in a leading function. As our world is becoming more global every day, this ability will become even more important in the future. Leaders will have to develop the ability to handle diversity constructively. The hardest part is usually to actually make contact with that other person. Say they pick a street musician. "How are we going to actually break the ice and start talking to this person?" Why should that be so difficult? It is because of the social order, the status rules; you do not have a prior connection. So they invent things such as, "If it is a poor person let's offer to take him out for a meal."

One of the most dramatic cases was when a pair wanted to contact a young AIDS patient. This pair was scared to death because they were really afraid they were going to catch AIDS. They actually found this young man, got together with him, and were profoundly influenced by the fact that he was desperately scared of catching something from them because that's the real danger. He was the one with AIDS, his immune system was very vulnerable, he was in much more jeopardy from talking to them than they were from him. That was an enormous insight for them.

The Empathy Walk is an exercise that doesn't take a lot of time but produces a profound interpersonal experience. If you make people *cross the social status lines in an inquiry mode,* they can have very enlightening experiences. It is also an illustration of the use of creativity to get at some things. We may not do enough of that in our education efforts. We need to invent new ways of giving people learning experiences without having the time for a whole internship. Change the process if not the timetable.

Do you see other important influences that will change management education and learning?

The bigger question is what will things look like in the future? I think we all have to watch with interest and not make any assumptions about it. The biggest influence will probably be information technology. Even right now, how many organizations are totally geographically decentralized? People have no offices and sometimes never meet. Relationships will be on the Internet, not face-to-face. I have no idea where this is going to go, nobody does probably. Maybe the kids do. I look at my grandchildren: teenagers. They may have a more accurate vision of the future. Maybe we should ask them instead of second guess it. Even this idea that the 14-year-old has her 25 people on Facebook, and does she go out on a date? No, she interacts with these 25 people. That is her relational set. Does she want anyone of them especially? No, she communicates with *all of them*.

That's a totally different set of rules. Maybe organizations will be like that. There won't be colocated teams, jobs will migrate into something that can be done on the Internet, and people will collaborate across continents. Education may change that way. We now already have a lot of distance education. I do a Global Classroom in which I lecture to and interact with over 400 people all over the world. I could have a group of students who will be networked for the next 6 months, working on a joint project, writing each other about how they relate to authority. Focused readings could simply be sent as e-mail attachments. You are *constructing educational events* from which you think they will benefit. You might even, at the end of the course, give them a degree without ever having seen them because you will have tested them through your interactions on the Internet.

Where is the experiential learning in this story, experiential learning that needs a lot of "touch"?

They are having different kinds of experiences, but it is not face-to-face. Why do we think that face-to-face experience is sacred? I have an example of one of my grandchildren about how the language itself is adapting. He is the middle brother of three. The rest of the family went to Hawaii on holiday. He is in college, so he couldn't go. They are all big athletes, and they all surf. The younger brother had a very good ride on a wave, and they took a

really good picture that shows Oliver on this wave, a beautiful photograph. This was sent to everybody, also to Peter who was in college. What comes back from Peter is the following message that all of us got: "that was sooooooooo unfair." He got it all across in one short line by stretching the word. You immediately understand what he feels and you are laughing. Who is to say that we are not going to develop a whole emotional language with these tools? Stretching words, sending pictures, and so on.

Embrace what is going to come?

Yes. And the best way to relate to my grandchildren is just watch them. If I get upset about what they are doing because they are spending too much time on television or their computer screens, that is stupid. It is *their world*. It is a different world from my world. We complain that they are superficial. By doing all this multitasking, they are not getting into anything deeply enough. Maybe true but so what? Why put a judgment on it? They may live in a world where depth is not important but where the ability to multiprocess is much more important. They can do things that I can't do. They can simultaneously text, listen, and watch, and that is what they are mostly doing in the classroom, too.

You are considered the father of organizational psychology. We are concerned about the future of organizational psychology. We see organizational psychology becoming very "poor," that is to say, moving back to experimental social psychology or being very instrumental and functional. Is there still a future for the experiential learning, group dynamic, processual approach?

It is *essential* and will catch on more and more. *If anything is going to die or will become irrelevant it will be traditional ivory tower academia.*

That's a statement, that's a very strong statement.

The human fields require a tight linkage between theory and practice. Good theory is not enough. Even in the very esoteric fields like finance, it is the tools, the applications, the financial mechanisms that the world has learned to use. And, as I have argued in the clinical approach, unless scholars have relevant experiences with real organizations, they cannot develop good theory. And out of good theory then comes good practice. The future is in practice. We, therefore, need much more respect for *theories of practice* in the social human field. What physics, math, and others do, that's another matter. In the human field, abstract theories aren't very useful unless they are based on and linked with experience.

The human fields require a tight linkage between theory and practice. Good theory is not enough . . . . abstract theories aren't very useful unless they are based on and linked with experience. —Schein

CORE CONTRIBUTION: IT IS EVOLVING

You have been working in a broad field. If you look back on all your contributions, what do you consider the most important, the one that you are most attached to from the work with the war veterans (Schein, Schneider, & Barker, 1961) to the work on helping (Schein, 2009a) you are doing now?

It is *evolving*. I don't think I have a single thing that I consider to be the most important. Each area seemed to lead to other areas. What is important varies with the audience. For example, I was asked to meet with a group of hospital administrators who were trying to improve health care. My consultant friends who were working with this group invited me in because they thought it was very important for the doctors to learn about culture and subcultures. All my experience with the health care system suggested that they really needed to understand culture better. So, on this particular Sunday afternoon, I gave them all the ideas about culture and it was all going very well. Then somehow an issue came up about "*All* doctors are like such and so, *all* doctors want autonomy, and so on." So I said just off the cuff "I have done some other research on careers that suggests to me that in fact maybe different doctors want different things." They looked a little bit puzzled. I explained a little bit on career anchors and made clear that some people want to be managers and some people want to be the world's best surgeon. The energy in the group shot up because suddenly they were being told something that was *brand new to them*. Culture, "Yes, interesting," but they knew about culture. But the idea that different doctors are in their field for different reasons simply hadn't occurred to them. And that there was research on this was a revelation *for them*. So we ended up having a very productive couple of hours on career anchors, totally unanticipated.

So I could say, "That's the most important thing I have done, the career anchors . . . for doctors." But maybe for some other population, it is something else. The human resources people might consider

the career anchors relatively routine. They might be more interested in some other aspect of what I have written about. I've learned that *what is interesting to people is what they do not know about*. So what's the most important thing to me? It doesn't resolve. Certainly the book on helping (Schein, 2009a) focuses a lot of it. I think I've always been obsessed with the relationship between the individual and the system, the individual and the organization. You can say that the career anchors idea is all about the individual, culture is really all about the organization, and process consultation and helping are about the relationship. So the contribution is the total package rather than one element of it.

Thank you very much for this interview. It was a wonderful experience. Did you enjoy it?

It was fun to do. I hope it will be useful and others can learn from it as well.

EPILOGUE

The main purpose of the interview was to learn from Schein's contributions to organizational scholarship and practice in order to become better scholar–practitioners. According to Schein, becoming a good scholar–practitioner comes down to developing process expertise in building and maintaining the helping relationship by engaging in "humble inquiry" as the situation demands. Although Schein has laid the groundwork and paved the way, helping is a very complicated social process (Schein, 2009a) that must be examined more closely in order to understand its profound implications on management research, practice, and education.

Helping and Humble Inquiry

From a temporal perspective, every helping relationship between a client and a helper-to-be is initially in a state of imbalance and ambiguity. Emotionally and socially, when clients ask for help they are putting themselves "one down." This makes them temporarily vulnerable because they are taking on a dependent role vis-à-vis the helper. Asking for help implies a temporary loss of status, face, control, and independence in the acknowledgment of not knowing what to do next or of being unable to do it. In all cultures in which growing up to adulthood means becoming increasingly independent, this feeling of losing independence is particularly strong. At the same time, the helper is "one up" having been given power, status, and value by the client, which also provides the helper an opportunity to take advantage of this position (see Schein, 2009a: 40).

Together with this imbalance, the initial relationship is characterized by ambiguity and tension because there is a great deal of ignorance about each other's internal worlds. Neither the helper nor the client initially knows what to expect or how to enact the relationship (Schein, 2009a: 35). At this stage, the helper's role is to create a conversation that will permit both the client and the helper to reduce their ignorance and establish equilibrium in their relationship. For the helper, this means engaging in humble inquiry. How this process plays out will depend very much on the actual situation, as is illustrated in the interview, the endeavor, however, is always to establish a working interpersonal relationship. The intention is to balance the status, build trust, and obtain crucial information that enables the helper to figure out what to do next. The helper has the choice to stay in the process consultation role doing humble inquiry or to move to the expert or doctor role. Depending on the emerging situation, the helper may shift between all the three roles as much as needed (Schein, 2009a: 64).

As humble inquiry is the common thread of the interview, the concept deserves further attention. According to Schein (2009a), humble inquiry is both a helper's attitude and his or her behavior. It embodies "accessing one's ignorance" and becoming open to what may be learned from each other in the actual situation through attentive presence and observing, genuine open empathic questioning, careful listening, self-inquiry, and suspending any judgment (Schein, 1996, 1999, 2009a). In this description, "to access your ignorance" means asking yourself "What do I truly not know?" It is not about testing your preconceptions or hypotheses, as clients will be inclined to follow them instead of disclosing their concerns. It is about genuinely and openly inquiring into the situation—suspending your assumptions, preconceptions, and expectations based on past experience—to enhance understanding. The interview makes clear that humble inquiry is important in the initial relationship-building process. However, it is also crucial in strengthening and maintaining the helping relationship because it provides a concrete way to stay continuously attuned to the client system (Schein, 1999, 2009a).

On the basis of his experiences as a researcher, consultant, and teacher, Schein illustrates above that learning to build and maintain helping relationships through humble inquiry opens up new possibilities to advance management research, practice, and education. By laying out a concrete relational path, Schein adds an important and new element

and level to the discussion on the crisis and future of our field (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2005; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, 2004; Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004, 2009; Starkey & Tempest, 2009). In what follows, we further develop and integrate Schein's insights into this discussion, stressing the implications for management research, practice, and education.

Management Research

The big problem that Schein sees looming ahead is that management academia will become irrelevant to the world of practice. Several others in the *Academy of Management Learning & Education* and elsewhere have made similar observations about our field (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). According to Schein, the core of the crisis is that management research is far removed from the actual practice of managing and organizing (see also Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) and so produces over-abstract and de-contextualized organization theories that are not very useful in practice. And even when we go into organizations, Schein argues, often our goal is not really to help practitioners but rather to collect data for our own research and publication agenda. By taking and not giving, asymmetrical, low-quality relationships are being built, which makes it unlikely that practitioners will reveal what is really on their minds. In this way, not only are we unhelpful to practitioners, but also we are not meeting our original goal of creating strong, impactful theories of what goes on in organizations because our research variables often do not reflect real-life organizational problems (Schein, 1993a, 1995, 1996). Moreover, Schein sees a growing trend in universities and business schools toward even more traditional academic research with a strong quantitative and prestructured orientation away from clinical, real-life research.

What should be done about this gap between the world of management research and the world of management practice? Schein's answer is straightforward. More academics have to learn how to collaborate closely with practitioners in shared projects, fostering mutual inquiring and learning, aimed at coproducing knowledge that benefits both communities in their own way. Others have also suggested coproduction as a possible solution for the big relevancy problem we are having (e.g., Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2009; Starkey & Tempest, 2009). What is new, however, is that Schein gives us real actionable insight into the critical condition needed for beginning and sustaining a cocreation process that is mutually beneficial. Researchers have to participate in the *client's issues* as engaged *helpers* or *partners* trying to assist practitioners in becoming more skilled in solving their own problems.

What is new, however, is that Schein gives us real actionable insight into the critical condition needed for beginning and sustaining a cocreation process that is mutually beneficial.

"Co-creation then is (a) an emerging reciprocal process of status negotiation . . . and (b) a process of trust building through reciprocal calibration of the degree to which each bit of conversation is understood and accepted by the other" (Schein, 2009b: 150). As the researcher and the practitioner converse, they might gradually remove some of each other's ignorance, and, if the researcher-helper has managed to make the "client" feel able to move forward, mutual trust is built that allows them to move forward *together* (Schein, 2009b). When this process goes well, they increasingly become involved in each other's inquiry and learning process as partners (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009). The researcher helps the practitioner in dealing with organizational issues, and the practitioner helps the researcher by generating more valid data, thus allowing the scholar–practitioner to build relevant organization theories that can have a major impact in both practice and academia. Therefore, like others (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2009), Schein advocates relevance as a necessary condition for rigor in his path to theory development.

Note that Schein does not want to contend that the academic is solely to blame for the practitioner–academic divide (see also Bennis & O'Toole, 2005: 103). *Both* scholars and practitioners have to learn how to become better helpers and better clients vis-à-vis *each other* (see also Beer & Nohria, 2000). As we argue below, management education might well play an important role in setting-up and facilitating these learning processes.

Management Practice

In the interview, Schein conveys an important message for management practice that must be examined carefully: "[Leaders] have to learn how to be temporarily humble in the interest of building relationships with the people on whom they are [increasingly] dependent." Given that organizations and societies live in a world that is becoming increasingly global, complex, interdependent, multi-

cultural, and multiexpert, leaders are going to find themselves more and more in situations in which (a) they do not know everything and need to ask and accept help from subordinates who are much more expert in some content area than they are, (b) subordinates ask for help in content areas in which the leaders are not experts, and (c) they are increasingly challenged to build and lead multicultural teams. However, enacting this humble helping role will be very difficult and problematic for most leaders: Not only do all the complexities of the helping process apply but also the presence of a hierarchical relationship compounds the issue.

