

Understanding the complex organizational
processes that help and hinder creativity and
innovation.

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Abstract: Understanding the complex organizational processes that help and hinder creativity and innovation. Robert James Sheffield, February 2012.

This study looks at the topics of creativity and innovation and how they are experienced as ordinary, everyday work. In business publications there is much hype and hope around the words “creativity” and “innovation”, but there is also a limited understanding of how creativity and innovation are enacted in organisations. Consequently, academics have stressed the need for ‘opening the black box’ of the firm and understanding how innovation really works (Birdi et al, 2003).

This research uses the Complex Responsive Processes approach to understand the ordinary, everyday experiences of people involved in work which was novel for the organisations concerned. I selected three organisational cases from the health and education sectors. I selected these because, in each case, people were working on complex challenges which had no single, obvious solution and which required the generation and development of new and useful ideas.

The research makes a novel contribution to knowledge in three ways. First, it has been unusual in that it has extended the application of complex responsive processes to understand the processes which impact on creativity and innovation in the health and education sectors. While complex responsive processes thinking has been applied to these sectors before, to my knowledge, this is the first time it has been applied to understand processes impacting on creativity and innovation in these sectors. Second, this research finds a pattern of dynamics between trust and a paradoxical concept of diversity, comprising both sufficient difference and sufficient common-ground between organizational members. In this research, trust was a necessary foundation for the exploration of ideas. However, for risks to be taken and ideas to be implemented, in contexts of high uncertainty and risk, trust alone was insufficient. The quality of conversational life flourished where both trust and diversity were present. Finally, this research makes a methodological contribution through using Stacey’s five areas for focusing attention as a conceptual framework. The use of this framework helps provide a depth of compelling detail and insights which would not have been obtained through traditional lenses from the domains of creativity and innovation. This is the first time this framework for focusing attention has been applied in this way to understanding creativity and innovation in empirical settings.

Acknowledgements

When I started getting interested in creativity and innovation in the 1990s, of course, I didn't realise it would reach this point. As I remember, I spent four years deciding not to start a Phd, because life was too busy. Eventually, I realised I must be motivated about the topic and had better get on and do something about it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The importance of creativity and innovation for organisations and societies is very topical:

“Innovation is today’s equivalent of the holy grail. Rich-world governments see it as a way of staving off stagnation. Poor governments see it as a way of speeding up growth. And business people everywhere see it as the key to survival.” (The Economist, 2011)

The quote from The Economist captures a perception of the growing importance of Innovation at societal and organisational levels. And yet, we seem to have a limited understanding of how innovation works in organisations (Birdi et al, 2003). In this work, the authors assert that it is not economies or sectors that innovate but individual firms within them. They go on to state that ‘opening the black box’ of the firm and understanding how innovation really works can help innovation in the United Kingdom as a whole, through enhancing positive trends and reversing negative ones. Yet the authors point to our lack of understanding of how ideas are actually developed within organisations.

Chapter two shows the lineage of writing around creativity and innovation. The topic itself is not new to organisational studies, however, what seems new to me is the scale of hope and expectation that it can and must deliver big benefits. French (2002) warns us of the risks involved in being seduced by the promise of the latest New Idea, cautioning us that getting wrapped up in hype and expectation may hinder our own thinking. For me, it was a curiosity about what the terms “creativity” and “innovation” meant that sparked a the motivation that eventually turned into this doctoral submission.

1.1 A personal motivation to study

My interest in the areas of creativity and innovation had been slowly building through the late 1990s. I had been curious about the meanings of these terms which seemed to be becoming more commonplace. They seemed to be associated with change, even upheaval. What appealed to me was the possibility of being involved with others in making something new happen. At the time I worked in the aerospace sector with Airbus which was building its A380 airbus. Outside our Human Resources department, someone had drawn lines on the floor to represent a building being designed to accommodate work for the new A380 aircraft. I wondered about how the agreement and consensus had come about to make this happen, having been privy to none of it. There was something exciting about the fact that it was going to happen, but the intricacies of *how* this had come to be were not clear.

At the same time, I chose to put myself through various programmes to learn more about this domain of creativity and Innovation: a Masters module on creativity, innovation and change as well as getting trained in a couple of relevant psychometric measures. Each investment of time and cost brought exciting insights. There were tools for creativity and the skills seemingly needed to use them effectively; questionnaires helped to measure and analyse individual preferences for demonstrating creativity as well as the health of team environment for supporting the flourishing of ideas. At the same time I sensed that seeing creativity and innovation through these new conceptual lenses, while bringing new insights, also raised new questions

such as *how do things really work with people under real work pressures and how can these tools be used effectively with work which is sometimes messy and unpredictable?*

From 2003 onwards, I was fortunate to be involved in work with a professional services organisation. This accounting and consulting practice trained its recent graduates in the skills of working effectively with clients, and our group of facilitators was selected to do the work. A brief description of the programme may be helpful here. Typically, a programme would involve eighteen participants over two days working in three groups of six. Each group would work with a facilitator whose role it was to help people learn something about relevant client management, taking their own style and approach into account. A feature of the programme was that we worked with UK charities who would attend each of our courses, providing work for our participants. A group of six would work for two days on a challenge set by a charity. Examples of these challenges included: we have a publicity event in 6 months time, and are including auctions lots - please find 2 auction lots that people couldn't find elsewhere; help us refine our marketing and promotions strategy; help us raise new sources of funds because our previous ones are 'drying up'; how can we increase the number and appropriateness of volunteers we recruit?

Quite often, the challenges were open-ended and allowed the course participants to generate unusual ideas. Sometimes charity members were explicit in asking for as many unusual ideas as possible. Charity staff would explain the task to the group on day one and return on day two for the results. In working with the group of six over two days, I was able to help and observe how they worked together. There were two aspects to their work: one was the charity work itself, and working hard to provide some value to the client; the other was the more nebulous *work* concerned with learning something useful around client management which may be helpful for people in their ongoing practice. For example, people may want to practice leading a team; have a positive 'impact with the client; learn more about their client management and/or teamwork skills; give and/or receive performance feedback more effectively. Facilitators, like me, are each attached to one group, and our role is to help them consider what they want to learn, and take appropriate risks to help them learn. As facilitator, my role was to stop the group working solely on the task and help them reflect on their current task and learning.

I worked with around 30 groups in this period and it was clear that some groups worked more effectively than others. My interest began to grow as I realised this was an arena where I may gather some insights about creativity in practice. The following examples show some of the notes I kept from this period.

In one group the quality of direct, frank communication was remarkable. One member of this group - L - was sincere in asking for honest feedback from others in the team. His directness was shown in both asking for feedback on his performance, and giving others feedback on their own. The effect in the group was to 'up' the challenge for all of us. Others rose to this challenge, and the quality of their communication and feedback increased to rare levels. The mood in the group changed for the better, as people realised that something unusual was happening. The quality of discussion rose sharply. Once achieved, people wanted more of this. What was happening, as far as I was concerned, was that a sense of excitement filled the room. People knew that the others were taking time and effort to help them with their learning goals, and trust in the group was high. There was little of the hedging, generalising and being careful that often reflects

the climate of a group where trust is lower. The effect was to 'buck-up' everyone, as people felt a mutual obligation to 'go out on a limb' and tell others what they'd done well and could have done better.

With another group it was very different

There was a limited diversity in this team, as judged by a measure of interpersonal preference style. There was some discussion of 'what we are expected to do here', but this was not sustained. The groups stuck with what the client has asked for – not clarifying or challenging it. Anxiety levels are high throughout much of day 2. The more the course progressed, the higher the anxiety levels and the less prepared was the group to stop its work and reflect on its way of working. There was little psychological safety in the room. I felt a palpable sense of the group wishing to be left to 'get on with it'. As a facilitator, my presence was unwelcome, because, I think, I brought an uncomfortable reminder of the other things the group should be considering. Even though the group may have believed its output was mediocre - as the client later remarked – they also perceived it was too late to start again. (By this late stage, they were right.) The more anxiety rose, the lower became psychological safety, reflexivity and group efficacy, and the stronger became the cornered fixation on task: 'rabbits in the deadline headlights'.

Another group had an encouraging way of working

I enjoyed the ideas from the discussion with client as much as the content of the pre-prepared report. There was some diversity in the team. A sense of people wanting feedback and responding to it positively. Anxiety levels were highest on the morning of day 2. However the group were able to reflect on what they'd prepared before the client meeting. They re-framed what they had available to focus on identifying real client value. They planned to express this in the presentation, and did so. Evidence here of being able to change tack, even with deadlines pressing, and make the best of what they had. (And this did have positive results in the meeting.) The putative leader in this group felt awkward - was very self-effacing. Other people didn't want to 'step on her toes' this can lead to a spiral of self-containment. However, the group did reflect – see above. As the pressure built, and deadlines came nearer, some talk was more blunt and direct: "we don't have time to spend 20 minutes on this." They had built the trust to express themselves more plainly by then.

I'd begun to see connections between the elements of psychological safety, trust, directness of communication, group reflexivity, and anxiety levels. I saw it expressed in several ways, both in people's personal learning risks, and on the more formal charity tasks. Often, the pattern was similar across these domains. If risk-taking was high on a personal level for enough group members, so it would be on the task, and vice versa. Also in how groups sought to work with others outside their group, or remained inward-looking. Some groups welcomed or sought outsiders in to their midst. Some asked outside for ideas and help, both from people on the course, and beyond. Others remained more self-contained, harder to influence and 'set' on a path, and seemingly increasingly resistant to considering alternatives. I wondered about what helped the pattern become more virtuous...? It sparked my curiosity about the extent to which this pattern is a broader phenomenon, and to any extent manageable.

These early reflections of mine preceded and overlapped with the start of my PhD. My early thinking was influenced by concepts I was reading about in the academic literature like reflexivity and psychological safety. In short, I was beginning to take an interest in research and practice, and to see ways of sourcing work opportunities as arenas for research settings. My motivation to do research was also growing. The focus of my interest was also taking shape and this was centred on how people work together in a context in which novel ideas are required. There was something about the pressures associated with 'new' organisational situations, where no blueprint for taking action exists, that seemed to me to put interpersonal relations at centre stage. I was increasingly interested in the realities of people working together when they had to bear a measure of uncertainty.

1.2 Remaining chapter descriptions

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

I discuss the mainstream thinking around relevant elements of the creativity and innovation literature. The literature is voluminous and I choose aspects relevant to my research questions. (These are shown at the end of this chapter.) As I explain more fully at the end of Chapter 2, I found much of the mainstream literature not suited to my research interests. I was prompted to re-think my approach by some vigorous questioning during my Doctoral progression exam.

Chapter 3 – Complex Responsive Processes

This chapter describes an overview of process-based research; the origins of complexity thinking, then focuses in more detail on the main body of theory I chose for my research: complex responsive processes. I finish the chapter with a description of a conceptual framework I use, synthesised from complex responsive processes work.

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology

This describes how I place complex responsive processes in a broader tradition of qualitative research, the methods for gathering data, and the decisions I took for analysing a large volume of raw data. It also sets out the challenges involved in doing so, especially from an ethical viewpoint.

Chapter 5 - Case 1: The Ideas Exercise

This case focuses on a change made to a relatively standard leadership development programme. The change involved introducing the Ideas Exercise to participants. This required them to generate creative ideas, and to present these ideas to two senior directors as part of the process. The case covered a 3-month period from October 2008 – December 2008.

Chapter 6 - Case 2: Co-ordinating Children and Young People's Services

This case reviews how I and a co-facilitator, Jane, worked with a natural work team over a 6-month period in 2009, and kept occasional contact with them for the next 16 months. The team was faced with the challenge of introducing common working practices across a large UK country after an organisational restructuring.

Chapter 7 - Case 3: The Business Faculty and Knowledge Exchange

This was the largest case, spanning 2 and a half years, from October 2007 – March 2010. It centres on the efforts of people from a British University to introduce new service offerings to a largely new target audience - people working who want help for their working practice.

Chapter 8 - Cases Synthesis

This presents a discussion of the overall findings, contribution to knowledge and illustrations of the value of complex responsive processes thinking. This chapter reviews patterns across the cases and what this means from a complex responsive point of view.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this chapter I summarise the contribution to knowledge made by this research, as well as pointing out the limitations of the research and further questions raised. I review my own learning from having done this research, applied to research and consulting.

I focus my research on two main questions to guide my work:

Research questions for this study:

1. How do conversations between people sustain exploration when 'acting into the unknown'?
2. How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when 'acting into the unknown'?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the main themes from the mainstream literature on creativity and innovation. These two words cover a voluminous amount of data in research terms, so I am guided by the research questions and their attention to the dynamics of interpersonal relations in a conversational context. In a context where the organisational unit concerned faces an unusual challenge, requiring novel creative thinking, how do people cope with the cognitive and emotional challenges aroused? The chapter covers the key research findings and finishes with a critique of the gaps in the research.

2.1 Creativity and Innovation - why they matter and what they are

Whatever is meant by creativity and innovation - and there's significant debate about the terms - there's a growing consensus that they matter. It matters at a personal level (Runco 2004), an organisational level, (West and Altink, 1996, Gyskiewicz, 1999, Carrier, 1998, Mumford, 2003), and at national level (Birdi et al, 2003). They also have importance from a normative point of view:

“The importance of new ideas cannot be overstated. Ideas and their manifestation as practices or products are at the core of social change.” (Zaltman et al, 1973: 8, quoted in West and Altink, 1996: 3.)

Runco (2004) argues that the flexibility of creative persons allows for coping with the increasingly complex changes that are part of our daily lives. For West and Atlink (1996)

“...many of the more pressing human problems are institutionalised, and it is only by bringing about innovative change that many of these problems can be overcome.” (p.3)

While the generation of creative ideas has not traditionally been valued in organisations, this is changing. Environmental changes for organisations, such as increased market competitiveness, mean that the translation of creative ideas into innovative products and services has become critical for their survival (Hamel, 2004, Byrne et al, 2009). There is an intimidating amount of data around creativity and innovation. King (1990) shows how innovation has been studied from the perspectives of social and occupational psychologists, sociologists, management scientists, and organisational behaviourists. To that list, West and Rickards (1999) add in the perspectives of policy-makers, economists, managers and sociologists. West and Atlink, (1996) contend that

“...it is within the discipline of psychology that the study of innovation perhaps most appropriately fits...” (p. 3)

In addition to the interests of the researchers, Rickards and Al-Beraidi (2006) point to the different domains in which the concept of creativity has been applied: education, psychology, commerce and culture studies. There have also been different foci of analysis for the research, at which innovation has been studied, which have contributed to difficulties in defining the field of the work. These include personal-level: Guilford

(1950) Kirton (1976, 2003); team-level: West (1990); organisation-level: Burns (1961); of whole systems: Csikszentmihalyi (1988) and at the level of society: Simonton (1999).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the research on innovation has been characterised by variability of findings (Aasen 2009b). These separate studies share the often unstated, belief that innovation is manageable, though with differing prescriptions as to where to direct attention. Different views exist as to the nature of the innovation challenge, from claiming it is a technical matter (Wheelwright and Clark 1992); to the nature of the work itself (Oldham and Cummings 1996); to the intrinsic motivation to be gained from such work (Amabile 1983, 1988); as a cognitive and behavioural challenge (Van de Ven, 1986); as a social and political matter (Kanter, 1988), and as a necessity for responding to a changing external environment (Kanter, 1989).

2.2 Terms and definitions

There has also been an evolving debate around terms. Creativity and innovation themselves have been treated inconsistently in the literature. For example Rickards, (2006) argues that one group of researchers, including West and Farr (1990) in their influential 1990 research, have tended to treat creativity as a form of individual-level innovation, whereas he himself advocates studying the differences in these 2 constructs. Where there has been some emerging consensus, creativity has tended to refer to the generation of novel and useful ideas (Stein, 1974, Gyskiewicz, 1987, Amabile, 1988, Amabile et al 1996). Innovation involves the successful implementation of creative ideas by the organization, leading to value realisation or benefits to stakeholders (West and Anderson, 1996). In this view, employees' creativity is often the starting point for innovation; an essential sub-set of innovation:

“Our position is simple. You can have creativity without innovation, but you cannot have innovation without creativity.” (Isaksen et al 2011: 14)

Regarding the source of innovation, West (2000b) argues that creativity is more a feature of individuals, while innovation implementation is more typically accomplished in groups, organisation or society. Amabile et al (1996) point out that the ideas may come from persons or teams. Mining deeper into 'novelty', West and Farr (1990) build on Zaltman et al's (1973), contention that the idea should be new to the unit of adoption. They provide a definition of innovation which has subsequently been cited widely:

“The intentional introduction and application within a role, group or organisation of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption, designed to significantly benefit the individual, the group, organisation or wider society.” (p: 9)

Using this definition, West et al (2004) distinguish between innovation and change, arguing that innovation is sub-set of change, comprising the aspects of intentionality, newness to the unit of adoption and designed to benefit. If a change has these three elements, then, according to this view, it is innovation. However, there are debates around this definition of innovation. For example, regarding what constitutes newness, in

a recent review of the innovation literature Crossan and Apaydin (2010) refer to Hansen and Wakonen (1997: 350): “it is practically impossible to do things identically”. Crossan and Apaydin argue that this makes any change an innovation by definition.

On the issue of benefits from innovations, Totterdell et al (2002) claim there have been very few studies as to the alleged positive outcomes of innovation, while much more attention has been focused on understanding the conditions that enable innovation. They attribute this, in part, to the uncritical assumption that innovation leads to positive benefits – a view supported by Abrahamson’s (1991) challenge to the economics-based assumption that innovations are ‘a good thing’.

2.3 Making sense of the research findings

It is difficult to distinguish neatly between research on creativity and that on innovation. The above research does not limit itself to the matter of what aids the generation of new and useful ideas. By extension, implication and intent it also enters into the question of what helps ideas get implemented.

Wolfe (1994) concludes that the

“...results of innovation research have been inconclusive, inconsistent and characterised by low levels of explanation...As a consequence the most *consistent* theme found in the organizational innovation literature is that its research results have been inconsistent.” (p:405)

Aasen (2009b) finds there to be considerable variance in the findings around innovation research; Crossan and Apaydin (2010) argue that research into innovation is fragmented, poorly grounded theoretically, and not fully tested in all areas; Drazin and Schoonhoven (1996) concluded that the domain of innovation had failed to produce a dominant theoretical foundation; Tidd et al (1997) point to the inadequacy of multi-dimensional approaches. This fragmentation across disciplinary interests, combined with the sheer breadth of discipline interest in the topic may help explain the differing interests driving research, and the wide-ranging prescriptions for action. According to Rickards (2003), ‘innovation’ researchers began the 21st century impoverished with regard to sound integrative principles of their subject matter.

Despite this, Rickards (ibid) goes on to state that innovation retains its fascination as a process through which change may be purposively influenced, and places this notion of influence over one’s world as a legacy of enlightenment thinking and the development of the scientific method. Rickards and Moger have been influential, European-based researchers, as founders of the *Creativity and Innovation Management* journal. In a review of a decade’s worth of contributions they point to another source of tension, concluding that the construct of innovation is:

“...living uneasily with considerable tensions between those practitioners and researchers who wish to explore innovation as a process for change in complex environments, and those whose preference is for a classical scientific management approach.” (2006: 14)

In referring to Giddens (1990), Rickards and Moger (ibid) point out how innovation has been given a thorough-going modern perspective. The ambiguities inherent in the innovation process have been

compartmentalised by researchers into the 'fuzzy-front end' where, supposedly, the creativity occurs. Rickards (2003) pointed to the growing requirement for innovation research to accept the existence of more uncertainties, displayed through longitudinal and multi-level studies.

Explicit or implicit in these definitions is the assumption that innovation can be managed, controlled, or at least influenced in some desirable way. Fonseca (2002) argues that this is a defining characteristic of much mainstream literature in this domain - that innovation as a whole is manageable. What is to be managed, how and with what degree of ease varies according to the author, but there is a broad consensus in the mainstream literature that the holistic innovation process can be 'managed' for positive benefit.

2.4 Creativity: a broad foundation

There seems sense to me in accepting that creativity refers to the generation of new and useful ideas. Creative ideas can be generated but, for many reasons, may not be implemented. I choose to follow Rhodes' (1961) influential and integrating 4-P theory. In reviewing the creativity literature, Rhodes collected 56 definitions of creativity and synthesised them into 4 main themes of *People, Process, Product* – meaning the creative result or outcomes - and the *Press* or context for creativity. This is probably the most often-used structure for creative studies (Runco 2004) and the importance of Rhodes' work has been affirmed by several scholars (Stein 1968, MacKinnon, 1978 and Isaksen, 1993).

2.4.1 The Creative Person

A pivotal moment in the history of creativity research came with Guilford's address to the American Psychological Association in 1950. This spawned several decades of investigation into the nature of individual characteristics that may predict creativity. What is it about the person that aids the generation of new and useful ideas? Runco (2004) cites Barron and Harrington (1981) as summarising the traits that characterise the creative person:

“...high valuation of aesthetic qualities in experience, broad interests, attraction to complexity, high energy, independence of judgement, autonomy, intuition, self-confidence, ability to resolve antinomies or to accommodate apparently opposite or conflicting trait's in one's self-concept, and, finally, a firm sense of self as 'creative'”. (Runco 2004, p: 661)

Guilford's address contributed to several decades of trait-based research. The most typical unit of analysis was an individual, deemed, by some criteria, to be creative and consequently assessed through research. A fundamental issue raised here was the extent to which these traits were 'fixed' or learnable. Guilford (1977) himself suggested that divergent skills and convergent skills were important for individual creativity and could be learnt. Divergent skills included four main characteristics: fluency – producing many ideas; flexibility – generating many types of ideas; elaboration – developing existing ideas; originality – generating

novel ideas. Convergent skills were also argued to help the creative act by focusing on and identifying the most promising options from a large number of possibilities.

An important juncture in the research came with Kirton's theory of adaption-innovation (1961, 1976, 1989, 2003). His argument is that all people can be creative, but individuals may have markedly different styles for demonstrating this. The more adaptive people prefer structured situations, generate well-developed solutions to ongoing problems, and tend to solve problems within existing parameters. Innovators prefer unstructured situations, solve problems while ignoring constraints, take greater risk, and have difficulty operating within organizational demands (Kirton, 1976). The theory is operationalised in research studies through a psychometric questionnaire called the KAI.

Kirton's theory has been tested and found support in many settings, including entrepreneurship, (Buttner and Gryskiewicz, 1993), project team managers, (Tullett, 1996), organisational change, (Kirton, 1984) and group working, (Hammerschmidt 1996). It has also received criticism. Kirton argues that there is no link between an individual's adaptive or innovative style and a person's ability, or level, of creativity. This has been challenged in practice, with researchers finding correlations between individuals' KAI scores and measures of creative ability, or level (Torrance and Yun Horng, 1980, Goldsmith, 1987).

2.4.1(a) The Individual in context

Runco (2004) describes how, until the early 1980s, much research had focused on the relationship between creativity and intelligence and creativity and personality. Gradually research began to assess the importance of the wider environmental and social context in which the individual was placed:

“In the 21st-century world of electronically connected organizations, everyone will have a part to play as the creator and implementer of new ideas. In this respect, older notions of the exceptional individual as a creative genius...will become obsolete.” (West and Rickards, 1999: 55)

Amabile's 'componential model' (1983), contributed to this greater appreciation of contextual factors. She argued that a combination of domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant skills and intrinsic task motivation are necessary for individual creativity in a particular domain.

2.4.1(b) The growing importance of teams

“Guilford opened the door to a world of personality traits and cognitive processing models. It is now up to us as creativity researchers to expand the scope of this field and explore creativity in all of its manifestations, from single individuals working together, to small teams, to large and complex groups.” (Kurtzberg and Amabile, 2001: 292)

The increasing importance of teams as a means of doing creative work has been widely acknowledged (Kolb, 1992, West et al, 2004, Egan, 2005). However, more research is needed to understand how the creative process works in groups (Kurtzberg and Amabile, 2001, Kratzer et al, 2004, West et al, 2004).

West et al (ibid) argue that teams are especially useful for implementing ideas, and that implementation is particularly crucial for organizational change. According to them we know little about:

“...what factors influence the extent to which teams generate and implement ideas for new and improved products, services and ways of doing things at work?” (p: 270)

As we will see, the insights about creativity and innovation in teams are varied and not always convergent.

2.4.1(c) The case for diversity and team performance

One of the main topics for team research is in relation to the use of diverse perspectives. Having and sharing a diversity of views can provide the spark for ‘constructive controversy (Tjosvold, 1998). In a study aimed examining problem-solving style and work content, Hammerschmidt (1996) used Kirton’s KAI questionnaire to assess thinking style. He experimented by creating four types of groups: those whose style was consistent with the work requirement and had a small diversity as measured by the KAI; those whose style was consistent with the work requirements and had large group diversity; those whose style did not match the work requirement and had small group diversity; those whose style did not match the work requirements and had large group diversity. The results showed that where the work ‘fitted’ people’s thinking styles, performance was high and it was highest with the more diverse groups. Where work did not ‘fit’ styles, performance was lowest in the more diverse groups. The best and worst scores were achieved in the more diverse groups, but mediated by the concept of ‘fit’ to task.

In a study of diversity performance, affect and self-perception, again using the KAI as a measure of diversity, Kurtzberg (2005) found that diverse teams scored better on a measure of idea-fluency. However, working in these teams was often uncomfortable, and the team members didn’t necessarily believe they were creative. Affect was shown to mediate the relationship between diversity and perceptions of creativity. In other words, what it *felt like* to be in the team had a greater impact on their assessment of their own creativity than did their actual creative output. This is consistent with Kirton’s (1989) views on the likely effect of too much team diversity – that it will be difficult to integrate too great a degree of difference, and that the greater the diversity, the greater the discomfort. This is especially so where there are high levels of conflict, making the effective management of a wide range of views key for effective creativity and innovation. (Mumford and Gustafson 1988, Nemeth and Owens 1996, Tjosvold 1998).

Other processes need to be in place to support diversity. West (2000b) argues that diversity needs high levels of psychological safety and internal integration to aid innovation; a cooperative context is needed to support a diversity of views, and be a stimulus for group innovation (DeVries et al, 1996). There is further work to do, to understand how different types of diversity may impact upon creativity and innovation. West and Hirst, (2003) review the evidence on the impact of diversity on group innovation, finding that

“...functional or knowledge diversity in the team is associated with innovation. However, when diversity begins to threaten the group’s safety and integration...Where diversity reduces group

members' clarity about and commitment to group objectives, levels of participation...task orientation...and support for new ideas, then it is likely that innovation attempts will be resisted.”
(p: 300)

2.4.1(d) Minority dissent and creativity

McGrath, (1984) found that “individuals working separately generate many more and more creative (as rated by judges) ideas than do groups” (quoted in (Nemeth and Kwan, 1987: 797). One of the factors at play is believed to be *social loafing*, defined as the reduction in motivation when individuals work collectively compared to when they work individually or coactively (Karau and Williams, 1993). In extreme forms, groups may portray characteristics of what Janis (1982) called Groupthink. Here, intra-team pressures create an overwhelming pressure for unanimity, crowding out alternate views. An aspect of teamwork connected with diversity, but sufficiently distinct, is that of minority influence. Individuals can bring about change through the persistent and consistent voicing of a minority view in groups, (Nemeth and Owens, 1996). Several studies have found that individuals holding minority opinions can move others to action. De Dreu and West, (2001) found a positive correlation between team supervisor ratings for innovation and minority dissent in a context of high levels of participation, team interaction and information sharing. In the same article, they also argue that it can prevent defective group decision making and increase individual creativity. Nemeth and Chiles (1988) found that a minority opinion-holder, worthy of respect and showing persistence, may encourage other individuals to say what they think. Nemeth and Kwan (1987) found this process can contribute to the generation of more strategies for solving a problem, though not necessarily always the best one. Finally, Nemeth (1986) suggests that the group's willingness to understand the minority viewpoint leads to divergent thinking.

De Dreu and West (2001) point out a major methodological limitation of the minority dissent research. These have been carried out, experimentally in the 'laboratory', with groups with no past or future. The authors caution that it may be inappropriate to generalise these findings to teams in work settings.

2.4.1(e) Reflexivity in groups

This is defined as the extent to which team members collectively reflect upon team objectives, strategies and processes as well as their wider organizations and environment, and adapt them accordingly (West, 1996). Essentially, reflexivity considers how far groups stop working, and take time to reflect on their challenges in their context. Groups must take time away from pressing work problems in order to explore options, experiment with alternative approaches and consider appropriate risk-taking. The theory has been further developed (West, 2000a), though Shalley (2002) points out conceptual limitations with its seeming similarity to goal-setting processes. However, the concept has been tested in the United Kingdom with television production teams, where higher team reflexivity predicted higher team performance (Carter and West, 1998). It was also tested in China where co-operative goals were found to be an important foundation for team reflexivity. In turn, higher team reflexivity was associated with higher ratings of innovativeness by the team manager (Tjosvold et al, 2004).

Interestingly, West argues that, because reflexivity involves recognising discrepancies between real and ideal circumstances, it is uncomfortable. Therefore, teams are unlikely to be reflexive without the aid of planned or unplanned external factors such as leadership facilitation, formal processes or events or shocks in the team's life (West, 2000a). Kratzer et al, (2004) found that the formation of sub-groups tenure – how long people have been in the team – increased the extent of the formation of these sub groups. As people stay longer in teams, so communication tends to centralise around these longer-term members, with communication taking place within groups, more than between them.

2.4.2 Creative Press

As the focus of creativity research expanded to encompass the context of the unit in question, so the concept of Creative Press came under the microscope. What are the characteristics of organisational unit environments that support and/or hinder creativity and innovation? That is a fundamental question legitimised by the study of Creative Press.

According to Isaksen et al, (2011) 'Press' was the word used to describe where creativity took place because it referred to the interaction between the person and his or her environment. Factors in the environment 'pressed' upon the person and the person aspects of the person impinged upon the environment. Early research established that the climate for creativity and innovation was generally viewed in an 'objectivistic' sense (Ekvall, 1987, quoted in Ekvall, 1996). 'Climate' was 'out there' - a property of organisations, independent of the perceptions of individual organisational members.

Research from the Center for Creative Learning in the USA, identified factors in the environment that can block innovation (Burnside et al, 1988). From Sweden there emerged a research programme identifying environmental factors supporting creativity and innovation (Ekvall, 1991).

A series of measures were developed to assess climate for creativity (Amabile et al, 1996, Anderson and West, 1996, Ekvall, 1996). Various, they have been tested in various private and public sector organisations, and in different national settings including private enterprises in Sweden (Agrell 1994), manufacturing firms in Malaysia, (Mohamed and Rickards, 1996), a university college in Sweden (Ekvall and Ryhammar, 1998) and health-care and bank employees in Italy, (Ragazzoni et al, 2002).

Key aspects of the environment affecting creativity and innovation included the following items. First, the work itself matters. Work requiring new and useful ideas is conceived as having certain properties: a variety of skills of the incumbent, and is therefore challenging; the task should reflect a whole piece of work, and is symbolically important, as well as having significance both inside and outside the organisation; there should be freedom in deciding how and when to do the work, as well performance feedback that highlights new ways of working (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). Puccio et al, (2007) argue that creative thinking is required when the problem or challenge is heuristic, that is, open-ended, with no set method to follow or obvious

solution. In summarising several studies, Byrne et al, (2009) state that the task must present complex, ill-defined problems where successful performance depends on the generation of novel, useful solutions.

Next, creative work is argued to be risky and uncertain, (Mumford et al, 2002). In particular, the soundness of ideas cannot be guaranteed, nor their ability to be developed, nor can the success of the outcome once it reaches its market (Cardinal, and Hatfield, 2000, quoted in Byrne et al, 2009). Given this uncertainty, Byrne et al (ibid) emphasise the role of leadership in attending to overall organisational strategy, as well as the contextual socio-technical systems within the organisation. French (2001) writes that

“...change always arouses anxiety and uncertainty. As a result there is a tendency to “disperse” energy; that it is to be deflected from the task into a range of avoidance tactics.” (p: 480, abstract)

In reviewing the literature around threat and habit, Claxton concluded

“There is a wealth of evidence to confirm the common impression that when people feel threatened, pressurised, judged or stressed, they tend to revert to ways of thinking that are more clear-cut, more tried and tested, and more conventional: in a word, less creative.” (Claxton, 1998:76)

This was supported by Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) who describe the dynamics of stress and increased cortisol and adrenaline levels. The impact is that memory, planning and creativity are badly affected and people fall back on habitual thinking. People are more able to generate new and useful ideas when they are feeling free from pressure and positive (Claxton, 1998). Having sufficient time for ideas also matters.

“...the participants in our study generally perceived themselves as being more creative when time pressure was high. Sadly, their diaries gave the lie to those self-assessments. There was clearly less and less creative thinking in evidence as time pressure increased.” (Amabile, 2002: 57).

Why is this so? Amabile (ibid) points to thirty years of psychological research. Time is needed to explore a range of potentially useful concepts in relation to a specific challenge, to learn things that may prove useful, and to let the brain link concepts in unusual ways. Without the time available one or more of these elements may be missing.

Humour and playfulness has been identified as a factor in enabling creativity This is understood as the spontaneity and ease that exists in the workplace (Ekvall, 1996). Winnicott (1971) saw play as a developmental requirement for individuals and as a source of emotional and psychological health:

“It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognised but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation.” (Winnicott, 1971, p: 65)

Winnicott’s work was with children, over a 40 year period. Martin, (1991) states that Winnicott’s work has direct relevance for organisational life and problem solving, for example in his advocating of contained

emotion, rather than too-high excitement. More broadly in the realm of positive emotions, creativity can be facilitated by a transient pleasant, affective state:

“...good feelings tend to increase the tendency to combine material in new ways and to see the relatedness between different stimuli.” (Isen, 1987, p:1130)

The authors speculated that people who are feeling happy are able to access a greater amount of cognitive stimuli. The thinking is that, since creativity can be considered to involve the ability to combine stimuli in different ways and to see connections between different stimuli, positive feelings allow individuals to defocus attention and to make a greater number of novel interpretations.

2.4.3 Creative Process

This aspect is concerned with how creativity takes place. It relates to the mental processing that takes place, as well as the techniques and skills used through different steps. Creative Process research focuses on how people behave when attempting to solve problems requiring creative thinking.

Wallas (1926) provided an early articulation of the steps involved from thought to new idea. He identified four steps: preparation - understanding and becoming immersed in the problem; incubation – considering the problem without conscious effort; illumination – when the bright idea appears, and verification – checking the idea for validity and substance. Other writers contributed to this growing field, all with the intent on making transparent the stages of what had previously been a mysterious process (Spearman, 1931, Osborn, 1953, Young, 1965, Koestler, 1969).

Value has been placed on generating ideas through a divergent phase, with its emphasis on producing many possible ideas, rather than one correct idea (Scratchley and Hakstain, 2001, Vincent et al, 2002). While producing many ideas is deemed useful, so is the ability to evaluate and reduce ideas to the most promising ones - known as convergent thinking. A well-known approach, incorporating both divergent and convergent thinking is that developed by Noller and Parnes, (1972) and Parnes and Noller (1972). In summarising the work on creative process, Scott et al, (2004) identify the following stages and claim the list to be a coherent description of the stages of creative thought: problem construction or problem finding, information gathering, concept search and selection, conceptual combination, idea generation, idea evaluation, implementation planning, and action monitoring.

To my mind, there are several assumptions underpinning the concept of Creative Process. First, there is the implication of a series of linear steps; second, the promise of reasonable replicability of results if these steps are followed; third, in line with the wish to make the stages transparent comes the view that they can be learnt, (Isaksen et al, 2011). In fact, there have been a number of studies investigating the effectiveness of creativity training. Rickards and De Cock, (1994) reviewed the effectiveness of creativity training offered at Manchester Business School. They concluded that training had altered many participants' attitudes and thinking towards creativity, and positively impacted upon their work. However, the survey approach made it difficult to gain compelling evidence of participants going on to achieve value-added products in their

workplaces. Further, to turn these increased capabilities into action, people need motivation, opportunities and organisational support. The authors posit the need for longitudinal studies to gather evidence of impact of creativity programmes. Birdi (2005) points to Simonton's (2000) work, arguing that while creativity training had been widely taught in organisations, little evidence was provided of the effectiveness of creativity training in the workplace. Birdi continues, stating that where evaluations have been carried out, these tend to be with students in laboratory settings, focusing on idea generation rather than their application. Puccio et al (2006) focus their attention on Creative Problem Solving, an approach based on the work of Osborn (1953) and developed in subsequent decades through Buffalo State College. They find strong evidence for the effectiveness of training in experimental and work-place settings at both individual and group levels. Through a meta-analysis, creativity training was also found to be effective in providing participants with cognitive strategies for dealing with information (Scott et al, 2004). From these reviews overall, while there is impressive evidence that participants can grasp quickly the cognitive strategies for generating ideas, their implementation and evidence of positive impact remains an under-researched area in the literature.

2.4.4 Creative Product

The quality of the creative product, or outcome, depends on people with the right traits, skills and knowledge using certain processes in particular types of environments, supportive to creativity. Creative products can be thought of as tangible and intangible outcomes that are new and useful (Puccio et al, 2007).

It is important to understand something of the different types of outcomes, because the trend has been to open up the domain of creativity away from the field of the solitary genius, to include all people in the workplace who can have and develop ideas. Damanpour and Evan, (1984) distinguished between technical and administrative types of innovation. The former include a new product or service or a change to production or delivery, while the latter take place in the social system of the organization, for example, changes in policies, procedures or organisational structures that influence communication between people. Pelz and Munson (1982) separate product and process improvements. "Product" can mean new services as well as products, whereas process refers to changes affecting internal organisational working. Cozijnsen et al, (2000) found that success and failure factors were different for different types of innovations. Moore (2004) argues that specific types of innovation are better suited to certain stages of the product life cycle. Despite the importance of trying to understand the dynamics affecting different types of innovation, Wolfe (1994) states that there is no commonly-used typology for classifying and researching types of innovation.

An important attribute, as opposed to type, of outcome is the extent to which it is more incremental or more radical. To what extent does the idea constitute a smaller, incremental shift in organisational behaviours, or a more radical major shift, (Dewar and Dutton, 1986, Zaltman et al, 1973)? Totterdell et al (2002) point to research concluding that there is a weaker relationship between more radical innovations and beneficial consequences (Van de Ven, 1995, Johannessen, 2001). They speculate that radical innovations are more likely to meet stiffer organisational resistance unless there is a supportive climate.

Scale of innovation is another important attribute. Totterdell et al (2002) summarise the work of Wolfe (1994) in identifying several aspects to this: cost to the organization (investment), its ubiquity in the organization (pervasiveness), and its disruption to existing organizational arrangements (magnitude).

Runco (2004) points out that the assumption behind studies of creative product is that the properties of the outcomes are objective and amenable to the scientific method. MacKinnon, (1975, quoted in Isaksen et al 2011) stated that this was far from clear:

“...the study of creative products is the basis on which all research on creativity rests and, until this foundation is more solidly built than it is at present, all creativity research will leave something to be desired...In short it would appear that the explicit determination of the qualities which identify creative products has been largely neglected just because we implicitly know – or feel we know – a creative product when we see it.” (Mackinnon, *ibid*, p: 69-71)

So what are the qualities or attributes of creative outcomes that make them ‘creative’? Isaksen et al (2011) point to work developed by Besemer and her colleagues (Besemer, 1987, Besemer and O’Quin, 1987, 1993, 1999, Besemer and Treffinger, 1981). They identify three dimensions for assessing creative outcomes: ‘novelty’ – referring to newness or originality; ‘resolution’ – how far it solves the problem for which it was developed; ‘style’ examines the degree of elaboration or synthesis that creates an outcome with elegance. This last point could include packaging or presentation, for example.

As Runco (2004) comments, the problem with a focus on the category of Creative Product is that, typically studies have focused on the outputs of amazingly productive individuals such as Piaget and Picasso. There is an obvious sampling issue which makes generalising from the efforts of these individuals inappropriate. Runco (*ibid*) also warns about the inferences that have to be made between productivity and creativity, and cautions that they are not the same thing. Conceptual and methodological limitations notwithstanding, I believe the area of Creative Product has some potential value in differentiating between creativity and innovation, given the definitional confusion described earlier in this section. For instance, as I see it, a person or team may have developed an initial idea into a more robust idea new product, service, process, organisational structure or strategy document. The idea has not yet been implemented but we still have a creative product. After having been implemented, we can review the extent to which benefits have accrued to relevant stakeholders, and we are then in the domain of innovation research. A focus on creative product is an appropriate area for research - given the efforts needed to turn ideas into ‘successful’ innovations, it takes an idea-rich workplace. (Stevens, 1997, Davis, 2000).

2.5 Leading efforts for Creativity and Innovation

The importance of leadership for employees’ creative efforts has been proposed by several researchers (Mumford and Gustafson, 1988, Amabile 1998, Tierney et al, 1999, Rickards et al, 2001, Jung, 2001 and De Jong and Den Hartog, 2007). Similarly, leaders’ impact on innovation is likely through impacting on team processes such as clarifying objectives, encouraging participation, commitment to quality, and support for

innovation in the workplace (Tannenbaum et al, 1996, quoted in West et al, 2003). And yet, according to Byrne et al, (2009) the *leadership* of innovation has not received its fair share of attention. At a time when the significance of management and leadership have increased in many situations regarding entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, (Burgoyne et al, 2004), this is a curious omission.

Not only can leaders make a difference, but, they should, according to Henry, (1991) who introduces an explicitly normative aspect to the leadership of creativity:

“By understanding the creative process and characteristics of a creative environment the creative manager is better placed to remove the barriers to creative action. At bottom this is a style of management that empowers others to live a more creative life.” (p:11)

We have already discussed the contention that creative work is risky. In a context of high uncertainty and risk, depending on the specific nature of the change(s) involved, how can leaders play a role in encouraging continued exploration? Creativity is, by definition, a move into the unknown and the unknown often brings anxiety. Simpson and Burnard, (2000) refer to work by Vince and Martin, (1993) who illustrate how defensive routines can inhibit learning; how anxiety may provoke the conditions that limit learning, Argyris, (1990) and Menzies-Lyth, (1990), and, on the other hand, how anxiety may be the starting point for learning (Schein 1993). What is the leader’s role in making a difference here? In these contexts of high uncertainty, Simpson and Burnard (ibid) argue that leaders fall into three camps: those who are naturally or habitually unsuited to not-knowing; those who take up a powerful position, where they act as if they know; and those leaders who are able to stay in a place of not-knowing. Simpson and French, (2006) refer to Eisold’s (2000) definition of negative capability:

“...precisely the ability to tolerate anxiety and fear, to stay in the place of uncertainty in order to allow for the emergence of new thoughts or perceptions” (Simpson and French, 2006: 65)

Simpson and French advocate this ability for dealing with the ‘current organizational context of radical uncertainty’, though they also state that more work is required as to what differentiates between different leaders’ capacity for this quality.

Aside from the capacity to tolerate uncertainty, leaders of creative efforts must have substantial knowledge of the area in which they work. They need technical expertise because it gives them power to represent and understand the needs of the group (Basadur et al, 2000). Expanding on this theme of depth of expertise, Gronhaug and Huakedal (1995) claim that more leaders with more relevant experience can produce more action-oriented plans during times of high uncertainty.

Basadur et al, (2000) state that leaders need problem solving skills. This helps them select projects, evaluate ideas and give appropriate feedback. This builds on the work of Maier, (1958) who concluded that leaders should adopt an attitude of problem-mindedness rather than solution-mindedness. The former explores the nature of the problem situation, while the latter reflects an anxiety to reach a solution with the concomitant issue of inhibiting novel avenues in exploring the problem. Too great a rush to solutions will likely block new and inventive thoughts about the problem itself. Part of the creative process involves interpreting and

framing the problem or challenge at hand. More specifically, Sternberg et al, (2003) identify three clusters of options for leaders: accepting the current paradigm and attempting to extend it; rejecting the current paradigm and attempting to replace it; integrating existing paradigms to create a new one. This relates to the stage of problem definition, and, as Amabile (1997) points out, one of the central issues leaders must address is in defining exactly what the problem is in the first place. My own view is that this critical act is a much more contestable phenomenon in practice than is typically noted in the academic literature. Once they have framed a problem or challenge in a compelling way, leaders of creative efforts require an *Organisational outreach*, meaning that they should understand the organisations' espoused strategy, goals and tactics for accomplishing them. This will make it easier to 'sell' creative ventures to senior leaders. (Mumford et al, 2002).

(Mumford et al, 2000) point to a swathe of research connecting leadership with aspects of creative problem solving. First, measures of divergent thinking skills are associated with leader performance (Bray et al 1974, Chusmir and Koberg 1986, DeVeaue 1976, Howard and Bray 1988, Rusmore 1984 and Sinetar 1985). Another aspect of creative problem solving is in implementing plans. This occurs in a distinctly social context, where the leader depends on the efforts of others and must be adaptable in responding to unexpected events. The leader will require knowledge of subordinates, peers, and superiors - people with whom the leader is interacting during solution implementation. Axtell et al, (2000) found that managers' support is required for effective idea implementation. Mumford et al (ibid: 17), summarise that the leader must be able to communicate vision, establish goals, monitor progress, and motivate subordinates as they attempt to implement a given solution plan (Hayes-Roth and Hayes-Roth, 1979, Zaccaro, 1996, Zaccaro et al, 1991).

How leaders interact with their team matters for creativity and innovation. Their role can be conceived of as a facilitative one, aiding and enabling others, whether in situ as role leaders, (Parnes et al 1977), and as facilitators of creative problem solving with project teams (Rickards and Moger, 2000). Conceptual frameworks have been developed to aid the development of one's team facilitation skills (Isaksen 1983, Isaksen et al, 2000, MacFadzean, 2002a, MacFadzean, 2002b). Leaders may have team members possessing deep levels of knowledge. In this context, where the leader and the team are interdependent, Goleman, (2000) argues that the quality of relationship between leaders and staff is crucial for innovation: for risk-taking to become a habit, there must be sufficient trust in place. Zhou (2003) found that developmental feedback from supervisors, (along with the presence of creative co-workers), was correlated with greater creativity. As well as giving feedback to improve and develop ideas, leaders should consider the timing of feedback, since premature criticism - when ideas are in a formative stage - can lead creative people to withdraw (Galluchi et al, 2000). Leaders who provide high degrees of support and encouragement are likely to yield more ideas, and high quality ideas, from their team members (Kaufmann and Vosburg, 1997), and leaders possessing qualities of the transformational leader are likely to increase team members' creativity through increasing their intrinsic motivation for the task (Shung and Zhou, 2003).

Finally, there is an emerging area around understanding learning, its impact on creativity and innovation and the role of leaders. Rickards and Moger (2000), have argued that little research has focused on what

distinguishes highly creative teams from others. In an attempt to understand this they gathered information about teams and reflected on their own experience in working with over 2000 work teams. They concluded:

“We now see the achievement of outstanding performance as arising from a form of team behaviour that combines learning and creating processes, triggered by the purposive actions of a creative leader.” (Rickards and Moger, 1999, p:xii)

Edmondson (1999) argues that psychological safety in teams is a key element in aiding the learning process. She allocates the responsibility for this at team-level, rather than with individuals or the wider organisation (Edmondson and Mogelof, 2006). In a health setting, Edmondson (1996) found that people’s willingness to discuss mistakes was in part influenced by their expectation of their manager’s response and the likely consequences, as well as the team members themselves. Here again, we return to the issue of quality of relationship and trust between the leader and team members.

2.6 A critique of the creativity and innovation research

The mainstream literature has produced a wealth of information about creativity and innovation. It is multi-disciplinary, but not collaborative, and this has contributed to a diffuse and fragmented set of prescriptions for research and practice. In the above chapter I have concentrated on the literature which is close to my research questions:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when ‘acting into the unknown’?
- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when ‘acting into the unknown’?

The majority of mainstream research is quantitative, focusing on correlations between variables.

Comparatively little research has focused on *how* ideas emerge and develop in practice. King, (1990) points to the need for more emphasis on the process of innovation, as well as the influence of social factors.

More studies are needed with real work groups (Nijstad and de Dreu, 2002). Many studies have been carried out in experimental settings and, as is pointed out in the above chapter, this makes it problematic to draw wider applications. Unlike real work groups, experimental groups have no memories of the past or expectations for the future. More studies are needed with real groups to understand the process by which they make real choices in real situations. In a context of discussing cooperation between teams, West et al, (2003) point out that while social psychologists have made progress in understanding groups in experimental settings:

“...they have neglected organisations as a context for this research...we suggest this is an ideal context in which to explore and understand the anger and anxiety provoked by in-group favouritism, out-group derogation and inter-group hostility.” (p: 576)

Further, most studies have focused on idea generation rather than implementation. West, (2002) argues that conducting creativity research with students in experimental settings is easier than doing research on implementation in real work settings because of the longitudinal design. The increased emphasis on implementation is also stressed by Wolfe (1994).

There may also be an issue of cultural imbalance - a large amount of research has been US-based, with possible limitations to the degree of generalisability (Raina, 1993). The European *Journal of Creativity and Innovation Management* has tried to redress the balance since 1990, but there is an issue of a cultural specificity.

King's (1990) wish for including more social factors in research can be understood as involving several aspects. First, there is the issue of the less rational, even unconscious aspects of human behaviour, in combination with the inherent unpredictabilities and uncertainties associated with work requiring creativity and innovation. This is a potentially potent brew that deserves to be acknowledged. Rickards (1996) points to a gap in the real-life experiences of those involved in innovation work. On the one hand, their theories in use admit to the need to react to unexpected events – which are inevitable, says Rickards. Yet, their espoused theories make no reference to surprises. When surprises do occur, participants get 'back on the plan'. Rickards argues that this gulf means that participants have difficulty in explaining what actually happened and why the plan was not followed. Consequently, learning is affected for the worse. Rickards is questioning how we make sense of what actually happens in innovation efforts. In my words, he is pointing to valuable insights to be gathered through the, occasionally irrational, direct experiences of the participants, as opposed to seeing happenings through the lens of rational, linear models of innovation. Van de Ven (1986) argued that popular management literature portrays people as rational beings who handle innovation with ease. A more realistic view would be to point out individuals' limited capacity to handle complexity and notice non-routine matters. Brown and Starkey (2000) write from a psychoanalytical perspective and argue that much organizational learning literature underestimates the barriers to learning, motivated by identity protection and employing various ego-defence mechanisms.

Second, mainstream research has little focus on the political context in which innovation is introduced. With the notable exceptions of Kanter (1988), and Frost and Egri, (1991) - who argue for researching the process of innovation - politics has been largely marginalised in creativity and innovation research.

Third, the topic of emotion is notable largely through its absence from the literature. Since innovation is, by definition, a challenge to the status quo, there is likely to be emotion involved in the dynamic process. As I make sense of the literature, the presence of emotion has been under-acknowledged, partly because of the mainstream presumption of economic-based, rational decision-making, and partly because of the propensity to hold experimental studies, where emotions are not being considered. Zhou and George, (2003) point to the importance of leaders' and followers' emotions in a context of group creativity, though this is still an under-researched area. In describing the work of Damasio (1999), Stacey describes how emotions work, even at an unconscious level, continuing to influence decisions made, inferring that our previous emotionally-laden experiences affect the choices we make in the present. Stacey asserts that

“The link between emotions and reasonable, ordinary everyday choices in conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty is, therefore, of great importance.” (Stacey, 2003: 160)

In a situation where there is no blueprint for action and novel solutions are expected, I suggest that ambiguity and uncertainty are highly likely to be present.

2.7 A personal view: shifting the research questions

As I read more of the mainstream literature around creativity and innovation I experienced a sinking feeling, as I began to get to grips with the fragmented literature. So much of it seemed to be partially explanatory, yet fragmenting ever more deeply into categories and sub-categories. What was becoming clearer to me was that so much research had taken place distant from the realities of those participants involved in innovation efforts. I was interested to do research as close to the ‘real work’ as possible without being clear on what this would mean in practice.

Around this time, in my progression exam, my external examiner asked me the same question several times over the course of a 90-minute meeting: “What are you passionate about?” For some reason this got under my skin. I’d been formulating potential research questions around the interplay between leaders’ emotional intelligence, idea generation and idea implementation. I was also looking from a fundamentally positivist point of view. This was an easy step, since so many research questions fall so naturally from a predominantly positivist literature. Crotty, (1998) describes positivism as being based on the presumption of an objectivity of knowledge, where meaning is ‘discovered’ pertaining to objects existing independent of the knower’s knowing. In other words, things exist ‘out there’ and, from a research viewpoint, the task is to locate and measure them.

The more I considered the question from my examiner, the more I questioned the path I had unwittingly followed. I began to question the neat, yet many, demarcations that seemed to be so characteristic of this literature. My thinking changed and began to crystallise around process thinking such as that of Van de Ven, (1999). It seemed to hold the promise of answering *how* questions and getting closer to the experiences of people involved in the work itself. Soon afterwards, I had a change of supervisor and my new one introduced me to Ralph Stacey’s work on complex responsive processes. This led me down a particular path, which I describe in the next section. It also led to a different type of research question: the ones I’ve quoted in the introduction chapter of this work.

Chapter 3: Complex Responsive Processes

This chapter starts with a summary of process research, and then proceeds to an overview of the complexity sciences tradition. Finally, it focuses in detail on complex responsive processes theory. I finish with a description of a conceptual framework which I use as an analytical tool in the remainder of the study.

3.1 Process research in Organizations

A focus on process is a focus on how something happens rather than the outcomes or results obtained (Patton, 1980). The author goes on to state that process evaluations are aimed at understanding the dynamics of, for example, a programme, organization or relationship operates. Thietart develops this by saying that the goal of process-based research is to describe and analyse how a variable evolves over time. For example, how strategy develops, or an idea takes shape. Yet, process-based organisation studies are comparatively rare:

“There are remarkably few studies of change that actually allow the change process to reveal itself in any kind of substantially temporal or contextual manner...episodic views of change not only treat innovations as if they had a clear beginning and a clear end but also, where they limit themselves to snapshot time-series data, fail to provide data on the mechanisms and processes through which change are created.” (Pettigrew, 1995: 93-94).

Pettigrew goes on to describe an approach to process research involving the interconnectedness of different organization levels, such as socio-economic environment and group behaviour, and the sequential links between phenomena embedded in history. As Pettigrew elaborates, antecedent conditions shape the present and the emerging future:

“Thus history is not just an event in the past but is alive in the present and may shape the future.” (Pettigrew (ibid: 95)

In the context of innovation, Schroeder et al (1986) describe this as the temporal sequence of activities that occur in developing and implementing new ideas. King (1990) states that most process research has been conducted at the organisation-level, leading to the development of a series of process theories emphasising steps or stages in the overall process. This was true of some of the earlier research around processes of innovation (Rogers, 1983, Rothwell, 1994). For example, Rogers’ (1983) work led to the identification of initiation and implementation elements. Schroeder et al (1986) criticise this approach to developing discrete stages of development, often with little accompanying empirical evidence.

The trend I note here is of static entities being created through this type of innovation research. The issue is whether this form of categorising and abstracting sheds light and aids further research and practice. Aasen (2009b) points to the distinction between an approach which views organizations as being composed of entities – a view which is most common in organization research – and that of organizations as manifestations of processes – which she states is represented by Van de Ven and Poole (2005).

Elias in his work *the Civilising Process* (2000: xii) neatly captures this dilemma:

“It may perhaps seem at first sight an unnecessary complication to investigate the genesis of each historical formation. But since every historical phenomenon, human attitudes as much as social institutions, did actually once ‘develop’, how can modes of thought prove either simple or adequate in explaining these phenomena if, by a kind of artificial abstraction, they isolate the phenomena from their natural, historical flow, deprive them of their character as movement and process, and try to understand them as static formations without regard to the way in which they have come into being and change? It is not theoretical prejudice but experience itself which urges us to seek intellectual ways and means of steering a course between the Scylla of this ‘staticism’, which tends to express all historical movement as something motionless and without evolution, and the Charybdis of the ‘historical relativism’ which sees in history only constant transformation, without penetrating to the order underlying this transformation and to the laws governing the formation of historical structures.”

Johannessen and Aasen (2007) argue that innovation is a generalised tendency to act. When we reduce a process to a state, bounding it, what we lose is the awareness of the many conversations that go into particularising an intent. They suggest (*ibid*) that innovation is a social process shaped and formed by the complex interactions of human relating.

Other research on processes of innovation shifted to accommodate a growing acceptance of both social and technical organisational aspects. Hargadon and Sutton, (2000) refer to the networking role knowledge brokers in keeping ideas alive; Pettigrew and Fenton, (2000), acknowledge the importance of history, culture and politics in innovation processes; Van de Ven et al, (1999) further support the view that the innovation process proceeds in a messier, non-linear manner than previously thought. In referring to the work of Stacey (2007) Johannessen and Aasen, (2007) point out that systems dynamics work does not take account of the emergence of novelty: radical change must be designed outside the system and ‘installed’. They point to the work of authors who have taken a complex adaptive systems viewpoint, and attempted to understand change as an emergent, self-organising process, applied to the innovation process (Carlisle and McMillan, 2006) and the leadership of innovation (Surie and Hazy, 2006, Plowman et al, 2007, Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009).

The appeal of process-based research for me is its potential to elucidate how phenomena in organisations come to be what they have become, allied with the capacity for it to include attention on personal and social processes such as power, politics, emotion, rational and unconscious patterns of behaviour.

3.2 The Complexity sciences

It is important to understand the thinking of the complexity sciences, in order to understand some of the theoretical origins of complex responsive processes. This chapter sets out an overview of the strands of

thinking around the complexity sciences, the implications for organizational life and summarises the importance of the work. It then goes on to review the various theory aspects of complex responsive processes.

Stacey (2011) describes complexity sciences as constituting a radical move from the Newtonian world which has dominated our thinking for the last four hundred years. The implication of Newtonian thinking, when extended to organisations, is that managers can control long-term futures. The foundation of this thinking, argues Stacey (ibid) are two laws: determinism and reductionism. The former relates to causality, with the view that action and consequence are predictable; the latter referring to the movement of phenomena being discoverable through the laws governing the movement of the smallest parts. In other words, the whole is the sum of the parts - which focuses attention on the smallest parts.

The strands of complexity thinking can be divided into three areas: mathematical chaos theory, dissipative structures and complex adaptive systems Stacey (ibid). Mathematical Chaos theory focuses on modelling the iterations of properties, over time, with a view to understanding the properties of dynamics. Results have shown how movements can shift between cycles of stable behaviour to dramatically unstable behaviour. Changes of stability are produced by properties within the system itself, rather than from outside, with negative feedback producing stability and positive feedback resulting in instability. Small changes in modelling input can result in large, unpredictable effects, such as seen in the modelling of weather patterns. A crucial point in regard to this work is that chaos theory models of systems do not have the capacity within the system to move from stability to instability. An external force, in the shape of the experimenter, is required to change input values being fed back into the system. These systems cannot generate novelty by themselves, and are reliant on external intervention for this.

A dissipative structure is one that imports energy from the environment, to renew itself constantly. Experiments have been conducted with convection fluids in the laboratory, involving the experimenter altering the fluid temperature. Small changes in temperature cause patterns of fluid dynamics to alter shape at some critical temperature. Changes are amplified through the fluid, leading to unpredictable new patterns, which are not controlled by the experimenter, and not reducible to the state of a previous pattern. As Fonseca (2002) explains, when the system is far from equilibrium (in this case, with temperature having been raised), the fluid molecules interact so as to 'discover' their next move to a new order. Multiple possibilities exist and the move cannot be predicted. There is spontaneity taking place, as a new pattern emerges, doing so without a blueprint. Stacey (2011) points out that, in this theory, self organisation and emergence are conceived of as characteristics of the collective response of the whole population.

In complex adaptive system simulations, a large number of entities, called agents, interact according to a few simple rules. Those working with this approach tend to focus at the micro-level, being attentive to self-organisation which refers to non-linear action between agents, acting locally with other agents without an overall blueprint or script for action. In the absence of an overall blueprint for action, researchers are interested to understand how widespread orderly patterns emerge and shift to new orderly patterns. Emergence in this context means the development of order, or complexity, from a state of less order, or complexity (Stacey, 2011). Researchers work with computer simulations because of the difficulties in

working with complex adaptive systems in the natural world. Some studies have been carried out with simulated life forms, in an evolutionary context, and have demonstrated that existing life forms can flourish and die out, and find new strategies for survival. What is different here, as compared to mathematical chaos and dissipative structure theory is that the agents display the capacity for spontaneous, evolution to new, unprecedented forms, *when those agents are heterogeneous* – the diversity of agents is crucial for novelty. Plowman et al, (2007: 342-3) summarise some of the characteristics of complex adaptive systems as follows: (1) they are made up of many agents who act and interact with each other in unpredictable ways, (2) they are sensitive to changes in initial conditions, (3) they adjust their behaviour in the aggregate to their environment in unpredictable ways, (4) they oscillate between stability and instability, and (5) they produce emergent actions when approaching disequilibrium. Additionally, complex systems are dynamic and non-linear, and rarely explained by simple cause–effect relationships.

3.3 Linking complexity thinking to organisational life

Chaos and complexity writing have changed the way we think about organisations. Tsoukas, (1998) points out how the metaphors of chaos and complexity theory have pointed to features of organisational life about which organisational theorists had been only subliminally aware. A new vocabulary has been introduced into the organizational field.

There are those that advocate an instrumental application of complexity thinking to organisational life. Webb et al, (2006) do so through the explicit description of a set of tools, including classroom-based games and materials; in an empirical study, Plowman et al, (2007) apply complexity principles to reinterpret the behaviours of leaders and form new prescriptions; Lichtenstein and Plowman, (2009) list leadership behaviours to assist with the creation of ‘emergence’; Carlisle and McMillan, (2006:7) suggest that ‘organizations will need to ‘dance’ between ‘the edge of chaos’ and ‘the edge of stability’ in order to create a healthy balance of incremental and more radical innovation and sustain a competitive advantage; Surie and Hazy, (2006) emphasise the need to get the conditions right for innovation through enhancing system capabilities and process throughout the organisation.

3.4 Summary: limitations and value of complexity thinking

There are limitations to the extent to which we can generalise the learning from simulation-based complexity studies to organisational life. Johannessen and Aasen, (2007a) point out that the complexity sciences cannot capture the range of human experience. For example, in describing responses influenced by emotions, power, identity and unconscious processes.

Stacey (2011) points to how some writers have recast the concepts of self-organisation and emergence as ‘forces’ which can be employed, sometimes to take an organisation to the ‘edge of chaos’, carrying with it the presumption of a leader’s ability to ‘place’ an organisation just so. The emphasis on leadership is striking, underpinned by the assumption that they can stand somewhat outside the interactions in which they are a part and design, control or influence events.

While noting these limitations, what seems important to me from the complexity sciences research is that it yields several important insights about change. First, it shows how change can occur without an overarching plan, through local interactions between agents following simple, or more complex, rules. Second, it suggests that the presence of diverse, or heterogeneous agents, can produce novelty from within a contained system. Finally, it shows how micro/local interaction is crucial for understanding macro-level patterns, and suggests a focus of attention to the micro level.

3.5 The overall perspective of Complex Responsive Processes

The main theoretical standpoint in this research is complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al, 2000, Stacey 2001(a), Stacey 2003, Griffin, 2002, Shaw, 2002, Shaw, 2006, Stacey, 2007a, Stacey 2011).

From this perspective, organisations are understood as ongoing patterns of interaction between people iterated in the present, (Stacey and Griffin, 2005b). The authors go on to explain how complex responsive processes thinking differs from systems thinking in that the emphasis of focus is on the experience of interacting with others, with in turn produces further interactions. This shifts focus from a spatial metaphor, with systems thinking, to a temporal metaphor, where the temporal processes themselves are ones of human relating.

Stacey (2007b) describes how this thinking has its roots in contrasting philosophical views of subject and object. He states how in the middle ages, there was no modern-day concept of the individual as an autonomous unit.

“The subject was defined in relation to a cosmic order so that persons come most fully to themselves when they are in touch with that cosmic order, in union with God and knowledge takes the form of the exegesis of God's revelation.” (p: 292)

In this view of self and society, individual identity was related to one's position or role within the ‘given’ social hierarchy, determined by external authorities. This changed over the following 300 years, as the scientific revolution progressed, raising doubts about everything concerning the external world, including God, and voiced by the Enlightenment philosophers. Stacey continues to describe how Descartes’ emphasis on the individual as a doubting self, helped shift the focus to the autonomous individual as someone defining himself, through internal, individual processes of observation and thought, rather than in relation to an external society.

Stacey (2011) describes how the modernist worldview emerged as one in which the person is self-aware, conducts if-then hypotheses generating, and tests the hypotheses against an objective, external world. He claims that Kant developed this view by articulating how these hypotheses can take the form of

“...regulative ideas in relation to organisms, which means that the objective observer ascribes an ‘as if’ purpose to organisms, understood as systems. Kant defined a system as a self-organising

whole consisting of parts which interact with each other to form both themselves and the whole. Furthermore the whole develops over time in a purposive manner as it moves from its embryonic to its mature form in developmental stages – the causality is formative.” (Stacey, 2011: 297)

This is a particular view of process and a particular way of understanding time: *systemic process*, in which the parts of the system interact, forming a whole, in a linear fashion, through life cycle stages. According to Stacey here, Kant’s position was to see human action as subject to a rationalist causality, separate from nature, or the external world, which is subject to an efficient or formative causality. Although Kant warned against considering human action as a system, because it was inconsistent with the autonomy of the individual, Stacey argues that many thinkers in the twentieth century have ignored this. Systems thinking has been applied to organisations and society, with the underpinning assumptions that organisations can be designed, shaped, influenced and moved (Stacey, *ibid.*):

“Management is about rationally designing and controlling organizations and this involves identifying the efficient and systemic causes of change in organizations to yield the predictions required for leaders and managers, as rational, autonomous individuals, to be “in control”. (Stacey, 2007b,; 293)

By contrast the thinking of Hegel’s view of process is a social one. Stacey describes this as a responsive process, in which humans aim for mutual recognition as participants. Crucially, Stacey (2011) summarises Hegel’s position as holding that humans develop thought through the world of our own experience, and that this is an inter-subjective process, evolving through people acting together. In Hegel’s thinking, there is no world outside human experience. This position contrasts with how others had used Kantian principles to posit a world in which humans can be ‘outside’ phenomena, directing and causing change within it. Consciousness is formed through ties of interdependence and mutual recognition, as individuals act through the social institutions which provide them identity. People have intentions, and express these in their interactions with others, but mind, consciousness, thought and desires evolve through our interaction with others. The emergence of our identity is only possible through this ongoing process of conflict and interaction with others, on whom we depend and who depend on us in turn. This is a paradoxical or dialectical process in which minds and identities are being formed as we form events, which are forming us at the time. Stacey (2010) calls this process *transformative causality* and it is one in which humans are immersed in iterative communicative interactions with others, and the interactions themselves cause change.

Norbert Elias rejected the commonly-accepted view of humans as containers or receptacles, based on the underlying spatial metaphor of a boundary between the individual and the external world. He termed this isolated construct *homo clausus*, and connected the increasing emphasis on individual self-hood to Descartes insights and the subsequent practices in western societies to establish social control through self control:

“Behaviour control of one sort or another no doubt exists in all human societies. But here, in many western societies, such control has for several centuries been particularly intensive, complex and pervasive; and more than ever before, social control is linked to the self-control of the individual.” (Elias, 1998: 287)

Elias is pointing to the historical evolution of our taken for granted concept of the primacy of the individual. By contrast, his work emphasises the essential and increasing interdependence of people in western civilisation. Elias argued that it makes no sense to consider individual personality and society as distinct constructs. Rather, they are both formed through the interweaving and interplay of the intentions of many people, themselves included, and outside of which they cannot stand.

“The network of human activities tends to become increasingly complex, far-flung and closely knit. More and more groups, and with them more and more individuals, tend to become dependent on each other for their security and for the satisfaction of their needs in ways which, for the greater part, surpass the comprehension of those involved. It is as if first thousands, then millions, then more and more millions walked through this world with their hands and feet chained by invisible ties. No one is in charge. No one stands outside. ... No one can regulate the movement of the whole unless a great part of them are able to understand, to see, as it were, the whole patterns they form together. And they are not able to visualize themselves as part of larger patterns because, being hemmed in and moved incomprehensibly hither and thither in ways which none of them intended, they cannot help being preoccupied with the urgent, narrow and parochial problems which each of them has to face. ... Thus, what is formed of nothing but human beings acts upon each of them, and is experienced by many as an alien external force not unlike the forces of nature.” (Elias, 1978: 9)

Elias is also pointing above to the limited extent to which individuals can plan and control change. However, there is not blind chaos, and there has been order of a kind, albeit usually outside the perception of individuals in their own lifetimes. The trend has been towards further interdependence as increasing division of labour and specialisation of tasks requires the self-control of interdependent people. Furthermore, in societies where there develops a state monopolisation of violence, the threat of immediate violence from one’s near-neighbour reduces, allowing the emotional possibility and requirement for co-dependence. In his major work on the civilising process, Elias describes how individuals contribute to the sustaining of interdependence, as intensive learning processes for the child bring self-constraint in support of social constraint such that it becomes a deeply ingrained part of the personality structure of individuals.

“As more and more people must attune their conduct to that of others, the web of actions must be organised strictly and accurately, if each individual is to fulfil its social function.” (Elias, 2000: 367)

Stacey (2011) contends that it is unlikely Elias was familiar with the complexity sciences. However, his thinking reflects concepts of self-organisation and of emergence. While individuals act together, applying personal intentions and plans, the impact and consequences of these intentions cannot be controlled in the

long-term or at a population-wide level. We can plan our own intentions but not the reactions of others. At the same time, a self-organising order has been discerned with the trajectory of society, beyond the control of individuals, but to which we all contribute:

“It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. This basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of people can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arises an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people compelling it.” (Elias, 2000: 366)

In their introduction to a collection of his works, Mennell and Goudsblom (1998) find four connected principles underlying Elias’ work: sociology is about people in the plural - interdependent beings, whose lives evolve in and are shaped by the social figurations they form together; these figurations are constantly in flux; long-term developments in human figurations are largely unplanned and unforeseen; the development of human knowledge takes place within human figurations.

3.5.1 Mead and Human Communicative Interaction

George Herbert Mead provides a very different way of thinking about communication, and is a theorist of major importance for complex responsive processes. Mead (1934) used the term *conversation of gestures* to describe how one body makes a gesture to another body, evoking a response from the second body, which, in turn, responds with a gesture to the first body. So, the ongoing process of communicative interaction continues. In this way of thinking, the fundamental unit of analysis is not the sender, nor receiver, nor the words spoken but the ongoing social act of gesture and response itself, which has only arbitrary beginnings and endings. Meaning emerges from the ongoing process, and this is a critical point. For example, Stacey (2010) describes Mead’s example of how a dog bares its teeth in a snarl, which may evoke a response of counter snarl, flight or crouching. The meaning to both animals of counter snarl is aggression; of flight is defeat, and of crouching is dominance and submission. The point being that meaning emerges from the interaction of both parties, and is not contained as intent on either side. From this way of thinking, it is the social act which is crucial for the quality of communication.

Stacey (2010) makes the key point that meaning and knowing are properties of relationship. Furthermore, meaning is not a reified unit, storable and retrievable. Instead, from this viewpoint, it emerges in the present which raises the relevance of time. Stacey (2010) summarises the thinking of Mead (1932, 1938) in which time is not a given to be re-discovered, but as a meaning to be formulated anew. Here, the past is known through the present, as we remember moments and events. However, the future is also influential here, as our anticipations and expectations of what may happen affect selections from the past which we bring into the present, and, in turn, what we remember affects our anticipations. In other words, the past comes alive, and can only live, in the present. According to Stacey, Mead is arguing that

“..each present has a different past in that in each present we interpret the past differently because we have a different viewpoint and so construct different meanings of different past events.” (Stacey 2011: 320)

Stacey (2011) describes this view of time as a *Living Present* as having a circular time structure, in which we select accounts of the past to actively reconstruct the past, and our imaginings for the future are affected by our selected accounts from the past. All of this happens in a present, which is therefore replete with reconstructed pasts and imagined futures.

Mead explores the question of how we can ‘know’ what response we evoke in another. He argues that our mammal ancestors must have evolved a central nervous system that was capable of realising in one’s own body the same response evoked in another body. The gesture now has a different role, and Mead called this a *significant symbol*: one that generates the same response in the gesturer as directed to the other person. This gives the gesturer a way of ‘knowing’ what the other person feels, and provides options for likely responses as one awaits the other’s response. This thinking of Mead puts the body very central to the communication process.

How does the body ‘know’ the likely impact of our gesture on another person? Mead insisted on staying at the level of interactions between human bodies. Stacey (2010) describes research from the neuroscientist Damasio (1994, 1999) and from Gallese (2001) as providing important insights. Damasio’s work emphasises the role of the human brain in regulating heart, gut, lungs, muscles as well as the immune, visceral and other bodily systems. At each moment, through one’s life, the brain is monitoring the internal feeling states of our body. As we are involved in situations with other people and other aspects of the world, arousing emotions, smells, memories and so on, we associate these patterns of experience with feelings. Situations similar to previous ones arouse similar feelings in us, which are fundamental in guiding us to select appropriate courses of action.

“...from a neurological standpoint, the body’s monitoring of its own rhythmic patterns is both the ground for its construction of the world it acts into and its unique sense of subjectivity.” (Stacey, 2010: 146)

Stacey asserts that there appears to be a resonance between the body rhythms of interacting individuals, and Gallese’s, research (2001) confirms this social connection. This research discovered that monkey’s brains contain neuron cells that mimic what another being does.

“This previously unknown class of brain cells operates as neural Wi-Fi, allowing us to navigate our social world. When we consciously or unconsciously detect someone else’s emotions through their actions, our mirror neurons reproduce those emotions. Collectively, these neurons create an instant sense of shared experience.” (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008: 76)

This is a critical point because, from a communication viewpoint, it allows us to imagine the feelings-level reactions of others to our gestures, as well as their likely range of responses. In turn, we can then improvise our gesture and intent through imagination, reflection and choice-making. And so, of course, can every

person involved in responding to our gesture. It is this possibility of pausing before doing, while involved intimately in the maelstrom of conversational dynamics, which allows us to take the attitude of others, imagined in private conversations with ourselves. Stacey (2011) stresses how Mead is arguing that human consciousness arises through this social act, so that one cannot exist without the other.

3.5.2 Processes of generalising and particularising

One of the features of complex responsive processes thinking is that it attends to the ordinary, everyday experiences of people involved in ongoing interactions. However, in our work and community interactions with people, we also have to take the attitude of large groups of people, with whom we may not experience direct contact. All of us engaged in society develop the capacity to take the attitude of many others, and this becomes generalised. Mead called this concept the *generalised other*. We cannot imagine the attitude and response of every individual who may respond to our gesture, but we can develop the capacity to imagine how a group, or society of individuals may respond. By *attitude*, Mead meant the tendency to act. As children, through our parents or carer's exhortations, we learn to consider taking others' needs and concerns into account. Given the increasing interdependency in western societies, pointed to earlier by Elias (1978), our validation and identities are bound in ties with others, and others' acknowledgement and consideration of ourselves is a powerful motivating force, while we consider alternative actions. Thus, our ability to take the attitude of generalised groups forms a powerful means of social control, enacted privately through self-control.

Mead (1934) distinguishes between the 'me' and the 'I'. The 'me' is my perception and imagining of the configuration of others' likely gestures and responses to my acts. The 'I' is the response to the perceived gesture of the group/society to oneself. Our sense of self is evolving as we come to understand the relationship between 'I' and 'me'. The 'I' is my response to my perception of others' gestures to oneself – the 'me'. We understand that our 'self' is first an entity for others, and by developing the capacity to take the attitude of others, we see our 'self' as an object. As we engage with others, so our understanding of our self changes and develops – this is self-consciousness. Stacey (2010) argues that the 'I' response is unpredictable, with no predetermined way of anticipating precisely how one will act. This brings the potential for difference, diversity, conflict and change.

People can and do have different interpretations of acts, and they may choose to explore their differences in an attempt to make generalised wishes become particular in a local situation. As I understand it, particularising is the process of local efforts to achieve joint meaning, so as to continue engaging with each other in continuous communication. Sometimes these processes break down, or become 'stuck' in repetitive patterns based on habitual responses, and sometimes change occurs.

As one considers the matter of change, Stacey (2010: 148- 149) raises the question of:

“How could continuous processes of gesturing and responding between thousands, even millions of people, all in their local interactions produce any kind of coherence?”

Stacey goes on to point to research from the complexity sciences to give insights to this important matter of connecting local action to population-wide coherence: with the potential for novelty, both creative and destructive, when the agents comprising the system are diverse enough.

“Models of complex systems demonstrate that nonlinear interactions between large numbers of entities with each responding to limited numbers of others on the basis of their own local principles of interaction will produce coherent population-wide patterns...By analogy, the continuous local interaction of gesturing and responding in the form of significant symbols between diverse people also has the inherent capacity to produce emergent patterns of interactions across whole populations of humans.” (ibid: 149)

In other words, coherent change can take place through the concept, operating locally, of significant symbols, combined with sufficient diversity. And this can emerge without the presence of a blueprint for change, and without senior leaders standing ‘outside’ the conversation and directing change.

3.5.3 Processes of Generalising and Particularising: Social Objects and Cult Values

Another way in which Mead (1938) described processes of generalising and particularising was his development of the concept of the social object. Mead gives the example of the market. A person may make the gesture of offering to buy food, opening a range of potential responses. However, the person offering to buy is also aware of the range of possible responses from other people: he is taking the attitude of the others. The likely interactions of people involved in the ongoing process are known by all people involved and this is the basis of co-ordination, as consciously or not, we expect ourselves and large numbers of others to act in similar ways in similar situations. Social objects are common plans or patterns of action related to the future of the act (Stacey, 2010) . The concept of social object seems to be close in meaning to Elias’ thoughts on interdependence and on social control. As Stacey states (2010), social control depends on the extent to which the individual takes the attitude of others, that is, takes the attitude which is the social object. Other example of social objects include organisations, meetings, music festivals, leadership courses and Business schools.

However, though we do have more or less vague understandings of what is expected of us in enacting social objects, the particularising of them is an imperfect, negotiated process. The contingencies of the situation will require that they be discussed and negotiated by people with differing understandings, or individuals who are members of different interest groups, thus bringing differences in ideologies and power relations to bear. Though, broadly, social objects are characterised by people behaving in largely predictable, largely habitual ways, the opportunity may emerge in the process of particularising for spontaneous acts, amplified by differences between diverse agents, to lead to change.

3.5.4 Cult and functionalised values

In another example of processes of generalising and particularising, Mead (1914, 1923) linked social objects to values, and developed his view of the idealisation and functionalisation of cult values. The reification of the collective of people, reducing them to an *it*, with over-riding values, is a way of creating a “cult”. Such a reified entity possesses a feeling of enlarged personality, in which cult members act in accordance with maintaining the values. Mead pointed out how this thinking acts as a diversion from what people are actually doing, as attention is focused on the idealisation. Griffin (2002: 121) states that:

“The psychological technique of maintaining a cult is to present to the imagination a situation free from the ordinary obstacles of social life or nature.”

Cult values can lead to terrible actions, such as love of one’s country leading to the glorification of combat; as well as leading to positive ends, such as those values underpinning democracy – “a vote for all”; health – “the best possible healthcare”; and education provision: “education for life, not just for work”. These would all be examples of cult values. Idealisation is normally accompanied by functionalisation, as people attempt to deliver, for example, “the best possible healthcare” in their particular settings, with their constraints of time and resources. Conflict is an inevitable part of the functionalisation of cult values, and Stacey (2011: 377) points to a paradoxical formulation:

“The idealisation must be functionalised in specific contingent situations – the meaning of the idealisation is only to be found in the experience of its functionalization. In its functionalization the ideal inevitably becomes less than the ideal.”

Mead’s thinking points to the inseparability of several paradoxical and dynamic processes: how gesture and response are inseparable aspects of a social act; the emergence of self-consciousness through development of ‘I’ and ‘me’ concepts as part of a broader social act; that social objects are generalisations made specific only through their particularising; that cult values can only ever exist in their imperfect, functionalised form, which, in turn are dependent on a sufficiently shared image of the cult value itself.

3.5.5 Power, ideology and the dynamics of inclusion-exclusion

Social objects may be based on principles of cult values. Where there exists the dynamic process of local functionalisation, so there are likely to be patterns of group membership. People will be included or excluded from groups dependent on their fidelity to the cult values being discussed. In this way of thinking social objects, and especially cult values, are means of social control, reflecting patterns of power between people.

Elias (1991) describes a view of power that is quite different from that found in mainstream conceptions. He argues that power is not a characteristic of individuals, but of human relationships. Power arises between us as we interact with each other. The basis of power is need and this is a dynamic, shifting affair. For

example, in the world of the independent consultant, I may have access to clients, to provide you with possibilities for generating work and so, you need me. This may have reversed in six months time and I now need you.

Another aspect of Elias' conception is that all human relating can be seen as power-based, since we enable and constrain each other in our interdependence. This is equally true for hostile as well as productive, even friendly relationships. Shaw (2002) explains Elias' point that people provide 'mutual valuing' as meaning that we require responses from others to sustain a sense of self and identity. We all have the power to provide, withhold and alter our responses to others, generating for us and others feelings of being less or more powerful. Shaw explains that this is not a rational, instrumental transactional exchange taking place between people, but that our relations

“...are creative engagements in which we make our identities as we strive to influence the conditions for going on together.” (p: 73.)

This description of 1:1 relationships with shifting power balances is more complex in reality as we are members of webs of relationships, patterned through power dynamics. Elias used the term 'power figurations' to describe the dynamic process of mutual enabling-constraining. The same is so with groups where power differences are expressed in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Elias and Scotson ((1965) 1994), studied the influx of a group of working-class people onto a UK housing estate populated by more established working class people. Hostility emerged between the two groups and persisted over a long time. The more established villagers had been organised for longer, and took all the local positions of government. being more established they were also more coherent, with a history of conversing and identifying with each other. The newcomers lacked this cohesion, and were more fragmented and open to attack because of it.

The authors noted the use of gossip as a means of dividing the two groups. Praise-gossip directed from the villagers to themselves, and blame gossip to the newcomers. The nature of the gossip revealed binary opposites: 'they' don't maintain their gardens, are dirty, uneducated with badly behaving children; 'we' keep our gardens tidy, are educated and clean, and have well-behaved children. The effect of these seemingly trivial differences was to define membership groups, based on ideologies, aiming to preserve power differences between included and excluded people. A surprising aspect of the research was how the stigmatised group responding to the attacks in a way designed to sustain them. The newcomers agreed that their neighbours could be rather untidy, and with badly behaved children. the perception of the established group had been imbibed by the newcomers and unconsciously reinforced. The researchers themselves could find no evidence for the bi-polar descriptions between the two groups. However, identities had been accepted based partly on these descriptions. For an established member of the community to question the 'truth' of these accusations would be to risk being excluded from the established group; similarly, the newcomers risked exclusion from their own group if they challenged the pattern. They had soon come to establish a 'we' group, with attachments and loyalties. For the preservation of existing power relations it is crucial that the stigma be accepted by the disadvantaged group. Stacey (2011) describes the helplessness of

groups bound in these ongoing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and argues that the stigmatised are kept in their place through humiliation and shame. Our increasingly interdependent society has had the effect of raising the levels of self-control and self-awareness. Threats of exposure and exclusion, from initiating (unwelcome) change in organisations can trigger anticipations and feelings of embarrassment and shame, which are rooted in fears of inclusion-exclusion argues Aram (2001), described in Stacey (ibid).