From childhood on, we learn that interactions and relationships are made possible through mutual maintenance of "face." We gradually learn to respect the social order, reinforce it with our actions and interactions, and avoid threatening it by "misbehaving" (Goffman, 1967). As subordinates we learn how to be properly deferent, and as leaders we learn what kind of demeanor is necessary to gain and maintain the respect of those below us, thereby making relationships felt to be fair and equitable (Schein, 2009a: 23).

The problem for leaders is that, in most cultures, asking and accepting help from a subordinate or admitting not knowing the answer to a subordinate's question disrupts the normal social order. It is "countercultural," thus often "not done," and might be felt by the leader as a loss of face (Schein, 2009a) and even career threatening in highly political organizations. For these reasons, it is doubtful that a leader will display enough humility even when this is necessary to build helping and learning relationships. However, Schein is not alone in stressing the importance of leaders taking a more humble stance toward the people they lead. Edmondson (2008: 65), for example, argues that the display of humility by leaders helps them to create safe psychological environments, thereby fostering mutual learning and inquiry (see also Prokesch, 1997). Collins (2001), too, states that effective "good-to-great" leadership embodies blending personal humility (as opposed to self-promotion, arrogance, egocentrism) with an intense professional will to excel (see also Mintzberg, 2005).

Leading multicultural teams poses yet additional challenges for leaders. When they face the task of building a good working multicultural team, leaders should start in a humble inquiry mode, Schein argues. As the appropriate rules of deference and demeanor are very different across cultures (Goffman, 1967), leaders might begin by structuring a group conversation in a more *culturally neutral* dialogue format (Isaacs, 1993) in which each team member, including the leader, tells in turn how he or she deals with important issues, starting with the management of authority and intimacy. Through suspending their culturally driven assumptions and carefully listening to oneself and to others, both the team members and the leader reduce their ignorance of each other's internal worlds and gradually build sufficient common ground that might enable them to inquire collectively (Isaacs, 1993) into how they might begin to work together. What is important in this dialogue process is that the possibility of suspending collectively remains part of the process after the group has learned to do so (Isaacs, 1993). Leaders contribute to this process by modeling humble inquiry behavior that displays the ability to suspend their preconceptions and judgments, which is necessary to develop and maintain reciprocal helping relationships (Schein, 2009a: 107). However, most leaders have never learned how to be humble inquirers and set up dialogue formats either in their cultural learning or in their formal management education.

Management Education

Several scholars agree that management education, like management research, suffers from a lack of relevance to, and impact on, the real world of managing and organizing (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Detrick, 2002; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, 2004; Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2004, 2009; Starkey & Tempest, 2009). The reasons are many but might be roughly summarized as follows: Inexperienced students are overtrained in analyses and quantification by professors with limited real-word experience, who strictly adhere to the scientific model of science delegitimizing pluralism in knowledge-production forms, acting completely in line with what their incentive and promotion system rewards, away from practitioners, considerably neglecting the development of important interpersonal management skills highly needed in management and organization practice.

Given Schein's thoughts about management research and management practice, what has to be changed in management education becomes crystal clear. More scholars and leaders (in business *and* faculty) have to learn during their training periods how to become better helpers who can engage in humble inquiry as much as needed in order to build and maintain helping relationships with those upon whom they are increasingly dependent. Universities and business schools might contribute substantially to this learning goal if we

are willing to change "what and how we teach" (Bell, 2009: 574).

The core of Schein's argument is that more professors and management-educators should engage in constructing and facilitating experiential-learning processes in their training programs and courses that develop essential helping attitudes and skills (see also Detrick, 2002; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002). Like others (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Detrick, 2002; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002), Schein stresses that much more attention needs to be devoted to building in internships during the training period of future leaders and faculty. What Schein adds, however, is the clarification of the necessary learning experiences and processes that participants have to go through in order to become better helpers. Instead of faculty making it easy for them, being "student-friendly" and providing the candidate organizations for an internship, Schein stresses the importance of not patronizing students but letting them have the experience of struggling and working through ambiguity as a necessary condition for experiential learning on how to be humble instead of arrogant (see also Detrick, 2002; Mintzberg, 2005; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002). If an extended internship is not possible due to time constrains, Schein calls upon our ingenuity to invent more experiential-learning exercises such as "The Empathy Walk" (Schein, 1996), which invites the participants to use their creativity (see also Detrick, 2002) in order to cross and bridge social status lines in an empathic, open, humble inquiry mode. Schein also encourages us to learn how to set up dialogue formats with our multicultural student groups and experiment with constructing learning events using the Internet.

Note that going through these kinds of learning experiences and building helping attitudes and skills in the process are important for both the future leaders and the faculty. As our world becomes increasingly global, complex, diverse, and interdependent, leaders are challenged to become better helpers in their work with subordinates, colleagues, cross-functional and cross-cultural groups, external stakeholders, and ... scholars, and faculty face the task of becoming better helpers in building interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research groups, facilitating the learning processes of undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and postgraduate students, and ... setting up collaborative work with practitioners to coproduce knowledge that matters for both.

All these learning experiences can be supported and deepened by relevant theoretical material in course sessions in which learning experiences are shared and inquired into combined with paper assignments aimed at explicating the most important learning lessons (e.g., Schein, 1996). As do others (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Starkey & Tempest, 2009), Schein advocates inserting more content from the humanities into our curricula. However, for Schein this content (e.g., face work, social order, communication as relational, contextual and rule-driven in cultures) always has to be relevant and strongly connected to the shifting needs and challenges of the world of management and organizing. Central for Schein in all of this is that we need to learn or relearn to relate to the world around us through a spirit of open humble inquiry, creativity, and genuine curiosity (see also Starkey & Tempest, 2009).

Engaging in Further Discussion and Action

We agree with Starkey and Tempest (2009: 576–577) that "there is a pressing need to open ourselves up to new ideas, to new images of possibility, to new design principles ... upon which to build." Given the current problems and issues we face in management research and education, Schein's ideas and insights have the potential to become building blocks for a more practice-close impactful management research and education field.

The major accreditation associations (AACSB, AMBA, and EQUIS) and most universities and business schools worldwide underscore, at least in their espoused theories (Argyris, 1985), practice-closeness and relevance as key aspects of impactful research (e.g., AACSB, 2008). The challenge remains, however, to convert these words into meaningful deeds. Moving in the direction that Schein suggests, therefore, will not be easy in the field of management research and education due to the current institutionalized practices (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Pfeffer, 2005; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) that block change (e.g., the current incentive and promotion system only endorsing discipline-based "practice-distant" scholarship).

It could well be that our enthusiasm for Schein's ideas has led us to give insufficient attention to their complexity and potential limitations. However, we know from experience, and our colleagues have repeatedly reminded us that the core concepts of helping and humble inquiry are multifaceted, challenging, and replete with fields of tension. For example, the notion of "accessing one's ignorance" is complicated. It is a basic "way of being with the other," always trying, but never able, to reach and understand fully the other person. There will always remain things that one is not aware of, that one does not know that one is ignorant of, or even that one cannot understand.

Hence, making errors is inherent to the process. The only possibility helpers have is trying to be as receptive and responsive as possible to whatever the situation and relationship brings, building up awareness of their emotional makeup and readiness to change, the goal always being to help the client to the best of one's ability. Helping on the short versus long term is another challenging tension that must be dealt with. For example, helpers may suppose that they are being helpful at one moment only to discover later that their help actually eliminated important learning opportunities for the client. Nevertheless, working with tensions is inherent in working with human systems. They cannot be completely resolved; they can only be taken as explicit subject matter into the reciprocal attunement and learning process between the helper and the client.

Furthermore, Schein's concepts are not static and prescriptive by nature but rather dynamic and multilayered. Their evolving meaning and significance only comes alive in the specific relationships and practices that helpers and clients develop in their specific contexts. Therefore, we call for more research in our field that inquires into these practices in order to capture the complexities, subtleties, and boundary conditions of Schein's concepts in a diversity of interactive settings ranging from the interpersonal group to the interorganizational and multistakeholder collaboration level; in hierarchical versus nonhierarchical contexts; in everyday forms of organization and work versus mutually negotiated learning settings (e.g., "cultural islands"); and across cultures (e.g., to what extent is the dialogue format, indeed, culturally neutral?).

However, in some emerging fields, notably ecology, sustainability, and large-system innovation and learning, interdisciplinary and multistakeholder inquiry teams are being built (e.g., Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007; Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit at Case Western Reserve University), driven by the joint desire to collaborate in order to seek and implement solutions for a variety of pressing complex societal messes (Ackoff, 1974). In these fields, the helping principles of Schein are currently being further developed, contextualized, and integrated in order to enact new cocreation forms to which multiple stakeholders and logics contribute. The question remains of whether the field of management research and education is willing and able to open up to these new possibilities and contribute in a humble but engaged way or whether it will leave it to others to do so.

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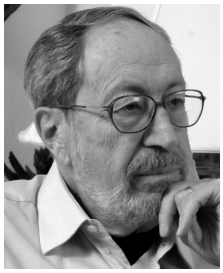

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CHAPTER 7

IN-DEPTH JOINT SUPPLY CHAIN LEARNING: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK

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In-depth joint supply chain learning: towards a framework

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to build a conceptual framework for understanding how in-depth joint supply chain learning can be successfully developed. This kind of learning is becoming increasingly important in highly turbulent and uncertain economic environments of new and growing interdependencies and complexities.
Design/methodology/approach – Using a "synthesizing" or "bricolage" approach, key insights, now dispersed over a variety of literatures and disciplines, are integrated to develop the framework.
Findings – The leading facilitative actor's orientations, competencies and behavior play a significant role in enhancing the relationships between the supply chain actors shaping in-depth joint learning. Starting with establishing interaction boundary conditions by the leading actor, this process is likely to lead to system-level generative outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, serve the process cycle of in-depth joint learning as inputs for the relationship building process among all the actors.
Research limitations/implications – By centering on the actual shaping of in-depth joint learning, and the concrete enactment of roles by protagonists enhancing this process, the paper has opened the black box. Future research should refine the framework.
Practical implications – Apart from giving insight into the repertoire of relational competencies and behaviors needed to enhance the relationship building process conducive to in-depth joint learning, the paper addresses how these skills can be developed in practice and education.
Originality/value – The paper identifies several implications for research, practice, and education. Instead of focusing predominantly on the content, procedure, levers, or outcomes of learning, the relational construction of the learning process itself is clarified.

Keywords In-depth joint supply chain learning, Interpersonal restraint for learning, Psychological safety, Co-ownership, Relationship building process, Leadership, Learning

Paper type Conceptual paper

> Even as companies differentiate from one another, they are interdependent and networked with one another as never before to enable wise technology and investment decisions (Dan Armbrust, SEMATECH President and CEO).
>
> Being part of the Food Lab is the right thing to do, the good thing to do – for the world. It's also good for our businesses. There's a competitive advantage for SYSCO to be involved, but we can't fully realize that competitive advantage without working together with others in this group to mainstream sustainability (Larry Pulliam, Executive VP, SYSCO).

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1. Introduction

Increasingly, different types of chains and networks, on different scales and levels, are discovering the value of in-depth joint learning for whole system or network-level transformation. For example, in the automotive industry, Toyota Japan and its suppliers have been engaging in

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interconnected supplier associations, consulting/problem solving teams and voluntary learning groups forming a high-performing "knowledge-sharing network" (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Dyer and Hatch, 2004). Similarly, although on a smaller scale and different level, Volvo Cars Belgium and its suppliers have been managing their interdependencies on HRM issues effectively in a shared HRM collaborative (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010). Moving from the level of a large automaker's supply chain to the industry-level, SEMATECH (SEmiconductor MAnufacturing TECHnology), the successful industry-government collaboration, is an example of building cooperation in a competitive industry that led to the renewal of the US semiconductor industry (Browning *et al.*, 1995; SEMATECH, 2011). Pointing to the global level, Sustainable Food Laboratory is a cross-sector, multi-stakeholder collaboration of business, non-profit and public organizations that have been generating market-based transformational change of the mainstream global food system, incubating innovation at every stage along the supply chain from producing to distributing and selling food (Senge *et al.*, 2007; Sustainable Food Laboratory, 2011; Society for Organizational Learning, 2011).

These examples have some characteristics in common (Gray, 1989; Vansina and Taillieu, 1997; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004), which call for in-depth joint learning:

1 Problems are often ill defined, unstructured and technically complex, and there is a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity about how to define and/or solve them (typically "messy" system problems).
2 Several actors have vested interests in the problems and are highly interdependent to create and maintain system health – there are serious limitations of what can be done in isolation.
3 Actors differ in terms of power and/or resources, perspectives, expertise and core competencies for dealing with the problems, possibly leading to tensions, even conflict, among the actors (Hamel, 1991; Vansina and Taillieu, 1997; Cox, 2004a, b).
4 The situation necessitates actors to go beyond continuous improvement within a given supply chain framework towards challenging, reframing and transforming the way the supply chain itself operates and learns as a whole (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990; Bessant *et al.*, 2003).
5 There is an awareness and expectation that intensive long-term collaboration is needed to solve the problems or to structure new developments together.

This set of characteristics delineates the supply chain/network context we focus on. We do not center our attention on the loosely-coupled, temporary network forms where actors swiftly combine and recombine on a project basis (as is common to, for example, the advertising, movie, and construction industry) (Grabher, 2004).

What kind of learning are we talking about? We define in-depth joint learning as building the capacity to create new knowledge and possibilities together (Senge, 1990; Holmqvist, 2003; Woodhill, 2003; Senge *et al.*, 2007) through a process where actors can learn collectively how to rethink and renew their supply chain frame. This requires that actors explore their differences constructively, gain awareness of their interdependencies in a flexible way, and find acceptable matches (inspired by Gray, 1989; Vansina and Taillieu, 1997; Holmqvist, 2003; Woodhill, 2003; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004; Cox, 2004a, b; Senge *et al.*, 2007; Pahl-Wostl *et al.*, 2008).

Becoming aware of interdependencies implies building an evolving and self-critical group understanding about how the behaviors of the actors are interlocked and are impacting on the way the system works and how the system influences the actions of the actors (Woodhill, 2003). Instead of trying to solve the asymmetries, imbalances and tensions inherent in all relationships (Huxham and Beech, 2010; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2011), actors "live with them in a flexible and evolving way of giving and taking" (Bradford *et al.*, 1964; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004, p. 148). In this article, the meaning of interdependency is that the parties are thrown back on each other in order to learn how the supply chain functions and might enact innovation possibilities as a whole system. We recognize differences in resources and power position among the actors. However, a single party, even a very powerful one, seldom succeeds in in-depth joint supply chain learning without inviting in and appreciating the contributions of others. All parties need each other because of their distinctive competencies (Selznick, 1957). Developing meta-knowledge on the system is required, and, by implication, the necessary information resides in-between the parties.

Finding an acceptable level of fitting together stresses that the actors become familiar with the way all actors think or behave so that they can react to each other in a proper way; that is, they search for continual attunement (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2011) and alignment (Cox, 2004b). Integration may be neither possible nor desirable (Cox, 2004b; Schein, 2009a). Attunement does not imply that there has to be an equal division of inputs or outputs between parties but, rather, that contributions are felt equitable by all actors involved (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994).

In-depth joint learning involves the conversion of implicit to explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994) through a process of experience sharing, collective sense making, and reflecting upon common practices and experiences. The aim is to move the supply chain beyond simple additive and corrective learning toward reconstructive learning (Friedlander, 1983):

> Reconstructive learning calls for in-depth confrontation of old patterns and the development of radically different new ones. It suggests the construction of new goals, policies, norms, styles rather than simple modification of the old (Friedlander, 1983, in Conway, 1985, p. 10).

This form of learning is particularly called for in situations where the challenge is to effect change across the entire supply chain and redefine its identity: who are we as a chain, who is in and who is out, why do we behave as we do, what are we capable of, and who do we want to be (Senge in Prokesch, 2010). Supply chains that do not allow for, or avoid, this kind of in-depth joint learning can find themselves non-competitive over time (Friedlander, 1983).

The question we want to address in this article is how this kind of learning can be developed and sustained. Hence, the main focus in this article is on "what goes on between the actors" while co-creating in-depth joint learning. This issue has been left underexplored in most of the extant literature. First, the strategic management literature on inter-organizational or inter-partner learning has typically focused on how single firms learn, and why some firms learn faster than others, through a collaborative effort. Learning is then seen as acquiring, internalizing or absorbing new knowledge, expertise, and skills to improve the firm's competence and

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competitive advantage (Hamel, 1991; Powell *et al.*, 1996; Lane and Lubatkin, 1998; Kale and Singh, 2007). Although this literature has produced valuable insights, the question of how actors jointly learn and create knowledge is left unexplored (Hedberg and Holmqvist, 2001; Holmqvist, 2003; Roth, 2008).

Second, the supply chain management literature on learning has typically stressed the benefits that accrue to those organizations that develop the supply chain competency to effectively manage their supply chain partners through learning (Spekman *et al.*, 2002). That is, the manageability of supply chain learning by a firm is stressed, for example, through the use of inter-organizational governance mechanisms (Hernández-Espallardo *et al.*, 2010). We acknowledge the importance of governance mechanisms to manage the paradox of inter-firm learning (Mohr and Sengupta, 2002, p. 283) – "while one wants to learn as much as possible from one's partners in order to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership, one also must limit transparency and leakage of information in the partnership so as not to dilute the firm's sources of competitive advantage." However, the actual process of joint learning is left out of the picture. Relational processes important to supply chain learning are certainly identified – for example "trust". However, these processes are mostly treated as static resources that can be used to create relational rents (Hernández-Espallardo *et al.*, 2010) rather than dynamic relational states that the actors develop in-between them depending on the quality of relationship formation (Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004).

Indeed, "success in any collaboration between organizations rests on the quality of relationships that shape cooperation, trust, mutuality and joint learning. But supporting relationship building is not easy, given the competitive culture and transactional relationships typical in organizational life. Only rarely do groups move beyond 'politeness' or win-lose debates into more authentic and reflective interactions characterized by candor, openness and vulnerability" (Senge *et al.*, 2007, p. 47, italics added). Although process models of inter-organizational collaboration have suggested – some more explicitly and abstractly than others – the importance of actors continually working on their interpersonal relationships in building effective collaboration and learning (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Doz, 1996; Ariño and De la Torre, 1998), this relationship building process is not well understood. Therefore, the aim of this article is to make this process clearer and more understandable. This is of high relevance as most problems in inter-organizational collaborations are attributed to the inability to learn from and with each other (Hagedoorn and Schakenraad, 1994; Muthusamy and White, 2005).

Research on the practice of supply chain learning (Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Flint *et al.*, 2008; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010), albeit scant, reveals three main problem issues that concern the relationship building process among the actors. First, supply chain learning seems to emerge more easily when one leading party acts as the facilitator of the learning process. However, few studies in supply chain management identify what these lead actors actually should do in order to best support joint learning efforts. Second, in the set-up phase, it is usually feasible for a leading party to convene the supply chain actors to participate in a learning arrangement given a shared sense of crisis or a felt joint opportunity. In the operating phase, however, it proves to be more difficult to develop and address a collectively supported learning agenda jointly compared to a one-sided agenda-setting process by the leading actor. In the sustaining phase, it is particularly challenging to maintain the effort through developing shared ownership, co-creating direction, and keeping a longer-term momentum (Bessant *et al.*, 2003). Third, Wagner (2003) suggests that learning in supply chains is greatly hampered when the actors are incapable of overcoming their interpersonal restraint for learning. Often, people experience "learning anxiety": they feel psychologically unsafe to speak up directly and openly because of their fear of potential embarrassment and/or loss of status, face, control, knowledge, and independence (Schein, 1996; Edmondson, 2008; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2011).

This article addresses these observations and develops a conceptual framework in order to explore and create new knowledge about how in-depth joint learning can be developed and sustained.

2. Method and framework building

We use a "synthesizing" or "bricolage" approach to develop the joint learning framework (LePine and Wilcox-King, 2010; Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011). Key insights, now dispersed over a variety of literatures (strategic management, multi-party collaboration, supply chain management and learning, organizational change and learning), are combined and integrated. For example, the collaboration literature complements the supply chain management literature through its explicit focus on how actors can effectively deal with unstructured, uncertain and ambiguous situations. The combination of these literatures provides us with a conceptual framework for understanding better what it takes to make in-depth joint learning work. The articles that inform the framework are chosen because of their potential to deepen our understanding about how the quality of relationships shapes in-depth joint learning, and particularly, how a leading actor can enhance this relationship building process by engaging in a particular facilitative role. Since this article aims at conceptual development, we do not review exhaustively all studies in the field.

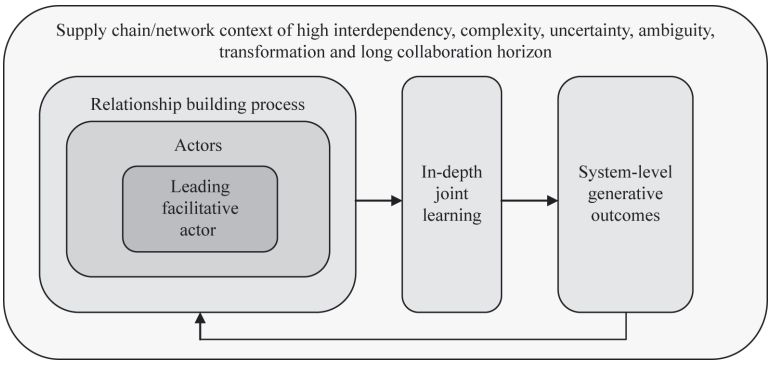
In our framework, we propose that the leading facilitative actor's orientations, competencies and behavior play a significant role in enhancing the relationships between the actors shaping in-depth joint learning. Starting with establishing interaction boundary conditions by the leading actor, this process is likely to lead to system-level generative outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, serve the process cycle of in-depth joint learning as inputs for the relationship building process among all the actors. Figure 1 shows the proposed relationships among the concepts.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, we develop our framework by explaining the concepts and their interrelationships as ingredients of in-depth joint learning. Second, we discuss implications for research, practice, and education.

2.1 Relationship building and in-depth joint learning

Learning occurs through ongoing social interaction (Holmqvist, 2003); it takes place in-between different actors who try to make sense together – as a social collective – of a highly complex and interdependent reality (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Weick, 1995; Weick and Wesley, 1996). From a

Figure 1 Relationships between the concepts in a process of in-depth joint supply chain learning



relational constructionist perspective (Gergen, 1994; Bouwen and Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2011), we argue that the quality of how actors interrelate and handle their differences (in terms of power and/or resources, perspectives, interests, expertise and core competencies) while working on a common task or project greatly determines the potential for in-depth joint learning: if relationships are of high quality, in-depth joint learning becomes a real possibility (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Bouwen and Hosking, 2000; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004; Shotter, 2004; Quinn and Dutton, 2005; Senge *et al.*, 2007; Schein, 2009a, b; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2009).

Relationships conducive to in-depth joint learning are characterized by the permanent possibility of a mutually open, confrontational, and inquiring interaction (Argyris and Schön, 1978), or what Argyris (1962) calls increased interpersonal competence. Actors inquire directly and openly into what works and what does not work. They deeply inquire into content and relationship issues, to the extent that this is seen as relevant to move forward together; they ask questions, seek feedback, and experiment (Edmondson, 1999). It is seen as legitimate both to question, negotiate and confront each others' points of view and differences and to reflectively inquire into the ongoing social process and the relationships being developed: "How do we deal with each other here, what would facilitate now our moving ahead on the critical issues?" (Bouwen, 2001, p. 366). Actors explore, appreciate and enhance the value of others' contributions and perspectives (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2009; Fry and Hovelynck, 2010). This way, they make their activity mutually rewarding and energizing (Quinn and Dutton, 2005). The value and relevance of differences – as an asset in function of task complexity – is socially recognized and confirmed in the group, forming a legitimate basis to respond and inquire into (the way) differences (are handled) (Vansina and Taillieu, 1997). For example, actors might collectively reflect on "how do we handle the power issues here?" to create a workable understanding allowing moving ahead jointly (Flood and Romm, 1996).

By relating in this way, actors gradually develop co-ownership of the content, process and outcome (Schein, 1999; Shotter, 2004; Pierce and Jussila, 2010): "This supply chain development, its future state and the way we collaborate on it is OURS." Co-ownership is a collective mind-set of a group, whereby there is a jointly held notion of an "us" and a shared sense that the target of ownership (e.g. supply chain project, idea, product created, way of collaborating and learning) is collectively "ours" (Pierce and Jussila, 2010). When actors feel co-owner, shared leadership can be built as a shared property of the group such that all members of the group, irrespective of their formal role or position, actively participate in the direction setting process (DeRue and Ashford, 2010) and engage in leadership behaviors and activities important to both task accomplishment and group maintenance (Carson *et al.*, 2007; Vandewaerde *et al.*, 2011). This way they become active partners in the learning process and go beyond "teacher-students" relationships.

However, building these relationships is inextricably linked with developing sufficient psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson *et al.*, 2001). Psychological safety is defined as "a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. [...] [it is] a sense of *confidence* that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up. [...] it describes a team climate [...] in which people are comfortable being themselves" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354, italics added). This confidence is based on mutual trust and respect among group members (Edmondson, 1999).

Psychological safety is not about agreeableness or absence of tension. Instead, it embodies the willingness to engage in being open, straightforward, yet showing respect for each other (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson *et al.*, 2001). It entails creating a supportive learning environment where actors are not posturing for each other (or for the "boss" or "most powerful party") or engaging in destructive politics but are jointly focusing on the job to be done (Amy Edmondson, personal communication, 2011).

Research indicates that building a psychological safe environment is usually quite difficult (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson *et al.*, 2001; Garvin *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, it needs continuous attention and nurturing from all actors involved. As we will discuss in the next section, the facilitator, in particular, has an important role to play in helping to create such a setting.

Indeed, there is a wide consensus among authors that learning will not be achieved by itself but needs careful designing and facilitating (Hamel, 1991; Dyer and Nobeoka,

2000; Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Hovelynck *et al.*, 2010). Not only does it take time, effort and discipline to build the kind of relationships we have discussed. The presence of a leading actor, who is able to enhance this relationship building process by engaging in a particular facilitative role, often seems a necessity (Browning *et al.*, 1995; Vansina, 1999; Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Edmondson *et al.*, 2001; Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Hovelynck *et al.*, 2010; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010, 2011).