There are implications from these insights for organisational life. Local interactions are characterised by ideological themes, often in unconscious ways. A basic manifestation is the 'us' and 'them' scenario. Conversation may be patterned along historically evolved lines of what is legitimate and illegitimate for discussion. These patterns may have formed before individuals joined the groups. In my experience sometimes no-one can quite remember why it is so. Stacey (2011) makes the strong point that ideology aims to preserve the natural order by making it seem natural. The taken-for-grantedness of the patterning of conversational topics is a powerful way of sustaining the current order of power differentials. From this point of view, change within organisations must involve change in identity, figurations of power and the dynamics of inclusion-exclusion. Such change is bound to raise anxiety levels for people involved. Where these remain at unsustainable levels, joint, co-operative action is difficult. Amongst other points, this raises the question of the role of those with power and influence: leaders. In sharing her research findings, focusing on innovation from a complex responsive processes perspective, Aasen, (2009b) argues:

“In my view, innovation processes are encouraged based on expectations of improved business performance, yet are inevitably met with opposition because development and adoption of novelty inherently also involves risk. This makes innovation a top management responsibility.” (p: 221)

3.5.6 Leadership, the 'unknown' and effectiveness

Leaders sometimes address groups of people through formal settings and present their views, visions and wishes for the future. However, most of leaders' social interactions with others take place through ordinary, everyday conversations, yet find it difficult to ascribe proper value to the importance of this, (Shaw, 2002). From a complex responsive processes point of view, leadership is seen an emergent process, arising out of social processes of recognition (Griffin, 2002). Without the recognition from those working with the formal leader, leadership does not exist. This recognition is continually reiterated, tested, considered and reviewed in ongoing processes of social interaction, so that

“The leader is as much formed by the recognition of the group as he or she forms the group in his or her recognition of the others.” (Stacey and Griffin, 2005a: 10)

This co-created process is extremely complex and can bring about destructive as well as positive ends. When people are dealing with novel and uncertain situations and 'acting into the unknown' they will often look to a person able to articulate a meaning that is emerging between them (Stacey and Griffin, 2005a). However, raised anxiety levels are often associated with 'acting into the unknown'. Leaders may be

idealised in such situations, and this idealisation may take the form of dependency, aggression and scapegoating (Bion 1961).

Norms - imposing mutual constraints on each other - and values – orienting us around desired outcomes – may emerge in interactions with each other, and the leader may be idealised in these processes, as team members come to associate him or her with the cult value. This process may be largely unconscious and not apparent to both leader and team members. For the leader concerned the risk of being idealised is the concurrent potential for being denigrated when wishes are not met, (Stacey, 2010). From this it follows that leaders require the capacity to be aware of these conscious and unconscious social processes:

“Leaders are often not aware of the powerful roles they come to play in the fantasy lives of others.” (Stacey, 2011: 493)

On a more political level, Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) argue that, because leaders typically hold an imbalance of power, it behoves them to be aware of their own feelings because leaders’ emotions and actions prompt followers to mirror those feelings and deeds, for better or worse. Effective and successful leaders also possess skills and the capacity to make a positive difference. However, Stacey (2010) makes the point that complex responsive processes does not take the view of a leader as an autonomous individual who can be transported into a situation with his or her personal capabilities and guarantee of success. The effectiveness of that leader and the deployment of their capabilities is a co-created process, emerging in local interactions, through social processes of self-formation and recognition by others.

It is impossible for leaders to step outside of the flow of interaction and to design and control events (Streatfield, 2001). Like all of us, leaders can only engage in local conversations with a few people at a time, (though more senior leaders are likely to have access to a wider network of people). The paradox is that leaders are not ‘in control’ and are ‘in control’ at the same time. What they can do is choose their next gesture to continue the communicative process (Mead, 1934; Streatfield, 2001).

Griffin and Stacey (2005) argue that effective leaders are able to articulate emerging themes in uncertain situations, such that further exploration is possible. This is not the same as solving the problem, but is likely to be a tentative expression of what they perceive is happening, so that meaning may emerge among the people concerned. Also likely is the capacity to be able to take the attitude of others, so that generalizations of the social object – especially those affecting the wider organisation - and how they are being particularised, can be expressed in the moment (ibid).

Furthermore, this capacity for empathy, feeling and imagining the reactions of others is crucial for helping people understand the needs of other individuals and groups. With such understanding comes the increased possibility of involving people from other teams and organisational units in conversations. In this way, a leader pays attention to subtle processes of inclusion and exclusion which are always involved in the formation of collective identities. (Griffin and Stacey, 2005).

Streatfield (2001) argues that courage is a key aspect of leadership, since no-one is really in control. In similar vein, Griffin and Stacey, (2005) contend that courage is required to continue interacting creatively into an unknowable future, because of the anxiety associated with this lack of control. To this, Stacey (2010) adds the need for the leader to exhibit greater spontaneity than others, encouraging self and others to take risks and being prepared to surprise oneself. This is not the same as unthinking impulsiveness, but is arrived at through reflection on current practices. Leaders need a strong capacity to think, feel, reflect and imagine. What may read like a prescription for a leadership checklist must be tempered. For example, while these capacities are desirable, they can also be turned to undesirable ends. From a complex responsive processes view

“...the practice of effective leadership is that of participating skilfully in interaction with others in reflective and imaginative ways, aware of the potentially destructive processes one may be caught up in. It is in this practice of immersing while abstracting from the games of organization that one is recognised as leader...In this way, a leader may be exerting a powerful influence on what others think and do, and so on what happens, but all of this can only be done through the quality of the leader’s participation in the conversation. (Stacey, 2010: 17)

In complex responsive processes, leadership is intimately connected with ethics. One of the dangers from the process of idealising leaders is that cult values become associated with leaders. Charismatic leaders may become cult leaders, and the problem here is the blocking of the functionalising needed to bring values ‘to life’. Mission statements, corporate visions and values are all attempts to create cult images. Yet, these can only have positive meaning for people through processes of functionalising, and these can be blocked if strong leaders choose. Leaders can also attempt to open up such statements through local negotiation, and attempts to co-create meaning through local interaction. Ethics is then conceived of not as some universal standard against which human action will be compared, but as ongoing actions, in a context of the continuity and transformation of personal and collective identities. This view of ethics emphasises awareness of how we are constantly negotiating the future on the basis of our accounts and experiences of the past. (Stacey, 2010)

3.5.7 Summary: Complex Responsive Processes

In my view, Complex Responsive Processes theory is a comprehensive and coherent approach to working with process thinking. It provides a means of including within the formal scope of research a range of phenomena which came to interest me in as my thinking around research developed. These include power, emotions, interpersonal relations, conversation and identity. This focus on the organisational realities of people working together in groups - small and large - appealed to me.

The theory has been criticised for drawing too-stark a contrast between more mainstream systems thinking and Complex responsive processes thinking (Luoma et al, 2011, and Zhichang, 2007); for being too deeply rooted in a particular (anglo-european) culture, (Zhichang, 2007), and to have a theory-practice imbalance, (Zhichang 2007), with a tilt to theory. However, it has also been supported for insisting on focusing on the

actual processes of organising (Luoma et al, 2011), and for providing a path-breaking socio-psychological interpretation of complex adaptive system theories, (Zhichang, 2007).

The composite theory is new, and, in my view, needs more empirical application and reviewing., However, authors outside of the immediate group of originators have applied the theory to settings including the Oil industry (Johannessen and Aasen, 2007, Aasen and Johannessen, 2007, Aasen 2009a, 2009b and Aasen and Johannessen, 2009), Health Care (Suchman, 2006, Mowles et al, 2010) and International Development (Mowles et al, 2008, Mowles, 2010).

However, in my view complex responsive processes is a genuinely radical amalgamation of social-psychological, sociological philosophical and complexity theory., I agree with Zhu (2007) about complex responsive processes' radical implication:

“The most significant implication, in my view, is to recognize that organizational change cannot be planned-and-implemented because change patterns emerge unpredictably in myriad local interactions.” (p: 448).

Complex responsive processes challenges the ideology of managerial control underpinning much mainstream literature, including the implication that ‘organisations’ can be controlled. From a complex responsive processes ‘viewpoint, it doesn’t make sense to talk of ‘organisational development’ or ‘organisational change’. Whatever we can influence we do so at the level of local interactions and nothing else. To take an example, knowledge management has been a topical area of organisational competitive advantage. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) wrote an influential book on how to capture knowledge and make it accessible for use and positive exploitation, providing organisations with a means of competitive advantage. Subsequent literature built on this, including looking at how to measure and manage intellectual capital (Roos and Roos, 1997). From a Complex responsive processes view, knowledge is not a thing at all, but a process where co-created meaning emerges, and is constantly reproduced and potentially transformed as humans interact in organisations in the living present. Therefore what is being stored is not knowledge, but abstracted symbols that can be codified. When humans interact and start using the tools it becomes knowledge (Stacey, 2001).

An interesting aspect of complex responsive processes thinking is its understanding of paradox. Stacey (2011) contrasts paradox with concepts of dichotomy, dilemma and dualism, and draws implications for how organisations likely to deal with contradictions in organisational life. To think in “dichotomy” is to polarise thinking and frame an “either/or” choice. “Dilemma” refers to choice over two equally unattractive options. Dualism offers a third way of understanding contradictions, and positions choice as “both.../and...” Stacey gives the example of managers who may have to customise products for local markets, and be faced with the challenge to standardise them for global competition. A dualistic approach separates the seemingly contradictory aspects so that managers may consider splitting the contradiction so as to remove the tension. Paradox provides a fourth way of considering the situation. For Stacey (ibid: 36) paradox means

“...the presence together, at the same time, of self-contradictory, essentially conflicting ideas, none of which can be eliminated or resolved.”

Stacey continues and argues that how we understand contradiction says much about organisational dynamics. Where success is equated with regularity, predictability and stability we are likely to remove paradox and the accompanying tension. Where we accept that paradox must be accepted, lived with and, anyway, is irresolvable, we accept the accompanying tension, stability and instability, predictability and unpredictability, regularity and irregularity all at the same time. Out of this, says Stacey, creative novelty may emerge.

Complex responsive processes theory is also a descriptive, not prescriptive, theory. It aims to describe what we are already doing when we work together in organisations. Conflict is fundamental to the thinking of Mead and of Elias and is viewed as an inevitable aspect of human relationships. In Mead's case because of the necessity to make particular broader idealisations and generalisations; for Elias because of the essential interdependence of people and the concomitant shifting power balances. The differences between us may as easily lend themselves to competition as collaboration, and, in fact, both are likely to be present at the same time. In relation to concepts arising out of earlier complexity theories, complex responsive processes theory retains a fidelity to those concepts but with an emphasis very clearly on the role of human agents in organisations. Stacey and Griffin (2005a, p: 8) summarise thus:

Complex is understood as a movement in time which is paradoxically stable and unstable, known and unknown, certain and uncertain, all at the same time. Healthy human relating has these characteristics, whereas relating which loses these can become 'stuck', habitual and inappropriate for dealing with the fluidity of ordinary, everyday life.

People interact with each other in ways that are *self-organizing and emergent*. Coherence arises through their interactions, based on local organising principles, and through these local interactions a widespread coherence emerges. This happens without a blueprint or plan for this wider patterning to take place. Patterns arise in the form of cult values and social objects, generalised through the myriad of conversations taking place locally, negotiated in difference, and particularised through processes inevitably involving conflict.

Finally, social objects and cult values can and do *evolve*. As manifestations of generalisations, cult values and social objects are never sustained in the same way, though they have the characteristics of seemingly stable social phenomena. They are subject to ongoing negotiation and difference, expressed through conversation. The non-linear nature of human interaction means that gestures and responses are never predictable, and spontaneity, improvisation and difference may mean that small differences are amplified and these social phenomena change.

3.6 Complex Responsive Processes Theory and Innovation

Complex responsive processes theory is not a process theory of innovation. To my mind, though, it has implications and promise for understanding how change occurs through human interaction, and these are

explored below. However, there is little easy crossover of concepts from the mainstream literature on innovation and the complex responsive processes view. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the radically different views of what organisations are, and how change occurs. Stage, or level, differentials reified in mainstream literature are not accepted in complex responsive processes theory. Furthermore, from my reading, terms including creativity, novelty, innovation and change are used seemingly interchangeably in the complex responsive processes literature.

What does complex responsive theory have to say about what change is, and how it comes about? Here are a range of comments from the relevant literature:

“The crucial distinction I am making here is that between more fluid conversation and patterns of conversation that take on a repetitive, stuck form. It is only in the former that potential creativity – that is, emergent new patterns of conversation, lies.” (Stacey, 2011: 346)

For Stacey (ibid) there are several necessary conditions for these emergent new patterns of conversation. There must be a sufficient holding of the anxieties which are likely to accompany ‘acting into the unknown’. Without this, conversation will collapse into sterile, habitual forms. Further, the quality of power relations also matters. When relational ties are too constraining, submission or rebellion is likely; when they are too low, the probable outcome is the disintegration of relationships and of the conversation. There must be sufficient mutual enabling and constraints between people, without an undue imbalance of power. For Shaw (2002) creativity makes sense only as a social phenomenon, emerging from fluid conversation, with diverse practitioners, localised in specific contexts, with mutual recognition conversing together. How do we know change has occurred?

“Organisational change is change in conversation” Stacey, (2007: 271).

and

“Where themes organising experience...are reproduced in sparse, highly repetitive, habitual form with little variation, then there is very little possibility of creative transformation in either social or individual terms. However, when the themes organising experience are rich in variety, reproduced with high levels of spontaneous variations, through imaginative exploration, then the prospects for creative transformations are high.” (Stacey, 2001: 160)

and, in discussing the value of strategic planning and “organizational leverage activities”

“So, it is my view that such activities are, in many ways, a distracting waste of time...Instead of being planned, global patterns emerge in myriad local interactions, and this is especially true for global patterns displaying any form of novelty. It becomes extremely important, then, to understand the largely improvisational nature of such ordinary, local interaction. (Shaw, 2006: 139)

Finally, Stacey (2011) states that:

“If one takes the perspective that an organisation is patterns of communication (relational constraints), then an organisation changes only insofar as its conversational life (power relations/ideology) evolves...Creativity, novelty and innovation are all the emergence of new patterns of conversations and patterns of power relations and ideological themes.” (p: 403)

All of these points have as their common focus the quality of ordinary, everyday conversation, impacted upon by the quality of relationships of people involved in those conversations. In turn, these relationships are situated in local and historical contexts.

3.6.1 Complex Responsive Processes Theory and findings from Innovation Research

There has been limited use of Complex responsive processes thinking explicitly applied to research around innovation. The clear examples are the work of Fonseca, 2002, Aasen and Johannessen, 2007, Johannessen and Aasen, 2007, Aasen 2009a, Aasen, 2009b and Aasen and Johannessen, 2009. Fonseca’s work was the first to apply complex responsive thinking explicitly to understanding innovation processes. He understands organisations as being:

“...iterative processes of communicative interaction, that is, repetitive patterns of human experience of being together in the living present, in which themes are continually reproduced always with the potential for transformation.” (p: 76)

In Fonseca’s view, what we perceive as organisations are really temporary stabilisations of themes, or habits, organising the experience of being together, emerging out of conversing together. In his study, Fonseca looked at three separate cases, and concluded that, from a complex responsive processes view, innovation could be understood as:

“...the new meaning that is the emergent product of the dissipation occurring in conversations characterised by redundant diversity, experienced as misunderstanding.” (Fonseca, 2002: 92)

My understanding of Fonseca’s definition is that he is focusing on conversations prior to a product, service, process, or other form of ‘innovation’ being institutionalised and garnering a common understanding. He is applying his focus to conversations prior to this stage, when they are often messy, and he argues that misunderstanding is the human experience of redundant diversity. People in conversations have different views and opinions, conversation fluctuates, sometimes breaking down, but sometimes continuing, as people struggle to understand each other and form new meanings. (Fonseca’s view builds on others who have recognised this characteristic fluidity: Van de Ven et al (1999), who called this the *gestation phase*, and Keon et al, (2001) who called it the “fuzzy front end”.)

What affects whether the conversation breaks down into previously understood meanings or proceeds? For Fonseca, innovation emerges when misunderstanding is at a critical level, meaning that it is not possible for

coherent action to take place, since there is insufficient common meaning. If anxiety levels are too high, people will revert to previously shared meanings and previously spoken words. However, when relationships are strong enough, continued exploration is likely, bringing with it the possibility of the creation of the new meaning that is innovation. Crucially, for Fonseca, (ibid), trust is the relational process that enables continued exploration.

Fonseca made the important point that people in organisations enact the new meaning, through legitimising speech, giving it one correct meaning, and the property of a “fact”. This leads to more habitual and routine behaviour. In effect, as the meaning of the innovation has become transformed over time so the relationships creating and sustaining meaning have moved from informal ones based on trust, to more formal, institutionalised ones aimed at generating economic advantage. Fonseca also pointed out the role that power can play. If people perceive a new meaning, or innovation, as a threat they may block conversations, ruling it out of legitimate discussions and thus blocking the opportunity for the emergence of new meanings to sustain it.

In her PhD paper (2009b), synthesising previously published papers, Aasen highlights a number of key findings from her use of complex responsive processes theory to understand innovation in the Oil industry. These include the importance of senior management support in acknowledging that novelty involves risk; that managers need to engage more often in conversations as they influence communicative processes; that individual credibility was needed to get the attention of senior managers; that there was a need for employees, including managers, to develop approaches to explore, clarify, and possibly develop emerging patterns of themes.

Both Fonseca and Aasen conclude that innovation is essentially unmanageable, as understood from a complex responsive processes perspective. Aasen emphasises the magnitude of the number of people involved in her case, which means it would not have been possible for a single person to have brought their intentions and plans to bear. Fonseca (2002) points to the critical aspect of redundant diversity, experienced as misunderstanding, as being unmanageable by definition. This is not to say that anarchy rules, and that individuals do not have influence and impact. Clearly they do, but for both authors, the focus should be on the role we play in our participation in ordinary, everyday conversation.

3.6.2 Areas for further research

This is a new and emerging area for the application of complex responsive processes. However, there are some clear pointers to areas for further work. Stacey (2011: 346) considers a key focus to be on the conversational practices that block fluid, exploratory conversations, and, likewise, what practices trap groups of people in highly repetitive conversations? Aasen points to the need to learn more about communicative aspects salient in innovation processes, and how these are enacted in different contexts (2009b)

3.6.3 Research questions for this study:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when ‘acting into the unknown’?

- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when ‘acting into the unknown’?

3.7 A Conceptual Framework

The framework I choose to use to investigate these questions has been developed by Stacey (2011, p: 476-483). His aim is to help managers understand where they can refocus their attention, in keeping with the theory of complex responsive processes. It does not attempt to provide prescriptions for effective action. His is not a framework for guiding research into innovation, but it is a pragmatic view of what managers can attend to, on the understanding that a change in attention can shape actions and may change conversations. There are five areas of attention, though it is clear that they are not independent and do connect with each other. Each is built on a foundation of overlapping complex responsive processes theory.

1. Focusing attention on the quality of participation:

From this perspective, no manager can stand outside an organisation and choose how it is to operate. Designs and intentions emerge in the conversations managers have with each other and with other people. Managers can never control the responses of people to their gestures and small changes may escalate, which may lead to the generation of shadow conversations, patterned by the figurations of power. Furthermore, managers do make decisions about whom they invite to conversations and whom they block out. Attention here is focused on:

“...the pattern of power relations, the patterns of inclusion and exclusion, the ideological themes sustaining them and the feelings of anxiety and shame aroused by shifts in patterns of identity.”
(ibid, Page 478)

From the viewpoint of innovation, the connection here is around which people are invited to join the conversation, with implications for the diversity involved. Also, which illegitimate conversations are starting, perhaps because of the existing pattern of power relations? The question I use to frame my analysis is: *to what extent are people aware of the patterns of inclusion-exclusion dynamics, and how this pattern is affecting the quality of conversation?*

I see this item connecting to complex responsive processes through notions of power, ideology and inclusion-exclusion dynamics; the role of leadership in including or excluding others and Elias and Mead’s work on identity formation.

2. Focusing attention on the quality of conversational life

“In organisations, relationships between people are organised in conversation that forms and is formed by the power relations between them...New themes emerge as people struggle to understand each other and as their conversations are cross-fertilised through conversations with people in other communities and disciplines. Organisations change when the themes that organise conversation and power relations change. Learning is change in these themes.” (ibid. page 478)

Here, the focus is on ordinary, everyday conversation. It is key for managers that they participate in conversation. Attention is focused on how they use their power and influence to introduce new ways of conversing, and being watchful for rhetorical ploys which block fluid conversation.

From the viewpoint of innovation, the connection here is around the fluidity, spontaneity and degree of improvisation in the conversation, as opposed to its 'stuckness', and repetition. Managers will also be aware of power relations and how the ideologies that underpin these in turn impact upon the words and actions people choose in conversation, as well as the conversations that are legitimised and marginalised. The question I use to frame my analysis is: *to what extent does the conversation itself reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?*

Connections to complex responsive thinking: Stacey's work on categories of conversational themes; Mead's theory of communicative interaction; Shaw and Larsen's work on spontaneity and improvisation in conversation; Mead's work on social objects and cult values and the role of conflict, exploration and negotiation in particularising the general.

3. Focusing attention on the quality of anxiety and how it is lived with

Conversational change brings uncertainties around new meanings and uncertain implications for personal and collective identities. Anxiety, then, is an inevitable companion of such shifts in conversational themes. Anxiety is inevitable because such shifts create uncertainty around individual and collective identities.

"Themes organising the experience of relating are not only expressed in the vocal, public conversations between people, but they also resonate with and change the silent, private conversations that are individual minds." (ibid, page 479).

Change is deeply personal when considered in this way. For managers, attention must be focused on the presence of anxiety, the reasons for its emergence, and the extent to which it may be making further exploration impossible. Managers must also consider what makes anxiety tolerable, namely, trust between people. The questions I use to frame my analysis is: *to what extent does there exist a sufficiency of trust to continue exploring in a context of anxiety and risk?*

Connections to complex responsive thinking: Fonseca's work on trust as a means of reducing anxiety; Stacey's elaboration of Mead and Elias' work on identity in relation to anxiety experienced during change.

4. Focusing attention on the quality of diversity

Complex responsive theory takes a paradoxical perspective of diversity:

"The paradox is this: if members of an organisation have nothing in common at all, then obviously any kind of joint action will be impossible. However, if they conform too much then the emergence of new forms of behaviour is blocked." (Ibid, page 480)

This focuses attention on the importance of deviance, eccentricity and unofficial ideologies that undermine current power relations.

“A condition for creativity is, therefore, some degree of subversive activity with the inevitable tension this brings between shadow and legitimate themes organising the experience of relating. Diversity is inseparable from conflict.” (Ibid. page 480)

Managers can pay attention to how they may collude in sustaining legitimate themes that organise experience, as well as being aware of their engagement in the shadow conversations that express deviance. It involves greater sensitivity to noticing which topics are ‘open’ for discussion and which are ‘out’, as well as which people are invited. Note the explicit connection to point ‘1’ above: *quality of participation*. The question I use to frame my analysis is *to what extent does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion and finding enough, (but not too much), common ground?*

Connections to complex responsive thinking: Stacey’s work on shadow and illegitimate conversational themes; Stacey’s elaboration of Elias’ work on inclusion-exclusion dynamics, using evaluative criteria including values and norms. The role of leaders in inviting people to or blocking people from conversations.

5. Focusing attention on unpredictability and paradox

Stacey argues that the most radical aspect of complex responsive processes may be the extent to which it points out the limits of certainty and predictability. He goes on to state that not-knowing is an entirely acceptable position, though can bring feelings of shame and incompetence. Managers must act without knowing what will be the outcomes because the failure to act will have unpredictable long-term consequences. As I see it, in this regard, managers may also feel ‘stuck’, on the horns of a dilemma. However, action brings with it concomitant uncertainty, and from a complex responsive processes view, surprise is an inevitable part of creativity, no matter how well-informed we are.

“It is quite natural not to know and this does not have to incapacitate one...Emergent meaning, often of a new and creative kind, is produced in conversational processes characterised by ‘not-knowing’. (Ibid, p: 481)

The meaning of control shifts from the cybernetic view of *action, receiving feedback and changing course*. This is not possible if one takes the view of the long-term unpredictability of actions. From a complex responsive processes view, control takes the form of mutual constraint, underpinned by power relations, ideology and socialised self-control. Paradox in organisations is also central here, and Stacey lists several (Ibid, page 482-483):

“Organising is at the same time intentional and emergent in the interplay of intentions. Intention emerges in the local, self-organising processes of conversation while at the same time organising that conversation.

Managers operate in a state of knowing and not knowing at the same time.

Complex responsive processes organise both conformity and deviance at the same time.”

The question I use to frame my analysis is: *to what extent in a context of not-knowing, do people still take action and are sensitive to emergent new meaning, explored in conversation?*

Connections to complex responsive thinking: Elias’ conception of interdependence as simultaneous constraining and enabling in relationship; Stacey’s conception of paradox, as opposed to dichotomy, dilemma and dualism; the impact of contextual uncertainty on the perception of risk.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework Summary

Focusing attention on...	The quality of participation:	The quality of conversational life	The quality of anxiety and how it is lived with...	The quality of diversity	Unpredictability and paradox
what extent...	... are people aware of the patterns of inclusion-exclusion dynamics, and how this pattern is affecting the quality of conversation?	...does the conversation itself reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?	...does there exist a sufficiency of trust (to continue exploring in a context of risk)?	...does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion and finding enough, (but not too much), common ground?	...In a context of not-knowing, do people still take action and are sensitive to emergent new meaning, explored in conversation?

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology

4.1 The methodology of complex responsive processes

The act of gathering and analysing data about social phenomena raises questions about the nature of those phenomena and how we know what we know about them. Crotty (1998) defines ontology as *the study of being*, whereas epistemology is concerned with *what it means to know* (1998: 10).

The complex responsive processes approach is interpretive, based on a stance of detached involvement (Stacey and Griffin 2005b). Our social life is always in perpetual movement and development, and we are involved in a process of ongoing interdependency with others. Our identities are being formed through our involvement in events which we are creating with other people, at the same time as those events are creating our identities. This is a paradoxical view of causality, called transformative causality (Stacey 2010), in which reality emerges from social interaction. From this view ontology becomes understood as our personal experience of our social interaction, and this has implications for research method.

Johannessen and Aasen (2007) refer to Mead's (1934) thinking, in particular, they suggest that his views about the development of consciousness, self-consciousness and society are based on a social view of human relating in which meaning emerges through the gestures and responses of smaller and larger groups of people. Our evolved ability to take the attitude of other individuals and groups of people – to anticipate with some accuracy the impact of our actions on them - gives us a way of 'knowing' what we are doing.

Since the theoretical justification for a view of reality is based on ongoing human interaction, the research itself must be participative, with researchers being sufficiently involved in ongoing human interaction. Furthermore the complex responsive processes view of knowledge is that it emerges through a history of social interaction. It is not the disembodied outcome of an autonomous mind, and cannot be created outside the experiences of social phenomena. This is a view which requires the researcher to be a part of the patterning of ongoing relationships, through which new knowledge is created when conversations and new ways of talking change Stacey (2001b). This view urges the researcher to take his or her personal experience seriously. Stacey and Griffin (2005b) define experience as:

“...the felt experience of bodily interaction between people, and this experience is patterned primarily as narratives of relating between self and other.” (page 9)

Clearly then, the researcher's interaction with others and reflection on their own experience are critical for research to take place. However, Johannessen and Aasen (2007a) state that the approach does not specify the role of the researcher very clearly. Researchers may well have intentions in advance of being at the research itself, but will also be open to perceiving the nature of the relational phenomena emerging in the situation, and will attempt to construct convincing meaning from this. However, the authors also point out that most research approaches do not challenge the view of the organisation as system.

In what he describes as “emerging participative exploration” Christensen, (2005) explains that he emphasises the ordinary, everyday conversational life of people in organisations. He points out that he does not follow a rigid research method when doing emerging participative exploration. The methodology itself

is emerging and participative. He will pay particular attention to the conversations of which he is a part in his work as a consultant, reflecting and making notes on especially striking moments during and/or after the work (Christensen, *ibid*: 87) By doing so he creates 'transformational narratives' to explore the patterns of ordinary, everyday conversational life. Christensen states that he does not develop hypotheses for testing, nor use diagnostic models, but allows his impressions of what is occurring to form as described above. Methodology is not prescribed but emerges as judged appropriate by the researcher in the midst of the interactions to which s/he contributes and is affected. This is the approach I have taken in the research I have conducted with my three cases. These are described in turn, in chapters 5, 6 and 7. It is one that has been used by several researchers over the last decade, including Fonseca, (2002), Shaw, (2002, 2006), Christensen, (2005), Johannessen and Aasen (2007b) and Aasen, (2009b).

Stacey and Griffin (2005b) summarise the implications for doing research from a complex responsive approach. For me, the key features are: the centrality of ordinary, everyday experience; a requirement for a subjective methodology to bring to light the subjective nature of experience; methods which allow reflection and reflexivity to allow personal experience to be understood within a broader social experience; an attempt to understand the experiences of organisational members more so than attempts to intervene 'on' a system and change it; attempts to explore the narrative nature of human experience. (Stacey and Griffin, 2005b: 77)

Stacey and Griffin (2005b) describe how students on their educational programmes use a reflexive approach to writing narratives of their own experiences. In the first place, these students attend the programme on a part-time basis, using their current experience of their organizational practice as a source for reflection on and writing about what they and others are trying to achieve. Through working in groups and presenting their narrative accounts of what is happening, students discuss the accounts and stimulate further thoughts leading to further iterations of the writing of these accounts. Narratives are later presented in a larger group setting with the explicit intent of being supportive and providing further thinking to stimulate reflexivity on the part of the students.

From a complex responsive processes viewpoint, global patterns emerge from local interactions. One of the implications from the point of view of data gathering is that the researcher should be sufficiently immersed in the detail of local interaction. How else can the researcher understand sufficiently the detail of what is occurring for themselves, and for others? Being part of the swirl of local and detailed interactions makes a requirement that researchers take a reflective stance to their own experiences, Stacey and Griffin (2005b). The authors describe the need for a subjective approach – a paradox of detached involvement.

'Involvement' here means the inevitability of being part of the pattern of human interactions, with the possibility for being caught up in highly emotional moments which may not be conducive to helpful reflection. By 'detachment' the authors are referring to rational thinking, favoured by the scientific method. In pragmatic terms, the complex responsive processes researcher is involved in an active process of sense making, by reflecting on one's own experience. Stacey (2010) points out that the process of doing research is in itself an example of complex responsive processes:

“Since what I and we are doing is inseparable from who I am and who we are, a meaningful narrative is always expressing, that is, iterating or co creating, individual and collective identities.”

The researcher identifies and articulates the narrative themes organising the experience of being together in organisational life. Stacey and Griffin (2005b) emphasise the personal and social aspects of this reflexivity. At a personal level, the individual reflects on how they contribute to a shaping the narrative that is evolving. This may include how their own life experiences are contributing to the selection and interpretation of events, and to the ideology being presented. At a social level, the researcher must be reflexive in the sense of locating their thoughts within a tradition of others’ thinking and writing which have also helped shape the researcher’s thinking. The narrative produced by the researcher contains both elements of ‘what happened’ in the selection of events selected and described, as well as a reflection upon and analysis of what happened, which employs ideas, concepts and theories from complex responsive processes literature.

With regard to research on innovation, Johannessen and Aasen (2007) argue that the complex responsive processes methodology shifts attention away from one of the traditional targets of innovation research: the nature of organisational characteristics. Instead, it helps reformulate research questions to focus on aspects including the quality of communicative action. In so doing, the authors argue, this change of attention can provide important insights for understanding innovation. They define innovation as the *processes of creating and adopting novel patterns of action* (ibid: 430). They propose a shift of attention to the relational phenomena in organisational life, noting that if we improve our ability to identify and articulate the patterns of these phenomena this may help us influence, but not control, communication patterns which are in turn impacting on innovation efforts. This is not viewed from a viewpoint of formative causality, instead the authors point to many influences on innovation efforts, concluding that they are influenced by many people but controllable by no-one.

4.2 A tradition of qualitative research

Complex responsive processes theory is a broad and coherent body of theory. It has methodological roots in the qualitative research tradition. For example, Blaikie’s (2000) description of abductive research seems to me to describe my approach to this research in some ways. This is a strategy conducive to the interpretive approach to social enquiry, where the emphasis is on understanding the jointly negotiated meanings of reality as constructed by social actors. Blaikie states that the meanings that emerge are not constructed privately but are intersubjective: members of groups or of a society create and share knowledge. The researcher using this process moves from lay descriptions of social life to more technical descriptions of that social life. Mason (2002) summarises Blaikie’s implications for data gathering and data analysis. Rather than testing specific hypotheses or propositions in a *deductive* approach, or gathering data in order to analyse it and form theoretical propositions out of the data, which is an *inductive* approach, the abductive strategy involves a dialectic process. Mason (ibid) describes (Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) description of the process as moving back and forth between the data, our own experience and broader concepts. I find this an accurate description of the experience of having carried out this research. There was certainly no linear

process of gathering data to forming theory. The reality of it was much more contestable, with my observations, reflections, discussions forming thoughts about emerging patterns within and between cases. I did not have the intent or opportunity to 'test out' the existence of these emerging ideas, but, rather, I would record them, remember them and they influenced my subsequent attention to and interpretation of what was happening. For example, the incidence of 'pairing' – people working in pairs to generate and implement ideas – was something I hadn't expected. I noticed it occur often enough to make explicit mention of it in my field notes, but have not made it a central aspect of this research. (I do identify it in my findings synthesis chapter as an area for further investigation.) As a description of the dialectic of data gathering and theory forming, I find this description helpful.

4.2.1 Reflexivity

Since complex responsive processes theory idealises the act of reflexivity (Stacey and Griffin, 2005c), this area warrants further investigation. Finlay (2002) states that reflexivity has a long history in qualitative research, spanning at least a century. Reflexivity involves acceptance of research being created through the active roles of the researcher, participants and their relationships. Meanings are negotiated in specific social contexts - another researcher will tell another story. Given the inevitability of the partiality of our accounts, there is a responsibility to be aware of *how* we are partial and selective - in other words, to reflect on our reflections (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002), and, as a researcher, to turn back on oneself and see oneself in the data (Weick, 2002). Finlay (2002) lists a series of challenges for the reflexive researcher including how far s/he should give a methodological account of their experiences; how much personal detail to disclose, and how far to represent a multiplicity of voices, and not lose their own (Finlay, *ibid*: 2112). By contrast, there is the risk of us falling in love with our own voices, and neglecting those of other participants (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas, 2002). To counter this, Finlay (*ibid*) points to the challenge of being able to point towards further interpretations and useful insights, rather than the researcher's thoughts and feelings being an end in themselves. For others, the practice is insufficiently developed - the *doing* of reflexivity remains vague when it comes to, for example, data analysis (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). All of which points to an attention on the researcher in relation to the research participants, whereas Hardy et al, (2001) point to the need to understand the research community, its institutions and the research system to understand how researchers are embedded in contexts which help shape the nature of knowledge required.

From a complex responsive processes view, the method of reflexivity is not prescribed, but is coherent with the theoretical position of the participative nature of communicative interaction. The emphasis placed on personal and social reflexivity also raises the issue of ends and means, and the validity of findings as judged by the people in the social context from which they grew. (Issues of resonance and validity are discussed below.)

4.2.2 Ethnography

With the acknowledgement of the privileged position of the researcher in being able to select and interpret research questions, data, findings and conclusions, so there is a responsibility on researchers to provide

convincing and coherent research accounts. To counter the accusation of undue bias is a challenge faced by all researchers using participative research methods, (Johannessen and Aasen, 2007a). The complex responsive processes approach bears resemblance to the ethnographic tradition in that the latter is characterised by an emphasis on understanding social phenomena; a tendency to work with 'unstructured' data; detailed investigation of a small number of cases, and perhaps just one; and a focus on the interpretation of meanings and functions of human actions (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998), described in Flick, (2002: 147).

However, ethnography is not a coherent body, and has several branches. Autoethnography has some strong apparent connections to the complex responsive processes approach. Ellis and Bochner (2000) state that

"Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)." (p: 740, quoting Reed-Danahy, 1997)

As influential initiators of the so-called "evocative or emotional autoethnography", Ellis and Buchner (2006) state

"Our enthusiasm for autoethnography was instigated by a desire to move ethnography away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation." (p: 433-4)

The authors advocate a form of autoethnography where the experiences of the researcher are of central importance. The goal is a normative one: to open up conversations about how people live, in the belief that the conversational style of communicating has the potential to transform and change the world. By contrast, Anderson (2006) advocates a form he calls analytic autoethnography. As with Ellis and Buchner, he is also convinced of the value of noting the experiences of the autoethnographer. The person holds a dual role, that of researcher and member of the social world under study; visibility of the researcher's impressions demonstrate personal engagement in that social world; the researcher should record changes in their beliefs and relationships, to indicate they are grappling with membership issues in a fluid situation; finally, autoethnographers construct meanings and values in the social world they investigate. The main contrast between the emotive and analytic branches of autoethnography relate to goals. Anderson wishes analysis to have "data-transcending practices" (ibid: 387) directed towards wider theory development, refinement and extension. Ellis and Buchner (2006) want their evocative description to increase understanding and empathy of the situation at hand, so that this understanding, per se, may have wider repercussions for change in the world.

'At-home ethnography' is described as a cultural setting to which the researcher has natural access (Alvesson, 2009), providing opportunities for the researcher to gather novel, interesting data in an accessible, economical way. Alvesson points to the excellent opportunities for access this can provide, especially to doctoral students combining work and research. He contrasts this approach with that of autoethnography. Alvesson advocates a low or moderate degree of personal involvement for the researcher in the work studied, with an emphasis on one's own cultural context, rather than on the experiences of the researcher. 'At-home ethnography' involves less presence for the author – his or her account is written

from a researcher's point of view, rather than that of an organisational member - while emphasising that this does not imply a view of the researcher as detached or neutral. The implication that one can adopt the role of researcher, rather than organisational member, along with the lack of attention to personal experience also distinguishes 'at-home ethnography' from the complex responsive processes approach.

4.2.3 Narrative Inquiry

For Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Since narrative is a key form of experience, as well as a way of writing about it, they say that narrative is both the phenomenon and method of the social sciences. In referring to the widespread use of narrative in research, Riessman (2002a) lists how the "narrative turn" has touched a wide range of disciplines and professions over the last 27 years, covering history, sociolinguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, folklore, law, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy and social work. As Hardy (1968) says

"We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative." (Quoted in Sims, 2003: 1197)

In a helpful review of narrative approaches, the same author, (Riessman 2002b) describes the diversity of narrative literature, concluding there is no binding theory of narrative but there is great conceptual diversity. She points out that nature and the world don't tell stories: people do. In a post-positivist world, there is no clear distinction between fact and interpretation, and people select what is included and excluded in narratives as well as what they mean. For Riessman, the narrative approach is based on the interpretive perspective, and researchers do not have direct access to others' experience but have to deal with ambiguous representations of it. Gabriel (1995) reiterates the power of stories to engender lived experience through the local, the parochial and the specific. Gabriel and Griffiths, (2004) highlight a danger of narrative research which is the assumption that memorable stories can access 'truths' inaccessible to direct observation. They illustrate how narratives are always actively constructed by researchers, who may be selecting data, even unwittingly, to suit their ideas. An opposite risk exists, that of disregarding important organizational events and regarding narrative and discourse as everything that matters – a stance based on regarding social reality as existing only through language..

These threads of qualitative research tradition are not mutually exclusive. It is eminently possible to carry out narrative interviewing in an ethnographic context, using a reflexive approach and an abductive strategy. However, as I see it, narrative methods and reflexivity, in particular, contain the potentiality for a wide range of ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations. There are similarities and differences with the complex responsive processes approach, though I wish to make the point that the practice of research from a complex responsive processes viewpoint has a heritage in the qualitative tradition. In the absence of guidance for gathering and interpreting data, researchers may borrow methods such as these described, and argue their relevance, which is what I do in the following section.

4.3 Data collection choices and methods

As a reminder, the research questions being investigated in this research study are:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when 'acting into the unknown'?
- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when 'acting into the unknown'?

I researched events in three separate organisations.

Case 1 took place in a NHS trust, as part of leadership development programme with a group of dispersed managers, some of whom knew each other but most of whom did not. In particular, I focus on a phase of the programme during which there had been a request from a senior director for the generation of creative ideas. The director concerned provided financial support to help whatever ideas that emerged become implemented. Case 2 was with another NHS organisation, and again as part of a leadership development programme. On this occasion the team was a newly-formed natural work team, responsible for conceiving and enacting policies across a county. Case 3 was with the Business Faculty of a University which was developing a new set of service offerings to a new target audience of customers. (I have made all three organisations anonymous, in accordance with the wishes of people involved.)

These three cases represented work with which I was involved as an active group member, either through my roles as a university teacher or as an independent consultant. I had work to do with the other people involved for a certain period of time, and I took the opportunity during this time to treat the work simultaneously as research and practice. I use a number of data collection methods. Firstly, I certainly observed the people with whom I worked, though I was participating in the work at the same time. Mason (2002) distinguishes between 'excavating' and 'constructing' data when observing. I saw myself in the latter position in that I was observing and noticing my own and others' interactions in order to explore and understand what was happening. I was certainly conscious of myself as an active formulator of meaning.

I am calling these examples 'cases' but the writing around the use of case studies is diffuse and some aspects resonate more strongly than others. For example Silverman (1999) discusses the principle of purposive sampling in choosing appropriate cases. This refers to selecting example cases because they are likely to contain features or processes in which we are interested. My rationale for choosing the three settings was based on my view that creative approaches were needed, in accordance with the arguments of Puccio et al (2007) and Byrne (2009), already described in the mainstream literature review chapter. For differing reasons in all three cases, (and these reasons are explained in more detail at the start of each case), the problems or challenges were open-ended, with no set method to follow and where successful performance depended on the generation of novel and useful solutions. I rejected the opportunity to pursue other cases because the need for creative thinking was not quite so apparent.

I found useful Yin's (2003) notion of 'unit of analysis'. The question is: 'what' is the case? Yin advocates that a definition of the unit of analysis will relate to the research questions, as well as issues of who is involved and who is not, and defining time boundaries. This discipline was most helpful in case 3, where I had greater

access for longer periods, and the potential for greater accumulation of unnecessary data, with likely subsequent problems in analysing large quantities of data. I found it helpful here to define the organisational-unit limits of my study, as well as time boundaries. (I summarise my thinking on this in the table at the end of this section.) However case studies have also been argued to be fertile strategies for theory building and testing, (Yin *ibid.* and Eisenhardt (1989)). Both of these authors write from a positivist viewpoint, with Yin describing researchers as “laboratory investigators” and Eisenhardt promoting an approach which is directed towards the development of testable hypotheses and theory which are generalisable across settings. That is not what I am trying to achieve in these cases, and it is not compatible with a complex responsive approach to research. This approach places a strong emphasis on the functionalisation and particularisation of abstractions and generalisations in a particular time and place. Attention is focused on these processes and the ways in which human communicative interaction repeats patterns and forms novel ones. While generalisability is not the goal, resonance certainly is, and this is likely to stimulate people’s thoughts in different settings – a matter I discuss more in the final section of this chapter.

4.3.1 Methods of collecting data

Complex responsive processes does not advocate a set of methods for the researcher. What is appropriate is deemed to be contingent on the situation, and to be negotiated with others with whom one is interacting. I found the following methods helpful in this research, and describe each in turn, along with a justification for their inclusion.

4.3.1 (a) Observation

Angrosino (2007) defines observation as

“...the act of perceiving the activities and interrelationships of people in the field setting through the five senses of the researcher.” (p: 37)

It was my formal role to be a part of the ongoing work in the settings of these three research cases. Since I would have this access, observation was an appropriate method for being part of ordinary, everyday interactions which would otherwise be inaccessible. Mason (2002) describes the observer continuum as extending from complete observer to complete participant, with an interim state of participant-observer. Mason argues that a researcher in practice is unlikely to decide on a ‘position’ and remain there. She quotes Coffey (1999) who places observation within the ethnographic tradition. Coffey advocates that we consider, reflexively, our role and involvement with others in the ethnographic setting. This will be the result of negotiations with others. This process of negotiating the identity of our self is, for Coffey, a part of the ethnographic research endeavour. This view did resonate with me. In one case I was a recognised doctoral researcher as well a team member. In the other two cases, I was one of a number of external trainers, working with people on a leadership development programme. I had a ‘role’ and that role meant, variously: teaching, facilitating, watching, listening, helping, encouraging and being available for personal support. My

experience of such programmes is that one does negotiate role with other people as the evolving meaning of the training programme develops. Typically, this negotiation is done more implicitly than explicitly.

The nature of the knowledge that can be gleaned from observation fits with a requirement to be involved in ordinary, everyday interactions, which is one of the methodological implications of taking a complex responsive processes view.

“...many devotees of observation would argue that a researcher can be a ‘knower’ in these circumstances precisely because of shared experiences, participation or by developing empathy with the researched. (Mason (2002, p. 85)

Observation affords the opportunity to know what it feels like, at least for oneself, and to try and understand how it feels for others. One of the challenges of observation can be the sheer bulk of material (Mason, 2002). One of the challenges for researchers is to turn their observations into notes that record moments or importance, and are amenable to later interpretation.

4.3.1(b) Use of Field notes

Patton (1980) asserts that the organisation of field notes is a matter for personal preference but that the option of taking field notes is not. MacNiff (2003) states that while some researchers differentiate between the terms ‘log’, ‘journal’ and ‘diary’ this can be confusing. She does advocate that it be kept regularly, be factual and relate clearly to the type of data one is setting out to keep. MacNiff states that it can also afford the opportunity for reflection on the content which may help make further sense of matters. Mason (2002) distinguishes between literal, interpretive and reflexive data. The former refers to form, sequence and the substance of what happened; interpretive notes involve the researcher in ‘reading’ the notes for underlying meanings; reflexive data refers to the researcher ‘turning back’ on him/herself, considering one’s role and the nature of the interaction of which you were a part.

In all cases, I kept notes and reflections on my impressions and reflections of what was occurring. I found it very helpful to keep a record of the thoughts from my work interactions in field books and on audio tapes. I would typically take the chance to write or record these thoughts as soon as practicable after the events. When audio recording could be done in private, I found it a very helpful method for the interpretive and reflexive data. Whereas my recollection of literal data could be written down fairly quickly, interpretive and reflexive observations seemed to take a little more time. I found it helpful to turn on the dictaphone, have a bath, or find somewhere conducive to relaxing and allow the thoughts to come as I relaxed, with no pressure to be quite so specific about details of substance.

4.3.1(c) Interviewing

In two of the three cases, I conducted interviews towards their later stages. As with the observations above, I saw my experience of these interviews as being one in which the interviews themselves were an

experience, in which through a dialogue with participants I hoped and tried to use the time available to create an evolving conversation, where I and those interviewed were actively constructing meanings resonant for the interviewees. This was not a data-mining approach to interviewing but a discursive approach, where those involved collaborated to make sense of what was being discussed. This approach is described by Mischler (1986) and seemed to me to be consistent with an interpretive approach and that of complex responsive processes with its emphasis on the research itself being communicative interaction, and not being an activity separate to practice. Interestingly, Kvale (2007) uses the metaphor of interview-as-traveller to describe an approach appropriate for when the interview is viewed as a phase of knowledge construction. Kvale refers to the original Latin meaning of conversation as 'wandering together with' and this is apt for the approach I took.

I interviewed some people in pairs, where this was possible, because I knew that these people had worked together to make particular changes happen and was curious about how they would describe their experiences, as well as what I would experience, with them, through the interview itself. I also tried to take a narrative approach to interviewing. This seemed to fit, as the data I wished to gather comprised their reflections on specific changes attempted, thwarted and perhaps implemented and what had contributed to all this. Having the frame of specific stories to contain all this seemed was a choice that seemed promising to me. Riessman, (2004) says that the narrative interview requires researchers to give up some control, as we follow people down trails they choose to describe. Furthermore, the same author (ibid.) argues that less structure in interviews gives more control to interviewees and interviewers to jointly construct narratives using available cultural forms. I did have planned interview questions to help me form a loose structure, and I did send these out in advance to participants, as illustrations of what we might cover. Within the interview, I was conscious of the need to be flexible and follow potentially productive paths during interviews.

With the exception of two interviews, I recorded all of them. I sought permission for this in all cases. As Patton (1980) asserts, the use of a tape recorder (in this case, dictaphone) permits the researcher to be more attentive to the interviewee. I found this to be the case, as being freed from having to write detailed notes in the moment gave room for my attention to be focused on the conversation itself.

There was also an interim stage between the initial collect of data and the production of final case material. With Case 1, I wrote up my field notes into an initial full draft in January 2009, and a second draft case for inclusion in a paper presented at the EGOS conference in Barcelona, July 2009. This served to help me select relevant data, refine and shape my thinking as to what actually were the key aspects of the case.

Table 2: Summary of data collection methods by case

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Case start and end points	September 2008 – January 2009	March – September 2009 for the leadership programme. Review of team process and organisational changes conducted between December 2010-January 2011.	October 2007 – March 2010
The unit of analysis	People on a leadership development course	People on a leadership development course from a specific team, and a later review of implementation of ideas back-at-work.	People in a university Business faculty.
Field notes in journals	Yes	Yes	Yes
Field notes as audio reflections	No	Yes	Yes
Interim draft writings of the final case material	Yes	No	No
Interviews	No	8 interviews conducted in December 2010 – January 2011: 4 with individual team members; 2 interviews with pairs, including the team leader; 1 interview with the organisation’s Managing Director, and 1 paired interview with myself and Jane, my co-trainer.	27 interviews conducted between April 2008 – March 2010: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 in April 2008 • 1 in February 2009 • 11 in June 2009 • 1 in November 2009 • 4 in December 2009 • 1 in January 2010 • 6 in February 2010 • 1 in March 2010

The data generated through these approaches was significant and gave me a significant challenge in how to select and reduce this 'raw material' to a finished and convincing narrative. In the section after next I describe my approach to analysing the data. But first, I give some reflections on the experience of gathering this data.

4.4 Reflections on gathering data

If the above section describes the dry mechanics of the process, the process of doing so was rarely mechanical. The experience of being a researcher was at times exciting and motivating, and quite often uncomfortable. For instance, the sudden emergence of Case 1 as a candidate for a legitimate case meant that I would have to apply for permission through the university's ethics committee. However, by the time this would be processed, the work would be finished. Because of this I did not discuss my research with the course participants, only with my fellow trainers after the event. I kept notes, in the ways described above, in the hope that this would later be approved for inclusion in my doctoral research. (It was later approved.) During the work, they did not consider me a researcher and, in my mind, I was a researcher waiting for permission. Whatever skills I was applying in data collection, I did have the formal stamp of a 'researcher' identity.

By contrast, in case 2 and 3, I was able to spot the opportunities very early and discuss these pieces of work with my colleagues. I discuss the ethical issues of this later in this chapter, and focus here on matters related to data collection. How far did being acknowledged as a 'researcher' change what was happening between me and others? When I mentioned the possibility of treating the leadership programme also as a research project to the people in case 2, the immediate response seemed to me a mixture of apprehension and curiosity. In case 3, the appropriateness of this as a research case was apparent early on. Those around me were, by and large, well known to me. There seemed to be interest in me using this as a research case. I thought of myself somewhat differently now – a researcher-in-learning – and believed that others thought of me a little differently too. This was a shift in identity for me.

At an emotional level I experienced a shift I had not anticipated, that was connected with the above identity change. I felt guilt at not sharing my up-to-the-moment thoughts as a researcher. This was difficult because, most of the time, my thoughts were emerging, forming and messy, like those of other people who were involved in the same work with me. I wasn't ready and able to articulate them clearly, but still I wondered whether I should be sharing my emerging 'research' thoughts, so as to be transparent about this. I wondered what 'they' – my fellow workers – thought of me in my role as a researcher. I formed an object of myself, in my mind, and tried to put myself in other people's shoes in deciding how much of this research to discuss. And amongst all this, I did talk with those around me about what thoughts were striking me, and what patterns I was noticing. I did this with some people more than others because those people were available, and, perhaps, they were easier to talk with, in my judgement. These talks, inevitably, became

relevant iterations of conversations, causing me to think further about the research questions themselves. Research and practice became very intertwined.

As I became more used to paying attention to conversations and their dynamics, what soon became apparent was the multitude of conversations taking place and the impossibility of being present in most of them. This is something a complex responsive processes researcher must accept. First, many conversations are simultaneous; second, others are occurring to which only some are invited; third, I was an active collaborator in inviting some but not others to these conversations. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion had an impact on the quantity of data that could be collected.

On the level of methods, the narrative interviews brought interesting results. Many of the interviews were towards the end of cases 2 and 3, though still within the formal timescales. They often served as occasions for people to reflect back on what had happened, though some had more immediacy when people discussed what was happening in the present. Some interviews yielded useful insights; others felt more pedestrian and more 'distant' from the events. What was interesting was that people rarely followed a story in a predictable way. They took their own paths, and these meanderings had the effect of helping me sharpen my interviewing approach. I noticed myself ask, in my mind: "How relevant is this part? Let it run for a while..." I was wondering about the extent to which organisational contextual factors may aid or hinder conversations, and I became more tuned into what I was seeking. Interviews did serve to corroborate (and sometimes counter) emerging patterns and they did give me insights into other people's experiences.

What proved most useful, in terms of constructing each case's final narrative, were the journal and audio reflections. Observations remembered, written down in field books or recorded and stored, reflected upon and drafted into narrative form proved the most convincing data.

Another, more subtle, process was at play while I was in the midst of data collecting. Eisenhardt (1989) accepts that the research questions may themselves shift during the research, whereas Yin (2003) places these as stage 1 in a sequence of design stages. As I set out in the early stages of my data collection, I was grappling with the shift from a positivist to an interpretive paradigm and making sense of a move to process-based research. I was clear that my interest lay in and around conversations taking place in a context of uncertainty, where new and useful ideas were required, yet may or may not happen. However, I did not really pare down the words to their final form until later. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) describe how researchers may impose upon themselves a pressure when working in naturalistic research settings. Since the potential for capturing a large amount of data is omnipresent, the researcher may leave little time for reflection. The authors (*ibid*) also describe the process of 'progressive focusing' where the research problem is developed or transformed and its scope clarified and delimited. This processual, developing nature of the research work was something I experienced. It was accompanied by fleeting feelings of incompetence, as I occasionally wondered 'by when should these research questions be finally pinned down?'

4.5 Data management and analysis approaches

I generated what seemed to me a lot of data. My first draft of case 1, minus analysis, yielded more than 7000 words; case 2 was a larger piece of work and produced over 1 hour's worth of audio files and 37 A4-size pages of written field notes, plus data from 8 interviews; case 3 was by far the largest of all, and brought 106 written A4 pages of literal, interpretive and reflexive notes, plus 5 journals of more literal notes of meetings and discussions, 1 hour and 20 minutes of audio reflections, plus the data from 27 interviews.

Blaikie (2000) states that a data reduction process transforms data into a form for analysis. My challenge was greatest with case 3, then case 2 and case 1 was much smaller by comparison. I worked through a series of steps which are listed and described on the following page.

Table 3: Stages of data reduction

Element of data management	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Data omitted at this stage	Effect of having completed this stage
1. Transcribe journal and audio reflections to an analysis document. (See appendices 6 and 8. Note that names have been removed to protect anonymity.)	No	Yes (Producing 38 A4 pages of research material.)	Yes (Producing 43 A4 pages of research material)	Any journal data which seemed clearly irrelevant to the research questions.	To capture in one place my relevant field data, ready for categorisation. Also, to start the process of connecting field data to my conceptual framework based on Stacey's 5 areas for attention, as well as seeing other emerging data patterns.
2. Transcribe interviews to an analysis document (See appendices 7 and 9. Note that names have been removed to protect anonymity.)	No	Yes (Producing 177 A4 pages of research material.)	Yes (Producing 473 A4 pages of research material)	Any interview data which seemed clearly irrelevant to the research questions.	To capture in one place my relevant field data, ready for categorisation. Also, to start the process of connecting field data to my conceptual framework based on Stacey's 5 areas for attention, as well as seeing other emerging data patterns.
3. Using NVivo software for categorising data from documents in stages 1 and 2.	No	Yes	Yes	Data which did not appear sufficiently often in the more frequently occurring categories was omitted from the stage 4 narrative drafts and re-drafts.	The categorising of data from stages 1 and 2 established predominant categories in 2 broad areas: Stacey's conceptual framework of areas for attention, and any other emerging categories.
4. Draft and re-draft the narrative account having received feedback on its quality.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Data in which I had not been directly involved appeared as interview quotes in the analysis section, rather than in the initial 'events' section.	This permitted me to check my narrative account with other people who were involved in the work, for both resonance and ethical issues.

4.5.1 Stages of Data Reduction: description and justification

Stages 1 and 2 involved transferring field notes, hand-written, typed and audio into a document which permitted an initial reflection on patterns emerging. These documents are examples of what Huberman and Miles, (1994) call 'data summaries'. The interim document worked well as a way of merging my literal observations with reflections. It helped me start to form emerging thoughts about patterns in the data within and between cases, as well as make connections between what was happening in my notes and other authors' writings in the relevant academic literature. I began to see patterns emerging, although at this stage I had only an intuitive confidence in their importance.

In stage 3, I used NVivo software, a software tool for analysing qualitative data. Specifically, I used the programme to help me categorise my data, working from the data summaries produced in stages 1 and 2. I created what NVivo calls "nodes" and which I thought of as topic categories. For example, the five aspects of Stacey's conceptual framework for attention were each categories here. I was interested to see how often they appeared in these cases. Other categories also appeared, related to complex responsive theory and less easily placed in Stacey's framework, such as, for example, "Power" and "Emotions". This stage was helpful because it made clearer which categories were most common. This was not a quantitative or ranking exercise to my mind, but it gave me confidence as to the 'threads' running through each case. As I progressed through this stage I began to see a narrative account forming.

In stage 4 I wrote a narrative account containing two main aspects. First, a contextualised description of selected moments from the case that seemed important in the light of the data I had gathered. For example, I chose events, meetings, happenings which seemed to me to reflect the key broad patterns I had found through analysing my data. With case 3 in particular, I still had many options at this stage. I deliberately chose descriptions with which I had been directly involved, so that my personal experience would inform the story. Secondly, I wrote a more analytical section for each narrative account, using appropriate literature from the complex responsive processes literature. I selected the aspects of Stacey's conceptual framework and accompanying theory that best seemed apt to describe what had occurred in the events described. I later checked my writings for 'resonance' with others who were present, and I describe this in more detail below.

4.6 Ethics, Validity, Ideology and Generalisation

Creating narrative accounts of your own and others' experience will inevitably raise ethical issues (Stacey, 2011). The first issue concerns writing about people with whom one is interacting and choices around including sensitive, even confidential, information. As Stacey (ibid) points out, one cannot keep telling colleagues that current material may be included in the final narrative. What the researcher can do is to tell people what is being investigated and to protect them as far as possible in the write-up, while still providing a reliable account of what happened. I took several steps in protecting people through these cases. First, where I did interview people, I provided an information and consent sheet for them to sign. Of all the people I since invited to interview, one person opted out. In the writing of the narrative, I changed names to

pseudonyms, including those for people, departments and overall institutions. Next, once I had written my narrative account, I sent people any quotes I had included from their interviews and gave them the choice of withdrawing all or part of a quote. Across the two relevant cases, a significant minority took up this offer. (There were some people I could not contact because they had left the relevant institution. For these I have taken care to protect them as far as I can.) I also contacted people if I had included any potentially sensitive material, pointed to it, and gave them the option to ask me to edit this. No-one took up this offer. I invited selected people to comment on whether there were any 'ethical' issues on my drafted narrative account. Finally, I also chose to omit particularly sensitive data where this may have affected a person's reputation or had other negative impact in their role. Having said all this, the nature of complex responsive processes research means that 'real' events will be discussed and that people involved in them are likely to be able to identify themselves and others. If one is to produce a persuasive narrative, I believe this cannot be avoided, but what can be done is to minimise the risk of harm.

The second broad ethical issue for Stacey (Ibid) is more focused on the researcher(s). This form of research can carry with it considerable risk. What one writes about may potentially affect existing power relations and even one's own job security. My supervisor's advice to end the research on one of the cases was good advice: emotions were beginning to run high in the institution and that may have put him and me in a difficult position. As with the first point, since research is itself complex responsive processes in operation, there can be no general rule to follow to ensure ethical standards are met. Negotiations must be conducted and particularised in specific, contingent situations. From a more procedural point of view, cases 2 and 3 were approved by an Ethics Committee in the University where I work.

Stacey (ibid) describes the issue of validity or legitimacy. What is not at stake here is the challenge of providing an objective validation of what happened. "Truth" from a complex responsive processes view equals "truth" in our context. However, the accounts written must resonate with others who were involved. It is not enough to write an arbitrary account. Stacey goes on to say that value can also be provided through writing narrative accounts which represent the messy, uncertain and emotional happenings that characterise organisational life, and reflect people's ordinary, everyday experiences. To check this, I sent narrative accounts from each case to a selection of people who had been involved in the relevant work with me. I asked them the question: "How far does my write-up of the case resonate with your own experience?" Almost all the people I asked replied to this and their (anonymised) responses are shown, by case, in appendices 10-12.

A further level of resonance must take place with the broader research community, such that the accounts presented seem persuasive, or at least plausible. This experience is still to come for me in the form of the PhD exam, and turning material into submissions for subsequent articles.

Ideology has already been discussed in chapter 2. However, ideology from a complex responsive processes view has implications for methodology. Stacey (2010) states that what is idealised here is human interaction with its paradoxical co-operation and conflict, difference and sameness. However, the idealisation of human interaction can only exist through its particularisation in local, contingent situations. The approach of Emerging Participative Exploration attempts to understand the dynamics by which ideologies sustain or

change existing patterns of power relations. The approach does not presuppose, or impose, an over-riding worldview. What it does value though is the process by which norms, or constraints, and values emerge in personal experience, from a subjective viewpoint.

Stake (2000) describes the tensions around claiming generalisability from case studies. One challenge is that the wish to generalise widely, and create testable theory from cases may detract from creating persuasive detail for an individual case. From a complex responsive processes view, it seems to me critical to produce detailed accounts of interactions from ordinary, everyday experience. Generalising per se, involves abstracting from particular examples and is not the goal of a complex responsive processes approach. However, I do believe that an analysis of interactions in one social setting can have resonance for another, and should aim to be thought-provoking. Blaikie (2000) quotes from (Bassey, 1981: 85):

“...an important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his (sic) decision making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case is more important than its generalisability.”

In this study, I claim no generalisability of results, but do aim to provoke the thinking of others who will judge the value of my insights through their work in their own contexts.

4.7 Summary

Christensen's (2005) concept of Emerging Participative Exploration is the approach I have taken through this research. Though specific methods are not prescribed in this approach, it appeals to me in a number of ways. First, it is coherent with the participative approach which follows logically from a view of ongoing human communicative interaction. This inevitably involves personal experience at a bodily level, and feelings and emotions will be a part of what is noticed. Christensen (ibid.) states that he attempts to help people make sense of their own experiences through a narrative form, in the hope that their past, their history might change and that a new meaning may emerge in conversation. He describes a hope whereby he will engage in fluid conversations, with a free-flowing quality to them, such that a new meaning may arise in situations of ambiguity and uncertainty. He describes his intention to be part of these conversations, though he will inevitably feel anxieties. His offer to his clients is to help them recognise that novelty is happening in the moment, and that, by paying attention to these processes, people may notice how change happens, as well as their part in re-creating and co-creating the patterns of experience they perceive. To me this seems an attractive and realistic way of trying to understand human communicative interaction.

Chapter 5 - Case 1: The Ideas Exercise

The following pages describe the origin and key moments in a leadership development course run between September 2008 – January 2009. I select significant detail in order to bring some key moments ‘to life’. This was the first of my three cases.

5.1 Background to the programme

This management development programme started in September 2008 and ran through until January 2009. The 15 participants each held formal management roles, and are from differing functions in the organisation, such as Finance, community-based services, ward-based nursing and locality-administration. Some people knew each other, but most did not. It was a disparate group, rather than a natural-work team. In previous years this course had been designed, and delivered, by internal staff from this NHS organisation. For this run only, our university has been asked to manage the programme. I was the project manager for the overall programme, responsible for choosing our trainers to deliver it, as well as being one of our trainers for the course.

The early weeks of the programme were important for establishing sufficient rapport with people. However, as the course progressed, so did my reservations about the programme design and what we’d agreed to provide. My thoughts at this time can be summarised as: “The programme is just about ‘ok’ but we need to customise this design to meet people’s needs. As course deliverers, we had been trying to engender some sense of agency in the group members, encouraging them to generate a sense of power and agency in their actions. So far, the balance isn’t quite right here. There’s a risk of this being a programme where participants are given too much material, without enough time for reflection. Are we ‘spoon-feeding’ them...?” I had concerns developing in my mind about how to bring the programme ‘to life’ and make it more timely and genuinely useful for people. My concern was that it was currently ‘safe’, a bit predictable and perhaps not very useful for the group.

5.2 The Finance Director meeting

Unexpectedly, I received a message that the Finance Director of the organisation had asked for a meeting because she had views on one of the modules planned. I’d found myself speculating on what she’d want to do. Perhaps include lots of process rules for writing these plans...? Ask us to adhere to an existing structure and set of organisational criteria for ‘good business case for improvement ideas...? It turned to be very different. At the meeting the Director and I were joined by Ben, who had joined the organisation only 2 months ago. He was responsible for co-ordinating the course, communicating to participants, booking rooms, ensuring things ran smoothly from within, but not delivering the training. My first impressions of Ben: he is brisk, and a bit ‘no-nonsense’. He seems to want to be efficient.

The Director started by saying she wanted the group to consider broader ‘good practice’ imperatives when asking for funding for improvement ideas. She referred to a model promoted by the treasury: the 5-case model. This is a recognised way of writing structured ‘business cases’ to support the development of

improvement ideas. Can we build this into the course design? I agree, knowing we have opportunities to do it. She also told us she would make £20,000 available for the group, if they could come up with creative and practicable ideas that would benefit the organisation. The money must be spent or committed in the financial year up to March 2009. She wanted the group to learn about balancing the creativity needed for initiating improvement ideas with the discipline of 'framing' them in a way that was persuasive to others. We discuss how this can be done, including the involvement of the Finance Director and CEO in seeing the group's ideas and business plans at a later point on the course.

I left the meeting, driving home to Bristol with a range of competing thoughts and feelings. I'm excited about the possibilities for grounding the group's learning on something 'real' as well as how it would also give them the opportunity to make some genuinely beneficial change happen. I also felt apprehension along the lines of: "but this group is already somewhat disparate...this is very different to what they've done so far...will they want the challenge?"

I also ruminated on some conversational themes which had been evolving in the early weeks. In the background, and later to prove influential, was a growing sense of pressure on the group. Some members of the organisation's HR department were concerned about haphazard attendance on this course in previous years - too many people not attending too many days. It had decided to increase the pressure this time around. Indeed, just recently, a senior HR Manager - who was delivering the day's training - told one of the group to leave the course for that day, because the participant could only attend the morning session, due to other work commitments. This was symbolic of concerted action by the HR department and was the first sign of a more 'hardline' approach, with the message being: be here all the time, or not at all.

Many group members were also feeling the pressure from having to attend this 15-day programme, covered in 4 months, at almost a day/week. They'd been given some notice of course dates - in their eyes, not enough - and were struggling to meet all their commitments from their job role and this development programme. There was a set of latent emotions around this: anxiety at balancing ongoing commitments; resentment at the perceived inadequate notice to balance these commitments effectively. To date, these emotions had been present, though largely silent. The evolving conversational themes were ones of course attendance and 'other' work pressures. With some ambivalence, I and other trainers built this new 'Ideas Exercise' into the course design, and planned how to give the news to the group in the coming weeks.

5.3 Start of the Ideas Exercise: 14/11/08

I was the trainer for this 'Creative problem solving' day. After an outline of the day, I told the group about the offer from the Finance Director and that this had been included in the revised course design. There was some free-floating apprehension in the room around the nature of the challenge, though specific thoughts or questions remained unexpressed. The group remained 'on task' at this stage, without showing much relish for the task. For my part, these thoughts I now express became clearer to me afterwards, upon reflection. At the time, I felt, bodily, the unease in the room, and proceeded with the work of 'nudging' the groups along to ensure some progress.

People spent some time generating a list of possible ideas which they may choose to develop more fully. I advised people to put their names against those ideas they found interesting, and see what emerges. At this time, I was thinking: it's important for people to choose ideas for which they have some initial energy – let them make their choices. In practice, this was slow work and took us up until lunch time. I felt some anxiety here at the slowness of the progress. I was struck by the inhibition around individuals committing to work on the listed ideas. No-one seemed to want to be the first to write their name. There was a 'stuckness' in the room, unarticulated, but physically present. This task of agreeing who would work on what took the best part of an hour. Co-incidence or not, as lunch-time drew closer, people stood up to write their names against selected idea possibilities. Three groups had formed, each having selected a promising idea for development. The morning's job was done.

In the afternoon, I took groups through the 1st stage of the creative problem solving process: problem exploration and definition. The principle being that there's little point in generating possible solutions until there is some agreement about the nature of the problem. The groups split into groups to start working through this. Both groups downstairs found the process quite stimulating. The first group chose one of the problem exploration techniques - Goal Orientation – and applied it to their idea. There was high energy in this group, much laughter and they seemed to be enjoying it. The 2nd group consisted of just two people, Alan and Philip. They too made progress, though without the enthusiasm and fun of the larger group.

For the group working upstairs it was a different story. When Ben and I walked into the room, the anxiety was palpable and emotions were high. I sat in the corner and tried to understand what was happening:

Sylvia: "Come on, we've got to try and get something done..."

Sheila was smiling, unconvincingly, looking bemused, somewhat embarrassed and surprised by what was happening..

Alyson: "How can *they* make us do this?"

She is furious. I'm not clear who "they" are...

Alyson: "Look it's best if I don't join in anymore..."

Alyson sits back and is silent for the next 30 minutes, until the group has a tea break. During her 30 minutes of self-removal, Sylvia and Sheila are trying to keep the group focused on action. The impression I have is of two people unable to sit still, desperately trying to make something happen: something better than nothing. There is no reflection in the group, just a skittish action. Sheila and Sylvia take turns to go to the flip-chart and try, again, to orient the group towards some kind of productive work. (They are discussing an idea for a web page which would encourage participation from service users, such as feedback comments on the service received and ideas for other services. This is congruent with their Social Inclusion priority.) Others in the group – Janice, Geoff and Rachael – are largely quiet. Rachael gives occasional assurances and prompts of encouragement. I imagine she is trying to keep positive, to calm the group, and reduce the anxiety. She too, like Sheila, is a little shocked, I believe. The task is to apply a creative problem solving model to the idea they have selected, but they are not doing this. They cannot focus on learning. I sense a

near-desperation to make some progress on this, and to be done with it. There is no talk of clarity of purpose. Efforts from Sylvia and Sheila are determined but unfocused, lacking the wherewithal to ask for help, stop or reflect.

I am sitting and thinking: this is early days for the group. It is OK to be anxious because there is a lot of uncertainty right now. At the same time, I believe they don't want me to intervene in their work. Also, their energy has claws. There is some suppressed anger in the room. I'm not sure I want to 'go there' and challenge them about the way they are working. I rationalise this by telling myself that they must make the decisions involved in this work, since they will eventually present their ideas to the directors. The group chooses to take a break for tea. There is an instant, physical relief in the room at this decision. Afterwards they list some questions about their chosen task, enough to take away. Through the afternoon, Alyson is still silent and keeps to herself.

I invite the 3 groups to reconvene in the main room at the end of the day. People want to discuss the next few weeks: Are the 2 directors assessing our presentation style or the ideas, or both? Is this an assessment – like the dragons den? What if we come up with ideas that require a lot of work to implement? We already have full-time jobs – who will do this work? What are they – the 2 directors – like? Is it a pass-fail? (I believe the implication, though unstated, is: what does this mean for our careers?)

After the day, I received an e-mail, from Ben, saying that Alyson has chosen to leave the course for personal reasons. Another member of the 'upstairs' group had e-mailed Ben. He did not enjoy the experience and reports and has told Ben that he is considering leaving the course, but Ben somehow persuades him to stay. He agrees to this.

Over the next week, I hear that 2 of the 3 groups' ideas are no-starters because they are already being pursued at work, or are considered non-viable for reasons which are unclear. Through the e-mail grapevine I hear that groups are re-forming. On what basis, and with what progress, is unclear. It is difficult to know how much work is happening between people, and I am conscious of their other full-time role commitments.

5.4 The reformation: 5/12/08

Rich and Anita, associate trainers, run this day. On the previous Saturday morning, we discussed the day, through a 3-way phone call. I share my concerns from experiences with the group so far. I want to support Rich and Anita and to explain the challenges that they may well encounter. After the day, Anita sends me an extended email, extracts of which are shown below:

- “Significant levels of anxiety in the room at the start of the day, but great willingness to discuss these in an upfront way.
- Everyone v stressed by the idea of performance.
- Shouldn't underestimate the pressure everyone is under with work, never mind the additional pressure of the programme.

- On reflection, we felt the Business Case was a big ask of everyone, given they are hurtling at full pelt through this programme without much space for pause or reflection
- We found the presence of Ben v. unsettling. (He) comes over like a more traditional ‘product’ trainer, with a bubbly, jolly, ‘acerbic’ style that is often well suited to teaching and instructing on things that have clear ‘edges’. However, I have rarely seen trainers with that kind of profile adapt well to the ‘softer’, more ambiguous, and more complex stuff of management development.
- Anita thinks Richard did a fantastic job in turning the Treasury model into something useable. A much simplified version – perhaps using different language – would be more than sufficient for this population
- The groups have really gelled.
- There were some really potent comments made about the values everyone brings to their work also the frustrations they face in their work. We think the Trust could do well to take these seriously and look at how they might build on motivation and values and collectively tackle the big systemic and organisational issues (Short staffed, stress, lack of ownership by some staff, poor communications, slow and difficult IT systems, slow and unresponsive HR including training!!! - we think) would be really good to take on board for the final review.”

I am hugely relieved to see this note. Rich and Anita seem to have done a good job, and at a minimum, have re-formed the groups around new ideas, and with a different configuration of group members. Over the next two weeks, I hear that the groups are making progress in their own time. They have written business plans to support their ideas and sent these to Ben, who has forwarded them to the CEO and Finance Directors, so they could read before the presentation day.

5.5 Presentation day: 16/12/08

Aileen – another external trainer - and I drive up together. I feel nervous, but am also looking forward to seeing the group deliver their work. I’m encouraged by the quality of the written business plans I’ve seen them produce in preparation.

We arrive at the venue at 08.15. As we walk into the lounge area, the smell is evocative. I’m transported back to Swansea, circa 1975. A social club, dark, well-worn carpets, no heating, decades of stale beer on well-worn carpets. Gasps of disbelief, shock and embarrassment are uttered as group members enter the room. Laughter and black humour pervade, and a spirit takes hold of we’re-in-this-together.

Aileen and I welcome the group, during which moment the electricity supply is cut without warning. The group provide instant comments about “working in the dark”, and “...thanks for laying on a special treat for us...” There is also an edgy anxiety and a contagious, hysterical laughter, much focused on the inappropriateness of the venue. We ask them to join their groups, and use the morning to finalise their presentations, ahead of the 11.00 arrival of the 2 directors.

There is a problem for one of the groups. One of the members – the same person who was ejected from an earlier class, has been asked by her manager to attend a different course on this day. She has e-mailed her group to ask if she can attend our course during her lunchtime, fulfil her presentation, then leave and return to her other course. Ben has said a flat “No” to this. The other group two members are angry and upset, and they convey this to me at the start of the day. I say that the logistics of the arrangement do sound unrealistic, but let’s get the facts... I speak to Ben and tell him that the two group members are not mentally ready to present, and still have the hope of involving their other person. Ben is adamant that she won’t be invited. I tell him that he should speak to them now to close the subject, and give them time to prepare. Some minutes later, he walks over to the three of us, sits down and, finger-pointing at Sylvia, says:

“There is no way that May is joining us. She’s been asked to attend a different programme, and that’s it. End of conversation.”

Immediately, Sylvia stands up and says

“Excuse me, I have to leave.” She walks out.

Rachael sits still, holding her counsel. Ben leaves us. Rachael remarks on her own self-control and walks out to find Sylvia. They reappear some 10 minute late, and Aileen, the co-facilitator, speaks with them for the next 15 minutes.

Ben and I speak, and I tell him that he pointed his finger at Sylvia in telling her his decision. He was unaware of this, and is a bit stunned. I tell him that I agree with his decision but that he has been overly firm in doing so. We agree to focus our remaining time in helping people in whatever ways they need. In the intervening time, the groups finalise their preparation. The two directors arrive and we have a buffet lunch together. Some group members talk informally with the directors; others remain in their groups; while others check the power-point technology for a final time. It is 12.30 and time for the presentations to start.

The groups have proposed one idea which, as far as we know, is not only new to their organisation but to their sector. A second would involve buying an energy-saving product which would be new to their organisation. The third idea would extend an existing service to a new target audience, and the fourth would be a re-purchase of an already-used set of diagnostic products. The 4 x presentations go well. The outcome is that all 4 ideas are given a qualified “Yes”. All need more work before implementation and some more than others. In total, the board directors promise more than £23,000 in funding for these ideas. The group are relieved and surprised at the positive feedback from the directors. They are also tired, proud. I feel the same, but not as surprised. The Ideas exercise is finished.

5.6 Process Analysis

The focus of the analysis below concentrates mainly on two particular sessions from the above description, plus relevant, important contextual information. The two sessions took place on 14/11/08 and 16/12/08. I concentrate on some particular parts of my conceptual framework, selecting the ones I believe to be especially important: the quality of anxiety and how it is dealt with; the quality of conversational life; and the quality of participation.

5.6.1 Focusing attention on the quality of anxiety and how it is lived with...

The question here is: to what extent does there exist a sufficiency of trust to continue exploring in a context of anxiety and risk?

14/11/08: The after lunch session on this day was especially illuminating. I spent the majority of time with the 'upstairs' group which struggled to proceed with the task. I was concerned about the experience for these people, and, to some degree, was worried about the possibility of strong emotions making the work irretrievable. What made the situation so powerful?

As the group began to discuss the idea it had selected, so it became aware of powerful emotions in the room. My retrospective sense-making of this is that the extent of Alyson's anger surprised people. They didn't know how to react. Some were stunned to silence; others reacted with physical dispersion into frantic activity. As awareness grew of the awkwardness and discomfort of the situation, so this awareness fed further anxieties and the quality of conversation plummeted. Geoff believed he was not listened to; others were silent and concerned. I sat, restless, on the edge of my seat, experiencing physical anxiety and this secondary sense of awkwardness as my awareness grew of the awkwardness of others.

Elias describes how the presence of high emotion can contribute to a cycle of reactions, increasing the chance of a positive feedback loop, and reducing the possibilities to apply realistic thinking.

"High exposure to the danger of the process tends to heighten the emotivity of human responses. High emotivity of responses lessens the chance of a realistic assessment of the critical processes, hence of a realistic practice in relation to it. Relatively unrealistic practice, under the pressure of strong affects, lessens the chance of bringing the critical process under control." (Elias, 1987: 98)

The group was caught in a bind, and were prepared to follow Sylvia and Sheila's courageous efforts to lead them somewhere, anywhere. These efforts were welcome and proved to be 'good enough' in the circumstances to lead them to the relative safety of a mid-afternoon break. Being present in that room for the 45 minutes or so leading to the break indicated to me that the unspoken goal was survival without humiliation. What was missing from the above session was the presence of realistic thinking about the task. I perceived a positive feedback loop: how the presence of strong emotions contributed to the difficulty of thinking clearly, which, in turn, contributed to the continuation of strong emotions.

What was the risk for people? Clearly Alyson's reaction was influential here. She had earlier expressed concerns about her current workload, in her new role. This training programme was an additional strain for her. On top of that, the *Ideas Exercise*, with the potential for yet more work in and outside of the formal classroom, was, I believe, a challenge she could not imagine. She was angry with *them* – the Finance Director and maybe me – for introducing this new element to the programme. Her exasperation and anger raised the immediate risk of more anger from her. Other risks and uncertainties were present, such as the potential for this exercise leading to a considerable amount of work outside of people's already-challenging job requirements. There was also the risk, expressed later in the day, of being evaluated by the CEO and Finance Director towards the end of the programme, when groups were due to present their ideas. What might this potential evaluation mean for current job, and future career, prospects? The significant amount of uncertainty brought about through the introduction of the Ideas Exercise aroused

Fonseca (2002) explains how exploration between people raises the prospect of misunderstanding, as people have differing views about how to proceed with tasks. This raises anxiety in participants, but the anxiety is an inevitable accompaniment to conversations leading to innovation. If people continue to work together and form new meanings, this may subsequently form the artefact of an innovation. What determines whether people continue to work together, exploring possibilities, or whether exploration 'collapses' and conversation reverts to the stability provided by some previously-held meaning? According to Fonseca (ibid) there must be sufficient strength of relationship to enable people to live with the anxiety arising in the frustrated expectations of finding rapid solutions and immediate support. In particular, trust is necessary for people to continue talking, so that a new meaning may emerge.

In this group, there were differing views about how to proceed to with the web site idea. When I joined the group, they'd already written ideas for progressing with the task on the flip-chart. Misunderstanding was present, as were strong emotions. What was missing was any social glue to bind them in their continued exploration of their work. People had little in common at this stage of the programme. They were a fragmented group, from different parts of the organisation, without sufficiently strong relationships. This *Ideas Exercise* was the first time the overall group had been challenged on something of 'real' organisational importance. Without sufficient trust in relationship, the group found it difficult to remain coherent. The mid-afternoon tea break became a survival goal, and, in the next few days, heard through phone calls and emails, the outcome was the destruction of the group. The fact that the group later found its idea was already being developed elsewhere in the organisation was largely irrelevant. My contention is that the group could not have continued with these people and the circumstances above. A lack of trust made ongoing exploration too difficult, in a situation which suddenly generated more uncertainty, risk and anxiety.

One other effect of the high levels of anxiety was that suspicion and fantasies emerged about the intent and nature of the directors' messages. (This was also occasionally aimed at us trainers as different authority figures, potentially conspiring with executive members. Some group members later asked if we'd designed the lack of clarity around the task to mimic real life. There was a degree of suspicion as to our role for some in the group.)

5.6.2 Focusing attention on the quality of conversational life

The question here is: to what extent does the conversation itself reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?

In the example above, the pattern of the above group's interaction was repetitive, flipping between attempts to focus on the task, encountering obstacles in the clarity of the task, and a lack of involvement from several group members, and reverting back to Sylvia and Sheila's valiant efforts to refocus the group. There was little reflection, spontaneity, and clear thinking. Stacey's areas for attention are not independent. The high levels of anxiety, described above, made fluid and uninhibited conversation very difficult in this situation.

There is relevant context, from the prior weeks of the course itself. Before the introduction of the *Ideas Exercise* there'd been a tendency for conversation to be slightly guarded and cautious between course members, and between course members and trainers. I'd been aware of the habitual pattern we'd helped create of course trainers 'providing new materials and exercises for each new day of the training programme. What we knew too little about was: what did the participants think of all this? Was it really useful for them? How could we, as trainers, know we were being genuinely helpful and effective unless there was sufficient immediacy and genuineness of conversation? Shaw (2006), asserts that we are highly attuned to spontaneity in conversation, with its attendant risk and improvisation. For her, this is not a personal quality but a quality of the interaction between people as we work together. The presence of spontaneity is experienced physically in our bodies, and we are aware of it in others' bodies, as spontaneity entails risk. The corollary of this, for me, is that when conversation feels more scripted, planned, rehearsed so conversation, as experienced in our bodies, feels more deadening and lifeless. In the weeks leading to the *Ideas Exercise* there was little of the feeling of liveliness that accompanies spontaneity.

The leadership programme itself can be considered a type of social object (Mead 1938). This is characterised by the people involved in the ongoing process taking the attitude of the generalised other – the other people also on the programme – and the groups of people acting in broadly similar ways. This is the basis of co-ordination, as we imagine how others will act, and imagine how they will expect us to act, in turn. This ability to see one as an object to oneself as a powerful form of socialised self-control. Seen this way, social objects tend towards stable, repetitive patterns of behaviour as we are co-dependent on our own and others' responses matching our expectations of our own and others' behaviour. I did have the distinct, somewhat unsettling impression, of people *behaving* well in a rather compliant way in the early weeks of the programme, and my fantasy was that this required a significant degree of self-control from participants.