2.2 Enabling orientations, competencies and behaviors of the leading facilitative actor

We propose that in-depth joint learning is most likely to occur if a key leading actor is able to create the boundary conditions (Müller-Seitz, 2011) enabling all actors to overcome their interpersonal restraint for learning (Wagner, 2003; Edmondson, 2008), to increase their interpersonal competence (Argyris, 1962), and to gradually develop co-ownership (Shotter, 2004; Pierce and Jussila, 2010) and shared leadership (Carson *et al.*, 2007). In this process, supply chain actors move from a wait-and-see attitude towards a more active, even pro-active, stance. Moreover, in-depth joint learning, we argue, will most likely arise if the key actor changes leadership over time moving from an up-front role to a stand-back role "in which one remains attentive to what is said in terms of the needs, anxieties and hindrances that stand in the way of collaboration" (Vansina, 1999, p. 48).

Our argument is supported by similarities between the opening examples of this article: the formation of:

- the knowledge-sharing network between Toyota and its suppliers (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Dyer and Hatch, 2004);
- the HRM collaborative between Volvo and its suppliers (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010);
- the SEMATECH consortium (Browning *et al.*, 1995); and
- the Sustainable Food Laboratory cross-sector, multi-stakeholder collaboration (Senge *et al.*, 2007).

Although they differ in branch, scale, level, and purpose, all learning arrangements are initiated and facilitated by one (or two) leading actor(s) (Toyota, Volvo, SEMATECH: Texas Instruments and Intel, Sustainable Food Laboratory: Unilever) who consistently engage in the same kind of start-up activities. These activities encompass stressing a superordinate goal, explicitly inviting actors into a high-learning frame, and engaging in asymmetric giving to reinforce commitment.

A superordinate goal is a "larger" purpose that matters to all actors involved; it transcends one's immediate short-term interests in terms of benefits exceeding costs. It appeals to one's sense of interdependence ("we are in the same boat") and the importance of transforming the whole system to the benefit of all (e.g. "reducing the vulnerability of the network", "renewing and preserving the common industrial activity", "mainstreaming sustainable supply chains"). The leading actor often induces the actors to recognize and discuss their interdependence explicitly in order to reach their main common goal (Browning *et al.*, 1995; Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Senge *et al.*, 2007; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010).

To truly engage actors towards this larger purpose, actors are invited into a high-learning frame (Foldy *et al.*, 2009). This involves developing a set of ground rules (Vansina, 1999) or network rules (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000) aimed at enhancing relationships conducive to in-depth joint learning. Commitment to these ground rules is an important step towards building co-ownership of the process. Ground rules might include, for example, that everybody is invited to "advocate their own points of view, speak up and inquire into other's perceptions", "provide valid and transparent information", "open their practices to each other in order to share the learning" but can also entail who sets the agenda, how conflicting views are managed, and how decisions are made. When experiencing "process loss" or problems in the interaction that hinder completing a joint task, the leader and the actors now have the possibility to make this observation explicit. They thereby create space for discussion about the effect of this "deviating" behavior on joint learning. Introducing this high-learning frame is often experienced as uncomfortable because actors are predominantly used to relate in a transactional, more detached and protective way (Argyris and Schön, 1978). However, these ground rules provide an explicit "minimal structure" that offers a joint feeling of safety (Edmondson, 1999). This feeling enables trust to develop among parties that often have different needs, interests, expectations, hopes and anxieties (Vansina, 1999).

Toyota, Volvo, Texas Instruments and Intel, and Unilever all have been engaging in asymmetric giving (Browning *et al.*, 1995) – in terms of investing time, and sharing resources, expertise and knowledge – to get the relationship going without excessive regard for immediate and specific payback, thereby showing full commitment; behavior that encouraged more active involvement and reciprocity between the actors as a "moral obligation to repay [...] continually being generated and reinforced" (Muthusamy and White, 2005, p. 419). This mechanism fosters strong feelings of shared fate and reduces the uncertainty for the actors in all of these networks.

However, a leading facilitative actor can only set the boundary conditions in a supply chain/network context if actors accept his/her authority to do so. Authority entails that it is accepted by the actors that somebody else determines the premises on which decisions are based (Simon, 1965): it is accepted that one actor establishes the procedure or design of learning. This authority is often drawn from one's core competence, level of expertise, credibility, reputation for fair dealing, integrity, and centrality in the supply chain. There is ample evidence to indicate that using positional power in a managerial way by a more powerful party often stifles joint learning initiatives in a network form (Miles and Snow, 1992) because little trust is being developed.

Leadership is emergent. Out of an unstructured situation people who have a vision of "what might be" come forward and they are sufficiently influential to direct the group towards outcomes that are beneficial to all (e.g. continuation and improvement, or innovation). The literature on strategic management or supply chain management almost always identifies a more central party possessing sufficient slack resources, taking the leading role (e.g. Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000). However, the multi-party collaboration literature frequently evidences smaller, more neutral parties taking the lead – in sensitive contexts of large power differences and conflict – as a mechanism not to disturb the initial power balances too much (e.g. Gray, 1989; Huxham, 1996). Such an arrangement seems equally plausible in supply chains but has not been described up till now.

Although the establishment of boundary conditions is important, they are not sufficient to create and maintain a psychological safe environment where actors can overcome

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their interpersonal restraint for learning. Here, the facilitative lead actor has a key role to play. Based on their research on learning teams and organizations, Edmondson *et al.* (2001), Edmondson (2008), and Garvin *et al.* (2008) have concluded that leaders can help to create environments that are felt to be "safe enough to learn" by engaging in particular kinds of leadership behaviors.

First, when leaders explicitly acknowledge to the collaborative that they do not have the full answers, or are unable to tackle the issue because they themselves lack the expertise and/or the problem is too complex ("I don't know the answer, let's help each other to find a way"), or made a mistake, they induce and stimulate others to engage in similar learning behavior.

Second, leaders able to facilitate psychological safety, exhibit a genuine interest in what others have to say, and explicitly ask them to contribute and speak up in a direct and open way, thus fostering the co-creation of a learning environment. For example, when hearing about incidents/difficulties in dyadic contacts, the leader encourages the actor to discuss his/her case in the group as learning material, stimulating taking stock of each other's practices and sharing the learning (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010). In essence, these leaders model the desired learning behavior by setting the "tone" ("Learning is allowed and wanted in this setting, it is the preferred way of relating here") signaling others that it is safe to do the same. Such exemplary behavior might foster a shared leadership dynamic (Pearce, 2004; DeRue and Ashford, 2010).

Indeed, research evidence shows that building collective commitment for joint learning needs a non-directive, facilitating, inviting (Mills, 1967), even "humble" way of leading where the leader fully acknowledges the importance of building relationships with the people on whom (s)he is dependent (Schein, 2009b). Leading then is about "inviting, addressing, encouraging, stimulating; [. . .] *never ordering or imposing what to do*, but always focusing on the task of attending individual partner interests while realizing the common goal" (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010, p. 99, italics added). In this sense, Vansina (1999, p. 48, italics added) formulated the essence of leading in collaborative networks as "*helping* to create and to maintain conditions for getting the most out of the diversity of perceptions, competencies and resources, while enabling the different parties to realize their objectives." Bessant *et al.* (2003, p. 172, italics added) also stressed the co-learning stance of the leading actor as an important success factor of sustained supply chain learning: "Supply chain learning proper only really occurs once the coordinating firm plays an active role in assisting processes of learning amongst other firms in the value chain, and proceeds further when it recognizes that it also has something to learn from these firms." Through a member-oriented leadership style, leading actors can create opportunities for all to structure situations and activities according to their needs, inducing and stimulating actors to take turns in taking the lead, regardless of their status and formal position, and contributing to the benefit of all: "Structuring relationships as peer relationships makes them more cooperative" (Browning *et al.*, 1995, p. 132).

Additionally, the likelihood of in-depth joint learning also increases if the leader enacts the following competencies (Schruijer *et al.*, 1998; Vansina *et al.*, 1998; Vansina, 1999; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004): giving direction and absorbing the uncertainty for other actors (Isenberg, 1984), or what Winnicott (1971) calls "containing", and explicitly recognizing in the group, from the outset, one's role as both a party with own interests and a facilitator of the learning process.

The leader absorbs or contains (without panic, or becoming upset) the expectations, hopes, and uncertainties in the collaborative, often by practicing patience in order to keep options open for a sufficiently long time in order to stimulate joint exploring and searching and to avoid premature closure. This way of relating attempts to maximize the opportunity for all parties to participate, speak up, take initiative and become co-owner of the learning.

Explicitly recognizing one's double role as interested actor and process facilitator generates transparency and trust because actors now have the possibility to reflectively discuss the role in the group as part of the joint learning process. Keeping the double role hidden leads to distrust. Combining the two roles, however, is everything but easy. It means keeping a fine balance between advocacy and inquiry from one's perspective as interested party and facilitating the process with "no preconceived ideas about the desired outcome, nor siding with some parties or stakeholders, but remaining dedicated to fostering collaboration" (Vansina, 1999, p. 48). The latter comprises seeing to it that nobody dominates the conversation and contributions are felt equitable by all parties (which does not entail an equal division of inputs or outputs between parties) (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). It might also be an option to appoint a specialized external process consultant (Schein, 1999) or third party in order to avoid this "dual role" conflict. His/her role consists of assisting the leading actor and the others in their group process toward task accomplishment (Vansina *et al.*, 1998). In this way the facilitating actor might have more space to realize own interests too.

2.3 System-level generative outcomes

Several learning outcomes can materialize. For this paper we just point them out in summarily form. One outcome is interdependent system optimization and development (Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Roth, 2008). This could involve product and quality improvements, a greater market share, a faster "time to market", product innovations, increased flexibility (Wagner *et al.*, 2002), or strategy development on the level of the supply chain (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010). Another outcome is joint competence development concerning how to improve collaboration and in-depth joint learning in order to keep the system healthy and highly adaptable in the face of an increasing rate of change and complexity (Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004; Muthusamy and White, 2005). A third benefit is the development of collaboration-unique mutual knowledge and expertise (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Hedberg and Holmqvist, 2001). A fourth outcome entails a heightened whole-system awareness concerning how the parts of the chain are interwoven and contribute to each other fostering more mutual understanding (Senge *et al.*, 2007; Senge in Prokesch, 2010). A fifth outcome is more fundamental in nature as it is about transforming the very essence or identity of the chain (e.g. new goals, policies, business model, norms) (Venkatraman, 1991; Senge *et al.*, 2007).

These system-level outcomes are likely to function as inputs through recursive feedback loops to the leadership actions and the relationship building process supporting in-depth joint learning. The rationale behind this idea goes back to the seminal contribution of Mills (1967) to group dynamics. He argued that groups can generate a "dividend" – a surplus in realization – by resolving certain critical organizational and emotional issues (e.g. commitment, authority). This "dividend" entails the group acquiring the capacities to take on more encompassing strategies thereby meeting wider ranges of upcoming demands. In other words, the supply chain increasingly becomes a learning supply chain that is "continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (Senge, 1990, p. 14), thereby moving from an "outward-in" strategy (reactive: adapting one's internal environment to the competition, the industry) to an "inward-out" strategy (pro-active: shaping, forming the environment starting from one's strengths and core competencies and their leveraging possibilities) (Leibold *et al.*, 2005).

3. Implications for research, practice, and education

This paper offers several theoretical contributions. Instead of focusing predominantly on the content, procedure, levers (e.g. trust), or outcomes of learning, we have aimed to clarify the actual construction of the learning process itself: how does the enacted quality of relationships shapes in-depth joint learning and, in particular, how can a leading actor enhance this relationship building process? In doing so, we respond to the call for more research into the relational problem issues of supply chain learning: how to overcome the interpersonal restraint for learning (Schein, 1996; Wagner, 2003; Edmondson, 2008); how to develop co-ownership (Schein, 1999; Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Shotter, 2004; Pierce and Jussila, 2010) and shared direction setting (Pearce, 2004; Carson *et al.*, 2007; DeRue and Ashford, 2010); and what kind of leadership is needed from leading actors (Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Vangen and Huxham, 2003; Flint *et al.*, 2008; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2010).

By centering on in-depth joint supply chain learning as reconstructive learning, we have conceptualized a type of learning that is becoming increasingly important in highly turbulent and uncertain economic environments of new and growing interdependencies and complexities. Although there is recognition of the importance of learning in a supply chain setting (Spekman *et al.*, 2002; Bessant *et al.*, 2003; Preiss and Murray, 2005; Flint *et al.*, 2008; Hernández-Espallardo *et al.*, 2010), the actual shaping of in-depth joint learning, and the concrete enactment of roles by protagonists enhancing this process (see also Selznick, 1957), is poorly understood. We hope to have opened this black box so that future research can inquire further into the relationship building process that is at the core of this important kind of learning. Issues that require more detailed development include: who emerges as the facilitative leading actor and when, how does leadership develop over time, what kind of roles can be enacted by the different supply chain actors, and how do actors in boundary roles extend the knowledge developed in the learning arrangement to the whole supply chain?