Social objects are generalisations and their particularisation is an imperfect, negotiated process, Stacey (2010). He goes on to describe how the situation will require discussion by people with differing understandings, who are members of different interest groups, bringing differences in ideologies and power relations. Whereas, a compliant kind of peace prevailed within the confines of the overall leadership course, from the introduction of the *Ideas Exercise*, things changed. Some participants were excited by the

possibilities it produced, but others were much more worried. It raised dissenting voices, questioning the aims and intended outcomes of this initiative, as well as the intent behind those who'd introduced it.

From the end of the first day of its introduction, and in the following weeks, up to Presentation day, there was an increase in the immediacy and spontaneity of conversations. We knew what we were dealing with as trainers. There was a much more frank exchange of views, though the questions were often hard to resolve. The concept of the living present (Stacey, 2011) was very much to the fore here, as group members considered potential future commitments by themselves in the light (or dark) of their assumed expectations by directors of themselves, which, in turn, were based on people's selected previous experiences with those directors.

Why this sudden shift from habit and stability to conflict and negotiation? My impression is that the *Ideas Exercise* brought with it more uncertainty and anxiety, for the reasons already listed above. It required a more urgent meaning-making process for participants. Answers were not easily provided, with limited access to the two senior directors, and, for some, the threat of the potential repercussions from presenting to these directors produced a need to understand what was required. As trainers, we aimed to provide time and opportunity for people to discuss and debate the *Ideas Exercise*.

One of the methodological limitations of complex responsive processes is that one becomes more aware of the range of relevant conversations taking place, at which one cannot be present (Aasen 2009b). Indeed, one may not be invited to these conversations. As the weeks progressed, and work was done by the teams both away from and in the classroom, so the *Ideas Exercise* was made more meaningful through discussions together, and, (though we trainers could not observe this), we intuited new patterns of coherence form between people, and commitments made and kept between group members. From a novelty viewpoint, the *Ideas Exercise* helped shift the quality of conversation. We did experience more spontaneity and fluidity in our talks with each other; we were suddenly much more alert to risk and opportunity. Over the ensuing weeks, novelty did emerge in shifting team forms, agreed both in and outside of the classroom, with and without help from the trainers.

5.6.3 Focusing attention on the quality of participation

The question here is: to what extent are people aware of the patterns of inclusion-exclusion dynamics, and how this pattern is affecting the quality of conversation?

Stacey (2001), describes different types of conversational themes. Legitimate themes organise what we feel able to talk about openly and freely in organisations, and would discuss with people we don't know very well. On this management development programme, this included the work we were here to do, topics of content for the week, and, suddenly, the *Ideas Exercise*. Shadow themes organise conversations in which we feel able to give less acceptable accounts of our own and others' actions - they are not sanctioned by the organisation. Typically, we would engage in these only with people we trust, and in small groups. On the course, the *Ideas Exercise* aroused these, sometimes on topics such as wondering what the 'real' agendas of the two Directors. Usually, these took place at break times, in corridors, and, I imagine, outside of the

formal course time. Stacey (2011) argues that the tension between legitimate and shadow themes is an important source of potential for diversity, and for novelty to emerge in spontaneous ways.

On the course, the *Ideas Exercise* increased the presence of shadow conversations and increased the tension between these and legitimate themes. A major emerging topic, which I believe had unexpected implications for idea development on the programme, concerned the issue of course attendance. I've described this briefly above, but, to recap, regular participant attendance on this course had been a matter of concern for people in the Human Resources department in previous years. It seems that they had determined this year would show improved attendance, and Ben, in his new role, would enforce the approach. Ben had only just joined the organisation, so had no direct involvement in the history of this topic. Course members were struggling to meet the demands of this (weekly) training course, and balance them with their clinical and functional responsibilities. Some struggled more than others. The Ideas exercise had fuelled the ire of some, with the potential for increased work to implement ideas, as well as the undeniable need for increased team co-ordination outside of the classroom training. More work was inevitable. This was the source of an increasing shadow conversational theme and the gathering tension expressed itself publicly in the removal, and humiliation, of May from one of the early classes. Finally, on the final day, the confrontation between Ben and Sylvia, based around May's non-involvement was a further example of the same topic, albeit at a key and emotionally charged occasion: presentation day.

As a course trainer, I'd hear occasional whispers and words from small groupings of people. The content of these shadow conversations typically centred around expectations as to ongoing commitments once the course will have ended: "If I'd know there'd have been this amount of work... "We weren't given much notice about the course dates and it has caused problems." "This attendance monitoring is a joke – treat as like adults and trust us." "I already have a full-time job... no-one told me this was expected..." Increasingly, when Ben entered the room, he was excluded from these shadow conversations. He represented the visible manifestation of the Human Resources department, and its approach to course absence. This situation became increasingly difficult to deal with, and an unpleasant emerging aspect of the course. We did not discuss ideology on the programme, but I believe there was a presence of ideological tensions, driving different approaches to valuing actions.

Stacey (2010, pages 200-201) contends that

"Ideology is constituted in the paradoxical interplay of desires, norms and values and restrictions, compulsions and voluntary commitments to choices of action. It is these complex responsive processes of relating that constitute the game in which we are all daily immersed."

He argues that patterns of power relations are expressed in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, which, in turn, are always reflections of ideologies. Stacey's nexus of ideology is important in understanding the pattern of group dynamics and its impact on energy and discretionary commitment with this case.

Values can give life meaning and purpose, and so are expressions of free will. Stacey (2010) argues that values can be considered a paradox as they compel and express voluntary commitment at the same time. They reflect what we feel it is good to desire, and are themes organising the experience of being together in

a voluntarily compelling, ethical manner. Norms can be understood as constraints and restrictions we choose to impose on ourselves because of our views about what is *right* and what *ought* to be done.

I identify differing values and norms in the account. First, the commitment to clinical delivery for most course participants. Most of the participants have a professional background and many years of experience in delivering clinical care to patients. Secondly, from the executive level there is the introduction of commercial practice, through the request to 'frame' improvement ideas using a business case approach. Finally, from members of the Human Resources department, there is the norm, requiring compliance, of attendance on the course, positioned as a be-present, and fully-stay or fully-go policy. The vigour of people's commitment to these values or norms never articulated clearly in my experience. However, the consequences became more apparent as time progressed. People on the programme used different criteria for evaluative purposes and found it difficult to discuss these. Conversation found a new pattern of shadow conversations, patterned by power dynamics, from which Ben was excluded. Stacey expands the implications of ideology, (2010, page 167) arguing that it provides criteria for choosing one action rather than another and serves as the unconscious basis of power relations, making it feel natural to include some, exclude others from groups, thereby sustaining power relations between those groups. Elias and Scotson (1994) describe how ideology is revealed and emerges in gossip in which binary, value-laden descriptions are developed to distinguish between insiders and outsiders. Ben was new to the organisation. Group 'insiders' understood how the organisation worked, were committed to clinical delivery and were not sufficiently 'understood' by those outside. For many on the course, the issue was of not having their efforts recognised in trying to balance the demands of the course with their ongoing work. Instead, they were being treated as children – as they saw it – through a tough attendance policy, functionalised in a take-it-or-leave-the-room way, by the Human Resources team, including Ben. Interestingly, this had been a theme from previous years, into which we had stepped. Though the conversation had apparently taken place in previous years, the introduction of the *Ideas Exercise* raised the stakes, and brought these ideological differences to the surface much more potently.

These conversational patterns became an increasingly prevalent aspect of the course, patterning interactions from the introduction of the *Ideas Exercise*. It's important to point out that no-one was in control of the development of these conversational patterns. The complex responses processes in which these course participants were involved, could never have been designed and controlled by anyone. As project manager, I welcomed this change in course design, for its potential for arousing interest and giving people the opportunity for tailor the learning to personal needs. It had the unexpected outcome of galvanising groups along ideological interests and increasing the volume on conversations that had been long present. Neither I nor, I'm sure, the Finance Director, were aware of these complex historical webs until we unwittingly shook them.

For me, in this case, paying attention to the quality of participation highlights how local conversations can be patterned by broader, more global conversations. People tried to particularise the desired generalisations of a powerful organisational unit – the Human Resources department. The subsequent patterning of communication fissured along ideological lines and this patterning of interaction influenced who was invited into ongoing conversations.

5.7 In summary: Implications for Creativity and Innovation

In the course of this leadership development programme, we experienced phases of larger group stability, smaller group destruction and the formation of novel team formations. It was not possible to observe all of the groups, all of the time, and so my accounts are necessarily selective. (In particular, I omit from my analysis the group process working of the team that produced arguably the most radical idea that was new to the sector, as far as we are aware. I did not see enough of this group interact because of my time with the 'upstairs' group on that afternoon.)

The findings and the research questions

As a reminder, here are the formal research questions:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when 'acting into the unknown'?
- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when 'acting into the unknown'?

5.7.1 How do conversations between people sustain exploration when 'acting into the unknown'?

From the perspective of the programme as a whole, the Introduction of the *Ideas Exercise* certainly brought vigour and liveliness to our conversations. We shifted from a pattern of trainers 'providing' and participants' 'receiving', to one where participants and trainers were 'acting into the unknown' together. Being in a role of recognised authority, as leaders we sought to position ourselves as members of the group, encouraging the course participants to take responsibility for their reactions to the changed situation. We made time for debate and discussion so that the many unknown aspects of the situation could be explored. We were, I believe, very attuned to the strong feelings of anxiety felt by the group, and which we felt in turn. In these sessions, the spontaneity and fluidity of conversational life increased sharply. However, it is notable that this, per se, was not enough to lead to a set of creative outcomes.

5.7.2 How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when 'acting into the unknown'?

As I experienced the work during the course, most people settled for a good-enough idea and presentation to the Directors. This meant not adding unnecessary effort and risk to one's situation. In a context where people felt that safety was low, with risk and uncertainty high, this was a potent brew, fuelling people's anxiety levels.

The limited degree of interpersonal familiarity and trust also contributed to people's unwillingness to explore novel approaches. This was especially true of the meeting on the 14/11/08. Here, the presence of anxiety was palpably high. The findings of Boyatzis et al, (2011) about negative emotions having the effect of reducing cognitive, emotional and perceptual openness is relevant here. I know my own awareness

became reduced in this session, as I feared a verbal attack from the group. From the view of factors sustaining exploration in conversation, what was evident here was that the group members were unfamiliar with each other and there was consequently very low trust. It became impossible for the group to sustain exploration. Instead their efforts were led largely by two courageous people, who helped them work, as best they could up to a mid-afternoon break. The effect of this sessions was dramatic- the group disbanded, with one member leaving the course, and another asking to leave.

A further factor was that of the wider organisational power relations, expressed in a conversational theme that had been rumbling for at least two years: that of participant presence/absence on the course. This was deemed important by the Human Resources department and its representative on the course – even though he had only joined the organisation three months ago. Some course members felt as if they were being treated ‘as children’, while their own values around clinical excellence were not being acknowledged, though they were negotiating their diaries to accommodate their weekly attendance on this programme. There was a lack of mutual recognition around the norm of course attendance and the value of clinical delivery. At the same time the *Ideas Exercise* ratcheted up the tension, without anyone intending to do so. Fundamentally, a key issue became the extent to which people were prepared to commit their discretionary energies to accommodate risks to their workload and, potentially, career prospects. The answer for most people, though not all, was that ‘good-enough’ became the goal, preferably without lasting damage to one’s reputation or negative evaluation from people in powerful positions. The above dynamics affected people’s motivation to explore and take risks:

One course participant wrote in his final evaluation:

“...It also seemed that the outlines of the exercise became blurred and confused people. The purpose of the task and perceived expectations became inflated and distorted. Members seemed to feel they were going to be critically judged and that the initiatives had to be successful. When the real objective was to go through the process of learning how to put a case together and the bonus was for the idea to be adopted. Therefore the group inwardly projected their own level of discomfort based upon a collective level of what the task held and the status of the judges. The information of the assessment being made up of fact/fiction, myth and emotion.”

Chapter 6 - Case 2: Co-ordinating Children and Young People's Services

This case looks at a leadership team of nine people from a National Health Service team who attended a leadership development course between March and September 2009. I also conducted interviews with the group in December 2010-January 2011, to understand what had happened in the interim. This was a larger case than in the previous chapter, and different because it involved a natural work team, rather than a disparate group of individuals.

6.1 Programme Start: a story of what happened

The leadership team was formed from three separate teams that had been previously split across nearby geographical areas. A mish-mash of roles, grades, differing responsibilities and working practices was inherited, without anyone being clear about quite what was the degree of variation in practices at the time of the team formation. The role of the team was to provide a common strategy and operational performance for overlapping areas of service relating to children and young people. These included: speech and language therapy, health visiting, school nursing and child protection. So the team itself was a new organisational formation, with a brief to bring consistency of work practices across the county. That in itself was a novel challenge for this group of people, but there were other pressures, both external and internal to the organisation which meant that the challenges they were facing were complex, ill-defined and without a single obvious solution. Creative thinking is needed when people face complex, ill-defined problems where successful performance depends on the generation of novel, useful solutions (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988; Besemer & O'Quin, 1999; Puccio et al, 2007; Byrne et al. 2009).

6.1.1 Pressures originating from outside the organisation

There had been several recent, high profile instances in the national media of child protection cases deemed to 'go wrong' These brought significant negative reputational problems for the organisations concerned. For example, the "Baby P" and "Victoria Climbié" cases were both fresh enough in the public and policy-makers minds to exert pressures on those working in the field of children's services.

In interviews team members discussed the pressures that required them to change their way of working.

"...the other thing is the safety element – processes for managing risk, as in Baby P...I suspect that at the time we didn't feel we had the security in the organisation when we were bringing 3 organisations together." Eleanor

"...the complexity is hugely greater nowadays: more children with complex healthcare needs, living in the community, their survival rates...got all the public health issues, increased obesity, emotional well being, vulnerabilities, complex family structures...substance misuse, domestic

abuse...thresholds into other areas feel as if they're getting higher. Social care pressures have gone up, less support services out there..." Eleanor

"...in light of baby P...more children going into care equals more work for Health Visiting. Also more immunisations for HPL screening; working to do very quick reviews of children who died suddenly – 12 hour response. Look at the range of additional work with already busy schedule with little extra resource... Yvonne

The Impact of changing external demand on team management was summed up by one manager:

"...looking at engaging whole of my team...we are having increased referrals, have more complex cases, getting everyone to work together. Own it together, rather than me deciding what we're going to do. ...some people will work harder and harder, but that's not effective...trying to get people to come together. Mia

One manager emphasised the unique challenges for Children and Young People' Services:

"Adult services focus on the sick and the ill, and children services focus on children who are well...difficult for other members of the NHS to get a grip on it...if you ask a district nurse what they did: 'go out in the community, take stitches out, do some dressings...' they'd say: "what do you do – they're not sick?..." ...the world is changing quite rapidly...everyone's becoming more business aware, conscious of costs. Got to be able to quantify what you're doing. ...we've had to be more creative and innovative to try and sell our service...I think we're the only group in the health service who work with well people." Paula

6.1.2 Internal challenges

In March 2009, within the organisation, there were a variety of challenges to working effectively, both from the point of view of working together effectively and with the rest of the organisation:

"One of the things we inherited, I inherited I suppose, was we'd been 3 PCTs all doing different things, different allegiances, facing outwards from - to different acute trusts. People got landed together, some knew each other well, some had managed each other...different organisational cultures" Eleanor

"It was quite new, things done differently in different parts of the country. Lead team needed to come together, to know each other...seemed to be a bit of a north-south divide. People in the group who were used to working a bit in silos...A matter of becoming a team, and get to know each

other...know strengths and weaknesses of where people coming from...(people have different things to offer to a team and need to know who's offering what." Izzy

"...also...going through this organisational separation – they're commissioners and we're providers and ...how does this directorate fit with all the changes going on around it? Eleanor

"I think we we're having to think about how we were going to work across (*names the county*)...how we think of - as a whole?" Angela

6.1.3 Stage 1: Programme start

The programme started at the end of March 2009. The university had agreed to run a leadership development programme with the client organisation, running between March and September 2009. This was to comprise 6 days of training, and 2 extra days, involving a series of 90 minute 1:1 coaching sessions, involving course participants and the 2 main university facilitators. The programme would be led by Jane, a long-term friend, with me as a regular co-facilitator. We started with a 2-day event at the end of March.

I arrived, straight from an 80 mile drive after some time with another client. I felt tired but also curious about what I was about to encounter. I join the group in the hotel bar, introduce myself, and get talking to some of the group. After a meal, we return to the working room, joined by the team's manager, Eleanor, who sits in on the session.

There is a sense of awkwardness and some anxiety in the room. I'm unsure about whether this is typical getting-to-know-each-other apprehension, or something more substantial. Jane asks the group how they will determine the success of the programme. In the ensuing discussion, one team member announces that she would currently rate herself "-5 for confidence". She leaves the room, in tears, closely followed by a colleague. Jane tells me that this is not the first (or second) occasion today that there have been tears.

We carefully restart, and all the examples of 'defining success' are concerned with improving service for service users, or with personal learning. None involve this team of people being effective, as a team – a note that strikes me the next day as I'm reflecting on their comments. I mention it to the group when we meet next, a month later, and the reaction is silence. I take it as something that had not occurred to the group, or that they don't know what to say in reaction.

Day 2 is rather mixed. There are sessions of input around particular content, for example, models of leadership, during which the group is interested and energetic. We also run our first half-day action learning set. Conversation during this second day – my first full day with the group – was distinctly uncomfortable. On numerous occasions when discussions were taking place as a large group, some contributed much more than others; a minority was reticent to speak for whatever reasons. The feeling was of treading very carefully with each other. The anxiety that accompanied these carefully-negotiated moments was apparent to all, and wearing. It was a tiring and unexpected experience for us as facilitators, and quite likely to the same for participants.

In our later co-interview, in January 2009, Jane and I described our surprise at what we encountered:

Jane: "I was totally taken back by what happened on that first day, by their resistance to being open with each other..."

Rob: "How was that resistance to being open with each other demonstrated?"

Jane: "I said: what kind of weekend have you had, two of them were in tears. I went too quickly as I now see it."

Rob: "My journal notes at the time refer to the lack of openness, spontaneity, fluidity, and lack of ease in the room..."

Towards the end of the day, we gather to review the two days. Mia makes a very spontaneous, impassioned speech about why she does her work. This makes a very strong impression on me and other people. Mia herself is moved to tears, as are others in the room. I am too, though I've met this group only last night. Later, one of the group members reflected how "the way she talked about it" had reminded her of starting her own nursing career. The idealism and passion touched her and energised her.

6.1.4 Things become better

The above section does not attempt to portray the whole story, for everyone present. A minority seemed ready to use the opportunity of this leadership programme to turn to whatever benefit they could. I believe they exercised considerable self-control during the first two days, choosing to hold back their energy, surprised by the difficulties described above. As our monthly course meetings continued, so a subtle shift occurred with the group. The previous anxieties are still there, though lesser in degree. True, I still notice some participants walk through the door in the morning, not making eye contact with us as facilitators, and, even with many of their own group. But, there is less physical tension present. In April, Jane and I ran a creativity and innovation session. We noticed how there was more laughter and enjoyment in the room. We had provided some theory, and allowed the group to put it to the test on work challenges of their choice. By allowing the group to focus on some content 'outside' of themselves and their relations with each other, this seemed to give some psychological distance and allow for some relaxation and thinking on the tasks they chose. Jane also ran a later session June, along with Carol, where the group learnt about writing a business case. This was highly relevant, since one of the group had an important service tender for which to prepare later in the year. Jane later recounted how it was a significant moment:

"...In the afternoon, something opened up about the possibility of them doing something different. Wonderful: Carol and I physically sitting back, stepping back, and allowing them to take the space...with relish and joy. We weren't doing what was on the agenda, but it was on the bigger agenda."

There were also important insights from informal conversations with group members which helped shed light on their particular circumstances. The understanding from these insights reduced some of the earlier confusion for me. The change in organisation, roles and responsibilities had altered circumstances for many, in ways with which they were still grappling privately. My impression was of people negotiating with themselves, privately, in their own internal dialogues. Role changes meant new and unfamiliar areas of responsibility for some; for others it meant a change in relationships with team members. People who'd previously been direct reports or managers were now peers, requiring a tactful negotiation of boundaries and ways of working together; for others, the current change stirred difficult reminders of how they perceived they'd been dealt with in the past by other organisational members. These thoughts often brought choices, or dilemmas, such as: should I stay in this organisation/ or go? How will I behave/how will she behave? I want to give my best for the patients/I'm annoyed at how I've been treated...

My notes at the time are full of observations of emotions occasionally articulated, such as anger, hurt and ambivalent feelings including excitement and wariness. Choices often seemed to be polar opposites, and accompanied by indecision. With the timing of this leadership course, there was also a high degree of internal self restraint present. My wonderings at the time are expressed in my journal notes:

"There is something here about acknowledging the past and moving on to an ill-defined future. The change of identity this means for people is significant. There may an issue around the extent to which a person can let go of the past sufficiently, to be able to invest energy in opportunities going forward."

I sensed some 'stuckness', for want of a better term. The impression for me was of some people undergoing a strong meaning-making process. This was not being discussed much, certainly not within the public space of our sessions. But it seemed to be present in the private role-play of several individuals. Overall, I recall this period as one without a single strong pattern. There was a stability of conversational themes as well as the possibility of new ones. As facilitators, we were tip-toeing our way to finding what worked with this group, as a way of encouraging them to talk and open up. We also sensed that people were learning about each other, and we speculated about them experiencing the same parallel process of cautious working together that was present for us. As spring turns into summer, so a new thought emerges for me. Gradually, my concerns about the participants and the levels of anxiety on the programme have abated. Now I am aware that the balance of responsibility is on us, as facilitators, to 'provide': new things...an interesting menu...something different for every session, each month. I am wondering how we can encourage the group to take charge of the agenda for this programme, on the basis that this may raise their sense of their own agency. I resolve to talk to Jane about it.

6.2 Process analysis: Programme Start

In this part of the case, I focus on the quality of anxiety and how this influenced and was influenced by the

quality of conversation. Also, how the group began to develop some critical mass of quality of diversity for itself.

6.2.1 The quality of anxiety and the quality of conversational life

With regard to anxiety, a reminder as to the question here: To what extent does there exist a sufficiency of trust (to continue exploring in a context of risk)?

Stacey (2011: 345) describes anxiety as

“...a generalised form of fear. While fear has a known cause, anxiety is a very unpleasant feeling of general unease, the cause of which cannot be located.”

One of the most immediate impressions of this early period was the inhibition in group conversation. This was most evident during those powerful first two days. There was a palpable sense of anxiety, surprise and frustration. For some this took the form of self-control, as they were perhaps taken aback by the reactions of some others. Some were, I believe, grappling with their own personal attempts to make sense of the change in this team, their roles, responsibilities, and the impact on how they saw themselves their relations with each other. Did they see themselves as able and wanting to look after new areas of responsibility? What did this mean for relations with others in the team, the boundaries of which were also in flux for some? While these internal negotiations were taking place, two unknown facilitators appear, unaware of the web of histories present in the room. Now we are requesting people to talk aloud, in a public forum, when, for some, these things have not been resolved within. Understandably, there was awkwardness and unease.

My thinking about it now is that there was an apprehension experienced by many in the room at what might happen on the programme. Uncertainties about this leadership development course, added to the melting pot of thoughts and feelings about the current organisational changes, made for a combustible mix. Emotions are contagious (Goleman and Boyatzis 2008), and those present spread effortlessly to others. Furthermore, as I perceived it, as the group became aware of the presence of shared anxieties, so this awareness of anxiety itself raised anxiety levels. It did for me, and I believe these feelings were shared by many others. This was a positive feedback loop that was difficult to break.

Furthermore, trust levels were fragmented in the group. This team had, until recently, been three separate teams. Group members knew some people well but many others not so well. There were displays of trust and support for some team members, who were experiencing emotional distress. Trust was present between people only in ‘pockets’ associated with their areas of clinical activity, and previously developed relationships. Trust was not well enough established to aid exploration and healthy, normal divergence and conflict of views.

Regarding the quality of conversation, my guiding question is: *to what extent does the conversation itself reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?* In these early periods, the conversation was cautious and safe. Friis and Larsen (2006) define risk-taking as

spontaneity in the face of power differentials. Generally, there was a lack of risk-taking present in the group in these first few days. I believe that one of the influential factors was that power differentials were unclear and were being re-negotiated. Elias' (1991) view is that all human relating can be seen as power-based, since we enable and constrain each other in our interdependence. Shaw (2002) expands on this, describing 'mutual valuing' whereby we require responses from each other to sustain a sense of self and identity. In these early days, when cautious conversation was most apparent, I believe that an underlying dynamic of the renegotiation of power dynamics was taking place, though was immature and still confusing. With the lack of clarity around mutual recognition, so high anxiety levels, combined with fragmented trust, combined to render conversation safe and cautious. People did not feel strong enough at this stage, to take conversational risks. A notable exception was Mia's speech at the end of day 2, when she described very movingly why she does her work, and why it is important for her. This was a brave talk, and had the effect of creating some common ground among people, as others recognised Mia's words in themselves, saw the same impact in others around the room, and felt closer to each other. In short, a declamation of personal values helped galvanise the group.

6.2.2 Unpredictability, paradox and limited diversity

The analytical question around unpredictability and paradox is to what extent, in a context of not-knowing, do people still take action and are sensitive to emergent new meaning, explored in conversation?

Early conversations with people on the course led to me to speculate whether, at this stage, some people felt 'stuck' between imagined options for them. It was striking that emotions were very close to the surface and, yet, people were unwilling or unable to articulate the nature of the struggle, and also seemed uncomfortable with reflecting on the team's working processes in this early stage. I wondered later whether the 'stuckness' of our group-wide conversational rhythms was a manifestation of private role-plays contesting struggles such as:

- Accept the change (organisational, job role, new hierarchy) or don't accept it (in some unspecified way).
- Stay with the organisation or consider leaving.
- Accept the change or be angry about the change.
- 'Bide my time' and see what happens or be angry with what has happened to me.

I had occasional glimpses of a pattern which suggested some people were switching between states, and therefore being 'stuck' yo-yoing in this polarised framing of the situation. This resonated with Stacey's description (2011) of dilemmas: framing the situation so as to choose between two equally unattractive options. This was the case for some, but not all group members. My impression was that this active framing of choices made by some people did contribute to a sense of 'stuckness'. How to choose between two undesirable outcomes? Furthermore, at this early time, in this early stage relations felt fragmented and

conversation was inhibited. These choices faced by people were largely conducted in private mind, rather than public conversation. Stacey's words around diversity and common ground do resonate strongly for me:

"If members of an organisation have nothing in common at all, then obviously any kind of joint action will be impossible. However, if they conform too much then the emergence of new forms of behaviour is blocked. Organisations display the internal capacity to change spontaneously only when they are characterised by diversity." (Stacey 2011: 480)

The analytical question is: to what extent does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion and finding enough, (but not too much), common ground? There seemed to be little in common across the group, and my view is that this phenomenon of a lack of group common-ground reflected a cognitive and emotional ambivalence experienced by individuals.

Rob: "so this 'nice, neat new' team, it wasn't that simple by the sound of it?"

Angela: No, and you call it 'new' but ...never felt anybody scrubbed the slate clean...we hadn't been together for very long...it was an amalgamation of all sorts of things...we don't seem to be able to leave history behind."

At this stage, I wondered about how we could collectively produce some common purpose that would hold the course together at all. I didn't feel panic, but did have a real concern about our abilities to work effectively with the team and do good work. It was difficult to see how this group could produce spontaneous change, emerging from them, without a sufficient common ground that held meaning for them. And yet, as the months passed, so I began to notice changes in the relationships between group members:

"...we're incredibly different, but we do get on. We did that exercise (KAI) and lined up and I remember waving to Trish, far down the end of the line, and coming back and acknowledging we're different and get on well, and are incredibly mutually supportive...what it confirmed to me was: as a team we were in it for the right reasons...we had a lot of common ground and that was really obvious." (Fiona)

In this period, Jane and I also had the opportunity to meet course participants, on a one-to-one basis, and talk to them in-depth.

"When did we do the coaching...after day 3...because for me, that was another significant way of them building their trust in us, which enabled them to build relationships with us...and be able to bear the bits that were unknown, unclear, uncomfortable...we were able to show our intentions

weren't malevolent or manipulative. We genuinely were doing things to meet what was the brief from Eleanor, particularly their leadership, creativity, innovation, risk-taking." (Interview with Jane)

Slowly, there developed a greater ease in conversing in the room and less tension. This found expression in the group exploring steps towards joint action together. On one of the days, they chose to work in preparation for a services tender that would take place later in the year. They enjoyed this day, and were clear about the work's importance, as it will be the first occasion when any of them, and indeed the whole PCT, has had to tender for its services in a competitive situation. On reflection, what was happening through this period was that the group was evolving, through its communicative interactions on this programme and outside of it, a gradual sense of identity, as a team. People were beginning to glimpse that there was work other than focusing on their clinical areas alone, and the idea of 'team' began to form a larger part of their identity. Underpinning this change in identity was a growing sense for many that they were in-it-together. This emerged from moments such as Mia's moving speech at the end of day 2; through doing work together, having fun and with spontaneous humour emerging; talking together more comfortably during breaks and lunches. One of the characteristics of our lunches on this programme was that we'd often bring our own, because none would be provided on the venue site. This helped form an unplanned social practice of some sharing of food and time.

A resonance gradually grew between people, and a connectedness emerged which was critically important for the future stage and significant changes they were able to make in the months ahead. This growing resonance made it possible to hold anxiety at bay, and in the following months there was a major shift in the quality of conversational life in the group. It's worth saying that at no time during this time above were Jane and Rob, as facilitators, ever in *control* of what was happening. We were certainly influential, as the next section argues, but we were never puppeteers. Whatever effectiveness we displayed was a combination of intent and responsiveness to what occurred, in-the-moment and could never have been anticipated.

6.3 Stage 2: The facilitators - Jane and Rob - working together

Thematically, this section focuses on me and Jane working together as facilitators. Though it perhaps wasn't obvious at the start that we'd need to demonstrate creativity, it becomes apparent as the work progresses. Chronologically, this section covers the period from before the course actually starting up to a critical intervention we choose to make during the course, and which occurred during July 2009.

Jane and I had known each other for some 5 years before the course started, though we'd not done paid work together before. We believe we'd helped create conversations that been influential in shifting a university's approach to executive education, and helping them start offering new services to the executive market. Indeed, this course was one of them. I'd wanted Jane to be our lead facilitator on the programme because I trusted her blend of qualities: a high sensitivity to the meaning evolving in a group, plus an ability to put others at ease fast. Along with this, she is able to say what needs to be said, plainly, referring to 'here and now' experiences with a group.

I'd started a new part-time role at the university in January 2009, having been a visiting lecturer at the same institution for some 9 years before. In addition, I still ran a private business. This university role was a big shift for me. At the time, and for some time afterwards, questions were forming in my mind such as: "Am I really an academic? Do I want to be an academic, or a consultant, or both? Am I good enough...do I want it...?"

My journal notes from the time mention that:

"January 2009. I hold a meeting with Jane on a Friday at the end of my 2nd week in the job. We're discussing the fine points of a proposal (for this leadership development work). With Jane, it's my first talk where I'm an authority figure. We're discussing some details of the work, and also who will be her co-facilitator. I am a strong contender for this role. There is misunderstanding, awkwardness and some tension in the conversation. I've been doing a lot of hours, far more than is in the contract and I feel tired. In my new role, I am really conscious of my power in giving work out to others, and the need for me to do so in a defensible manner. We are treading carefully with each other. I detect in my thoughts some new layer of identity. There is ego, power and authority present. I hear myself talking with a detached, bureaucratic tone to my voice and a flattening of my energy. (A distancing of me to Jane and of me to my work.) I emphasise that Jane must choose someone she wants to work with, and that we choose from a shortlist of able people. I'm surprised by the sudden fragility of our (previously solid) relationship. Does Jane see me an authority figure now? How can I exercise my authority in giving out work as fairly as possible? We talk in staccato terms about both about the proposal, hindered by me trying to remember some points of detail, but primarily by my attempts to be 'objective'. I am wondering if, in trying to act as an official of this (for me) new bureaucracy, I'm actually being obstructive."

Having considered the pros and cons of several people, Jane says "do you want it?" I say "yes" and she says "Well do it!" I accept. With some of the personal power I recognise in her, she has brought to an end a 15-minute conversation, painful at times, which crystallised for me how power is keenly present in my mind, though not comfortable for me in this new role. We are finding our way together, and part of that newness

is a change of role and identity for me, which clearly has a keener relational aspect than I'd imagined. Matters of change and personal identity were part of my internal dialogue in January 2009.

As the work progresses, we agree a formal split of roles through the spring of 2009, and allocate work to each other. I will deal with our University, ensuring the work is properly costed and budgeted; course materials and files are prepared; course presenters are scheduled for particular days. Jane will work more directly with the client, and be our primary connection with the course participants.

Informally, and unplanned, as the days progress and our interest develops in the work and the group, it turns out that we discuss the programme a lot. When we are co-facilitating, we often drive to the event together, from Jane's house in Bath. We talk a lot by phone to share news from the programme, if we haven't been at the same event, sharing thoughts, insights and worries about how the work is going. I am drawn into the swirl of the work, curious about the relational dynamics emerging, combined with anxieties about how events will proceed. It matters, and I am thinking about it a lot.

A thought takes hold that we should challenge the group about what they want from this programme. I am noticing our tendency to be helpful and it taking the form of the provision of interesting monthly offerings on the course. It seems to me that there is an imbalance of responsibility, and I believe we should say this to the group.

I mention this to Jane over the phone, and tell her about a previous course where Derek (a co-facilitator) and I had sat in front of a group and told them our impressions of how the course is going. By doing so, it sparked a lively conversation, bringing more spontaneity into our talks from then onwards. I mentioned this to Jane, and she paused and said she liked the idea. She also said:

"I wonder if we could put a 3rd chair up front, where people could join if they want to respond?"

I was unsure of this and said:

"I like the idea because it could get them involved. I'm also concerned because what if they got defensive and (it) turned into a bit of slanging match?"

To which, Jane's response was:

"We'd be able to deal with that, in the moment."

The night before we are due to try this exercise, I spend some time at home writing my thoughts and forming some notes. This group now seems more relaxed, there is fun and humour; conversations flow in trios and pairs, though full group discussions are still inhibited. The group is also quite formidable, I find them a touch intimidating... what is the collective leadership role of this team overall? I plan to use these as a prompt to share my thoughts with them. The next morning we drive to the venue together, sharing our thoughts along the way. After some time reviewing of what has happened in the intervening period, we announce to the group that we have an exercise we'd like to show them. We explain how it works. We will pull up three chairs in view of the group. Jane and I will sit on two of them and leave one empty. We have

some thoughts to share about how the course is going and what we are noticing with the group. This should take around 10 minutes.

“10 minutes?!” shouts out Paula.

She can't believe it will take this long. We explain that the 3rd chair is for anyone who wants to join us, having heard our initial thoughts. After that, anyone else can walk to the chairs, tap someone sitting on the shoulder, meaning that person leaves the seat, replaced by the new joiner. And so the conversation continues. We imagine it will last around 20 minutes in total. There is some nervousness around the room and excitement too. Jane tells everyone that this particular method is something new to us.

We start...

I had thought prompts on my lap, but actually, the texture of the conversation was more backwards and forwards between us, it was more in the moment, more responding to what each other was saying, and occasionally bringing in some important thoughts we'd had beforehand. A mixture of intention and spontaneity. We start by saying what we observe is working well, until Jane said: I think we shouldn't avoid saying what we talked about before – about the group needing a challenge. (Journal notes: 29/09/09)

We talk about the group needing to be challenged more, and we say that we wonder about what is holding them together as a team, and what is their collective role, aside from their individual clinical areas?

Jane and I talked for about 5 minutes, before Paula couldn't hold herself back, and came up and sat down...Paula was followed in close turn by others in the group. By the end of the conversation, which actually took 40 minutes, nearly every group member had spoken.

It went spectacularly well. There were moments of personal disclosures from people, including around feeling isolated from the team. Others suggested that the team plan and meet like this more often. I remember a strong sense of resonance between people in the room, at what was being said. There was a very strong sense of mutual support, of being in this together, of increased energy and a heightened immediacy, risk and resonance in the conversation. It felt that something significant had changed: that the level of spontaneity of conversation was so much more apparent and immediate. Individuals were taking the risk to say what was really on the mind, to the whole group. This was an impression confirmed during the later interviews:

“...thinking about the goldfish bowl (Chairs exercise), it was quite an honest session. Some people voiced thoughts, and I hadn't expected them to do that...I was surprised with their thinking, showed how closely mirrored my own, we were thinking same stuff. What was frustrating me - several people were feeling the same...(Fiona)

Jane and I leave the group to have some discussion time. We also share the results of a questionnaire they've recently completed, looking at their team. This looks at the health of their working climate for supporting innovation. These results, on top of the earlier excellent conversation, need some time to

absorb, and we decide to give the group time away from us. We rejoin them 30 minutes later, discovering them buzzing with energy, talking about organising themselves to meet on a regular basis. They seem to have given the questionnaire results little attention.

Later that afternoon...

...we gave them 40 minutes at the end for discussion, for making the best use of the final 2 days of the course. And that was interesting too – a lot of different ideas floating around... they thought through the different community health partners they'd want to invite and the pros and cons of that...The 1st September is...on partnership working, what is the purpose of the day; was repeated, repeated, not defensively, but plainly and straightforwardly...And ideas coming out and being discussed, quite openly. What they eventually decided was that they would instead produce some publications on morning of 1st of ninth, and on afternoon of 1/9 they would do some planning of the final day (30th September), which is intended to be partly a reflection on learning and planning ahead in the afternoon; but in the morning, a final preparation for, and presentation of their learning. They also had a discussion about which people to invite along for that final day, (agreeing on a number of directors from the organisation). So, I felt they really took ownership of their agenda, and it was a real commitment buy-in, and process of engagement that I had not seen with this group before. And it was exactly what was needed. Maybe – it got them talking about things they hadn't talked about before. One of the things that became a theme through the day was how often they see each other, and what they want to do about that, so that they can have conversations like this. (Journal reflections 29/9/09)

It has been a real pleasure to see the group working like this. There is so much more mutual involvement now. Comments are shared more evenly across the group; there is more rigorous, frank debate about the various decisions they have to make: what to concentrate on, whom to invite, how to use their remaining time... They are taking decisions themselves, without the previous attendant anxiety. The onus of responsibility for this programme seems to have shifted now, from us as facilitators to all of us. There is excitement and anticipation in the room, as well as the realisation that there is work to do together. Jane and I are delighted and share the news with Eleanor, the team leader, in the car on the way back home. She can hear the pleasure in our voices.

6.4 Process Analysis: Jane and Rob working together

In this section, I divide the analysis into two main parts. First, for the lead up to, and inclusion of, the chairs exercise, I focus on the quality of diversity and the quality of conversational life. After this, I provide a brief analysis of the group session later that day, when they planned for the final part of the programme, and look here at the quality of diversity and of unpredictability and paradox.

6.4.1 The quality of diversity: facilitators

To what extent does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion and finding enough (but not too much) common ground?

As I reflect on the work with Jane, my thoughts turn very often to the word *relationship*. This was the first time we had worked together. As the course progressed, and we encountered and discussed unexpected difficulties, made progress, worked together, planned sessions, brought in other people to do work... Thus our relationship evolved and our mutual acknowledgement of our interdependence increased. This mutual acknowledgement of our roles, described above, was important. It provided a visibility of the simultaneously enabling and constraining aspects of our relating. For Elias, (1991), the basis of power is need, and the mutual recognition of need gives currency and identity in relating.

What did we need of each other? From my view, Jane needed me to deal with matters institutional within the university, enabling her to focus her efforts with our client. I certainly needed Jane to put her best efforts towards working with the client group, and especially since our start had been unexpectedly difficult. As the weeks progressed, I believe we developed a measure of trust in each other's competence and our willingness to work hard. This gave us an insurance against the unpredictabilities of what may emerge next. This mutual recognition of need and our evolving interdependence was not planned, but was a feature of our working together that emerged over these first few months of the programme. I experienced this as working 'tightly' with Jane, as we focused a lot of efforts on this work, discussing it regularly.

Furthermore, we occasionally discussed what was important to us in doing this work. We didn't use the word 'value' but I believe there was a strong patterning process, which we co-produced through our regular conversations. For example, we'd discuss how it was important for us to help the group members feel more powerful and able to 'make things happen'. Also, that we'd be prepared to take risks and change the programme if we thought apt. We thought of our roles as being to encourage group members more frequently into the conversation, with more spontaneity and energy, and that we'd know when to be quiet and encourage the group to pursue an agenda helpful to them. Also, we wondered how we could disclose the process of our own working together, in a way which may be helpful for the group to make changes to their own processes. These views, which we shared, served as a kind of membership criterion to an informal group, and we belonged.

Our close way of working was based around this sufficient common ground. It served to galvanise us, and to look for ways in which we could help the group, without necessarily following the design. The following discussion, from our January 2010 interview reveals some of what was important to us, in talking about our way of working with the group, which we did in the explanation of the Chairs Exercise:

Jane: "I think it's important here to acknowledge how skilfully – that was a peak of our skills and experience and intelligence in the way we talked about them."

Rob: how do you mean?

Jane: "I think we conveyed authenticity, total commitment to them and their leadership development. We were disclosing of our own fallibility and wondering and weakness. We were open and probably humorous, while maximising the opportunity of the exercise. For me, that was the pinnacle of our performance on the course. Any notion that we were denigrating them, weren't truthful, would have bugged it up, or wouldn't have allowed the full potential to come out...I want it recorded on there, that it's our skills that made it pivotal."

I ask Jane to explain what she meant in more detail

Jane: "Because, Rob, one of the elements in helping them be creative and innovative, was our role modelling of that...because we said: 'we've been talking about it in the car on the way here.' That kind of truthfulness...we say those things to each other, which means there's such an attuned-ness and integrity to what we do."

Rob: "We hadn't tried this exercise before...you said to them at the start: oh, and, by the way, this extra chair – we've never done it before."

Jane: "...and again, that's part of the role-modelling" (meaning the risk-taking on our part).

6.4.2 The quality of conversational Life

To what extent does the conversation itself reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?

I started to think about the need for the intervention with the chairs exercise, sometime around May 2009. The need, in my mind was to:

...give challenge and provocation to the group. And to ask them questions about their collective responsibilities. I'd wondered about their responsibilities as a team, as opposed to leading separate clinical areas. (Journal notes, 29/9/09)

The development of the idea itself, described in detail above, was genuinely co-created. It was impossible to say who had created it because aspects of its design came from both of us responding to what had previously been said. The final plan for the running of the exercise was new to both of us. I'd started with an intent to mention this to Jane, did so; Jane responded with her suggestion of extending the number of chairs; I responded with interest as well as concern; Jane helped allay this. Shaw (2002) argues that responsiveness is a key for creativity, and must be considered a social attribute, emerging from the ongoing conversational dynamics between people in smaller or larger groups. If meaning emerges from ongoing, unpredictable gestures and responses in conversation, rather than the intent of one person or another, then spontaneity and improvisation are crucial to being recognised by other people as being responsive. Such spontaneity involves the risk of being misunderstood, rejected or ignored. What helped us sustain the conversation and keep exploring ways of imagining it working, was the quality of relationship we'd evolved up to that point. The idea appealed to us at a 'values' level, with its explicit attempt to invite people in to the conversation, block others out but also encouraging them to listen, and providing them with the opportunity to join the conversation when they chose. Also, the trust we'd evolved served to reduce any anxieties about how the exercise may turn out.

As it happened, the Chairs Exercise was a radical step in the course of the programme. I don't want to overstate this because I also believe that conversation in the group had been evolving and cautiously finding its way in the preceding weeks. However, the Chairs Exercise did accelerate the process, and helped produce a sudden shift. There was little doubt that the 'Chairs exercise' has made an impact. My reflections from the session of that afternoon, where the group are planning ahead for the remaining two days, indicate that:

...Energy levels were so much higher, and it felt just healthier. The group was going to make something happen – there was little doubt about this. Note that it was nothing to do with skills. Something fundamental had changed between them. It did seem to be a relational feature. I sensed more support for them, from each other. And the mutual network of support was more palpable now. (Reflections, 29/09/09)

6.4.3 The quality of diversity: team members

The Chairs exercise finished at lunch time that day. Through lunch and for the rest of the afternoon, there was noticeably more energy and 'zip' in the room. A quote from an interview with a team member confirms the same impression (referring to the chair exercise as the 'goldfish bowl':

"It struck me and I didn't know it was going to strike me...it had a life of its own...it was quite spontaneous and that took me by surprise and perhaps built up my trust in others in the team, you know, they are my allies...Across the course it became obvious...we wanted to be a team, move ahead as a team and take the opportunity, as leaders of the service...maybe the goldfish bowl was the turning point for that team..." (Fiona)

The group spent the latter part of the day preparing for the remaining two days of the course, and discussing how they'd demonstrate their learning to a selected audience on the final day. Something had changed in the group, as they tackled this with vigour and volume! They also debated the merits of taking various risks in the final session, including how to demonstrate what they'd learnt as well as whom to invite.

As I experienced this, my impression was that people experienced themselves as being more *connected* with each other. They felt closer together and more coherent. In the Chairs Exercise, people had openly shared why they want to do this work, as well as the frustration involved for some in doing so. I believe they had connected on the level of shared values about doing their work. Though there were many differences between the people present, they had a connecting interest, which was now fuelling energy and excitement. The excitement and the energy, in turn, felt good, and fuelled a further boost to the liveliness of the conversation. This positive feedback loop was similar in dynamics, though opposite in effect, to that experienced in the first two days of the programme.

6.4.4 The quality of unpredictability and paradox

To what extent, in a context of not-knowing, do people still take action and are sensitive to emergent new meaning, explored in conversation?

What was very striking here was the extent to which the group was, quite suddenly, prepared to take risk, acting into an unknowable future. The work was to decide how to give an account of their learning to a powerful group of senior directors from the trust. That they did so, and how, is explored more fully in the next section, but the origin of the decision formed here on this day. Earlier in the course, uncertainties and the perception of risk, in a context of unpredictability, had manifested themselves for a significant number of people as polar-opposite decisions. I perceived, through talking with people, that they had formed dilemmas in their minds, and risk was associated with either option, leading to a sense of 'stuckness' which was uncomfortable, internalised, and associated with a high degree of invisible self-control. (This is described in part 1 of this case.)

With the group at this stage of the course, there were still risks involved: how might our senior audience react? What if we embarrass ourselves? What impact might this have on our careers? It's interesting to wonder what made the difference for the group at this stage compared to earlier in the programme. I did not detect a change of framing from 'dilemma' to 'paradox'. However, I am very clear that it would have been difficult for the group to choose to take the risk they did four months ago. I believe what helped the group hold explorative conversations and *choose* to take risks on the forthcoming days was their increased sense of belonging to something larger than themselves, which produced a feeling of excitement. By this stage they were beginning to establish coherence and control through mutual enabling and constraining. This brought confidence and trust in their each other. They still perceived the presence of risk, and their action was not blind. The difference was that group coherence, based on a perception of common values, focused around service to patients, drove the group on to challenge themselves and help each other.

There was another consequence of the above change in the conversational dynamics. The themes organising our experience of being together shifted from formal content, previously supplied by the facilitators, such as “managing change”, “creativity and innovation”, and “writing business cases” to a much more open, negotiated agenda. The leadership team now had a greater say in actively and jointly planning the final 2 days of the programme.

6.5 Stage 3: Preparing for and leading the Presentation day

Jane spends the day with the group on 1/9/09, and tells me how they've chosen to run the final day, when the Managing Director, Clinical Director and Workforce Director will attend, as well as their immediate manager. The aim of that day's morning session is to 'present' what they have learnt from this course. Rather than present their thoughts using power-point, the group has chosen to run a series of exercises they've experienced as participants through this course, including the chairs exercise. This is a riskier approach, and one which increases the opportunity for audience involvement and unpredictable conversational turns. I take it as a further validation of the impression that they are prepared to consider novel approaches to their challenges.

6.5.1 Presentation day: 30/09/09

The directors are due to arrive at 11.00 that morning, giving the group some 90 minutes to agree any final preparations. (The presentation session itself would last around 75 minutes.) In our co-interview, held in January 2010, Jane and I reminded ourselves of a key moment of this session. What was being discussed was whether the Chairs Exercise would be somehow scripted, using planned comments from the group, or would the group opt for a genuinely spontaneous approach?

Jane: "I can remember that: the extent to which you and I had to carry uncertainty for that hour and a half was massive. ...encouraging and enabling them to take the full risk was a massive part of what we did in those hours...At the same time, there's the systemic shift, so we're more on the side of the participants of this programme. They knew we were on their side, but not doing it for them."

Jane told the group she advocated not over-engineering, and the group agreed with this. There is an explicit commitment to being available to support each other:

Kat: "We could think of the first few (*meaning comments*), to get us going..";

Mia "Help us out after 30 seconds...";

Lorrie: "Don't worry, we'll be queuing up." (Field notes)

There is anxiety present, and we feel it, as facilitators. But it is of a very different quality to that observed in the early days of the course.

Jane: "...it's much more explicitly held between all of them...an appropriate level of anxiety about taking some risks with some senior managers...maybe looking foolish. (Our later Interview)

The directors arrive, and after some coffee, the group participants start the session. Soon, they introduce the structure of the Chairs Exercise and start the conversation, to illustrate how it works. There is interest

from the directors, and they each join the exercise and contribute some thoughts. At one point, the Managing Director, joins the group and asks the sitters:

“Have you considered what your development means for your manager?”

The question is followed by silence – but not for long. Izzy joins the team and says to Eleanor – the team leader - who is sitting in one of the 3 chairs:

“We need your permission, to try things, knowing they may not always work well.”

Eleanor nods her head, and it leads to some discussion of Eleanor’s role. The moment is quite delicate and (possibly) poignant for Eleanor. There is an edge to the talk. This is not a dry presentation about learning. It is about what needs to happen next. After the whole learning session, the Managing Director says this is the “most together team” she has ever known. I’m a little surprised by this, but am pleased with her words.

We break for lunch, joined by the directors. There is a distinctly pleasant feeling of relief, plus pride. I am proud of the group, and what they’ve achieved, especially in these last two months. The directors leave after lunch, during which time, Jane and I sit down and prepare a summary of how we have noticed the team ‘shift’ over the programme. We share it with the group in the afternoon:

Table 4: Group Process Improvement Summary

From	To
Jane: tears	Laughter
Rob: silo/fragmented	Cohesive
Jane: Anxiety and difficulties around difference	Embracing and working with difference
Rob: Operational	Operational and strategic
Jane: guarded	Open dialogue
Rob: habitual way of being/working	Sense of agency and accountability
Jane: Group	Team

We also make the point that we are unsure about to what extent this change in group processes has so far reflected itself in impact on service user delivery.

6.6 Process analysis: Preparing for and leading the Presentation day

From the Chairs Exercise onwards, the group took ownership of the course, and, as facilitators, we let them do so. The group planned and ran the presentation day, choosing to do so in a form that introduced risk, and demonstrated a series of exercises they'd experienced through the course. A key part of this was a rerun of the Chairs Exercise, but this time it included three senior directors and the team leader.

6.6.1 The quality of conversational life

To what extent does the conversation itself reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?

What was most striking on the morning of the final day was the degree of articulated support for each other – promising a kind of safety net – as quoted above. In the moment, when there was still anxiety present, this support was instrumental in the group choosing the spontaneous approach to this exercise, with its greater attendant risk. When the Directors entered the room there was a potent mix of positive emotions that was very different to what we'd experienced at the programme start. There was now warmth, encouragement and humour and it communicated itself to the new arrivals. Boyatzis, (2011) describes how

“A contagion of positive emotions seems to arouse the Parasympathetic Nervous System, which stimulates...cognitive, emotional, and perceptual openness.” (McEwen, 1998, Janig and Habler, 1999, Boyatzis et al, 2010) all quoted in Boyatzis, 2011).

The conversation was unpredictable and lively. It was also serious and frank, with an edge to it which suggested it may take paths leading where no-one could control it easily. A key moment in the ensuing talk was when the managing director asked the group if they'd considered what their development meant for their immediate manager. This was one of those moments that could not be anticipated, and which the group had vaguely imagined with some apprehension: an unscripted comment from a senior figure, with the potential power to influence futures. It was a question I hadn't considered. I remember feeling my stomach tighten, and that I held my breath at that moment. The silence following was long enough for eyes to dart around the room, and the unspoken question was 'who would speak next?' Into this silence stepped Izzy and gave her comment about the team requiring Eleanor's permission to experiment without the guarantee of successful outcomes. Izzy said this succinctly, to Eleanor, who was one of the 3 people sitting on the chairs at the time.

It took courage for the group to choose this exercise, in the context of who was appearing. It also took courage for Izzy to speak in an unscripted moment, when many possibilities were available, and risk was present.

“As we take steps together, the spontaneity involved challenges power relations, and this is why spontaneity and invitations to spontaneity are felt to be risky.” Shaw (2006: 63)

The effect of Izzy's action was to enable an important new meaning to emerge – the changing nature of the interdependencies between the team leader and her team members. The group continued to explore this for some of the remaining time. This evokes Griffin and Stacey's, (2005a) point about leaders enabling others:

“It is particularly when they deal with the creative, the novel and the uncertain that people find they must act into the unknown. It is in the process of exploring what to do next in such situations that members of a group turn to those who are able to articulate some meaning in what is emerging between them. This is not the same as finding a solution or providing an answer. It is, rather, the tentative expression of what may be going on that triggers further exploration by others.” (p: 11)

In this specific case, the situation required someone to step forward. I don't believe the group expected any particular person to do so. Izzy's act was one of peer leadership, which served the purpose of sustaining effective exploration.

I believe that this conversation would not have been possible with this group in the spring of 2009. What had changed most clearly was the level of explicit support for each other right here and now, the degree of trust they held of each other in relation to dealing well-enough with moments that could not be predicted; and an emerging common ground, based on shared values for delivering high quality service to users. People began to identify themselves as being part of a team, and it was this actually quite rapid process of shifting personal and collective identities – from June to September 2009 - that made a bodily and cognitive impression on team members and outsiders, and was sometimes called 'cohesion' or 'togetherness'.

This willingness to take action, in a context of uncertainty and risk, was a striking feature of the transformation of this group in a 6 month period. That is how I came to develop an understanding of the difference between support and trust. Through this story, I think of support as being present here and now; trust is more of an insurance policy for an unpredictable future.

6.7 Stage 4: The Leadership Course and the aftermath

Once the course finished, our immediate work with the group ended. I conducted interviews with the group in December 2010 - January 2011. However, I didn't experience the same level of close working with the group, nor have the opportunity to work with them in so intense a way, such as contributing to and observing their communicative processes. My interviews focused on both the ways in which they had worked together since the end of the course, and on ideas they had implemented or sought to implement in that period. I was curious about the extent to which they'd been able to consolidate the changes in working together which were so patently clear from the course. Or whether, for whatever reasons, those processual changes had not 'stuck'.

What is clear from interviewing people is that the group has been productive in the period from the end of the programme, September 2009 – January 2010. They have implemented a number of changes and some of them are considered radical in their context. The log of changes in appendix 4 shows a list of the changes described by people during this period.)

For me, the most striking aspect of this period is the extent to which many group members have implemented changes. This has been achieved in a context of high uncertainty, where the structure of the public health service has been under review, and further organisational structure changes have now been made. In fact, this team has now been integrated into a different organisation, which manages its services. What has helped people take action in a context of uncertainty?

6.7.1 Focusing attention on unpredictability and paradox

Stacey (2011) argues that paying attention to unpredictability implies thinking about not knowing, and the potential for shame and incompetence that this implies. Managers must act, even though they cannot predict the outcomes of their actions over long periods. They must act because the failure to act will also have unpredictable outcomes. From this way of thinking, surprise is an inevitable feature of 'acting into the unknown', and to think this way can help reduce the anxiety of not knowing.

My question here is: to what extent, in a context of not knowing, do people still take action and are sensitive to emergent new meaning, explored in conversation? The key issue is when does not knowing and the accompanying anxiety that goes with it inhibit action and explorative conversation, and when, while still appreciating the uncertainties and risks involved, do people choose action and continue to explore, seeking emergent new meaning?

In this regard, this period after the course is an interesting contrast to the start of the course which has already been described. Then, action and conversation were inhibited, feelings of ambivalence prevailed and caution and wariness were apparent. In this 16 month period, the tone of conversations in interview with people is very different, as are the observations of the Managing Director of the organisation:

“...there are people who are much more responsive to doing more.” Yvonne

There was a significant change in the group’s willingness to take action, seize the agenda and take risks together. People described different sources that helped them take action.

6.7.1 (a) Acceptance of lack of control and of responsibility

Izzy: If someone wants to kill a child, you can’t always prevent it. It’s impossible to ensure every child is protected.

Rob: there’s a limit to the amount that you as an individual leader can do to guarantee everything?

Izzy: Yes, but at the end of the day you’re responsible for it.

and

Rob: I was thinking it sounds like you’ve changed a bit.

Angela: yeah...

Rob: What’s changed?

Angela: I don’t know really, confidence in some ways. I’m always someone who, has to do stuff for a while...when we did the course, I was wondering where’s this going, headed, going to be happening...? And now I don’t feel like that...it’s fine – well not fine - you sort of feel you can cope with it now, but then I wasn’t sure.”

and

Rob: it’s interesting – sometimes another change coming up can paralyse change: ‘let’s put something off until we know what’s happening...’ It doesn’t sound like that’s happening.

Trish: we’re not going to let it.

Angela: I think there will be stumbling blocks. I was talking to - yesterday...we’ll still be talking to commissioners about what’s needed. Will we have two masters?

Rob: but it’s not paralysing what’s needed in the meantime?

Angela: no, but I could see it in the future...

Trish: we’re trying to make as much happen as possible by April 1st...if you’re doing it and done it, they’re not going to come in and say this is wrong...

In these examples above, people are accepting of the complexities of their situation, and the limits to which they can be 'in control'. But also accept they must act, and, in fact they did – seeing through changes in this time period that were deemed to lead to significant improvements.

6.7.1 (b) Emotional support aiding action

The following exchange continues from a description of various frustrations in working with commissioners, as an important competitive tender was being designed. The emotional support provides energy to deploy on relevant work challenges.

Rob: ... I guess your frustration could have got in the way of buckling down to the task. How were you able to put it to one side?

Mia: I was able to move on by being very honest about how I felt with Eleanor, knowing it was treated confidentially, then I could move on.

Eleanor: ...with people it feels safe to talk about...then move on...I think we used humour a lot, I think that's really important. Have to move on and some of that is how you relate to each other.

Mia: I think it's absolutely key to moving on. If you don't have an environment of trust and you're not encouraged to say, (*sounds exasperated*), you have no closure and it gets in the way of progress.

They quite clearly sense the cognitive and emotional challenges that come from operating within a context of unpredictability and risk, and the potential this has for reducing action. However, while unpredictability was uppermost in people's minds, they did not talk so openly about paradox. There were certainly contradictions in place such as: we must integrate and become a team, and, at the same time, we must take 'risky' action in our own personal clinical areas. Did managers experience themselves being in state of knowing and not knowing at the same time; communicative interaction with each other reinforce conformity and deviance at the same time. If managers evolved to a 'framing' of paradox from the previous dilemma, this was not evident enough.

What accounted for the shift to taking action in this shifting context, when caution and wariness had been predominant early in the course? It seems to me that two patterns were crucial. First, higher trust levels permitted anxiety to be lowered and a more healthy conversational state to emerge. Without this there would have been no change. However, trust was the first and necessary condition but was not sufficient. What fuelled drive and improvement after that was a collective determination, based on an emerging collective identity wishing to improve healthcare services. The team recognised strong values in each other, similar to their own, and felt part of something 'bigger' – a leadership team. This process of identifying with each other, and the social construction of the 'team' also entailed a mutual recognising of power relations. People saw themselves as interdependent peers, simultaneously enabling and constraining each other. Earlier on the programme, power relations had been more vague, contested and not mutually agreed. This

collective identification provided mutual strength and proved an ongoing source of support for many, whether enacted in pairs, small groups or team meetings.

6.8 Overall case review: Implications for Creativity and Innovation

In discussing the pressure on public sector organisations to continue to provide evidence of performance improvement, Stacey (2011) argues that efforts have been patchy, and that widespread improvements continue to elude us. Stacey argues that the dominant discourse typically thinks of organisations as ‘wholes’ which require organisational change. From a complex responsive processes view, change is change in conversation, emerging from myriad local conversations, with the implication that it is impossible to operate at the taken-for-granted level of the ‘whole’. From a complex responsive processes point of view, change can only emerge from dynamics patterning interactions at local levels. In this case above, the leadership team produced a significant number of changes to their way of working in the 16 months following the leadership programme (see appendix 4). What were the dynamics patterning interactions at local levels, and what implications do these have for creativity?

As a reminder, here are the formal research questions:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when ‘acting into the unknown’?
- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when ‘acting into the unknown’?

6.9 How do conversations between people sustain exploration when ‘acting into the unknown’?

6.9.1 The development of trust, to facilitate the exploration of possibilities

There was a gradual increase of trust between participants, through the first three months of the programme and this was fundamental to enabling more fluid, spontaneous conversations to take place. Trust was an essential, but not sufficient, condition for the risks taken in the final sessions of the programme. Other aspects helped too, and these are described below. How trust developed is less easy to pinpoint. My observations were that it grew incrementally, sometimes aided by full-group discussions during the early months of the course; very likely, though I was not part of this, through smaller group discussions during the course and away from the confines of the course. We never set out to build trust explicitly, and, indeed, did not label any of our sessions with the “trust” title. It happened without a plan or blueprint.

Trust also developed between me and the other main facilitator on the programme. Again, its emergence was important because it contributed to exploration in conversation, from which various ideas arose for the improvement of the course. (The Chairs exercise discussed above is a notable example.) Through reflecting on how it occurred with us as facilitators the most notable factors were trust developing through confidence in each other’s competence, and trust developing through evidence of working hard, or discretionary effort. The positive impact of growing trust was an insurance against the uncertain outcomes when choosing to take risks to improve the programme. Trust acted as a safety net, enabling further

conversation. A final point here is that, in the moment, it was impossible to isolate the existence and growth of trust because many other factors were present in-the-moment. The presence of trust, for me, has become clearer in reflecting and writing. I see trust more clearly now as a relational property.

“I suggest that good-enough-holding’ is a quality of the themes organising the experience of relating. When these take the form of trusting interaction, they are themselves forms of ‘good-enough-holding’ that enable people to live with anxiety...when the quality of relating is characterised by trust, conversation can take more fluid forms. This interpretation of ‘good-enough-holding’ is...in the quality of the interaction itself.” (Stacey, 2011: 345)

The question arises: what does trust ‘feel’ like in the human body? When I reflect here on my memory of working with Jane, at key times during the course, I remember the presence of anxiety, but not at paralysing levels. I recall a clear capacity to think, talk, listen, explore, without knowing the likely outcome of the conversation, and being able to tolerate this uncertainty. Zak, (2008) states that stress, uncertainty and isolation all work against the development of a trusting disposition. His work has focused on the release of the chemical oxytocin, associated with trust:

“Residing in a safe, nurturing environment may stimulate us to release more oxytocin when someone trusts us—and to reciprocate that trust.” (p: 95)

This is a complex process, and not yet fully understood. Zak (ibid.) believes there are physiological, environmental and life-experience factors involved our wish to have social interaction. Barraza and Zak (2005) found a positive relationship between the degree of empathy experienced and a change in Oxytocin. As I understand this, there are physiological processes occurring which respond to the perception of being trusted and which reinforce trust in return. At the heart of this case, relationship was fundamental to enabling changes in conversation to take place. An evolving trust was fundamental to the group developing healthier conversations. The growing experience of trust was sufficient to hold anxieties at bay, which had earlier threatened to make lively conversation impossible.

6.9.2 The growth of a ‘team’ identity, based on shared values

Paula: “That’s the other thing about the leadership course: we were all viewed as one department – speech and language was one department...child protection...school nursing and health visiting were better as a joined up...and then we had the specialist services that Fiona does. Now I think we are much better at thinking of ourselves as children’s services.”

This interview quote, from January 2010, indicates that the pattern seen on the course – of an increased group cohesion - continued in the 16 months following the programme. Even though individuals still work in their allocated clinical areas, time together is largely valued and appreciated. There is also a view that

common practices have started to evolve across the team such as in the way they manage staff reporting to them. There was a gradual strengthening of common identity around the concept of a leadership team. (Not all, but many) people began to feel they were members of a team, in which people had similar values to themselves, though they worked in different clinical areas. These values were firmly based around providing the best possible health service for the service user, and this was the fuel that connected people to put such emphasis on improvement and change, both incremental and more radical, during the post-course period. This change in identity manifested itself in greater support being provided to each other, in the service of enabling organisational change:

Angela: "For me, doing that course and bringing things together, I think if we hadn't done that, the learning curve we were on to work together would have taken longer. So I probably wouldn't have taken on and tackled some of those things as confidently as I did.

and

Rob: "and when you say 'to work together' what do you mean by that bit?"

Angela: "When things start to be challenging, I know Trish and I support each other, and the same would have been said of Lorrie...she was very supportive...because we knew each other better, we knew how to support each better. I would have felt more isolated if we hadn't done that course...geographically had to know how to work with each other at a distance."

and

Trish:" ...now I could quite confidently make a decision about doing something in the south, thinking I do really feel Angela would support this, and I think she'd feel exactly the same, in the north..."

The strengthening of identity was observed during the programme most clearly during the day of the first Chairs Exercise. What was apparent was the excitement at the realisation of having established common ground, and of being part of something larger than oneself. As I argue earlier, this was based on a perceived sharing of values to provide the best possible health service for the service user. If trust made continued exploration possible in conversation, the drive, energy and excitement for improvement came from this values-based cohesion.

6.9.3 A positive feedback loop in a healthy quality of conversational life

From a complex responsive view, organisational change is change in conversation, (Stacey, 2007). With this group, the change in the quality of conversational life was dramatic, and was intimately connected with their growing team identity, and the more subtle presence of trust. In time terms, three months after the

group had started the programme, the quality of conversational life had improved greatly. Increased trust lowered anxiety and combined with greater team cohesion. This helped produce more fluid and spontaneous conversation, which allowed for the generation, development and implementation of ideas such as the group's approach to the final day review. The in-the-moment awareness of this spontaneity of conversation reinforced the pattern, as team members enjoyed the experience of being part of the conversation. Positive feedback loops helped reinforce existing strong conversational dynamics.

6.9.4 Difference making a difference

It was not methodologically possible to see team members working in their more typical natural work settings, and to pay attention to the quality of diversity present. What did emerge from interviews was evidence of diversity between small groups, or pairs, of people. There are numerous examples of differences between people, most notably after the course was finished, from interviews with people. (See appendix 1 for examples.)

In these cases, diversity was used once trust and group cohesion was established. In other words, these relational features were in place, providing a kind of group 'safety net' before diversity became applied:

Fiona: "...we've been able to use each other's styles to our advantage. But also, been able to build up enough trust in each other to give us permission to do that. If I hadn't known Angela through that leadership course I might not even have tackled that."

For this person, and consistent with the pattern we observed on the programme, it was the build up of trust through the leadership programme that gave a foundation of safety for exploiting differences in styles and approach. The trust came first. However, another insight for creativity and innovation is that the discussion and exploitation of personal difference, even in small groups, contributed strongly to resultant change. This has been effected in different ways, whether through people working in pairs as mutual 'sounding boards'; using their different knowledge backgrounds to good effect; or noticing and deploying different styles which have impacted upon creativity.

Rob: "...in the range of changes they've made over the last couple of years, is there anything radical...?"

Yvonne: "I'd have to come back to speech and language ...service is transformed, look at waiting times."

The approach used in this study is to focus on the immediacies of conversational dynamics wherever they may go, rather than attending to the emergence of radical ideas and tracking what contributed to their existence. However, what seems to have aided the above (perceived) radical change is, in part, the working pattern of the team leader and the team member in charge of speech and language services:

Rob: “When you said about Mia’s creativity, what is ‘Mia’s’ creativity’?”

Eleanor: Well...it can go from there to there...

Rob: so you give her time?

Eleanor: Time – to wonder- she has that type of mind...I think we’d then start to try to narrow it...

Mia: I have to verbalise it, that might set off some thinking with you, you’d ask a question, set off thinking with me...

Eleanor: it wouldn’t have worked if we’d both been the same, would it?”

The practical implication for creativity and Innovation is that the presence of a formal organisational requirement for creative thinking, to face the challenges described at the start of this case, was not enough to bring about the productive exploration of options. In this example, novelty in conversation only emerged once the group had established sufficient trust, common ground and difference between themselves.

6.9.5 Taking action in the midst of uncertainty

Finally, it is striking that this team has introduced a wide range of service and process improvement changes in the lifetime of this case. This has happened in a sectoral context of high uncertainty, at a time when national-level healthcare re-structuring is about to occur. In particular, this group of leaders, responsible for the leadership and delivery of children and young people services across the county, are about to be incorporated to a different ‘host’ organisation, with new reporting lines and leaders. However, by and large the team has forged ahead, taken risks and implemented a series of important improvements. What helped them do this, rather than wait and see what their ‘new masters’ may want? It is striking that they provide a good deal of mutual support. There is clearly a great deal of determination from team members to see changes through for the good of the service users. What was also apparent through the leadership course and subsequent interviews was the senior-level leadership support by team members. They were encouraged by their immediate team leader – an associate director – and the Managing Director of the organisation, both of whom attended the final day review. What seems to be the case is that the group members have little doubt about the value of the work they do, and that the improvements are within their scope.

(One unconfirmed possibility is that people in the group shifted their earlier framing of the situation from a dilemma. How they did so, and to what new framing, I am unsure because of the methodological limitations of the study. However this is an important point for further research.)

6.10 How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when ‘acting into the unknown’?

6.10.1 A positive feedback loop in an unhealthy quality of conversational life

In the early days of the leadership development programme, what was striking was the cautious, wary and anxiety-ridden conversation of the first two days of March 2009. What was apparent to me, more on reflection, than at the time itself, was the positive feedback loop reinforcing the unhealthy and healthy states. In the early stages, there was high group fragmentation, based on unclear power relations, and experienced as inhibition and anxiety in large conversation. Furthermore, people’s awareness of this inhibition in group conversation, in itself, became a source of concern and embarrassment as we tip-toed carefully with each other, trying not to make an anxious situation worse. Awareness of the conversation reinforced anxiety and further inhibited conversation. The impact of this on idea generation and development was substantial – there was very limited spontaneity in conversation, and people were inhibited in expressing whatever difference existed. Ideas simply were not expressed for consideration. It was very difficult for team members to ‘snap out’ of unhealthy conversational patterns without help. In this case, having external help from facilitators made a crucial difference, building on changes already instigated by the group, and accelerating these changes.

6.11 Final Summary

This research is not about tracking all the moments that led to the organisational changes listed. Nor is it about being present at every conversation held that may have had an impact on eventual outcomes. What this research has tried to do is to discern how conversational dynamics can organise themselves to reinforce repetition, stuckness and habit on the one hand, and fluidity and spontaneity on the other. By doing so, I argue that creativity can only emerge from the latter dynamics, and the data from this case support that position.

It is striking that many of the changes made after the leadership course finished were associated with 2 or 3 people working together. Perhaps a pairing is the minimal, sufficient and pragmatic number for enacting social and emotional support for change, in the knowledge of a broader team support. This needs further research.

In this case, the group were successful in setting in motion many changes. These are at different stages of implementation and adoption, and it is not possible at this stage to identify all the benefits from these changes. It’s also difficult to calibrate the degree of change of this team in comparison with others. However, through the views of team members and a senior organisational director, it has been a productive period for the group. Through attending to the micro-processes of everyday conversations in the context of a leadership course, this case has highlighted some important points for teams who need to generate new and useful ideas in their context. In an interview a senior director argued that:

Yvonne: "I'm not sure we have created capacity...we've given people the opportunity to learn, take things forward: 'you are senior people, take time out to think.'"

What was clear in the dramatic transformation of this group is that it did not come about through intensive skills building. However, it was also about more than providing opportunity. What helped this group in the first instance was a strengthening of trust, because this helped them explore options. This was then allied to a belief, for a critical mass of team members, that the group had shared values around clinical excellence. This latter point provided the fuel and determination to implement a series of organisational changes, some of them radical, over the 16 months following the course.

A point here is that one group's cohesion may constitute exclusion to other people. This interview quote was from December 2010:

"We're a much more mature team. We were probably at the storming stage at that time...it's not perfect, but I think we've come a long way and developed. In the organisation they see us as quite a stable directorate. This can be a negative thing, because people from outside may have trouble coming in, and/or we might need to be better at going out. (Eleanor)

Rob: how important do you see it in your directorate, to 'go out' and get ideas?

Mia I think it's very important but takes some confidence...I'd be interested to have some people from local authority to sit in with our group...we're ready for that now..."

With the imminent change to a new organisation as this case study was being written-up, the implication for creativity and innovation, as the group perceived it in discussion with me, was that they would have to be careful to build understanding relationships with new, influential people. Without this, they recognised that their potential for contributing to performance improvement may be hindered. Though I make no claims for the replicability of the experiences here, the message from these insights is to provide adequate time and resource for people to build trust and common ground with each other, *before* embarking on high-profile change programmes. Given the time and performance pressures connected with work in many of today's large institutions, including the NHS, it is easy to envisage such an aspect being given insufficient consideration in the planning of change programmes.

Chapter 7 - Case 3: The Business Faculty and Knowledge Exchange

This final case is the largest of my three cases. It involved the greatest number of people and spanned several organisational units. Unlike the previous cases, which took place in the setting of leadership development courses, this occurred in the 'natural' setting of people's workplace: a University faculty.

7.1 Case overview

This is a story of an organisational change between October 2007 – March 2010. It happened in the Business faculty of The University, and the change focused on the creation of new service offerings to people, in jobs. What distinguished the service offerings was the focus on helping these people in their practice. The change was variously called Knowledge Exchange, Executive development and Executive education through the above period. This was the umbrella label, within which many smaller ideas and changes started, stopped, prospered and died. In this case, I will refer to it as the Knowledge Exchange (KE) initiative.

In practice it entailed the setting up of new organisational roles, newly created programmes, a network of a new pool of labour to deliver the work, and many smaller ideas, seen through from generation to implementation and wider adoption. In retrospect, it seems to me, with the benefit of distance in time and opportunity to reflect, that there were some distinct characteristics of periods. I've divided the case into 4 of these:

1. The official experiment: Make Something Happen (From October 2007 – July 2008)
2. Unofficial growth: Mess and stress (From August 2008 –mid-January 2009)
3. Institutionalisation: Growth that fits (From Mid-January 2009 – June 2009)
4. Rejection: A slow stagnation (From July 2009 – March 2010)

They are not stages in a sense of development of growth, and the exact periods of time they cover are debatable. However, I will argue that each time saw the emergence and development of particular characteristics that made it sufficiently distinct. These changes are also pertinent to the matter of how conversations were affected during this period.

This is the most multi-faceted of the 3 cases I've analysed, involving the greatest number of people, interest groups, and many conversations heard, made and missed.

By necessity, I've had more challenging decisions to make around what data to include and omit. I've chosen a selection of data, and written narratives of these. I've also have chosen narratives which represent well enough the broader emerging patterns that made each period distinct enough. My approach for each stage is to:

- Give an overview of the key points of contextual information and milestones for each period.
- Select and write narratives providing insights for that time period.
- Use supporting passages from interviews, and from my journal notes to supplement my analyses.

7.2 Stage 1: The Official Experiment – “Make Something Happen”

7.2.1 Important milestones and notes for this period

- Pat had agreed with the faculty executive to fund 4 people, each to work on £5,000 contracts, under the broad banner of Knowledge Exchange. This was something new and different for the faculty – to have these dedicated roles aimed at strengthening our knowledge exchange work
- Two of the four of us were from outside the university, though with long histories of working for it in various guises. The other two, were employed by the University; one full-time, the other part-time.
- We divide our efforts around 4 subject areas: Leadership Development, headed by me; Career Management by Sharon; Action Learning by Mia and Coaching and Mentoring by Mandy. In the spring of 2008, a fifth group member joined – Neil – who took a sector responsibility for Health Care.
- The project is hosted in The Department of the Business Faculty. This is no surprise, since this department has been the origin of similar conversations, for some years building up to this official experiment.
- The phrase “*make something happen*” becomes familiar during the period: a cultural *meme*, as one interviewee said later. The significance of this is that we have a certain amount of freedom as well as an expectation that we deliver... something, sufficient to establish and maintain a momentum for whatever comes next.
- Pat has secured an important symbolic agreement from the university. People doing the work secured by any client contracts will be paid £600/day for this knowledge exchange work.
- There was little supporting structure for this effort – no administrative infrastructure, no offices, and little dedicated leadership support, with the exception of Pat in his role as Business Development Director.
- As an indication of the scale of Knowledge Exchange work in the Business Faculty, client contracts were worth around £98,000 in April 2008, (compared to £10,000, 12 months before that).
- We have started to build relationships with people in a different faculty - Faculty 2 – and this is helping us win work in these sectors.
- Towards the end of the period, an announcement is made that a suite of rooms, on the university site, will be made available for hosting dedicated ongoing knowledge exchange activities.
- Also, it becomes known that further funding will be made available for continuing the Knowledge Exchange efforts, reflecting the perceived success of the work.

7.2.2 A little preamble

Echoes of an earlier meeting, from August 2007 are with me. That had been an exploratory meeting, to understand the wishes of a disparate group of people, all ostensibly interested in Knowledge Exchange. The part-time Business Development Director, Pat, had convened the meeting, and two aspects in particular remained with me.

Late in that August meeting, Pat sat back in his chair and said:

“I need to take more risks.”

I asked him what he means by this, and he replies:

“I have high expectation of people. If I ask someone to do something and he says ‘yes’, I have high expectations.”

Martin said that this was a critical point and we need to understand it more. I remember the room being very quiet at this point as Pat talked a little more, without expanding greatly on his points. My private thinking was that: Pat has been reluctant to co-opt help from people on this work because he has high expectations of anyone who says they’ll help. ...But isn’t offering help a good thing?...Well, maybe Pat worries that they’ll let him down, or themselves down, and things will get messy. But if Pat isn’t getting real help from people, how’s this ever going to work?”

The nature of this work – with a definite focus on client practice – and the potential scale of it, would be a new venture for the Business faculty. Pat had previously suggested that his worry about making promises to clients about the university working with them in this area, was that we would not be able to deliver.

Later in this meeting, Jack presented his thoughts on the idea of establishing an independent organisation to fund and resource the training and consultancy work that may be generated. He argued that this is a clear-headed, more formal way to organize. Otis debated this and posed the idea of a ‘guerilla’ organization that would just ‘get on with it’, at least initially. This would have the advantage of speed, action, quick progress, and lowering the risk of confronting the need for political and financial support. This topic realised a great deal of animation - energy levels increased considerably in the room.

At the same time, the full-time members of academic staff wondered they could get involved in this, when their work programmes were currently full, leaving little freedom for involvement in this risky, though, exciting new work. The meeting finishes, with many questions unanswered, and a sense of new possibilities.

7.2.3 A strategy meeting, October 2007

The first meeting of the formal group of 4 Knowledge Exchange workers takes place, at Mandy’s house towards the end of October 2007. We have been in our new roles for some 3 weeks, and this is our first opportunity to meet and discuss our work. The four of us are each responsible for discrete, but potentially overlapping, areas of knowledge exchange activity. The day starts with declarations of wishes for making it a useful day:

“I want a work schedule/job/programme/Sheet” says Mandy

“I want to know my list” - Sharon

Mia and Rob seem less focused on task completion, agreeing and accepting that the current situation is necessarily messy. We work through the day, using a series of problem solving approaches to help us gain

insights into focusing our efforts. To me it seems that we are treading a little cautiously with each other, perhaps being respectful, and allowing people to take their turn and get heard properly. The spontaneity in conversation has seemed low, though we have experimented with a variety of exercises. However, at the end of the afternoon, there is also relief at having made progress. Each, in turn, expresses some satisfaction with this.

When my turn comes, Sharon asks how I feel about the day:

I say: "I'm clearer now, about what I'm not clear about...but I'm not sure we've looked at the bigger picture, some of the high-level stuff". I make a gesture with my hands to demonstrate an umbrella shape. In that moment, without much time for clear intent, I took a small risk and said what was bothering me: that our efforts had been limited to the here and now, and focused on the short-term. Immediately, Mia stands up and walks to the flip-chart. She names an institution:

"In this place, people accessed information from the bottom-up, for free (she draws a diagram of this), but then we'd have some kind of membership organisation at this level (she draws a top-half of the diagram) where all these things go on..."

We added content and extra ideas to this and began to build a conceptual model of how the university could create a network, including creating membership at corporate and individual levels; contact and discount alumni; provide a mentor match service for the region... It is, by consensus, the most open and explorative session of the day. We wonder later, in the weeks following the meeting, how much of this feeling liberated was permitted by the lowering of anxieties helped by achieving some short-term task progress. There is a combination of pressure to turn abstract labels - action learning, career development, coaching and mentoring, leadership development – into concrete, realised 'things'. At the same time, we have a shared sense of excitement between us, and a belief that this is a good group of people who can make something happen.

We touch on the issue of accessing power for support. Without any immediate intent, we wonder about talking with senior Business Faculty executives about this initiative to understand their view of it. At the same time, we wonder how Pat and Estelle would feel about this: are we 'going over the heads'? Would they give their permission and even support? (This topic – of approaching senior executives directly - is to become a regular conversational item over the next 30 months.)

7.2.4 The review meeting – April 2008: Mia's house

We gather one evening, to review our progress, share concerns and eat some food. Neil is there, having just joined this group, with responsibility for the health sector. Also present are Mandy, Ron, Pat, Neil, Mia and me. This was unusually frank and open conversation. Since the turn of January 2008, this Knowledge Exchange work has felt different: more challenging and with an emphasis on making real progress. Meetings

have often had limited time, with a full agenda, quick decisions to make and limited time for exploration of possibilities. In meetings and in corridor conversations, we have acknowledged the increasing workload, while at the same time doing so fleetingly, eyebrows raised in mutual understanding. Specific pressure has been building around our decision-making to allocate work for client delivery. This is an important point. Neil, Rob and Mia are currently delivering work for the university beyond the scope of the work included in this short contract. We deliver this through our own, separate consultancy businesses, which we have run for many years. As client demand for the university services begins to grow, so the spotlight is turning to the ways in which we make decisions about who is 'in' and who is 'out' of this list of trusted deliverers.

At this meeting we talked about the way we work in much more detail, with more time, as we looked at the process of how we create an offer to go to our clients. What became apparent was that a great deal of the decision-making, and therefore time falls on Pat's shoulders. We start to explore why this is, and Pat provides some honest words:

"I don't give extra work to people, because I'm worried about how much I can do this (meaning: ask others to do more)."

To which my response was:

"And because you don't make us accountable, I don't make the extra effort to find out, because I know you, or Mandy, will."

The repercussions of Pat's self-questioning regarding how far he can extend others' goodwill were clear to us: an increased burden on himself.

But there was more from Pat:

"I have a real concern about competence."

He explains that he holds back responsibility from others because of questions around how well they'll do the work, as well as his wondering about how much can he reasonably ask others to contribute. Pat is in a powerful position as the leader of this project. He can and does allocate and withhold work to people. My feeling at the moment of Pat's comment around competence, was a mixture of nervous apprehension and relief that some truth was being told. I think that others felt good about being present at the disclosure. At being included in a group, in which, presumably he felt he could trust people enough to say these things.

We leave the meeting with an increased understanding of each others' positions, and a general acceptance of the principle of extending delivery work to more people. How we'll do this is not clear. As I reflected on this meeting in the following days, I acknowledge that issues of work prioritisation, discretionary effort and goodwill have started to emerge around this work as a shadow conversational theme. It had been occupying increasing space in my mind and gaining ground.