We point to implications for practice and education. Traditional hierarchical-positional leadership (ordering, imposing, telling what to do) usually will not work in non-hierarchical chain and network forms that are challenged to engage in in-depth joint learning (Gray, 1989; Miles and Snow, 1992; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004; Müller-Seitz, 2011). There is a growing awareness that interdependency matters: "Independent actions from each can produce non-anticipated, uncontrollable and dissonant consequences for all" (Vansina and Taillieu, 1997, p. 183). In addition to chains in the private business sector, we increasingly see collaborations between private and public companies in order to tackle complex interlocked problems or "messes" (Ackoff, 1974) jointly. Pressing sustainability issues ("the greening of the industry") are a good example. Problems are ill defined and technologically complex, and new stakeholders emerge. These actors differ in terms of perception, information, power and resources. Therefore, multiple stakeholders and logics become a highly interdependent amalgam in defining and solving the issues.

Each actor has to be capable of answering the "what's in it for me"-question positively. Leadership then is not about imposing a view on a group. Leadership rather refers to initiating and setting the boundary conditions (superordinate goal, high-learning frame, asymmetric giving). Moreover, it entails modeling the desired learning behavior (inviting, addressing, encouraging, stimulating) – always remaining sensitive to the relational dynamics that hinder learning. The leadership role shifts, moving from an initiating up-front role to a facilitating stand-back role.

By building on success cases, and focusing on what it takes to make in-depth joint supply chain learning work, we might have given the impression that this type of learning occurs frequently. This is not the case. There are not many managers who confidently can handle the dynamics, and/or are capable of enhancing the relationship building process conducive to in-depth joint learning. The relational skills that are needed are hard to teach but can be learned. For example, university educators might construct and facilitate more experiential learning experiences in their training programs such as "The Empathy Walk" (Schein, 1996). The purpose of "The Empathy Walk" is to conduct a conversation with a person that is "most different from you" in a way that allows the students to get into that person's world and see the world through his/her eyes – an essential relational skill for (future) supply chain managers.

Moreover, internships could be set up where students have the opportunity to work through ambiguity and uncertainty as a necessary condition for experiential learning on how to be inquiring and patient instead of arrogant and quick-fix (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the necessary skills can be broadened and deepened on the job through "lessons of experience" (McCall *et al.*, 1988), in-company management development assignments to tackle specific challenging issues (building new business models, working with unions) (done by Bekaert, DSM, etc.), or post-graduate professional development courses that focus on developing relational skills.

This paper also has its limitations. The presented framework is mainly built upon evidence from successful cases. Including insights from cases of mistakes (Ariño and De la Torre, 1998) would give the opportunity to refine the framework. The framework now is predominantly oriented towards the creation of start-up conditions and surpassing the thresholds for in-depth joint learning. As such, the time horizons and life cycle aspects (start, fully operational phase,

decline or renewal of the operations) are not addressed in this paper. Also, the paradox of inter-firm learning (Mohr and Sengupta, 2002) is recognized but not focused on.

In keeping with "the art of the possible" (Cox, 2004a), we propose a model developed to make sense of in-depth joint learning in a supply chain/network context characterized by high interdependency, complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity, transformation, a long collaboration horizon and the presence of a leading initiating actor. The assumption is that repeated cycles of relating within the supply chain form the basis of learning and knowledge creation. Our focus is on lasting collaboration. The more temporary, loosely-coupled (virtual) chains and networks where actors swiftly configure and reconfigure on a project basis are not studied. However, it would be interesting to study if joint in-depth learning can occur in these swift networks and how these "temporary architectures of learning" (Grabher, 2004, p. 1491) are similar to, or different from, what we suggest in our framework.

The emphasis of the framework is on the relational dimension of learning. However, in time this focus should be complemented by linking the sequences in the task dimension (e.g. problem definition, problem analysis, solution analysis, implementation) to the requirements in relational development (Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004). In doing so, the relational requirements will be intertwined with the technical aspects concomitant with the learning process such as technical innovations, R&D and financial investments.

In addition, the relational requirements should be refined to match the nature and type of logistical chains. In general we would expect a continuum of relational demands, with, on the one side a predominance of accepting and sharing technical skills and competence in chains where variety reductions and control lead to standardization of operations (e.g. automotive, food), and on the other side, chains that operate in settings that are characterized by lasting ambiguity and the need to preserve variety (rapid growth, globalization, internationalization) requiring the acceptance, skills and competences to frame and reframe problems into new categorizations and opportunities.

The framework should be validated and further enriched with empirical data. Theory building from multiple longitudinal case studies (successful and unsuccessful ones) using a pattern matching analysis, comparing the conceptual insights with the actual course of events (Yin, 2008), would be appropriate.

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CHAPTER 8 INTERIM STRUGGLES

Now it is time to take a step back and ask the question: "what does this all mean?" It is not my intention to give a summary of the articles, or to readdress how they are connected, or to be complete in answering this question. I do want to share with you my "interim struggles" (Weick, 1995a, p. 389)—my evolving thinking, that what occupies me most at the moment and the implications and contributions I envision, as a bridge between past and future.

I invite you to think with me and join my learning journey as I ponder over issues of (1) building a relational theory of generative organizing, change and learning, (2) implications for theory building efforts on system-level learning in family business research, (3) the distinctive nature of a relational theory as compared to agency theory and stewardship theory, (4) conditions for a scholar-practitioner to thrive, and (5) engaging in a particular challenge/opportunity when writing future articles.

8.1 Towards a relational theory of generative organizing, change and learning

The starting point of this section is the idea that organizational life within and between organizations is full of interdependence (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000) and possibilities to learn and build cooperative capacity to create the future (Senge, 1990; Barrett & Fry, 2005). Working with the premise that all organizational realities are human relational constructions (Shotter, 1993; Gergen, 1994, 1999; Hosking, 2011), I strongly believe—based on research and experience in organization development work—that realizing these opportunities greatly depends on nurturing high-quality relationships (Bouwen, 1998; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Lambrechts, Martens, & Grieten, 2008; Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen, & Corthouts, 2009a; Lambrechts, Sips, Taillieu, & Grieten, 2009b; Lambrechts, Taillieu, & Sips, 2010; Lambrechts, Bouwen, Grieten, Huybrechts, & Schein, 2011; Lambrechts, Taillieu, Grieten, & Poisquet, 2012). There is an extensive research literature that leaves little doubt that cooperative capacity building, or continually expanding a living human system's ability to create the new ("learning organization"), are strongly connected with sustainable competitive advantage in terms of long-term value creation, human systemic health and longevity (see, among others, De Geus, 1988; Stata, 1989; Adler & Cole, 1993; Collins & Porras, 1994; De Geus, 1997a, b; Becker et al., 1997; Pfeffer, 1998; Beer & Nohria, 2000a; Senge, 2000; Barrett & Fry, 2005; Pfeffer, 2010; Cooperrider, 2012).

When people excel in organizing, they collectively make sense of surprises/opportunities/ interruptions/unintended consequences (Weick, 1995b, 2000), are highly energized (Quinn & Dutton, 2005) and attuned to each other (Barrett, 1998; Schein, 2009a; Lambrechts et al., 2011). What this means is that they stay in motion engaging in local experiments and concerted action, formulate and enact a shared sense of direction, structure and re-structure flexibly, and are attentive to local, system and environmental dynamics/demands continuously updating their organization. These ongoing adjustments, according to Weick (2000), enable them to change as rapidly, or, I might add, even faster, as their environments. In the creation of collective excellence, strengths are connected to strengths and it is the connection, or "space between" (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000, p. 551) that not only performs but transforms (Cooperrider, 2012).

The necessary condition that makes all of this happen takes the form of high-quality relationships or, what Karl Weick calls, "candid dialogue … and respectful interaction" (Weick, 2000, p. 233; see also Weick, 2002, 2011). Through high-quality relating, people are able to enact effective emergent change: "ongoing accommodations, adaptations, and alterations that produce fundamental change without a priori intentions to do so" (Weick, 2000, p. 237; see also Orlikowski, 1996). Table 1 juxtaposes the characteristics that point to high-quality relating to those that indicate low-quality relating (based on Lambrechts et al., 2009a, 2012).

Table 1

Concrete and observable characteristics pointing to low and high quality relating

Low-quality relating	**High-quality relating**	**Inspiring authors**
- one-sidedness in relationship	- reciprocity between the actors' contributions	Bouwen, 2001a; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004
- 'talking about': distant, disengaged or uninvolved, unresponsive interaction	- 'talking with': sensitive, engaged or involved, reflective, responsive interaction	Shotter, 1993, 2004; Beer, 2000
- statements are vague and not illustrated	- mutually open, concrete and illustrated communication	Argyris, 1962; Argyris, & Schön, 1978
- mutual questioning, testing and confronting is not possible or avoided	- permanent possibility of a mutually inquiring and confrontational interaction	Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schön & Rein, 1994
- devaluing others' contributions and view points; mutual blaming, defending and complaining	- exploring, appreciating and enhancing the value of others' contributions and perspectives making joint activity mutually rewarding and energizing	Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003; Quinn & Dutton, 2005; Fry & Hovelynck, 2010
- reflective inquiry into the ongoing process of relating is not possible	- permanent possibility of a reflective inquiry into the ongoing process of relating	Bouwen, 2001a
- no possibility of jointly becoming author and owner of a task or project	- joint authorship and co-ownership of a task or project	Schein, 1999a, 1996b; Shotter, 1993, 2004; Pierce & Jussila, 2010
- dominant voices control the interaction, other voices are kept silent and are excluded	- multiple voices can speak up, are listened to and included	Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Hosking, 2004, 2006; Weick, 2000
- talking from outside the here-and-now interaction	- talking from within the here-and-now interaction	McNamee, 1998; McNamee & Gergen, 1998

When people succeed in persistently maintaining or re-establishing high-quality relating, they are building a "learning organization" that thrives and outperforms by "continually expanding its capacity to create its own future" (Senge, 1990, p. 14). This does not exclude that people can engage in low-quality relationships while building learning organizations, thereby producing blockages or rigidities in organizing and change. After all, organizations are living human constructions. However, the ability to collectively notice what is going on, reflect, reframe or speak differently, swiftly returning to high-quality relating—alleviating "stuckness" in the process—is what, in my view, distinguishes learning organizations from others (for related thoughts, see Van Dongen, De Laat & Maas, 1996; Bouwen, 1998; Bouwen & Hosking, 2000; Weick, 2000). From a relational orientation, low performing organizations are stuck in patterns of low-quality relationships and inflexible structuring processes generating downward spirals of performance. This does not mean that moments of high-quality relating and energy are entirely absent; they are just not so easily noticed, alleviated, enlarged and sustained because people are not used or able to do that. In contrast, organizations that excel and learn are able to sustain high-quality relating or take immediate actions to return to high-quality relating, build cooperative capacity (Barrett & Fry, 2005), and create upward spirals of performance

and development. One might say that it is in their organizational routines and culture (Schein, 2010) to do so.

When looking at organizational realities as human relational constructions—continuously in-the-making, in continual movement—the smallest "unit" is micro-moments of practice (Gergen & Zandee, 2012). Organizing, then, can be conceptualized as a dynamic constellation of relational practices (Bouwen, 2001a), that is, interactions between two or more people, with a certain quality of relating going on. In this line of thinking, each moment of interacting or conversation (in the hall way, a meeting, a team, a work or project group, the board of directors, an inter-organizational platform, collaborative task-system), can be seen as a relational practice (Bouwen, 2001b). These relational practices can differ in nature and relational quality, and evolve over time, and can be very different among various groups and subcultures (Schein, 1996a, 2010).

The implication of this is that excellent organizing not only comes down to creating relational practices that are of high quality, but also to nurturing high-quality connections between these practices. As Schein (1996a, p. 18) puts it in a within-organization context, "Until executives, engineers, and operators [three subcultures] discover [through cross-cultural dialogues] that they use different languages and make different assumptions about what is important, and until they learn to treat the other cultures as valid and normal, organizational learning efforts will continue to fail." Similarly, others underline the importance of actors to inquire into, appreciate and enhance the value of others' contributions and perspectives (Fry & Hovelynck, 2010) to enact in-depth joint or social learning in a multi-actor collaboration (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004) and supply chain/network context (Lambrechts et al., 2012).

The idea that organization and change are produced, sustained, and modified through creating and assembling relational practices with a certain quality of relating, nicely ties in with Ford and Ford's (1995, p. 560) view that "the macrocomplexity of organizations is generated, and changes emerge through the diversity and interconnectedness of many microconversations." This means that relational practices are continuously embedded in a specific historical–relational context—a background of existing conversations and relationships (Ford, 1999)—that is always partly actualized in the interactions people engage in (Lambrechts et al., 2009a). Interaction and context are coproduced (e.g., Bourdieu, 1980; Lave, 1993; Hosking, 2006); contextual embeddedness is the source of new possibilities, but it also constrains what can follow (Hosking, 2004).

When people excel in organizing, thus producing effective emergent change (Weick, 2000), the task of the leader becomes one of helping to make visible "what has been learned"/"what works", encouraging further experimentation, so that people can build more consciously on those collective strengths. When organizing falters, or runs into blockages, it is the task of the leader to create conditions to restore ongoing adaptations and continuous adjustments. However, intervening in a living human system cannot be taken lightly and calls for appropriate caution and care. From a relational orientation, producing planned, intentional change, then, becomes a matter of purposely creating a new organizational reality by engaging in new relational practices (Bouwen, 2001a), or shifting conversations (Ford & Ford, 1995; Ford, 1999), making new linkages. In this process, the most important "health criterion" always remains caring for the quality of the relationship (McNamee, 1988).

In this reading of change, leaders, but also consultants and scholar-practitioners, are "practical authors" (Shotter, 1993; Cunliffe, 2001) of new organizational realities through their conversations. As practical authors, they are actively engaged with everyone involved in co-creating a clear picture of what is happening, starting from the ambiguities in the context (surprises/opportunities/crisis/ interruptions/unintended consequences). They aim to generate new possibilities of organizing through the creation of new possibilities of conversing and relating (Shotter, 1993). In that sense, Schein (2010) also stresses that leaders are entrepreneurs and the main architects of culture. Ford and Ford (1995) offer clear indications of how one can interpret and author different types of conversations (different combination of speech acts, specific content, sequence, tone) depending on the stage of development of the change: initiative conversations (starting a change), conversations for understanding (generating understanding and involvement), conversations for performance (getting into action) and conversations for closure (completing the change) building ownership of change throughout the process. Absence of, or too little attention for, one or more types of conversation, the linking of conversations, and low-quality relating, can produce breakdowns in changing (Ford & Ford, 1995; Ford, 1999).

In his chapter in *Breaking The Code of Change* (Beer & Nohria, 2000b), Weick (2000) lays down a very important message that must be inquired into carefully. *Regardless of the content* of the change program (p. 233: "any old program will do", "there is nothing special about the content of any one program per se that explains its success or failure in producing change"), planned change will *only* work when it triggers sustained energy/movement, direction, attention/sensitivity encouraging updating, and candid dialogue and respectful interaction. Although I fully agree that these are important conditions for planned change to work—because they re-establish effective emergent change (Weick, 2000)—I do believe, from a relational orientation, that some change philosophies and approaches *are more likely to enact* these conditions than others.

One example is Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider, 1990; Barrett, 1995; Powley, Fry, Barrett, & Bright, 2004; Barrett & Fry, 2005; Cooperrider, 2012; see also Lambrechts et al., 2008, 2009a). By focusing people on what is already working well in their system ("what already gives life to our organization?")—inviting people to explore and appreciate each other's stories and inquire into the essential life/energy-giving forces ("mine for the gold": what exactly gives life/energy?)—people build generative connections in a collective effort to imagine, design and create the wished-for future. As Ron Fry puts it, "generative connections are interactions that bring a feeling of energy, aliveness and potential, leading people to create more and new things *without* being told or asked to do so" (Fry & Bushe, 2012, italics added). As such, appreciative inquiry is a relationship-enhancing activity that opens up more and new possibilities to go on (Bouwen, 2002), fostering the production of self-directed effective emergent change, releasing and vitalizing the flow of organizing. By appreciatively inquiring into what works well, and building on that, people also build psychological safety (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001) that will make it easier for them later in the process of organizing and change to discuss problem areas that need improvement (Schein, 1996b): the enhanced relational quality generates new possibilities to do this effectively.

At this moment, we do not understand completely that what makes appreciative inquiry work. It seems that the *act* of *genuine* listening, inquiring, appreciating—engaging in reciprocal generosity and making generative connections (Fry & Bushe, 2012)—might be more important than the content of what is being shared. At the same time, the *nature* of the questions we ask and the language we

use seem to be very important (Barrett & Fry, 2005; Cooperrider, 2012): “we live in worlds our inquiries create” (Cooperrider, 2012, p. 108) and “words enable worlds” (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990). Consider the question “What’s the biggest problem here?” alongside the question “What possibilities exist that we have not yet considered?” These two questions *do* different things to the relationships, to the possibility of innovation, to the motivation of a person, to the organizational reality that is being built.

Intervening by staying close to the system, respecting it and building on the life-giving essence of it —instead of focusing people on deficits, what goes wrong—fits very well with a relational orientation with at its core capacity building through developing and regenerating high-quality relationships. It is more about continuity in change, about evolving, than it is about drastically disrupting a system, with no respect for the ‘old’ often leading to “resistance to change” (Bouwen & Fry, 1988)—“a function of participant interactions that shape and are shaped by the nature and quality of the agent-recipient relationship” (Ford, Ford, & D’Amelio, 2008, p. 372). As Schein (1999b, p. 16, italics added) puts it, “It is better to build on what is working than to obsess about what is not working. It is easier to *evolve* the culture than to change it.”

In my view, the problem with a lot of intentional change is that one does not give enough attention to the importance of the relationship building process. If the power of relationship building is neglected, forgotten, or denied, the change process will—sooner or later—run into blockages because the quality of the “relational space” (Barrett & Fry, 2005; Fry & Hovelynck, 2010) is too low evidenced by “energy loss”, “resistance to change”, “apathy”, “stress”, and “indifference”. The effective leader, then, who is capable of stimulating and supporting effective emergent change, is sensitive to the relational processes of organizing and change. He/she is able to capture what is going on in the relational space between people—the ebb and flow of relating—and *authentically* author new relation-enhancing activities and conversations as appropriate. Humble inquiry can help leaders to do so (Schein, 2009b; Lambrechts et al., 2011).

The relational production of organizing, change and learning—both the generative and degenerative flows (Gergen & Zandee, 2012)—might be most visible in entrepreneurial family firms, especially the young and small ones, and multi-actor collaborations, or in episodes of transition where the further development of the social system is at stake (Schein, 1996a; Bouwen, 1998). Multi-actor collaborations, set up to tackle inter-organizational domain challenges, are often emergent processes, moving from under-organized states—where individual stakeholders act independently—to more organized ones, characterized by concerted decision-making (Gray, 1989; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). In multi-actor domains, there are no or less fixed structures, roles and habits to fall back on, which makes the relational collaboration building process more visible. “Organization-in-the-making” through relationships and interactions is also very visible in young and small entrepreneurial family firms (Bouwen & Steyaert, 1990) where the inertia is less anchored or reified (Weick, 1979) in structures and the impact of the quality of relating between an entrepreneur, his/her family, co-workers and outside stakeholders on the quality of organizing is immediately noticeable.

8.2 Implications for theory building efforts on system-level learning in family business research

The dominant organizational form in the world is the family firm (Shanker & Astrachan, 1996; La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes, & Shleifer, 1999; Astrachan & Shanker, 2003; Morck & Yeung, 2003; IFERA,

2003). Globally, firms with family involvement are pervasive and have a substantial economic impact (Sirmon, Arregle, Hitt, & Web, 2008). Empirical evidence suggests that the financial performance of family-owned firms is at least as well as, or slightly better than, non-family firms. Yet, evidence is inconclusive (Gómez-Mejía, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). What is clear, however, is that, in general, family firms outperform non-family firms in terms of longevity: they survive and create value over longer periods of time (Collins and Porras, 1994; De Geus, 1997a, b; Ward, 2004, 2006; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2005; Pieper, 2007; Poza, 2010; Astrachan, 2010).

Do family firms, then, have *a more natural tendency* to build learning organizations, continually expanding their capacity to create their own futures, enabling them to life longer and thrive over generations? How do family firms—as continually in-the-making through closely knit family and business interactions and relationships—actually learn at the collective system level? How do family dynamics produced through blood and kinship relationships (Nicholson, 2008) shape family business learning and how does learning at the family business system level shape family dynamics and learning? It is a surprise, from my background, that these, and related, questions have not been addressed in the family business literature; a literature where learning perspectives, both at the individual and the collective level, are missing but called for (Moores, 2009; Hitt, 2012). There are some elements in the learning organization literature, and family business literature on longevity drivers and family business distinctiveness, that can guide our theory building efforts on these questions.

From the learning organization literature (see, among others, Senge, 1990; De Geus, 1997a, b) we know that business longevity and learning are intimately connected, or put stronger: learning is a necessary condition for longevity. De Geus (1997a,b), a strong proponent of the learning organization, argues that living, learning companies are more concerned about building purposeful and enduring human communities that stay alive—valuing people, their development, and capacity building—than they are about maximizing economic returns as money-making machines. “To them, assets–and profits–are like oxygen: necessary for life but not the purpose of life.” (De Geus, 1997b, p. 55). De Geus’ insights on *The Living Company* (1997a, b) are based on a Shell study of 27 long-lived companies (ranging in age from 100 to 700 years old) that have survived and prospered over a long period of time. These long-standing firms share several characteristics, the essence of which is captured well by Senge (2000, p. 76-77, italics added): “These firms have a sense of *identity*, of what they stand for—a purpose and core values that *transcend* what they do. Curiously, this *appreciation for continuity* makes such companies *tolerant* of continual experimentation and novel ways of doing things: They continually grow the new in the midst of the old. They are sensitive to their environments, and they are *conservative in their financing* so as to allow for flexibility as that environment changes.” The leaders who help to build these organizations take the development of employees as their primary concern. They loosen steering and control in order to give people space to self-organize and innovate, organize for learning encouraging direct communication and constructive relationships, and take care to create a healthy ongoing community (De Geus, 1997b). Several of the companies selected as exemplary by De Geus (1997a, b) are family-owned or family-influenced. Very meaningful also is that the research team did find a lot of companies over 200 years old, however, “Most of these were family firms that did not meet … size requirements [comparable size of the Shell group or larger]; many of them still under the control of the founding family dynasty” (De Geus, 1997a, p. 5).

When comparing the family business literature on drivers of long-lived family firms with De Geus' (1997a, b) study of learning organizations, remarkable similarities show up. Ward (2004, 2006) argues that long-lasting family firms have *continuity* as their primary purpose, not maximizing profits. They are driven by the values of their highly committed and united familial owners (see also Pieper, 2007) and most common values are mutual respect, stewardship, integrity, personal responsibility as autonomy and fun (see also Denison, Lief, & Ward, 2004). They are prudent, not only in financing terms, but also in terms of unnecessary risk-taking, managerial incentives and protecting the reputation of the firm and the owning family. This focus on continuity, combined with a sensible and careful attitude, *makes them* engage in *proactive adaptability*—they proactively seek new opportunities to adapt to; they constantly sense, test, experiment with new ideas, developing the capability to be flexible, always appreciating the old, because continuity is their purpose. Their strategic orientation is more about adaptation than it is about constant growth in financial terms. Moreover, Poza (2010), referring to Collins and Porras' *Built to Last* (1994), which has a lot of excellent family business examples in it (almost half of the exemplary firms are family-owned and almost none of the unsuccessful firms where so, see also Ward, 2006), underlines that family businesses that have been built to last appreciate the old, that what made the enterprise successful so far (traditions, its core values and identity), while building the new through *ongoing dialogue* across generations. This ongoing dialogue keeps these family firms from getting stuck in traditions. Miller and Le-Breton-Miller (2005) report similar findings. They argue that long-lived family firms act as unfettered stewards rather than servants to shareholders. They ensure *continuity* by pursuing a lasting mission of substance, not a money-driven strategy. And above all: they create a community—a caring collective, not a tournament—and they build secure generous relationships with outside stakeholders (see also Miller, Lee, Chang, & Le Breton-Miller, 2009). Furthermore, Salvato and Melin (2008) argue that family firms successful in long-term value creation and strategic adaptation (see also Zahra, Hayton, Neubeum, Dibrell, & Craig, 2008) are characterized by an ability to constantly renew and reshape their interactions, relationships and meanings within and outside the controlling family.

Other studies in the family business domain, seeking to capture the uniqueness of family firm behavior and competitive advantage, argue that family businesses *are more likely* to possess some resources and positive attributes that may give them an edge over non-family firms[1]. These characteristics come very close to the ones identified as longevity drivers. Family firms frequently have a longer-term orientation (James, 1999; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2006), have access to patient financial capital (Donckels & Frohlich, 1991; Harris, Martinez, & Ward, 1994; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003) (versus having to answer to impatient, short-term focused shareholders and debt holders) and are value-driven (Denison, Lief, & Ward, 2004). They often pursue other than purely financial goals (Astrachan & Jaskiewicz, 2008), driven by the family owners' socio-emotional wealth preservation (Gómez-Mejía, Takacs Haynes, Nunez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007; Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011). Employees working in family firms are frequently more committed to the organization (high human capital commitment) as compared to employees working in non-family firms (Lee, 2006; Vallejo, 2011). In addition, family firms are said to rely more on personal, informal, and close relationships that frequently develop between family-owners and employees (Karra, Tracey, & Phillips, 2006; Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon, & Very, 2007; Harris & Reid, 2008; Miller et al., 2009), and often

[1] I am not suggesting that these positive attributes and resources are present in *all* family-firms and/or are completely absent in non-family firms (see for an illustration of this argument the CARE case in Chapter 4).

engage in deeper, enduring relationships with outside stakeholders (Arregle et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2009), triggering a reciprocity and kindness dynamic (Karra et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2009), respectively building bonding (internal) and bridging (external) social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Adler & Kwon, 2002). Habbershon and Williams (1999) and Pearson, Carr and Shaw (2008) have argued—from a strategic management, resource-based lens—that precisely these human interactions and relationships, captured under "family firm social capital" (Pearson et al., 2008, p. 956) create value and form the basis of "familiness", that is, "the *unique* bundle of resources a particular firm has because of the systems interaction between the family, its individual members, and the business (Habbershon & Williams, 1999, p. 11, italics added).