I'd been, usually privately, and sometimes in conversation, weighing up the pros and cons of increased involvement in this Knowledge Exchange work, given the seeming likelihood for growth in the work. A strong involvement in this work could be invaluable for contributing to my PhD. I've realised, by now, that this can be a central case in my research, and have shared this with others working alongside me. Also, this client work itself is usually interesting, and a culmination of years of nudging the university towards doing this kind of work. Why be shy now, just when we're starting to be successful...?

However, I perceive some risks too. The project is perceived to be successful, even in these early months. A range of criticisms has been levelled from within the university: "You're undermining undergraduate teaching", says a member of staff to Pat. (Under-graduate lecturers are paid less than the £600/day paid to Knowledge Exchange course deliverers.)

All of this change was taking place within a very 'mechanistic' organisation, defined by Hatch (1997), as consisting of high complexity – meaning it has many layers of both hierarchy as well as horizontal functions or departments; high centralisation of decision-making, with decisions being made at senior levels, and high formalisation, which refers to the extent to which rules, regulations, procedures and policies govern organisational activities. This organisation is used to the regularity of traditional courses which require accreditation. Arguably, these programmes are also much more predictable and require less attention to the differences in customer requirements. Conversations around these traditional courses are comparatively stable in pattern.

We hear on 11/5/08 that funds will be invested to continue with the Knowledge Exchange work, though it's not clear when they'll be available. Pat informs us that a suite of rooms has been allocated for use of Knowledge Exchange-related activities on campus. The early months have proved busy, demanding and somewhat risky. We've started to do good work with our clients (which is commented on more fully in the next section), and secured enough support from the wider organisation to continue with Knowledge Exchange.

7.3 Process Analysis: Stage 1

7.3.1 The quality of diversity

To what extent does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion finding enough (but not too much) common ground?)

Generally in this period I was most struck by the amount of effort that went into clarifying and negotiating our roles. What were we really there to do? We had no template and were, in effect, making it up as we went along, with support in various forms from each other. I was running a consultancy business outside this role and this was true for 4 of the 5 people given contracts to *make something happen*. The other person – Mandy – had many other roles within the university aside from this work. The pull of competing demands was quite intense, and the pressures from this added workload were experienced as walking faster, feeling under time pressure during conversations, and wondering how this could all be done. The level of generalised anxiety was raised, and this typically had the impact of reducing people's availability for full group meetings. There was not a pattern of exploration between us as a full group and I hadn't anticipated this. Indeed, for much of the time during this period, there was little exploration of possibilities between us as a full group. Several members expressed regret later that we'd only met as a full team twice in the 8 month period.

However, as with the October 2007 meeting, once we'd allayed our anxieties sufficiently for the moment, we did enjoy moments of unplanned, co-created idea generation. Members of the group knew each other variously well, but there was the basis of sufficient trust, from our existing relationships together for frank talk and enjoyment of each other's presence and capability. Many conversations were held between this group of 5 in pairs or trios. Though there was a fairly solid foundation of trust and mutual respect among us, we lacked cohesion. As I reflect back on that period, I believe the fragmentation of our efforts, described above, was an important, rarely articulated aspect, of our challenge. We were developing a common ground between us, but this was in its infancy.

I believe that we were forming a view of ourselves based on an emerging set of ideological themes. Elias (1991), considers power to be an aspect of every act of human relating. Since we need each other and are interdependent, we both constrain and enable each other, and this paradoxical activity constitutes power (Stacey, 2010). In Elias' view, power is based on need, and is a relational property. If I need something from you and we both acknowledge it, you have more power. However the dynamics of this will shift over time. This pattern also takes place at group level, and these power figurations are reflected in group patterns, where some are included and others excluded. Belonging to groups gives identity, and individual identity is inseparable from social identity. In this way, individual identity is fundamentally a matter of power relations, and our ongoing interdependence means we are bound to be part of, and always forming, this web of power relating.

Ideology constitutes our views of what is good and bad in our power relating. Complex responsive processes thinking takes a paradoxical view of ideology, since ideology is at once helping us decide what is good and

bad about power relating, and is also itself being formed and amended by the actions of our power relating. During this initial period, members of the group of 5 would occasionally talk about maintaining something of our 'outside-in' identity. This was important to us. It meant that, though we were part of the academic institution, we wanted to retain a set of approaches, which would differentiate us and make us appealing to clients. We referred to qualities such as our speed to respond to clients; the importance of not getting 'sucked into' the bureaucracy of the university; an emphasis on practice and being helpful and connected with people whom we were working with through this knowledge exchange work. We would place a value on understanding what our clients wanted. Though we spent little time trying to understand what these meant in detail, they were a kind of ballast that served in this initial period, to differentiate us from people in the institution we were joining.

Stacey (2010) would describe these as values: they were attractive and compelling aspects of ideology which were voluntary and committed us to action. This early manifestation of an emerging ideology was to become more pronounced, and more opposed, by competing ideologies as time went by. In these first few months, this identity was slowly taking shape but was not strong enough to enable us to take any cohesive action. We had fewer group conversations than I'd imagined we would, and worked typically in pairs or trios. We also worked more often directly with clients and course participants than with each other. We had trust, excitement, but only an embryonic membership group. The fragmentation I experienced, as a result of having competing priorities in my working life, was, I believe, experienced by others, whether they were pulled in various directions, inside or outside of the university.

I also sense an increasing risk of inclusion-exclusion dynamics becoming strong and hard to shift, with implications for who is offered this work and who is excluded. Some permanent members have expressed an interest in contributing to Knowledge Exchange work, but have, so far, not been accepted. In a later interview, a full-time member of staff offers a perception about the Knowledge Exchange work, relating directly to this growing theme of inclusion-exclusion:

"...I think I would be quite scared about it. I think a lot of people are because I think it is shrouded in... some sort of mysticism. And I have to say is that on purpose? Is that some deliberate, exclusive policy, by saying: we're doing knowledge exchange and you're not, and we want you to know you're not? And I think a lot of people have felt that. (I haven't felt that.)" (Georgie)

7.3.2 Risks in conversation and public/private binds

Another notable aspect of this period was the emergence of two specific conversational themes. These were to prove influential in the years to come, though we didn't know so at this time. The first was the issue of speaking directly to faculty leaders about this Knowledge Exchange work. Even the first uttering at the October 2007 was accompanied by ambivalent feelings: excitement, embarrassment, empathy for managers whom we may be perceived as bypassing in the process; and some anxiety for the risks we may be taking in doing so. This was to become a persistent and difficult conversational theme, revisited many times over the course of the case study. This had the quality of a shadow conversational theme:

“A condition for creativity is, therefore, some degree of subversive activity with the inevitable tension this brings between shadow and legitimate themes organising the experience of relating. Diversity is inseparable from conflict.” (Stacey, 2011, 480)

We wanted to make more senior people aware of what we were doing, to understand the formal plans for knowledge exchange within the university, and to start to understand them as people, likely to be more influential in our work. However, any conversations on this topic were also accompanied by feelings of guilt at the prospect of being seen to ‘bypass’ the intermediate managers with whom we were working. In an environment where formal communication seemed to follow a strict hierarchical process, this would not be viewed as a neutral act. Hence the gradual development of this topic as a shadow theme, accompanied in conversation by hesitancy, awkwardness and guilt.

Similarly, the issue of allocating, and asking for, work in this period is rife with conflicting thoughts and emotions. This seems to be the case for all parties involved, whether as representatives of leadership in the university or, like me, as newcomer to this initiative, increasingly trusted to do the work, and wondering how much work to accept and request. There is a web of complex factors involved, including preserving the reputation of the university by only giving work to people who’ll do a good job; preserving one’s own reputation by implication of association with these decisions; uncertainty about how much time extra work would take and the knock-on effect on other commitments; wondering how one will be perceived by generalised others within the university, if the work is deemed to be tilted unfairly towards an ‘in-group’; excitement at the prospect of being part of a ground-breaking activity for the university; guilt at accepting more work and money from this activity; guilt at withdrawing from conversations where one may offer more time to help with the work. The impact of the ambivalence felt was that conversations on this topic were stilted and awkward, if they were public at all. My experience was that more words were spoken in my mind on this topic than in public with other.

The mixed feelings accompanying these separate themes were to become increasingly prevalent as the case progressed. They are also indicative of how ambivalence occasionally inhibited conversational fluidity.

However, it was also definitely an exciting time, with a mood redolent of (overdue) possibility. One of my interviewees later expressed that:

“You took me back to the conversation with me, Pat and the 4 of you – trying to get something very simple going...bring back idea of working directly with clients, as support to teaching and research profile of what we were doing in The Department at the time. My feelings then were hugely exciting – the time felt right...things could happen.” (Estelle)

7.4 Stage 2: Unofficial growth: Mess and Stress

7.4.1 Important milestones and notes for this period

- This is a loose, unstructured time in the Knowledge Exchange project. Apart from Pat and Mandy, there is no official resource dedicated to the delivery of Knowledge Exchange work in this period. Even for these two, their Knowledge Exchange roles are fractions of their overall workloads, which also comprise teaching and research.
- However, administrative support is confirmed with the opening during this period of the executive development centre – a suite of rooms dedicated for Knowledge Exchange work.
- I decide to apply for a part-time Knowledge Exchange role with the university, which will start in January 2009.
- Client demand for our services is growing. In an associates meeting in November 2008, Mandy estimates that we anticipate growth of contract value from the current £100K to around £300K over the next two years.
- The growth in work is putting ever more pressure on our decision-making methods for choosing how people deliver the work. A decision is made during to form an official network of The University preferred suppliers, as a means of selecting appropriate people to do Knowledge Exchange work. The selection process takes place in this period.

This was a period during which the Knowledge Exchange work continued, but without the formality of the previous 5 contracts given to Rob, Neil, Mia, Mandy and Sharon. To a greater or lesser extent these 5 people continued to be involved, but without the contractual clarity from earlier in the year. We continue to make good progress in enhancing our reputation with clients, and there are strong prospects of bigger contracts in the near future. The focus of our work with clients, since October 2007, has been with health and social care organisations, and this continues to be a very productive area for us.

The section below gives a series of short narratives from moments in this period that were representative of a trajectory which the Knowledge Exchange work was taking: building strong client relationships, doing good work with organisations and, in so doing, evolving models of our programmes which would be refined and developed in the future. At the same time, the matter of selecting appropriate labour from a wider pool was growing more pressing.

7.4.2 Doing client work

Neil and I worked with an intact team from a local PCT. This programme started in January 2008 and finished in September 2008. When I interviewed the client later, she was delighted with how the work had gone.

Rob: "how productive was that time (18-24mths)? How different, or run of the mill?"

Cheryl: “The – programme – the outcome of what you did was...transformational. It changed people’s mindsets in getting those people thinking more like middle managers, rather than supervisors.”

What was interesting to me in this case was the evolving nature of the relationships of Neil, me and Cheryl – the client. Neil and I reflected on how we’d worked in a later interview:

Neil: “It was partly to do with the way we used ideas - seed them then come back – that goes on. One of things I’d do is be quite specific about what would happen, how they would learn, what they would take...I guess I was quite a critical friend.”

Rob: “I remember that happening, I’d get a bit carried away, you’d say: hold on, how’s that going to work...but in the end we’d come with something we were both OK with.”

Rob: “We’d meet, and put the time in...”

Neil: “Oh absolutely, lots of discussion, looking in its widest sense: what we’re trying to achieve and how to do this, how to involve people...”

Neil and I met up several times to discuss and plan the work. Typically, this would be at either person’s house, and the planning time would usually be unpaid. We put a lot of discretionary effort into this programme, as it came to matter to both of us. We also discussed Cheryl – the client – and her role in helping the programme run well. As well as the sheer effort, we also learnt to appreciate and use the strengths of our own styles. Often, I’d suggest an idea and Neil would develop it, testing it for how they’d work on the day. During these talks, to me it felt a very open way of working, where we were doing our best for the people on the programme, and for our own continuing enjoyment of it.

As time went by and we worked together more, I began to value Neil’s ability to speak frankly and this encouraged me to do so. It gradually felt that, despite our different styles, we were working together and learning to make good use of our conversations, so that we co-created a plan of action ready for each next session with the group. We included several changes to the existing design through the development of our own ideas.

One of our planning conversations led to us wondering how we could make the forthcoming day more ‘live’ and direct. The theme was due to be “Influencing others”, and we wondered what topical organisational issues the team may use to put their efforts to good use. We called Cheryl and said what we wanted. She informed us that a current organisational policy proposal would have a detrimental effect on the team we were working alongside. As the team later explained to us, the policy would alter the current team structure, reversing a change that had been implemented a year or so ago.

We proposed to Cheryl that the group would use the time to compose its own response to the policy proposal, should they choose to do so. She agreed with this. That's exactly what the team did on the day, crafting a formal response to the policy and pointing out the benefits of the existing structure for their service users. The group submitted their response through formal channels when they returned to their work. At our next sessions, they seemed genuinely surprised when they announced that their written response had convinced senior managers in the organisation. This was a major victory for the team and gave them considerable gratification and an increasing sense of their own agency.

As Neil and I continued on this programme, we developed a stronger sense of mutual support, and this gave us sufficient confidence to face whatever may emerge:

Neil: "One of the things I think is better is I think we were less conscious of need to show selves as able. We knew we could do this stuff...not (worrying) about getting everything right, but knew what to do if it went wrong...were secure in our ability as trainers/facilitators to manage the day...we were OK about making mistakes..."

The relationship with Cheryl, the client, was also significant. During the 9-month programme, on several occasions Neil and I had ideas for changing the programme content and asked for help from Cheryl at short notice. She later commented about this in an interview:

"I didn't mind the short notice – that was the product of being creative. You start off with something planned and I don't feel compelled to stick with any plan, to be honest...what you were suggesting sounded spot on, and more imaginative than just being in the room. All of that cemented the relationship even more: you're in control, working as you see fit. It told me you're thinking about it, paying attention to it, rather than turning up and 'just running' it – it felt more alive."

From a Knowledge Exchange point of view, the outcome was that this programme helped start a very good relationship with the client, which helped lead to successive pieces of work with the PCT over the next two years. It became one of our major organisational clients.

7.4.3 A supply of Labour – anxiety, binds and risk-taking.

While client demand for our service is growing, and anticipated to grow further in the near future, the issue of who will do the work is becoming more important. The sheer amount of work being handled is also causing some stress, and is a cause of concern for some team members. It is unsustainable for a growing pot to be delivered by the same small group of people. My journal notes at the time (20th October 2008) record notes about my ambivalence in taking on more work. Clearly the opportunities are present to be more involved, but so are various risks.

Sharon: I'm really worried about Mandy...she's had a cough for 4 weeks and can't get rid of it.

Rob: One of the issues here is Mandy doesn't say she needs help. I am aware of offering it, but don't want to be presumptuous about getting more work. (When I have no official role, it having ended in July 2008.) I feel some guilt around this, and don't want to be exploiting too many opportunities in this situation. Mandy won't ask and I'm not offering.

Soon after in talking with Mandy about workloads and allocation of work to the current people involved in Knowledge Exchange, including me:

Mandy: I can't ask them to do any more. We're already asking too much of them."

There are powerful binds here which were inhibiting free-flowing conversation at times in this messy period of unclear roles and lack of clear work contracts. What I'm articulating here to Sharon had been only dimly aware to me. The awkwardness was that I felt a multitude of ambivalent emotions during this messy period: uncertainty around what would be the implication of agreeing to more work during this period; excitement at accumulating a large amount of interesting Knowledge Exchange work, which I'm delivering through my own consultancy practice; guilt at the fact that a significant number of days are being given to me, as a seemingly trusted 'insider'; some resentment at how the volume of workload, and emails, is more regularly creeping into my evenings, intruding on any family time. The boundaries are shifting in an unpredictable way, and my journal notes record how I am requiring to display a good amount of self-control and calming, in an effort to ward off a never-too-far-away sense of panic.

This swirl of emotions is taking place largely inside my head, unresolved, difficult to articulate because of their contrary natures, and more mundanely, because I rarely find the opportunity to share these thoughts as the pace and pressure of work increases. And while these thoughts and feelings continue, so the trend, all the time, is that the Knowledge Exchange work grows steadily, ratcheting up the pressure, as questions intensify as to who will deliver the work, selected in which way, by which rules, to whose satisfaction?

7.4.4 November 2008 – review meeting

Things reach an uncomfortable pinch-point during a November 2008 review meeting at Mandy's house. Present are Pat, Mandy, Sharon and me. In this meeting we talk about a nexus of issues, comprising how can we organise ourselves to work more closely with clients; how we can allocate the growing workload in an appropriate way; as well as allowing Pat and Mandy's Knowledge Exchange roles to adapt and shift to attending to internal relationship issues within the university, to secure the ongoing support we need.

My notes from the Audio tape, November 2008 describe me reflecting on:

Pat says that both he and Mandy are currently overloaded. Pat is saying that the project managers for our work need to come from inside the university. I ask why are we having this conversation about project managers only coming from within The University, when we've just had a talk about the importance of developing relationships with clients, and who's got the skills to do it. We have a bunch of people wanting

to work with us, as associates, employed outside the university, who already do work with clients, and why can't we use those?

Pat: Ok, who do we trust from those that we know?

We list a series of people whose competence and intent we respect and trust. As we discuss the delicate issue of who would be acceptable, matters of politics, risk and safety and confidence were put forward as reasons for us continuing to deliver the work internally, but, to me, what it seemed to come down to, actually, was trust: who do we trust to do it really well, and not set fur flying within the university?

Later in the morning, Pat comments on how, for him, the last month his attention has been focused on intra-university matters. He cites as an example, a difficult relationship with a member of the faculty executive, and his wondering about how much support we have for Knowledge Exchange work from another executive member. (This deterioration in the health of relationships and our access to reliable power and influence was eventually to prove very important, and the roots of it became apparent in this period.) We spend a considerable amount of time in the morning understanding how those in authority could block Knowledge Exchange work, and how to deal with this, given an absence of delegated authority to PAT and our levels. Later in the day, in an attempt to connect this growing Knowledge Exchange work with research and teaching, we came up with the idea of a funds flow which would direct the surplus of our Knowledge Exchange activities into other areas of the business faculty. Whether this means hiving off the Knowledge Exchange work into a separate business, or retaining the current structure is not as important as the principle of transparency of income generated, surplus made, and the clear support for other business faculty activities. This appeals to us greatly. Pat agreed to discuss it with the faculty executive. (Later, to our considerable disappointment, the idea is seemingly rejected though the reasons are unclear.)

Late in the afternoon, we have a difficult conversation about Mandy letting go of some of her current workload, on the basis that this is not a sustainable pattern, given the pressures for growth.

Mandy says: The more stressed I become the easier it is to do it myself.

Pat presses Mandy saying that it's important she let's go of some current workload. If she doesn't do so, it's difficult for him to do his role effectively because he's pulled both towards her strains and the emerging demands on his time - to deal with complex internal-facing political and relational issues. He'd like a change in approach from Mandy.

Sharon says: you have to be honest with us here, Mandy.

There is some end-of-tether tone to Sharon's voice, borne, I am sure, out of a growing concern for Mandy. She is pressing Mandy to 'open up' and say what's on her mind. She says very little in reply, whilst clearly appearing ill-at-ease. My interpretation is that Mandy knows there are no easy answers to this, and that her ongoing huge personal commitment is both a symptom and cause of the blockage in resolving our problem of producing a labour supply for client work. She is torn in several directions, and this is stifling conversation. We, too, have mixed feelings: admiring Mandy's capacity and willingness to take on work;

respecting her as a trusted and competent work colleague, and also seeing how this pattern is not a sustainable one for the good of the growth of the activity.

It has felt a frank, honest talk for most the day. The quality of conversation has been open, acknowledging, not hiding, the emerging difficulties we may face. There have been difficult conversations, as well as what seemed like 'breakthrough' moments. There is an increasing sense of our mutual interdependencies. In this final conversation though, it is different, and the various complexities, ambivalences and binds conspire to stifle the quality of conversation.

For me, three main themes are crystallised in this meeting:

1. The binds that were making it difficult for us to talk openly about own work commitments as well as the evolving criteria, especially trust, for bringing in others to do the growing amount of work.
2. The degree of wider organisational support and power upon which we can rely. This is in doubt at a time when work orders for Knowledge Exchange are increasing.
3. In line with point 2, how Pat and Mandy's attention as leaders are being refocused towards internal matters. I see my role, increasingly, as being to reflect topics relating to our offerings and client needs in these review meetings, else, they'll be sidelined.

7.5 Process Analysis: Stage 2

As I reflect back on this period, there are two areas from the conceptual framework that are most relevant: attending to the quality of conversational life and to the quality of participation in conversation.

This was a period of considerable exploration, generation, development and implementation of ideas with clients, and in developing new service offerings. It was extremely important for the development of Knowledge Exchange work in the university. The work between Neil and me, described above, helped us develop an excellent relationship with our client, and this led to a considerable amount of work with this NHS organisation in the years to come.

7.5.1 The quality of conversational life

As I reflect back on my personal experience with Neil in designing and delivering the above management development programme, what remains most vivid was the quality of conversational life. *To what extent does the conversation reflect stability, repetition or habit as opposed to ongoing conflict, negotiation and exploration?*

Larsen (2005 and 2006) understands spontaneity as a process of relating without being in control of the situation. It is about making sense of an unfamiliar situation together, staying with the situation, acting surprisingly into it and searching for an evolving mutual understanding. This describes well my experience of working with Neil on this programme. We held several meetings to discuss and plan the work. Many ideas emerged from these sessions and were used on the programme: offering the group the opportunity to influence the 'live' policy proposal; giving them our direct feedback on how the course was progressing; using other 'real' organisational tasks for them to work on, in groups. One of the aims that evolved as we worked was to encourage the group to achieve a spontaneity and richness of discussion with each other that would help them strengthen their relationships, and so help with their work. For us, this was a strong value that guided our work: how to help the group increase its sense of cohesion and agency, to be able to influence the conversations of which it was a part. If we could somehow bring this way of working 'into' the programme, so they could experience what it felt like, that could increase the chances of them replicating such a way of working in their 'host' organisation.

What characterised the conversations with me and Neil was a growing sense of not knowing what was going to happen, but of typically finding a way to an agreement. In the early weeks, I had many ideas for the programme. Neil's approach was pragmatic: 'let's consider how we can do this within our constraints on the course...I'm not sure about that...how will this 'fit' with other parts of the day?...what are they learning from this?' We certainly had different styles, mine being largely more divergent and idea-generating; Neil's being more convergent and enabling us to shape ideas and tailor them for the team and the other constraints of the overall day. I noticed my own thinking slowing down, and that I would look forward to the interaction itself between me and Neil. We'd known each other for some 8 years, but this was our first full programme together. I began to develop an awareness of my faith in the process of conversing itself, and that we would make something happen, somehow. We would discuss, propose, disagree, build-upon thoughts, pause, re-

start, keep going... I began to enjoy the frankness itself of the conversing, realising it was something exciting and quite rare, in my own experience. There seemed to be a commonly-held strong focus on the work itself, much more so than on any personal agendas.

It was an interdependent activity that neither of us controlled. My growing appreciation of the tone of our talks was simultaneously accompanied by feelings of risk and some anxiety. There were pressures of time – to get the work done, well enough, while we were also doing other work. Larsen (2006) also argues that spontaneity challenges existing power relations and this is another source of risk involved. As we explore possibilities together, and try to take the attitude of the other we may become confused, challenged, make connections and perhaps create new meanings. This process of moving tentatively forward together, in which we risk recognising or not recognising what each other is saying, is the basis of a new interdependency, and is the changing expression of power relations. What changed for me, in working with Neil, was that I entered the talks feeling confident of my resourcefulness with regard to the project. I had done work like this before, and had many views on how it could be arranged. Perhaps I felt myself in a position of some authority, though this was certainly not reflected in any formal position. Anyway, I did feel confident and was not slow to suggest ideas and proposals for action. What altered, in my experience, was an acknowledgement that of our growing interdependence – that we must enable and constrain each other at the same time.

This was a gradual process. What aided my growing acceptance of this was the experience of putting our ideas into effect, and the knowledge that this was helping the group. We were receiving positive comments from our client – Cheryl – and the group. The client developed trust in us, and so did we in each other. At the same time our efforts went way beyond any formal contractual requirements, and I believe the fuel for this was the common ground held by Neil and me around helping the team to increase its own sense of agency. This was an important interplay of interdependent power relations, growing trust in our competence and enough difference as well as a common ground built on values. At a single moment in time through this period, I would have found it difficult to articulate precisely what was happening with these separate processes, but on reflection, their contribution seems very important. It enabled Neil and I to work together in a way that aided the generation, development and implementation of ideas, and my experience of this was through the liveliness of the conversations we jointly constructed. By doing this, we mirrored what we wanted the group to do, and which they were able to do in the case described above.

In this example above, we had considerable autonomy to experiment with our ideas. We also had active support from a responsive client. In the same period, another pair started conversations around the subject areas of Coaching and mentoring which were to have major implications for the development of a Masters programme as well as short course offerings in the subsequent years. I had limited direct involvement with their conversations, but have included excerpts from their interviews for two reasons. First, these two people contributed to a major development in executive development service offerings:

“There have been attempts within the Department before to get our own Masters programme up and running and nobody’s done it.” (Mandy)

Secondly, in interviewing them, they describe in some detail their way of working.

Mandy: "Well, it's interesting, in some ways we work together incredibly well, and in other ways, less well...we worked together from a position of friendship, and that makes us quite tolerant of each others' imperfections, shall we say (laughs). We start out with quite a lot of goodwill to each other and wanting to make things happen...when you start out doing something different, in an organisation that is risk-averse, having a minimum of two of you, it is undoubtedly helpful.

Rob: "Because?"

Mandy: Because you talk each other up. For instance, Sharon has been having a rough patch with a colleague recently, and I know it's got to her, and got her down, but the fact we can e-mail and have a chat on the phone, you don't feel cast adrift...

There was a great deal of discretionary effort from Sharon and Mandy, and a close connection to how strongly they felt about the work itself. Their values are clearly important here:

Sharon: "...we'd had weeks of 03.00 to 04.00 in the morning, 2 hours sleep, getting things done, putting something to someone who said we hadn't understood, we had to re-think the entire model. I remember feeling sick...we hadn't got enough time to do the research...but we turned it round and (*names someone here*) is off selling it in Malaysia."

Rob: That type of work for developing something new doesn't have development time for it, so it was in your and Mandy's own time. Why did you even want to do it...?

Sharon: Because there'd been a market gap for (*mentions course here*)...and we realised when we went to conferences...courses were based on psychology or sport...there was nothing that was a breadth of theory and skill...we believed, very strongly...I suppose, value-based...people had to know the breadth and out of that, critically, come up with their style authentic to their value-base and their organisation. We thought we could do something better."

Mandy later reflected on the motivation for implementing the idea, and its origins in this earlier, more exploratory work:

Mandy:" I think it came from the relationship between me and Sharon, and both having a personal passion about potential benefits of (*mentions course here*)..., but it wasn't always done very well...having done work together at the - and seeing some remarkable things happening as a result of the training, feeling good about it...

They also mentioned the existence of support. In this first instance it came from Mia, who was also a member of the original group of five:

Mandy: certainly for Sharon and I she was the 3rd party...there were times when she coached us through the difficulties, but we hadn't set them up as formal coaching sessions...I sense that Mia is something of a container."

As the idea progressed and began to require internal institutional support, so support from influential people became important:

Mandy: "...it made a lot of difference that (*names a faculty executive member*) was behind it. In two ways: power, which she's got; knowledge that she's very political and wouldn't put it forward if didn't think it would hack it...that was worth quite a lot...it's confidence in us...and we understand the system well enough to think there's a very good chance it'll go through. And (*names faculty executive leader here*) is a great person to work with – has incredible energy. It's the support that's around you."

Sharon concurred with this point about power through executive support:

Sharon: But had I not networked with her (*names same faculty executive leader*), had I not managed to get on that sort of relationship with her...and she highly respects Mandy...had we not had that, I'm not convinced it would have got to the stage it got either. I believe there's a need to have that networking of power bases to get the creativity"

Both of these mini-cases were influential in the ongoing fortunes of the business faculty's knowledge exchange offerings. The Management development programme helped cement a relationship with an organisation which became one of our biggest supporters; the coaching and mentoring work led to the creation of a Masters degree in the area, as well as a series of related short course offerings. What is common to these stories? Interestingly, there is a strong central pairing with evidence of an appreciation of diversity within each pairing; there is appropriate support from inside or outside our university. The relationships are also characterised by sufficient common interest around the work being done, explicitly linked to the values of the people involved. There was a considerable energy and passion for doing the work well, in both cases, and this served to provide energy for the hard work, expressed in hours worked well over and above what was requested.

7.5.2 Growing contextual pressures

While we have grown the contract value of Knowledge Exchange work through this period, so it has raised areas of difficulty for us. The speed of the increase in client work means we have to make quick decisions about whom we choose to do the work. We are not developing a set of trusted course trainers as quickly as we need, and those of us involved in Knowledge Exchange work tend to get wrapped into doing the work. Further, relations between Pat and an influential faculty member have become strained.

7.5.3 Focusing attention on the quality of participation

Seen from the view of focusing attention on the quality of participation, the question is: to what extent are people aware of the patterns of inclusion-exclusion dynamics, and how this pattern is affecting the quality of conversation?

There was certainly a growing stress being created out of our success in winning more work. This was most strongly centred around the issue of who would deliver this work. Around this seemingly simple question was a web of connected thoughts. When we considered the 'organisational needs' we thought things like: we must expand our network of trusted trainers, to share the work and widen our pool of available trainers, thereby giving us security; we don't know enough about potential trainers, to judge if we trust them to do the work; giving work to the same limited number of people will raise questions within the university as to whether we're giving these people too much money.

At a more personal level, I felt very ambivalent about the work, saying to myself things like: it's exciting to have these possibilities of doing good work, and being part of a team that's 'making things happen'; I'm irritated that this work is creeping into my evenings, weekends and family time; I feel guilty about being in a position to benefit financially, and with good work, from the growth of this area... As I take on more work in this period, I am told that I am becoming a test case for the university, as an external supplier delivering training and consultancy work. Furthermore, I have selected this case as one for my PhD, so am already 'extracting' use from it.

I quite often kept these thoughts to myself, and I believe others did too. The meetings described above, when we said to each other the difficult things that needed saying, were actually unusual. Much more typical was that these things would be kept private or perhaps expressed 1:1, with a trusted other. In effect, we quite deliberately limited the amount of participation in conversation. We were taking the attitude both of specific individuals with whom we worked, and of the *generalised other*, (Mead, 1934). In our context, the generalised other came to represent imagined, powerful people within the university faculty who would have a view about this growing Knowledge Exchange work. This also included groupings of people who focused more on teaching and/or research and who, I imagined, would have views about our work. I found myself thinking of me, and others doing this Knowledge Exchange work, from their point of view. Issues of university reputation, risk, reward and possible retribution became part of my imaginings and occasional talks with others, expressed in shadow/illegitimate conversations. Mead described this ability to take the attitude of generalised groups a potential and powerful source of social control, as we could anticipate conversations and so forge our gesture in anticipation of a response. Certainly, in this case, there was a great deal of personal control, following the imagining of these wider potential conversations.

We were attempting to make the generalised concept of *knowledge exchange* particular in a time and place. In an organisation unused to the development of more practice-based offerings, our early efforts to debate, explore and make the general more particular largely failed. As I have said above, one of our responses was to limit our own participation in conversation. Why was it difficult to talk openly about these emerging themes? Because there was no simple answer to them, and, more immediately, because the mention of 'thorny' issues such as extending the range of trusted others brought bodily discomfort to the

conversation. Also, because I, and (I believe) others, anticipated censure or disapproval from the generalised other. In a context of high growth, this was an uncomfortable dynamic that was hard to solve and easy to ignore for the short term. In addition, the university worked through a communication process that was largely hierarchical. Many of us were not invited to wider conversations outside of our immediate work, and we chose not to force ourselves into these conversations. We complied. The processes of ongoing negotiation and conflict which are crucial for making the general wish come to life became largely stuck, habitual and repetitive, though punctuated by occasional, difficult meetings as described above. This was a period of paradox - the simultaneous, coexistence of two contradictory movements: novelty emerging through some conversations, mostly concerned with client-facing work; and a trend to 'stuckness' in our dealings with conversations pertaining to the university.

7.6 Stage 3: Institutionalisation - Growth that fits

7.6.1 Important milestones for this period:

- We establish an external suppliers' network, which becomes known as the Associates Network. Around 70 organisations are selected to join it, representing work across areas such as business strategy, Leadership, Executive Coaching, Human Resources Management and Operational management. Some of us have roles as staff members and as preferred suppliers, through our consultancy businesses.
- We allocate contact with the associate supplier organisations between academic staff already working on Knowledge Exchange activities.
- There is an important consolidation of the strategy, which is to institutionalise Knowledge Exchange activities within the current framework of the existing departments of the business faculty. Business faculty departments will each decide how they enact Knowledge Exchange work in their own areas.
- In order to co-ordinate Knowledge Exchange activity across the faculty, Knowledge Exchange co-ordinator roles are created, and resources are dedicated to staff in these roles across the faculty.
- The Department creates 4 x 0.5 roles to work on Knowledge Exchange activities. Two start in January and the other two in June 2009. Other departments in the Business faculty also take on staff to work in this Knowledge Exchange area. Department 2 – 2 x 0.5; Department 3 - departments 1 x 0.5
- Client income continues to grow, and we win contracts from new clients, setting up programmes on a much larger scale than previously. As of the end of April 2009, we have started or recently completed programmes to the value of over half a million pounds. (Much of this value was with the health and social care sectors.)
- There is increased emphasis on collaboration between departments and across faculties in order to plan, design and deliver client work. This is required because of the larger scale and complexity of some projects; the sheer amount of work to do; as well as the increased political emphasis on delivering work through the existing departmental structure within the business faculty. All of this puts emphasis during this period on developing our ability to deliver through internal staff, as well as through our newly formed preferred suppliers' network of associates.

7.6.2 The organisational context - Pursuing Knowledge Exchange strategy within the existing departmental structure

In January 2009, I join the university in a part-time role. Soon after me, Charles does the same, and we work in the Knowledge Exchange team. This is the team that has, by common consent, pushed most strongly for the development of Knowledge Exchange activities in the business faculty. We are quickly involved in delivering client work, as well as in trying to shape and understand our role.

There is a significant strategy formalisation during this period, which is that any Knowledge Exchange work will be managed through the existing business faculty departments. Individual departments will have discretion over how they manage their Knowledge Exchange work. We'd previously discussed the possibility

of setting up an autonomous unit to deliver Knowledge Exchange work, and this had remained unresolved. Now, it seems to have been rejected in favour of this department-led strategy.

At a review meeting in March 2009, Charles, Mandy and I meet with Pat and discuss how we can best focus our efforts. Pat encourages us to:

“Bring ideas and spread your wings, as long as they’re within the system...We need to continue to build relationships and trust with internal people.”

Through this time period, Pat acknowledges the importance of building our work in a way palatable to the faculty executive:

Pat: I have no sense of making money through this - the value of big contracts. Yes, it would be good to win one, to build our story, but in terms of internal trust at executive level it’s all about: do you look like me? That’s what I think is going on. ‘Exec Ed’ – ooh, it’s scary and different. What’s helping is the things we’re doing look like what we’ve been doing for years. Now, when you look beyond me, at what you and Mandy are doing, it’s more radical, but I have a suspicion that I act as...

Rob: a bit of air cover?

Pat: Yes, it looks safer – safe uncertainty, as Mandy calls it.

Rob: Which makes me think of the value of keeping us away from them...

Pat: Yes...particularly the more radical we are, the more it’s better to let them not worry about it...

and later:

Pat: ...Within the exec, they want innovations that look like previous successes or activities...given the strategy we’ve agreed on – through the business faculty, rather than hiving off as separate area of activity, I think it helps when innovations are not too innovative...I’m confident we are innovating quite significantly – the capacity we’re building...

This was an important part of the political context of the time. Our contract book was growing and, for the executive, what made the rapid change seem safe enough was the perception that it was nothing too different anyway, and it will be managed within existing structures, and power bases. A corollary of this growth and the shift of focus to internal relationships was that it became more important during this period to work closer and build relationships with people from other departments and other faculties. Collaboration was a strong and emerging theme during this time. In a university discussion paper from later in the year, collaboration across and beyond the university was emphasised:

“Our size and academic span gives us a regional, national and in some instances international advantage; but only if we can make effective connections between the different elements of the University. We must build activity around our current strengths and use them as a platform to create new futures – bringing together different academic disciplines, combining and mixing offers based on our strengths and market needs.”

However, for those involved in collaborative working the experience was often mixed.

7.6.3 Collaboration within our faculty: a tense meeting

Pat has pointed out that there is some consternation in another department about a programme we're due to start in a couple of months. There is some troubled history here in that people from our department and the other had visited the same client, without appreciating our joint presence and interests.. Our department has won a £60,000 contract to deliver a leadership programme for this NHS trust. We will run 10 x 3-day programmes for 15 people per programme: 150 in total. The project will take 12 months for all of these programmes to be finished. I hear that members of the other department are less than pleased, since they have had a long-term association with the client. As the project manager for the forthcoming work, I've been told to meet them and reach a compromise that prevents any further tensions.

On the 14th January 2009, Neil, Bryony and I meet with Joan and Ian from Department 2 within the business faculty. There has been little cross-departmental talk between these people before – there is no shared history and much uncertainty as to how the meeting will go. I explain the design of the programme that's already been agreed with the client. Ian and Joan explain that they want to be involved in delivering the programme and that, from their point of view, it is missing some fundamental aspects for good management. They want to ensure it contains an overview of their department's models, and explicit connections between these and performance.

There is a sense of watchfulness and wariness around the table. I am conscious of trying to balance the continuity and urgency of the programme with the explicit wish from Pat that I involve Joan and Ian in this programme. We discuss the pros and cons of the programme, with Neil, in particular sharing our wishes that it have a strong element of practice and experiential learning. I have a strong sense that The Department people have a pedagogic preference for more experiential learning designs, with a built-in capacity for responding in-the-moment to participant wishes. My growing feeling is that the people here from Department 2 wish a more direct, instructive approach that lays a common foundation for the days to come. I sense the gist of a divide and wonder how we will handle this.

We spend 45 minutes discussing the current design, though the sub-text from the Department 2 people is, quite clearly: “we want more involvement in this programme”. No-one is saying that though. Instead there is much caution, politeness and effort taken to keep options open. It is beginning to be wearing for me. I suggest a 5 minute break. I want some thinking time, and am finding the meeting difficult. I'm beginning to

think we're not really discussing much at all, and we've reached a point where it will help to be straight-talking with each other.

We return. I ask Joan and Ian, "What do you want from this programme?" Ian says: "To run day 1." We spend the remaining 30 minutes looking at how this could be done. There is some relief, a significant reduction of tension and a feeling that an impasse has been breached. There are many unanswered questions about how we'll work together, and re-design the course, but I'm confident enough this can be done. I'm also relieved that it's over.

We did redesign the programme and co-ordinated it over the next 15 months, sharing the delivery between the two departments. We achieved a satisfactory, though not creative, approach to delivering the work. For me, the working together on the programme felt too much like two different sets of groups, each happy enough to have their part; working in a partly integrated way, but certainly not a synergistic way. There was now parity of access to the students and the client, but there was little genuine exploration of novel possibilities in our working together. As if the real goal had been the restoration of honour and parity, rather than collaboration per se. As soon as we had a reliable programme, we delivered as best we could, with our focus on the client, rather than also looking at how we may work together to improve the course.

7.6.4 Collaboration between faculties: Trust, risk, reward and hurt

Two senior university people were instrumental in enabling productive collaboration across faculties. The successful collaboration between faculty 2 and the Business Faculty provide essential for giving market access for many programmes for the period of this case study. Without this collaboration, the overall story would have been very different.

Rob: I suppose there's some degree of risk involved?

Dianne: Of course there is, and I took the highest risk. I put our contract at risk...because we're up for re-tendering in 2011. This had to be a real winner for the faculty...The biggest risk was for me...me in my role...our reputation was at risk...it was about being sure the people who went it to deliver would take rep forward not pulling it down.

Rob: And, I can see why that's important for you...how do you know you can trust us?

Dianne: That's a very interesting question. In nursing we have this thing called innateness and an inner-knowing ...there's intuitive knowing that comes with dealing with people a lot...I do have quite an intuitive feel for individuals. My background influences that - I am a mental health nurse.

Dianne: Pat and I were very interesting...1st time we met he said: I'm going to be taking on this role, and I said I'm going to be brutally honest with you, I find the business faculty blinkered, they're not creative, not prepared to come out...He said: I'm glad you said that, that's exactly what

I feel...and...immediately, there we linked. There was somebody there who said 'Yeah, I know what you're saying and I feel the same'. How can we get over this?

In talking about Dianne, Pat described what he liked about her:

"She'd challenge the status quo; 'what else can we do?'... not defensive about doing things differently ...I could see straightaway, she completely got it...a lively, enquiring, curious mind. Open to possibilities and interested in developing relationships without preconceptions about where they may go."

The honesty and frankness of this first conversation was key for both people. They developed an immediate rapport and resonance and were on enough of a similar wavelength to be able to work together. As senior representatives of their faculties, their relationship was key to providing access to budgets, clients and people from their areas.

Another person who'd been involved in cross-faculty work with the Business Faculty, had experienced a difficult time in gaining acceptance as a valued member of the programme. She'd had to persevere, despite a feeling of being excluded and evaluated for what she brought:

Rob: "It sounds like, in different ways, you've had to be adaptable, to get your points across. That the stuff that you value is worth others thinking about?"

Bea: "I'm passionate about (*names her faculty*)...and about leadership and management...and I think that we have to make learning obtainable...And so, you pick your battles...I can't say there haven't been times that I haven't come back really hurt, begging (*names Dianne*) to let me go...many ill comments were made, and exclusive conversations...and I still feel very vulnerable in that environment because I know they'd like me not involved and out of the picture...but why should they? It's an initiative that's bringing in good money for the organisation and it needs both players...But, yeah, I've had to adapt phenomenally. I've had to bend ridiculously into positions I didn't always think were right."