Although the family business literature identifies several resources and attributes that might explain the unique behavior and longevity of family firms, the most important building blocks of the learning organization, that is, the quality of the relationships, are not studied. Family business scholars, often from a strategic management perspective, do name the relational processes that are important for building a healthy learning family business—for example "social capital", "fruitful quasi-family relationships", "community", "family unity", etc. However, these processes are typically treated as static human and social resources that these firms "have" and can "use" to create sustainable advantage, rather than dynamic relational states that family business actors continually develop in-between them depending on the quality of relationship formation (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). The nature of relational processes themselves is not theorized. I agree strongly with Astrachan (2010, p. 8) that "the sources from where these resources emerge, the ways in which they change over time, and the means through which they can be nurtured and preserved are not well explored." The relational perspective, developed in the previous section and throughout this PhD, can provide more insight because it allows researchers to inquire more in-depth into the embedded quality of relating as related to the quality of family firm organizing, change and learning. For example, social capital will only stay "capital", a resource, when family business actors succeed in building, sustaining or swiftly re-establishing high-quality relational practices between the family, its members, and the business. Nurturing and preserving family firm social capital means nurturing and preserving high-quality relating family-business wide. When family firm actors become stuck in patterns of low-quality relating and inflexibility, social capital will erode and will stop being capital, undermining sustainable competitive advantage and performance.

How do family business actors—acting out of their position in the overlapping, interacting, and interdependent subsystems of family and business—jointly learn, co-create knowledge and build cooperative capacity to create the future? Are they more apt to learn as a collective given the evidence from longevity studies? Is it *because* continuity in change—holding on to stability while changing; evolution, not revolution—is often their primary purpose; not maximizing profits but building a sustainable, healthy community of people, that they are more apt to become a learning organization? Maybe, we do not know. To date, it is an open question, and it will remain so in this PhD dissertation.

However, from a relational perspective, I expect that when family business actors—family and non-family—succeed in persistently building, sustaining or re-establishing high-quality relationships (see Table 1), they are building a learning organization (Senge, 1990) that gives them a sustainable competitive advantage. Family firms, then, are approached as dynamic constellations of relational practices (Bouwen, 2001a) within the family, between family and non-family members, and with

outside stakeholders. These relational practices can differ in nature and relational quality, and evolve over time, and can be very different among different groups. However, the family firm will only learn at the collective, system level when family firm actors build and retain high-quality relationships. For collective family firm learning to crystallize, it is not enough to nurture high-quality relationships within the family system, or within the business system; high-quality relating has to occur family business wide and be extended to outside value chain partners. From a relational perspective, family firm actors only learn at a system level, across the borders of family and business, if they are not afraid to speak up (Edmondson et al., 2001), try to understand each other through careful genuine listening engaging in humble inquiry (Schein, 2009b; Lambrechts et al., 2011), find an acceptable level of attunement/alignment (Lambrechts et al., 2012), and build the trust that is needed for everyone involved—family and non-family—to move forward together.

What, then, might be unique in family business learning? Next to the indications found in studies on the distinctive characteristics and the longevity drivers of family firms, it would be particularly useful to include the family firm unique concept of "socio-emotional wealth preservation" of the family owners (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007, 2011) into our theory building efforts on learning family firms. According to Gómez-Mejía et al. (2007, p. 106, italics added), socioemotional wealth (SEW) refers to "*non-financial aspects* of the firm that meet the *family's* affective needs, such as identity [preservation], the ability to exercise family influence, and the *perpetuation* of the family dynasty." These authors see the preservation of SEW of the family, or continuing a healthy affective, socio-emotional family life, as an end in itself—the main purpose of the family firm. Therefore, family firm behavior, and especially major managerial choices, "will be driven by a desire to preserve and enhance the family's socioemotional wealth apart from efficiency or economic instrumentality considerations" (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011, p. 656). For example, family firms, which often carry the family's name (Dyer & Whetten, 2006), might engage more in people and relationship centered practices, without there being immediate financial returns for doing so; this in order to protect and preserve the family reputation and family name. Examples are investing in a great place to work environment, responsible corporate citizenship, or community building with inside and outside stakeholders. To be known as "good family owners, caring people and good citizens" might be more important for family owners—that is, might meet their affective needs more—than aiming for immediate financial paybacks; this because their identities are often closely linked with the firm they own and influence.

Might the preservation of SEW, then, foster family firm learning? From a relational orientation, learning on the system family firm level will only occur if there is an acceptable level of attunement/alignment between meeting the affective needs of the family and meeting the affective desires of the rest of the family firm. This proper alignment and sufficient mutual understanding can only be realized sustainably through high-quality relationships. A lack of alignment will often lead to inaction and stuckness in the process of family firm organizing, hindering learning as an organization. At this moment, it is not clear how SEW preservation will work in family firm learning. However, it is my view that the preservation of SEW will give a unique flavor to family business learning that is worth-while to explore in further research.

When conversing with Arie De Geus (personal communication, August 14, 2012) about his book *The Learning Company*, and my ideas about family firms and learning organizations, some interesting ideas emerged which can enrich our thinking. Most companies that are older than 100 years, De

Geus argues, have all started off as family firms, some stay family-owned, others do not. Both types of firms are included in the book. Are the companies portrayed in the book learning companies because they are still family firms, or started off as family firms? The answer, according to De Geus, is of course no. I agree. However, De Geus goes on to say that there might be an important feature conducive to becoming a learning organization that is more likely to be found in family firms. That is, the tendency of the family owners to engage in what he calls "generational thinking." According to De Geus, this is more than just long-term thinking. It is thinking in terms of the future happiness and health of the children and grand-children; the family. This thinking in generations is more emotionally-loaded and the time horizon under consideration is likely to be much longer (multiple generations) than the usual "long-term thinking" of many non-family firms. Thinking in terms of the good of the following generations is a more sustainable way of approaching business that might drive the evolution towards a truly learning company. And although this generational thinking is very important, becoming a learning company will only happen, De Geus argues, if the value pattern of the family celebrates values like community, responsibility and learning, and strong value-driven people-oriented leadership is willing and able to anchor these values organization-wide as the life-giving force and this across different family generations (see also Lambrechts & Voordeckers, 2010). From this conversation with De Geus it becomes clear that family firms, like all firms, have to be approached as a heterogeneous group (e.g., Dyer, 2006) and studied in their infinite variety, in all their forms. Also, in respect of the SEW concept, owning families might differ considerably in terms of what SEW exactly means to them, the value/importance they attach to it and how they relationally construct the preservation of SEW across generations. Indeed, as suggested by Gómez-Mejía et al. (2011), the operationalization of SEW remains a challenge which calls for in-depth qualitative case studies in a diversity of family firms.

Is the relational view developed throughout this PhD manuscript the relational perspective that some scholars in the family business domain have been calling for, complementing perspectives such as agency, stewardship or resource-based view (e.g., Milton, 2008; Salvato & Melin, 2008)? According to Milton (2008, p. 1075, italics added), "within family firms, relationships may be a pivotal, *insufficiently recognized*, source of unique competitive resources (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003), or they may fatally undermine performance. Although the family enterprise literature has recognized the importance of relationships, the relational perspective of family business remains *underdeveloped.*" Moreover, Salvato and Melin (2008) underscored in their multiple case study research that studying how social interactions among family members, and between the family and nonfamily agents, shape family firms' adaptive strategies over time is a "relevant, but widely overlooked, topic of investigation."

8.3 The distinctive nature of a relational theory as compared to agency theory and stewardship theory

In the process of writing this PhD dissertation, my promoter from Hasselt University, Wim Voordeckers, asked me "how does the relational perspective relate to economic theories that are often used within management literature, for example agency theory and stewardship theory; what does the relational perspective add?" This is both an interesting and a challenging question—one that has been puzzling me over the past few years when working closely together with business scholars and economists. To foster collective creativity (Catmull, 2008) and theory development

(Weick, 1995a) on this issue, I would like to present my ongoing thoughts as openers for conversation.

Both agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989) and stewardship theory (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997; Hernandez, 2012) view the firm as a "nexus of contracts" between different resource holders. Two parties are in focus in these theories: principals (e.g., owners/shareholders) and agents or stewards of the principals (top-level managers, contracted by the owners to manage/control their firms for them). Moreover, both theories specify how to manage the formal contractual principal-manager employment relationship in service of protecting and maximizing shareholders' wealth. However, the theories differ fundamentally in their core assumptions about man and, consequently, offer very different prescriptions for organizational governance.

Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), originating from economics, and currently the dominant model in finance, views managers as self-serving utility maximizing agents who, given the opportunity, will most likely act at the expense of their principals and the long-term welfare of organizations: managers are not to be trusted, short-term focused, individualistic, and opportunistic. Moreover, agency theory assumes that there is a substantial chance that the interests and goals of principals and agents are not aligned (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989). This divergence of interests causes agency costs, that is, losses in wealth, for the principals. To ensure interest and goal alignment, agency theory prescribes—from the assumption that managers are extrinsically motivated—the use of agency cost control mechanisms such as financial incentive schemes (e.g., stock options, pay-for-performance) and governance structures (e.g., boards of directors) (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012), rooted in psychology and sociology, proposes an alternative view, one that sees managers as other-serving stewards: they are trustworthy, long-term focused, collectivistic, and they act pro-organizationally, placing the "long-term best interests of a group ahead of personal goals that serve an individual's self-interests" (Hernandez, 2012, p. 172-173). To stewardship theorists, managers are intrinsically motivated to perform as they mainly seek to experience autonomy, responsibility, appreciation, and self-actualization. In addition, stewardship theory assumes that the interests and goals of principals and managers as stewards are aligned (Davis et al., 1997). Thus invoking control mechanisms is not necessary (because there is no agency problem) and might even be counterproductive because it lowers stewards' motivation to perform and act pro-organizationally (Argyris, 1964; Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012). Instead of control mechanisms, stewardship theory prescribes facilitating and empowering governance structures and mechanisms (e.g., job enrichment, development/learning opportunities) that support managers in their search for personal growth, achievement, and self-actualization.

According to Davis et al. (1997) the principal and agent rationally *choose* between agency and stewardship relationships depending on individual-psychological (e.g., extrinsic and intrinsic motivation) and situational factors (e.g., control-oriented or involvement-oriented management philosophy). However, the choice of a stewardship or agency relationship is mainly dependent on "the level of risk that is acceptable to each individual and his or her willingness to *trust* the other party" (Davis et al., 1997, p. 40, italics added). Trust—defined as "the willingness to be vulnerable"—

between the principal and manager, is seen by stewardship theorists as a very important condition to engage in stewardship relationships. If the principal and manager are "unwilling to be vulnerable" and risk-aversive, an agency relationship is the more evident choice (Davis et al., 1997). Hernandez (2012), building on the work of Davis et al. (1997) and others, adds that managers are likely to engage in stewardship behavior—"a type of pro-social action, intended to have a positive effect on other people" (Hernandez, 2012, p. 175)—because it is likely that a sense of connection emerges through the development of psychological ownership (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001) of the organization.

The relational perspective developed throughout this PhD dissertation offers a more multi-voiced, encompassing, dynamic and generative view of relationships and organizing. The core focus of both agency and stewardship theory is that an organization has to be managed to serve the interests of one stakeholder group: owners/shareholders are the most important or "principal"; defending and maximizing their wealth is paramount suppressing the interests of all other stakeholder groups. Consequentially, both agency and stewardship theory can be seen as mono-logical theories, that is, theories in the service of just one party/voice/logic.

Conversely, a relational perspective can be considered as a more multi-logical or multi-voiced theory. It draws its circle of social inclusion wider in an attempt to include all the relevant interdependent parties giving them an equal voice. The premise is that organizations are built by highly mutually dependent multiple actors (owners, top-level managers, middle managers, employees, unions, suppliers, clients,…) whose interests, expertise, needs, hopes and perspectives/logics are *equally* valuable and important ("principal"), without presuming the primacy of one party over another. Hence, managing an organization adequately comes down to appreciating and reciprocally enhancing the value of all these contributors and perspectives in service of moving forward together sustainably creating *common* value. Creating and assembling high quality relational practices among a multiplicity of interdependent parties is the foundation of a well-functioning organization.

A relational perspective also differs in terms of how relationships are approached. Both agency and stewardship theory focus their attention on a particular subset of relationships—either agency or stewardship relationships between principals and managers—within a particular interaction context characterized by certain given or assumed conditions (e.g., trust or distrust). Moreover, both theories consider relationships and interactions as mere economic instrumental exchange and negotiation transactions between principals and agents/stewards without considering the quality of relationship formation between them. However, doing "things" together (transactions, exchanges, tasks) cannot be decoupled from the quality of relationship formation among the actors (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Bouwen, 2010; see Table 1).

As a more overall perspective, the relational view broadens and deepens the meaning of relationships by bringing the *co-creation* of *all* relationships and interactions into focus as the essential constitutive element of organizing, change and learning. This PhD mainly focuses on capacity building within a collaborative learning setting, where parties have the intention to simultaneously help themselves and others in an effort to move forward together. However, the relational perspective has the potential to explicate and deconstruct the whole range of interactions—from collaboration to negotiation to fighting and power games—in terms of quality of

relating and outcomes for both the different parties involved and the shared organization activity and context.

Where agency and stewardship theory only study *reified* (fixed, "frozen") relationships between principals and managers (the relationship is there or not), the relational perspective focuses on the *fluid*, dynamic and reciprocal co-creative character of all relationships and interactions between a multiplicity of parties, be it within an organization or network or multi-actor collaboration context: when actors come together to work on a task or problem domain, they *continually* "invite" each other into a specific relationship and way of relating—ranging from low to high quality (see Table 1); they define own and other's identity and "position each other in membership roles with particular power differences" (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004, p. 144). Through their way of relating actors *do* "things" together and with each other, continually co-creating the interaction patterns and organizing contexts of which they are a part of (cf., enactment, Weick, 1979, 1995b). The relational perspective also highlights that the basic choices or value pattern about how to do "business" with another, how to relate, determine to a great extent the quality of the relational practices that are possible and the kind of organization that crystallizes (see also the comments of Arie De Geus above).

Also, instead of talking about an assumed static state of trust/distrust, control-oriented/involvement-oriented culture (e.g., Davis et al., 1997), or psychological ownership (Hernandez, 2012) as an *antecedent* or necessary condition to engage in a particular relationship, a relational perspective argues that concepts like trust and psychological ownership are *dynamic relational states* that actors continually develop in-between them depending on the quality of relationship formation (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Lambrechts et al., 2012). They are not a given of the situation or some individual psychological state; they themselves are actively build, maintained, and repaired in evolving relationships. Additionally, the relational perspective argues that it is more accurate to speak of *levels* of trust that are being built in relationships: relationship development, in the sense of engaging repeatedly in high-quality relating over time, and trust development (e.g., from superficial trust to calculative to deep mutual trust) are two sides of the same coin.

To date, both agency and stewardship theorists have been struggling with the dynamic character of relationships and shifts that might occur from, for example, an agency towards a stewardship relationship (e.g., Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012). A central principle of the relational perspective is that the possibility to develop relationships towards more mutual understanding, appreciation and joint performance is always a given. These shifts can be triggered by moments of joint inquiry and reflection into the ongoing relationships (e.g., how do we deal with each other here, what would help us to move forward together on the critical issues?). The dynamics of relationship formation, and the possibility of actively working on relationships in order to make them more reciprocally rewarding for everyone involved, is not taken into account within agency and stewardship theory.

This comparing exercise shows that there is much to be learned from exploring the relationships between agency theory, stewardship theory and relational theory. The insights developed here are still under construction; however, they show the potential of inter-disciplinary thinking trying to integrate knowledge across disciplines. When we do not attempt to make connections between theories and disciplines, when we stay in our disciplinary silos just talking to people who speak

already the same language, we will keep falling short of understanding and managing the growing complexity of our organizational world and broader society.

8.4 Conditions for a scholar-practitioner to thrive

My learning goal and ambition is to become a better scholar-practitioner, someone who is dedicated to generate new knowledge and help individuals and organizations to develop themselves (Schein, 2009b; Lambrechts et al., 2011). Schein's work, specifically his classic *Process Consultation* (1969, 1999a) and recent book on *Helping* (Schein, 2009b), has been consequential for me. It has been focusing my attention on the importance of the quality of the relationship between consultant/researcher/helper and client to both better serve and develop new knowledge. I have one foot in the world of academia, my primary work context, and one foot in the world of practice—working together with local organization development (OD) consultants, employer organizations, business leaders and entrepreneurs. This practice-closeness has always informed and grounded my ongoing research and teaching. I am a frequent boundary crosser; I like to mix and help in the world of practitioners and I like to converse with colleagues from academia coming from other domains and disciplines searching for fruitful connections and joint learning opportunities. Actually, this PhD manuscript is in itself an interdisciplinary act of boundary-crossing between Organizational Psychology, my "first love", and Business Economics.

Because my primary home is academia, a great deal of my work concerns theory building out of my experiences with practitioners. I try to develop knowledge that is both relevant to academics and practitioners. I consider bringing articles and books, when appropriate and helping, back into the conversation with practitioners an important part of my job: knowledge comes back "to live" and becomes meaningful through the enacted relationship. My research background in methodological rigor helps a great deal in this because it allows me to give back something that is conceptually and methodologically solid. Moreover, next to this methodological academic training, I have been learning through hands-on-experience in OD work outside academia—stimulated by significant mentors acting as role models—the ability of building relationships that foster joint learning. I have been investing greatly in my personal development, following the one-year experiential learning course Matrix—Leading and Coaching in Connection (Cycle 6, Hasselt University, 2006), which focuses on how to build high-quality relationships in group and collaborative settings. In most courses I teach, an experiential learning component is present. For example, since 2009, all my Business Economics students of the third Bachelor course "Organizational Behavior and Strategic Management" (n=115) carry out the Empathy Walk (Schein, 1996b; Lambrechts et al., 2011).

However, particularly in the broader management field, the conditions for realizing the ambition to become a better scholar-practitioner are everything but favorable. The interview with Edgar Schein makes that very clear (Lambrechts et al., 2011). First, in general, the current academic incentive and promotion systems of our universities are primarily endorsing discipline-based scholarship, *away* from practitioners (e.g., Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Pfeffer, 2005), "rewarding A [publications in a narrow set of top-listed journals] while hoping for B [scholarship that addresses the questions that matter most to society]" (Kerr, 1975; Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 74). Second, although the major accreditation associations (AACSB, AMBA, and EQUIS) underscore in their espoused theories the equal importance of scholarly efforts aimed at formal discovery (discipline-based scholarship), practical contributions, and good teaching, the balance is tipped strongly in favor of

"disciplined scholarship when it comes down to key decisions such as the granting of tenure" (Birnik & Billsberry, 2008, p. 986). Third, acting in line with what their incentive and promotion system rewards, most university and business school faculty have limited real-world work experience (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005)—be it as an entrepreneur, consultant, or manager. Hence, instead of developing practice-based, contextual knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006), management scholars are typically producing "over-abstract and de-contextualized organization theories that are not very useful in practice" (Lambrechts et al., 2011, p. 142; see also Ghoshal, 2005) and, consequently, are less relevant to students.

These elements, taken together, point to the danger of creating universities as monocultures where only one type of scholar, the "pure" practice-distant scholar, is *really* valued and supported while others—scholar-practitioners and practitioner-scholars—are excluded or merely tolerated. Embracing pluralism and diversity in scholarship, as an indication of whole-system health, seems to be lost, especially in the management field (Clegg & Ross-Smith, 2003; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Starkey, Hatchuel, & Tempest, 2009; Lorsch, 2009; Sharma, 2010).

After the publication of the interview with Edgar Schein in *The Academy of Management Learning & Education* (AMLE) (Lambrechts et al., 2011), I received several e-mail reactions from colleague-academics world-wide[2] and spoke with several others directly at conferences and by Skype[3]. There is one common thread that binds these conversations: all colleagues agree with the core message of the AMLE article, and with similar calls for change that have been made in several of our top management journals. However, as is so often the case, common sense does not seem to lead to common practice.

What would be a more favorable context for scholar-practitioners in the human fields to work and thrive in? In the 50th Anniversary Issue of *The Academy of Management Journal*, Bartunek (2007, p. 1330) challenges us to "imagine a future in which academic-practitioner conversations and mutual relationships happen as a matter of course, and imagine how they might enliven research and practice by helping academic researchers and management practitioners enter into each others' worlds without needing to cast their own worlds aside."

Inspired by a lot of conversations with colleague-academics and practitioners, I have come to believe that a more sustainable and organizationally healthy way of organizing is only possible when our individual institutions change their internal review and promotion systems in the direction of valuing and rewarding pluralism and different types of contribution to society. Instead of building a monoculture valuing one type of scholar while devaluing another, an individual institution might make the fundamental choice to build an organization that allows and stimulates people to build on their strengths and work together—be it as scholar-practitioners, "pure" scholars, practitioner-scholars, *all the flavors*. As Lloyd Steier puts it in a conversation I had with him at the 10th Annual IFERA World Family Business Research Conference (personal communication, June 29, 2011), "Being a scholar-practitioner might be more an institutional portfolio question … Does the institution allow

[2] Among others Jon Pierce, University of Minnesota Duluth; Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School; Ken Starkey, Nothingham University Business School; Pramodita Sharma, University of Vermont; Ken Moores, Bond University

[3] Among others Lloyd Steier, University of Alberta School of Business; Joe Astrachan, Kennesaw State University, Editor *Journal of Family Business Strategy*; Pramodita Sharma, University of Vermont, Editor *Family Business Review*; and Frank Hoy, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

pluralism and diversity in its workforce? Does the institution allow incentive changes related to career stage?" Indeed, why should the evidence from the Human Resources Management literature about the virtues of having a diverse and well-attuned workforce necessary to handle an ever increasing environmental complexity and variety not apply to our academic institutions?

Imagine the possibilities if we would reconfigure our universities, business schools or faculties into what Starkey et al. (2009, p. 1528) call "a new kind of knowledge space, … [an] agora in action where different stakeholders and different disciplines interact and learn from each other?" This is, however, very challenging. Not only do the relevant actors have to be identified and convened. Above all, for such a multi-party collaboration to work—in terms of co-creating new understanding and viable options concerning a complex problem domain[4]—the critical question is: "how will the relevant interdependent actors find a modus operandi in which the identity and contribution of each party is valued while simultaneously working towards a common understanding and action strategy?" (inspired by Gray, 1989; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Lambrechts et al., 2011, 2012). Indeed, different stakeholders and different disciplines use different perspectives to frame the issues, make different assumptions about what is important, and work with very different kinds of knowledge and forms of expertise (Schein, 1996a; Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). Indeed, knowledge can be highly contextual practice knowledge (experiential "doing"-knowledge), strongly embedded in a particular community of practice: implicit, difficult to explicate and learned through participation in the community. Or, knowledge can be highly codified, theoretical, systematic and practice-distant scientific knowledge (universal analytical "understanding" knowledge).

The major developmental task of the multiple parties, then, is to learn to constructively manage all these multiplicities without reducing them to one format: they have to learn that all parties, and the contributions they make, are equally valid and normal; searching for "who is right and who is wrong" will not lead to joint progress on the problem. Engaging in high-quality relational practices (see Table 1) offers a more viable and sustainable alternative. The scholar-practitioner can join the multi-party setting as another stakeholder bringing in his/her process expertise (Schein, 1969, 2009b). He/she can engage in participatory action research creating moments of reflection and/or facilitate and co-design work formats where high quality relating is possible (Bouwen, 2010).

There are increasing pressures from the business community and society at large to "give enough back", to be relevant. Because of the financial crunch, being relevant will become even more important. Political support for a management and organization science that stays practice-distant is becoming increasingly fragile (Starkey et al., 2009). Both Frank Hoy (personal communication, February 15, 2012) and Pramodita Sharma (personal communication, February 7, 2012) argue that the business community and entrepreneurs will bring more resources to universities and business schools that succeed in maintaining a healthy practice-academy balance. Moreover, they maintain, and I strongly agree, that those institutions that thrive on a good balance will be given more attention and status, and will become the more desirable places to work. INSEAD, Indian School of Business, and Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University where named as such places offering a truly unique value proposition to their faculty and stakeholders.

[4] For example: organizational change, innovation, succession issues in family firms, sustainability issues, climate change, global supply chains, natural resource management, regional development, plant closings/restructurings, viability of industry, unemployment, health care, mobility issues, etc.

And, “it is perhaps not a coincidence that the Organizational Behavior department [from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University] recognized as best by the *Financial Times* over the past 5 years is dominated by an *appreciative approach*, rather than traditional ranking- and deficit-based evaluations. When Peter Drucker asserted that “the task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths so as to make people’s weaknesses irrelevant,” he did not suggest that his organizational advice was applicable to all institutions except academia” (Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 91-92, italics added).

8.5 A particular challenge/opportunity when writing future articles

To conclude this final chapter, I want to add one major challenge/opportunity—an opportunity that was also articulated strongly in the pre-defense/pre-examination of this PhD: actually *demonstrating* or *illustrating* episodes of organizing, change or learning more in terms of the *actual* relational practices (real-life conversations, exchanges or interactions among the actors), and their inter-connectedness, shaping an evolving process over time. In my future articles, this can be done better by inserting detailed examples of (the assemblage of) actual “good” or “bad” relational practices-in-action and their outcomes. I could, for example, insert vignettes of concrete interaction, showing the actors (who is involved from which perspective or logic, and who is not involved), the task they are working on, how they are relating to each other with what quality of relating, allowing or not allowing new meanings, co-ownership and joint progress. These examples can be selected from in-depth interviews, participative observation, and/or own well-documented experiences of participating in change or learning processes as a scholar-practitioner.

Actually, an article about how to do research consistent with a relational perspective will be written in that format showing the actual relational practices between researchers and practitioners becoming co-inquirers and co-owners of a joint learning project. In the “Methodological underpinnings” of article three we already narrated the main joint activities between researchers and practitioners towards that goal; however, we still need to demonstrate the actual (combination of) relational practices-in-action shaping the whole learning process. The material is there: all the conversations and interactions are systematically documented (field notes of common experiences/interactions, interview transcripts). Actually, my first PhD, a monograph-type, was full of these kinds of detailed examples (Lambrechts & Grieten, 2007). The book format allowed very rich narratives of organizational life in-the-making.

The fifth article with Edgar Schein, for example, also shows in detail the actual relational practice in the form of a conversation between five actors. It demonstrates very concretely how high-quality relating between the interviewers and Edgar Schein allows for new insights, ideas and knowledge to emerge. The conversation moves from a traditional question-answer format to a dialogue format in which knowledge is co-created by co-inquirers on the spot (see Edgar Schein’s interventions stimulating this shift in conversing). The knowledge being developed is not abstract or codified knowledge; it is knowledge that, basically, resides within a good conversation between people. It is more evocative and actionable in nature because people can almost see the movie of the interaction playing in front of their eyes. This kind of knowledge production should, in my view, become much

more important in academia, certainly in human sciences, and should be valued as an equally valid and normal knowledge production form.

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