Rob: "So was a risk taken? Did you take a risk?"

Bea: "They (*meaning the Business faculty*) had to take a risk because they did not believe that my profession...needed that level of work... I also had to take a risk in demanding that I took certain sessions, because there was a belief system that I would not be able to teach to that level. I had to make myself very vulnerable at a time I was new to the environment anyway, and wasn't 'in' there. So, I had to prove a lot of things at a stage I was new myself."

Rob: "It's interesting - about those groups or faculties, departments, professions a person is a member of that ascribe to them status for the knowledge that they have. You're talking of a hierarchy of valuing. And what it makes me wonder is whether there's a risk in collaborating? And I

wanted to check out your experience because...if one collaborates in our particular place how much is there a risk of not being valued by your own organisation and not being valued by them (*meaning: those with whom you're collaborating*)? It might be you lose it (*I mean value or status here*) where you had it and don't get it where you hope to get it!?"

Bea: "I am that person. That's why I say it hasn't helped my career at all, and that's where I say I've got very hurt by it which is where it's not very good for my health. Because you're in a lose-lose. I know I'm highly valued by the students...but my work (here) is invisible...my visibility is high in the community."

For this person, collaboration between her and staff in the business faculty had produced unexpected consequences. She'd felt excluded from her own faculty/community, as well as having to struggle against the risk of exclusion from the business faculty.

7.6.5 Collaboration with Associate suppliers

The associates' network had existed informally for over a year. What was different about this period was that it was now a formal entity, with people being accepted onto or rejected from the list. Also, the scale was different. Whereas in the previous year we'd had around 10 – 15 hopeful and potential suppliers appearing at meetings, now there were around 70 organisations recognised as preferred suppliers to the Business faculty. In the next 15 months, up to March 2010, it proved to be a difficult experience for many people involved, though productive for a minority. It was certainly a new approach for the faculty:

Rob: "How new and different is it to use associates on this scale?"

Rhian: "I think that is quite novel here. Previously, we'd use: who do you know, who's good? ...here, we're thinking: what are the criteria? Just on this bundle of documentation..."

There were various objections to working with the associates:

One person was talking about how, for her, knowledge exchange means that the university learns from its interaction with client organisations, and, potentially, can integrate this type of applied learning with its teaching and research.

Ian: "I'm not sure that using associates is the answer to this because associates I think we lose that exchange, because that learning will not come back to us."

For another it was about in selecting associates:

Rhian: "I don't think, in all honesty, we've used associate consultants that much...the ones that have been more engaged with us usually have something more complementary, rather than direct

substitution...it's been really slow, because personal relationships tend to be important. It's a matter of reputation and trust, so when that's not there, people are resistant."

For others it was more to do with risk to our reputation:

Rhian: "As you and I know when you do that kind of work, it's quite stressful, off-campus, the reputation of the Business faculty rests on that...so it's seen as quite a risky type of activity, reputation-wise...why there is resistance to associates doing it - we pay the damage, but they do it as a one-off and presumably walk away if went horribly wrong."

and

Rob: "From your point of view is the use of associates potentially risky?"

Ian: "Yes...because it's hard to monitor them when we don't know who they are, particularly with the large numbers we have, from large consultancies, who we don't know are going to field on the day..."

and

James: "...our success in having 200 masters students is based on being rated as a centre of excellence in the profession. We are closely monitored... suddenly something was going to happen where we were not only going to go off doing things off piste, but we were going to use another lot of people who we wouldn't know that much about who would be doing it in our name, and what would they be like?"

What was rarely discussed was the thoughts of the associates around their own reputation. One of the associates talked to me in the summer of 2009 about the risk to her reputation of working with us, the Business Faculty. Her view was that she was taking a risk by associating with us, when the Knowledge Exchange work seemed so unpredictable and devoid of any guiding strategy. Thoughts around risk, brand, reputation were rife, and usually expressed only in shadow, corridor conversations, or privately during break times.

7.6.6 Relationship-building with clients

We were growing our contract value and widening our thinking about who could do the client-facing work. We were also continuing to meet existing and new clients. Since the large majority of our work came from the health and social care sector, and we were earning significant repeat work with clients, there was an emphasis on maintaining good working relationships during this period.

My journal notes record the following interaction with an important client during this period. I met with Cheryl and was dreading it. I'd prevaricated on a piece of work - the 'learning framework' – and had pulled the work together at late notice, and with accompanying anxieties. There's been some lack of clarity over the source of funding for doing the work, and there was potential for conflict and misunderstanding over this.

We meet at our regular site – a hospital half-way between Cheryl and my office. I hand over the work I've done, giving Cheryl time to read it, and I offer to buy us coffees while she does so. I return. She says she likes the work.

Me: "I'm very relieved about that because I've been struggling to keep all the balls in the air while we have such a lot going on..."

Cheryl replies: "I'm really glad you tell me this because it gives me a sign of what's going on in the University, and how you're dealing with the realities of doing well, and resourcing everything. And how guilt and compromise and standards come into play...it tells us that you're not an ivory tower – which some people think you are – and that you're facing the same things as us, in fact..."

Cheryl went on to describe a similar situation she was facing at work, where 'success' had put a strain on the demand for resources available. She continued: "I can be an advocate for you, if I know these things..."

It was an air-clearing, cleansing talk where we connected strongly, and I thought she empathised greatly. In the remaining 75 minutes of our meeting, the level of ease and spontaneity in the room rose sharply – it was much more 'light'. I remember this as a significant moment in our working together, when my professional façade was lowered, and we talked about the pressures of getting work done well enough.

7.7 Process Analysis: Stage 3

7.7.1 The Quality of diversity

In this period, the item that fits best as an analytical tool is that of focusing attention on the quality of diversity. The question here is: to what extent does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion and finding enough, (but not too much), common ground?

This period has followed one of has been a period of high growth, forcing the host institution to make a decision regarding the management of Knowledge Exchange work. Strategically, the over-riding imperative during this period has been how to enable our continued growth while finding a trusted labour supply. How we do this is a contested matter, with issues of departmental and faculty reputations perceived to be at risk. Kirton's theory of adaption-innovation is relevant here (1976, 2003). The organisation has chosen an adaptive response to the problem of how best to manage the growth of Knowledge Exchange work in this institution. Adaptors prefer to use existing structures and systems to accommodate new ventures, being efficient in the way in which these are integrated. In this period, the university has chosen to integrate this new branch of work within an existing framework – the departmental structures of our faculty – retaining the power bases that exist within these departments. It is a low-risk approach that was welcomed by the majority of department managers.

The emphasis on collaboration within and between faculties, and outside the university, has brought conversational dynamics to more people. It is interesting to note the qualities of those collaborations that flourished and those that did not. From the above descriptions, with Dianne and Pat there was a more or less immediate rapport, based on their frank exchange. From a challenge by Dianne as to the Business Faculty's open-ness to working with her, she receives a surprising, and honest, response from Pat. Similarly, from a position of weakness and concern, I shared with Cheryl, our client, my apprehension about the work I'd prepared for her, and how this had been something of a struggle. She appreciated this frankness. I'm not suggesting that these relationships were based purely on frank interactions. I am indicating that the quality of the relationship was formed in moments of spontaneity, like these above, and that the process was paradoxical: spontaneity influencing relationship while relationship influenced the spontaneity. In both cases, there was also some common ground present, where both parties understood the other, and had a reason for wanting to work together – an awareness of their interdependence. There was also a pattern of emerging trust, based on perceived competence, between people involved. Both Dianne and Cheryl spoke to their constituencies – people whom they represented and were attending programmes being run by us. They received feedback about our effectiveness, and they weighed this up as part of their evaluation of the risk they'd taken in working with us.

Those collaborations that were more problematic are revealing of wider organisational differences. Firstly, as an individual, Bea had found the attempt at collaborating with people from the Business Faculty difficult and sometimes painful. Her area of work had a definite practice-orientation to it. Her background as a health professional was predicated on the value of helping. She experienced the threat, and reality, of exclusion, both from her own faculty members, and from the faculty with which she strove to collaborate. Secondly, in our muted attempts at inter-faculty collaboration, what became apparent was that one

department had a strong research emphasis, while this Knowledge Exchange work was certainly practice-oriented. It was really no difficulty to establish good-enough working relationships with individuals, but one became aware of larger group dynamics, and collective identities, in the background. Thirdly, for people in our associate network, of which I and others working in the business Faculty were members, the experience was largely one of frustration at not being included in work activities. They found that some departments preferred not to work with them, for the reasons described above. During this time, associates actively send us leads for work, including tenders, and, typically, we didn't pursue these, leading them to wonder what they should send our way and refrain from doing. In all of these cases, what is missing is some strong sense of common ground.

Where collaboration was difficult it was often indicative of strong differences. Diversity was certainly present, but

“...while diversity is essential for the evolution of novelty, such diversity can easily become polarised and stuck, so blocking the emergence of novel patterns of relating.” (Stacey, 2011, page 391)

Sometimes it became apparent that people belonged with certain membership groups. The Knowledge Exchange work threatened to disrupt existing power configurations. The ideologies underpinning different groupings were rarely articulated explicitly, and Stacey (ibid) goes on to state that one of the functions of ideology is to make the current order seem natural. One way in which the current order prevailed in the university was through the fairly static approach to communicating via roles on the hierarchy. Those of us who noticed this and wished it were different, still largely abided by it.

What were the membership groupings? Broadly, there were differences between people according to whether one was predominantly interested in teaching, research or knowledge exchange. The latter was very much the new activity for the faculty, at least on this growing scale. Academic careers were much more solidly established for members of the first two camps, whereas promotion through expertise around knowledge exchange was not a proven career path. It was new and unproven. There were also differences in valuing the work itself, with one person saying that our work was considered ‘training’ – not something with which a university should be engaged.

There were also differences in the valuing of different conceptions of knowledge produced by knowledge exchange and other academic work, (again, from an interview):

Rob: Why might an academic put more value on research?

Rhian: ...Both are ways of generating new knowledge, but they're a different kind of knowledge. For some academics, it's being independent, not swayed by business, standing outside - the traditional role of being in ivory tower.

As efforts to collaborate around knowledge exchange increased, so these strong and stable differences came to the surface. They were experienced by people as providing limits on the extent to which collaboration was desired. More pointedly, people also felt excluded from broader communicative

processes, and, in extreme cases, from one's own group. As Elias and Scotson (1965) explain, in return for belonging to a powerful group, conformity to existing norms is expected. If this is transgressed, the person can expect to be excluded. When the people from The Department moved to the bungalow in the autumn of 2009 the same invitation was extended to a Knowledge Exchange member of another business faculty department. This person chose not to move with us, explaining that his physically re-locating with the Knowledge Exchange group would reduce his influence in his department. There would be the prospect of censure from his group and this influenced his decision to remain located with them.

In my own experiences of working to collaborate across departments and faculties, it felt like I was joining a conversation which had rumbled on for some time. There was a weight of history: previous experiences between people were influencing expectations of how the future would progress, and these expectations were affecting thoughts and feelings in the present moment. This sense of a living present (Stacey, 2011) was very potent, and had a distancing effect, as, being a newcomer, one was not privy to these historical details.

7.8 Stage 4: Rejection: A slow stagnation

7.8.1 Milestones:

- The Department's Knowledge Exchange team (and staff working on the MBA programme) move together into a separate physical location from other academic staff in our department: "The bungalow".
- There are now 4 people in The Department's Knowledge Exchange team (plus a team leader with time allocated to her Knowledge Exchange work). The 4 team members are on fractional appointments of 0.5 of a role. All of us do run our separate consultancy businesses outside of these roles.
- The nature of our roles is becoming clearer. We are expected to allocate 20% of our time to teaching on university programmes; 20% to research activities, leaving 1.5 days/week for Knowledge Exchange activities.
- A series of institutional policies are enacted which impact on Knowledge Exchange work:
 - The issue of pay for Knowledge Exchange work reaches a critical stage within the university. External associates are still paid at £600/day. However, from August 1st, 2009, those of us who work part-time for the university, *and* are on the associate suppliers list will not be permitted to deliver client work as associates, instead being expected to deliver these days within our existing 0.5 university roles. We expect this will put pressure on the time available for business development and winning further work.
 - Staff overtime is stopped. Since Knowledge Exchange work is often difficult to plan into their work schedule, the buffer of overtime has been a necessary support for staff doing Knowledge Exchange work, because it gives a means of them doing work at short notice and getting paid for it.
 - Knowledge Exchange work is valued at = 3 credits/day activity. This compares to 6 credits/day for undergraduate teaching. Symbolically, this is damaging to our cause and makes our work unattractive for staff who may be interested in our activity.
- Aside from The Department, there is very limited active use of associate suppliers' from the other business faculty departments.
- In the broader university, including our business faculty, a reorganisation has started which will result in the merger of faculties, and departments within faculties. There is much speculation about senior-level roles requiring job-holders to apply for their jobs, with no guarantees of success.

This was a difficult period for people working on Knowledge Exchange activities in the Business Faculty. In particular, there continued to be difficulties with the supply of appropriate staff to deliver Knowledge Exchange work. The policy changes listed above made it more difficult to recruit internal staff, and there was a growing unease with the associate network concept, made manifest in most departments' decision to limit the use of associates to deliver our work.

At the same time, the Department had never employed so many people directly on Knowledge Exchange-type work. Contract values with clients were still strong, on the basis of contracts already won. For us working in The Department, our perception was of a withdrawing of wider organisational support for the Knowledge Exchange activities. Certainly, we interpreted the above policy moves as likely to be damaging for further growth, in particular limiting the availability of an internal staff supply, as well as impacting on our time to bring in new contracts.

The main narrative in this section focuses on the efforts by The Department's Knowledge Exchange team to create a strategy for its actions, and to agree this with key internal stakeholders. I believe it is an appropriate place to focus attention for this final part of the case study, since the people in this department had pioneered Knowledge Exchange activity in the business faculty in this period, and had always delivered the great majority of income for the business faculty.

7.8.2 The Department's Knowledge Exchange strategy – an attempt to 'shift' focus

Between July and December 2009, we held a series of meetings. Initially these were partly organised to bring some integration to the team in the form of information-sharing, understanding roles, and allocating work. We are trying to find some coherence in working together that feels good and right. It is an espoused bid to regain a sense of agency, and not be at the whim of short-term workload pressures. Out of these early meetings, we resolved to produce a more formal strategy document, which we hoped would help us define how we could best contribute to Knowledge Exchange work in the business faculty. The main people involved are Darryl, Bryony, Charles, me and our manager Estelle. This is a new team, with Darryl and Bryony having joined in June 2009.

July – August 2009: Our early meetings are held amidst the rumour that we may not be permitted to carry out Knowledge Exchange work as associates. Rather, we would have to incorporate delivery of work within our 0.5 roles. Initially the conversation is hesitant. It is a new group of people finding their way together. Charles is unclear about what he's going to say. As he says these words, there's an impression of someone working it out as he goes along:

"We don't need more ideas. We need to put into practice some principles that we already know... Work with teams is easier to evaluate; easier to maintain relationships with over time; easier to help because they work on identifiable tasks. In comparison with much of our current work: individual leaders attend programmes, then leave. It's harder to tailor our intent..."

We start to discuss the promise of working with teams. Several benefits come to mind, and I feel some resonance with Charles' words. After he speaks his mind there was a palpable, bodily infusion of energy. The five of us share some thoughts that are important to us. We are at a stage in life when we have something to offer, and wish to create some sense of meaningful purpose, towards which we will pour our energy; we want to help people do their jobs better; to make a difference and have an impact; there is an excitement and belief that the team has talent; also, there is a tentativeness with each other as to what we believe works – a lack of sharing about we each believe to be effective in leadership development; we

express a respect for the role of Estelle in managing our team; there is also some 'ritual sniffing' and politeness with each other.

There is politeness, spontaneity, a treading-carefully-with-each-other. These statements have the quality of broad intentions cautiously stated, but not yet debated and understood among us. At this stage, the questions in my mind are: do we continue to explore together, to risk misunderstanding, to disagree, stall, risking agreement, commitment...?

In mid-September, we have an unplanned end-of day meeting. Charles, Bryony and I meet and are discussing our wishes to present to and persuade Mandy and Pat about our agenda. If we don't get a date in the diary to work towards, our energies will dissipate, (never to be recovered, is the fear), given the sweep of other urgencies... A mood pervades of humour, hilarity, a dash of light hysteria, and an end-of-tether frankness. I've known this before – the talk that comes from energy reserves being low, and talking with people I am enjoying being around. There is a growing feeling of safety with these people. There is also a real resolve present, borne out of frustration, concern about reputation, wishing to do good work well, and a fear of the power of the slippery slope of doing things half-well.

In mid-October, we hold our next formal meeting about our strategy. We discuss our aspirations for the type of Knowledge Exchange work we want...

- Darryl: I want us to work on something edgy, challenging.
- Bryony: more emphasis on learning and cross-organisational change.
- Charles: outcome measurement and research links.
- Me: personal change as well as working on teams.

This is really the first time we've all stated so bluntly what we each want to do. We try to understand what this means for the people involved, and begin to imagine how this could work in practice. Charles is concerned about the range of differences; Darryl expresses some confusion about it; Bryony and I are more positive in thinking of the differences as not being unworkable. We agree to set up a presentation meeting and present our thoughts on our work priorities to the senior members of our department: Pat, Mandy and Graham.

I reflect that the meeting has been rich. We have experienced disagreement, conflict, curiosity and some anxiety around the manageability of our wishes. As usual, the tone of our conversations is respectful, if a little haphazard. We have some very different working styles in the group. Charles is quite structured and seems to have a good grasp of what could happen in practice; Darryl is rather different, making novel connections between topics. He is harder to contain and I often find myself wondering: "I wonder what he'll say now...oh, that's interesting...how will we make it happen...?" Bryony can be challenging too, wanting change to happen, interested in collaboration and strong in her views. I see myself as providing some glue between the team members, and Estelle has said the same thing to me. There is quite a lot of diversity in our small team and I wonder whether the differences are too great. I also wonder what we have to hold us together, enough. One of the very practical elements that holds us together is our manager, Estelle. She allows the conversation to wander and invariably brings it back to what we've agreed we'll discuss. She

seems to have a fine sense of when to loosen the agenda and when to bring us 'back on track'. This gives me confidence that the time can be well spent, and reduces the risk of us exploring possibilities that may become 'dead-ends'.

The work of this group is proving an interesting counterpoint to the prevailing experience of working in this organisation. I perceive support for Knowledge Exchange to be slowly withdrawing, and I have mixed feelings about the work and find myself wondering where it will all end. I find myself weighing my personal commitments to the Knowledge Exchange work, as we pay attention to the unfolding events around us. And while this group makes halting progress in writing a strategy, my own thoughts and feelings are mixed. I experience moments of fun, excitement and hope in working with my colleagues in this team, though these feelings are never without accompanying ones of risk, pessimism and the growing thought of 'let's give it a final try...'. I'm wondering how much I and we really *want* this... I'm anticipating the consequences of being successful in securing agreement for a strategy on work that, increasingly, is losing support.

In November we progress with our development of a draft paper. There is more spontaneity and less anxiety than at some of the earlier meetings. We meet in pairs, trios but rarely as a full group because of diary pressures. In this messy, opportunistic way, we are coming to know each other better.

Darryl and I agree to draft a draft vision, drawing together the themes from our recent talks. Later in November, we have a final preparation meeting of the 5 of us before the presentation day. Darryl and I have put together a paper for discussion and he has produced a vision for the business faculty. Charles and Bryony make the point that we should focus more on our department rather than the whole faculty, since we can influence this more readily. Darryl will need to narrow down his scope. It's interesting and visionary, but too long and broad. Charles and Bryony are careful, tactful and clear in saying this, and I feel awkwardness as well as relief as they say this. Darryl hears the comments and remains silent.

I allocate pairings to each of our 6 priority areas. There is work to do before we present them on 4th December 2009. We have noticed that pairings have often emerged in doing previous work between us. It seems a pragmatic, useful way to get work done. I am concerned about the coherence in our group. The opportunities for us all to meet, talk frankly and gain confidence in each other have been limited. I wonder what are my worries really about? Do we have a solid understanding of what we're saying here? Will we present a coherent argument in front of Pat, Mandy and Graham? Will we embarrass ourselves?

We discuss the strength of our relations with the faculty executive, for gaining wider organisational support. This Knowledge Exchange team from The Department has been at the forefront of Knowledge Exchange activity in the entire faculty, but has had very limited connections with the faculty executive. This has been a regular conversational and power pattern for over 2 years, and no-one has taken steps to disrupt it. No-one from the executive has spoken to us directly about the work we're doing, and we have not approached them to discuss how and what we do. We have colluded in this. Sometimes it has served our purpose for Pat to be a mediator of the meaning of messages. We are now wondering about the wisdom of this, since Pat has been struggling to assure the support of Knowledge Exchange at executive level. On a more physical plane, PAT has been notably absent in recent months. I wonder whether the trials involved with promoting

Knowledge Exchange work have taken their toll on him, and if he is recovering in some way. Around this time, several corridor and pub conversations develop as we anticipate our presentation. We speculate about bypassing our faculty executive and talking direct with the university Vice Chancellor. After all, he has spoken of the need for us to develop links and work with local and regional organisations. There is a groundswell of agreement around this option and the mention releases great energy. This is quickly followed by an appreciation of the risk involved for full-time members of staff who may have more to lose than those of us part-timers - we can always turn to our consultancies. Other comments are made to the effect that we wouldn't be 'badmouthing' our own executive, but making a reasoned case for the growth of Knowledge Exchange work. We also realise this may be easier said than done, and how would it be interpreted...? There is a spirit of alliance-forming, as mutual interests are cautiously expressed, with the ghosts of others near us, reminding us of the nexus of different wants and wishes, mutual constraints and responsibilities.

7.8.3 The Department's Knowledge Exchange presentation meeting - 4/12/09

Estelle has circulated our draft vision paper before the meeting. Darryl's broader visionary element is not included. The people present are: Pat, Mandy, Darryl, Bryony, Graham, Estelle and me. We talk from 1.20 to 2.35, well past its allocated time.

Estelle opens the meeting, and soon we are discussing how difficult it is for Knowledge Exchange work right now. The wider university context of faculty mergers, including Faculty Deans applying for their roles, means that attention is elsewhere. We have lost meaningful, active support at our faculty executive level.

Darryl has drafted a time sheet, for recording how we actually spend our current Knowledge Exchange time, broken into different categories of activity. Graham is concerned to institutionalise our business development activities, making it a legitimate and recognised part of what we do. Pat agrees that this is critical, because without it we are vulnerable to people misunderstanding the details of the work we do, and changing our roles without understanding the repercussions. There is increased air time, suspicion and questioning about our role boundaries at executive level, and in some other departments, not least because of how our consultancy businesses may overlap with our internal work.

I sit in the meeting, finding this focus on internal processes, procedures and politics frustrating. Where is the attention on building our work through developing new offerings, understanding our clients and anticipating market changes? Isn't this the work we have developed over the last four months and are here to discuss? Our strategy document has been aimed exclusively at understanding these. I say:

"We are currently blocked for support at executive level. Do we have the option of going directly to (I name the vice-chancellor) for support?"

Mandy supports the existence of this choice, and it raises a series of responses: we should wait until the new Dean is appointed and put our views to him or her; Pat advocates that we show self-control and patience and it's better to focus on our role definition, and get legitimacy for this; if we go direct to the vice-

chancellor we may be interpreted as badmouthing the executive, and we'll have to live with the consequences... None of us counter this with any gusto and from here on the talk is largely cautious and contained. Our sense of our own agency has slumped. I experience the power of the conversational current swirling around the attractor of internal difficulties. Why is it so difficult to shift the talk back to what may make us successful in growing the Knowledge Exchange work? I notice my reluctance to counter this pattern, having tried once, and others seem unwilling to do so.

There is a palpable sense of riskiness and pessimism amidst the uncertainties of the time. Graham, Pat, Estelle and Mandy will have to apply for their roles in the forthcoming merger plan. The meeting ends with a muted acceptance of the current political realities.

7.9 Process Analysis: Stage 4

This period of the knowledge exchange work was increasingly frustrating. The growing contextual pressures were making it increasingly difficult to grow, and even sustain, the Knowledge Exchange work we'd built over the previous 2 years. We'd entered a critical period for Knowledge Exchange work in the business faculty in our university, which would prove to be crucial for its ongoing efforts. From a research point of view, it would have been interesting to extend the timescale of the case. However, 2.5 years had already given plenty of data. Furthermore, things were heating up around the Knowledge Exchange work, and emotions were strong. As my supervisor said, towards the end of this case:

“As emotions get hotter, it gets more difficult to do live research.”

The focus on the work of The Department's Knowledge Exchange staff in this period is relevant since this department unit had been the prime mover in establishing and growing the work for the period of the case. We were typically pushing the university's capacity beyond where it felt comfortable for the entirety of the duration.

From the analytical model, the element that seems most relevant here is focusing attention on the quality of diversity. The question is: *to what extent ...does there exist a degree of difference, deviance and subversion and finding enough, (but not too much), common ground?* It is helpful to consider the question both from the view of within The Department's Knowledge Exchange team and also in its relation to wider organisational support.

Within our team, we held many conversations through July – December 2009. This was a newly-created team, and these talks helped us bond and cohere to some extent. For the most part, we also came to enjoy working together:

Charles: “Darryl and Bryony joining has allowed us to talk more...Now I feel part of group – can see I belong to this team now. That's been hugely helpful...because of this identity and where we fit ...and our ability to laugh and have fun. That's significant – hysteria, manic-ness and dark humour is part of it.”

We also had differences in personal style and interests which have already been described. More fundamentally, I believe we identified ourselves as consultants more than as academics. We were new to academia but very experienced as consultants. We valued our experience as consultants, in working closely with people to understand and help them in the work challenges. We were also fragmented in that we each held half-time roles in the university, and ran businesses, or worked as associates outside of the university. This put significant pressure on our diaries and had the practical impact of limiting our time together, certainly as a whole group. However, from the viewpoint of novelty, the team did produce a set of knowledge exchange strategic priorities for discussion. To my knowledge, no other department in the business faculty did so in this period. This was the outcome of the conversational processes already

described, and to which our team leader – Estelle – made a significant contribution. Stacey (2011: 346-347) describes how:

“A particular view of the role of leader follows from the claim that creative organisational strategies are more likely to emerge in more fluid, spontaneous forms of conversation...Given the power relation of the leader to others, he or she is in a particularly well-placed position to create opportunities for conversation that may foster greater spontaneity.”

Estelle helped us create this document for discussion through helping us agree a focus at the start of meetings, subsequently allowing our talks to wander where they may, in the hope that we may hit on interesting thoughts. She encouraged and allowed exploration, and gave group members time to share their variety of views. In the context of describing Foulkes' (1964) views on the role of a therapy group conductor, Stacey goes on to state that when trying to encourage spontaneity in discussion the role of the leader is to encourage group members to take responsibility, avoid submission to the group leader and engage in co-operation and explorative conflict. This was very clearly the role performed by Estelle, and it had the effect of giving sufficient binding to a fragmented team.

Stacey (2011) discusses how organisations display the capacity to change spontaneously only they have sufficient diversity. For instance, he discusses how diversity is inseparable from conflict, and how unofficial ideologies are expressed in shadow conversational themes that attempt to undermine existing power relations. We certainly contributed to the development of unofficial conversational themes, and brought difference and subversion to our talks. We regularly discussed how we may overcome the perceived lack of wider organisational support. We discussed the blockages of the formal communication system, operating via the hierarchy, from which we felt excluded. We wondered about how we may directly request support from levels beyond our immediate faculty, bypassing our faculty executive. We shared our views about the risks and potential rewards of doing this. These conversations took place in pairs or trios, occasionally in the whole group, in corridors, over coffee and during the evening, in pubs. And yet, despite the presence of this manifestation of diversity, during the presentation meeting itself, we found it very difficult to change the conversation away from an internal focus, to a market/customer one. From a complex responsive processes perspective,

“...changes in conversations are changes in organisations.” (Stacey, 2011: 365)

Quite clearly the outcome was that we did not influence the situation to bring about change. When the crunch point arose in the presentation about whether we should talk directly with the university vice chancellor, we complied quite meekly with the advice of our departmental leaders. Why was that? Part of the reason, I believe, was that we found it difficult to absorb and accommodate our own differences in the preparation for the meeting. Darryl's' vision was omitted from the final document. We were still learning about each other and found it difficult to galvanise our thinking. There was some, but limited, resonance between us. As one of our group expressed in a later interview:

“Other people have different ways of working. I’m an explorer type..., how can we harness that difference?...There’s a lot of talent, and at the moment I don’t feel it’s being properly focused yet, the end result is...our impact is going to be minimised, because we’re slightly pulling in different directions.” (Darryl)

7.9.1 The Business Faculty as Social Object: Functionalising cult values

Mead (1938) described a social object as one only understandable in terms of human experience. The social object can be thought of as a generalised tendency of a large group of people to act in similar ways in similar situations. We come to expect a fairly predictable pattern of responses from ourselves and others in these situations. Mead gives the example of the marketplace, and other examples would include organisations, and units within them, as well as large sporting events, such as football matches. However, it’s important to note that the generalised tendency only becomes enacted through particular behaviours at specific points in time. Conflict is an inevitable aspect of particularisation of social objects, and this is what may lead to their evolution, as small differences of fairly stable behaviour patterns may become amplified through spontaneous human interaction. From a complex responsive processes point of view, organisations are thought of as

“...nothing more or less than the iterated ongoing processes in which people are together particularising the generalisations in terms of which they perceive their organisation.” (Stacey, 2011: 365)

In other words, the business faculty can be considered a social object, on the grounds that it was a place where people interacted iteratively and locally with each other. They were aware of their interdependence, and, paradoxically, were forming that organisational unit at the same time that their identities were being formed by it. Organisations are ongoing, sometimes changing, patterning of conversations. My experience of working in a university, since 1999, albeit employed in different formal roles is that most people care greatly about the nature of the work they do. Mead, (1923) pointed out that people have a tendency to individualise and idealise a collective and ascribe ‘it’ over-riding motives or aims, making the collective a ‘cult’. Today, mission, vision and corporate values statements would fit this character: each aiming to describe a future shorn of constraints, and through which we belong to an extended personality. In the business faculty, there were several cult values such as: producing knowledge that is independent of funders’ interests; helping people in their jobs; widening access to education for the disadvantaged.

Cult values can only exist in their functionalisation – that is, the particular ways in which local experience and explorative conflict brings them into being. Stacey (2011) points out that

“...nowhere will the conflict caused by making some generalisation particular be greater than where this generalisation is also a cult value.” (page359)

In these cases, people will have to negotiate and explore ways to functionalise ideals, in ways which will

affect their personal and collective identities. In a business faculty where invitations to conversations were routinely extended through the hierarchy, negotiation was hampered, and news of any progress was by means of hearsay, via our departmental managers.

7.9.2 Ideology and stigmatisation

For those of us working directly on Knowledge Exchange work, our position was weak, based on the prevailing ideological and power patterning within the organisation. As I've said, we identified ourselves with external consultants more so than as "teachers", "researchers" or "academics". I know I did, and I believe that was true for others in our team, with the exception of Estelle, our team leader. Elias and Scotson ((1965) 1994), looked at the sociological dynamics of two communities, one living in an older village, the other on a nearby, more recently-built estate. There was no conversation between the two groups outside of work and faculty. The researchers noticed that the more traditional, powerful and coherent villagers were stigmatising the newcomers using binary-laden gossip such as: dirty, ill-educated people who don't maintain their houses and gardens, and whose children are badly behaved. Whereas the villagers described themselves as well-educated, clean people who maintained their homes and gardens, with well-behaved children. This simplistic ideology split good from bad, making it seem natural that the villagers should occupy positions of power in the local community – which, in fact, they did.

Knowledge exchange work, on this rapidly growing scale, provided a threat to existing power relations. Pay had always been a highly symbolic issue in the Knowledge Exchange work. An agreement had been reached, before October 2007 that people doing our work with clients would be paid at £600 per day. This had fuelled a significant amount of resentment, from lower-paid teaching and research staff, as well as departmental managers. As of August 1st 2009, we were no longer paid this higher rate, since we now delivered through our staff roles. However, some people were uncomfortable with the university making money, and many were ill-at-ease with the distribution of that money. We felt stigmatised by association, though we rarely experienced that stigmatisation directly. Instead it pervaded through rumours and gossip.

Graham: "Some of our academic staff say: 'it's all right for those Knowledge Exchange people because they earn enormous big bucks.' They assume that you're bringing/developing the work and with the other 0.5 going on to the associate rate at £100/hour. That's been mentioned in corridors."

We understood very clearly that our work was valued less highly by prevailing power groupings, than was teaching or research. We heard rumours of our work being described – never to us directly – as "atheoretical, consultancy – not university – work, managerialist and swayed by business". From my point of view, from August 2009 onwards, this 'background noise' became an effective barrier to conducting open conversations with the faculty executive and even with non- Knowledge Exchange staff in our own department.

Ian: "How does it fit into our research/teaching...? I think this is why there's not much engagement from my colleagues – they see it as an isolated activity...it's got to be integrated."

Rob: "And is it?"

Ian: "No."

Rob: and when you said earlier that they didn't agree with the principle of it...

Ian: I might be wrong but I think it's seen as a money-making activity, and that's not our purpose as a university. I think that's at the core of it – I might be wrong but that's the perception.

We were working amidst rumours of suspicion of how we were prospering nicely from bringing in this work. Suspicion from whom was difficult to know, as no-one ever spoke directly about this. But, as with being followed by a police car, in the context of a supposedly suspicious authority, feelings of guilt and shame were aroused.

Stacey describes how

"In established, cohesive groups, steams of gossip flow along well-established channels that are lacking for newly-arrived groups. The stigmatisation, however, only sticks where there is already a sufficiently large power difference." (2011, p: 392)

By comparison with more established groupings within the university, our team was fragmented and weak. We did not hold formal positions of power. Ultimately, our perception of this weakness in relation to the prevailing power dynamics made us choose not to challenge the system. From the viewpoint of focusing attention on diversity, it was a failure to find sufficient common ground, driven partly by our own personal circumstances which made fragmentation a powerful force, but more potently, by the prevailing power relations which led to a feeling of embarrassment, perhaps shame, at being stigmatised. In this context the potential risks of rebelling were too high; the perception of the likelihood of reward too low. Perhaps the inclement economic climate of the time did not aid taking such a high risk approach, but more potent was the power relations pattern I've described above. One of the consequences of this was that team members began to talk in more restrained ways about what we may contribute to work. There began a period of a gradual reigning in of commitment, risk taking, discretionary effort and the exploring of possibilities.

Pat: "...this work is very relational: do I as a manager trust the people developing the work? If a manager trusts it creates the possibility for risk to be taken, doesn't guarantee it, but creates the possibility, and therefore for things to be developed innovatively. And if a manager doesn't trust it constrains risk-taking. If it's as extreme as last year, it completely quashes risk-taking, innovation - not even innovation but engagement. Talk about incremental-radical, there's a step before incremental which is just doing nothing – you carry on doing the same because know the same is safe."

In my interview with Estelle, 2 months after the strategy presentation, she described what she is not seeing in our team:

“For me it’s: where is your passion in this? What is it you want to make happen...I miss not feeling that from the team.”

Rob: Not feeling...?

Estelle: That people want to make something special of their own...not finding the wherewithal within what we’re creating, to hang on to that...I find responsiveness there, and willingness to help each other there. A will to make this good...but I’m missing a little flair of creativity, innovation...I’m missing it.”

7.10 Overall case review: Implications for creativity and Innovation

7.10.1 A reminder of what was new and different about this work

This knowledge exchange programme was an experiment for the university. This type of practice-oriented work had been carried out in previous years, but there were various new features:

- The scale of the work, as measured in contract value, was far greater than previously achieved.
- The formalisation of the work, spanning across the business faculty, and the degree of resource allocated to Knowledge Exchange work within the faculty was completely new to the faculty.
- The degree and duration of collaboration with Faculty 2, and, to a lesser extent, with Department 2 within the Business Faculty, extended beyond anything previously achieved.
- The establishment of an associates' network was a radical experiment.

7.10.2 What did the change achieve?

There was considerable ambiguity around what had been achieved in this Knowledge Exchange initiative. For example, the university did not have financial systems established to measure accurately the contribution of this new area of work. Consequently there was a lack of clarity around what contribution to income had been brought into the university through this work, though there were also various assertions made over:

Sales value:

Pat: "Over the period, 2007 – 2010, we've done £750,000 of business that we wouldn't have done."

Loss-making:

Graham: "Because it's a cost at the moment...we're losing money from it, but, how much money, no-one can actually tell you...nowhere can I find anything that accurately measures this and records it."

Gaining reputation that lead to other programmes:

Mandy: "We have introduced new students, who wouldn't have necessarily had an exposure to university education; we've got ourselves a bit of a reputation for doing good quality stuff, certainly in the health sector...good for our social goals as an institution. On our Coaching and Mentoring module, we have people who don't have a first degree and found they're capable and competent to do a masters module, and some have gone on to do the masters programme...we give people a taste and some people think, 'I could go on and study – it's not beyond me' The work we've done with (names a client) has been recognised by the Strategic Health Authority, looks like we'll get (names a leadership programme) now."

Pat: I think the most important thing, the radical thing we've done, that wasn't there before is we've built reputation in 2 years for high quality stuff. I think we got the Social care contract on the back of what people were hearing we could deliver."

James: "It is radical in the sense that it steps beyond a very traditional, bureaucratic role of education, which this business faculty, and this department have been very good at, and we've grown and grown...but this has come along and challenges that bureaucratic view of Higher Education, and that's interesting – it's about self-confidence really. It's about the brand out there – do they see us as a genuine Business Faculty, or the boys from the Poly?"

Wondering about progress made:

Maurice: I'm hard put to identify anything else really distinctive against other institutions. If you look at what we're doing with regional health providers: very good work, interesting and quite distinctive...We don't have enough nationally-recognised activities in Knowledge Exchange. I don't see us being considered for big, private sector contracts.

The above comments partly reflect the lack of agreement about what the Knowledge Exchange work was initially intended to achieve. 'Make something happen' was achieved, but how much our growth was valued by leadership members with authority was always something of a mystery. Generally, the consensus was that we'd made significant progress in gaining income and reputational progress, within a limited branch of the public sector. We'd certainly not extended ourselves beyond this sector, and we'd also focused our effort on a limited geographical area - the region local to us. Interestingly, even this significant but limited growth has been enough to raise crucial organisational obstacles.

As a reminder, here are the formal research questions:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when 'acting into the unknown'?
- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when 'acting into the unknown'?

7.11 How do conversations between people sustain exploration when 'acting into the unknown'?

From this case, there are several findings related to this question. In the early stages of the work, there were many ideas generated and implemented. The growth of our business activity during this period points to good work being done, though it was not possible for me to be immediately present in all of these discussions.

In the work where I was more or less involved, there are three examples of novelty emerging: the management development programme and coaching and mentoring programme, described in stage 2; and The Department's Knowledge Exchange strategy described in stage 4. What typified these first two examples was that trainers had good access to external clients, and the opportunity and autonomy to experiment with approaches. In these cases, there was also the presence of key support, whether from a responsive client or from key internal stakeholders who trusted the trainers.

What characterised all three examples was the creation of formal or informal pairings. Also, in each case, there developed a quality of conversational life which was lively and spontaneous. The quality of relationships became such that anxiety was lowered sufficient to explore possibilities, and there was at least sufficient trust to continue exploring. Trust was essential, as a means of enabling the exploration of possibilities, whether these turned out to be successful in their implementation or not. While trust enabled spontaneity and exploration in conversational life, by itself it wasn't enough. Other factors were important and are described below.

When people did take action, often involving significant extra effort and risk, it was often associated with a passion for the work. Diversity was important – both in the sense of sufficient difference, and crucially, enough common ground, which was often expressed in terms of passion or values. In all three examples above, there were different styles and approaches helping to produce novel outcomes on specific pieces of client work. However, in The Department's Knowledge Exchange strategy example, whilst we produced a novel organisational document, we failed to find sufficient common ground between ourselves to fuel our efforts. In the context of the organisational power dynamics this was understandable, but it also led to our lack of sustained effort to bring about change. In the other two successful cases, my interpretation is that there was sufficient common ground as well as difference. In both successful cases, the common ground related to values held by the people involved, which were related to learning, and conferred a sense of shared identity.

In summary what helped sustain the exploration in conversations in this case was a foundation of trust between people which allowed for ongoing exploration, debate, confusion and the creation of new meaning. However, while trust was a necessary condition, it was not a sufficient one for sustaining exploration over time. For this to happen, sufficient difference as well as common ground was required between people, to maintain efforts. This common ground was based on shared cult values relating to learning, and provided a collective identity.

7.12 How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when 'acting into the unknown'?

There were several relevant factors here. Sometimes, the quality of conversational life was inhibited, as I've described in Stage 1, when people held ambivalent thoughts and feelings about the growing work. The impact of this was that we avoided holding conversations to broach difficult topics such as how to share

work among people, when we have not established criteria for doing so, when faced with increasing workload pressures. We found ourselves in a bind, which became increasingly difficult to loosen. Our ambivalence became manifest in a hopeless form of repetitive conversations which sustained the unhealthy cycle of a few people doing more and more work.

The ambivalence itself became more widely pronounced as the change became institutionalised in stage 3. As more people joined the initiative, and others within the organisation began to employ policies which seemed to indicate a lack of support for the work, so ambivalent feelings were generated:

Mandy: "There are times when it feels a real buzz, other times it's immensely frustrating. A hugely emotional experience."

and

Darryl: "It's a weird mix, really. I feel in constant paradox about the whole thing. I ebb and flow. It feels both exciting – so much potential – and immensely frustrating – all at the same time. Difficult to resolve because I keep feeling opposite emotions."

(I'm unclear to what extent people dealt differently with this mixture of feelings, and in which ways were some people able to note its presence and still take action, while it may have incapacitated others. It was a pattern I hadn't expected and merits further research.)

Identity was also important. The Department's Knowledge Exchange strategy work was an attempt to forge an agenda, and take mutual responsibility, rather than follow the organisational current. We created the document but failed in our efforts to influence important leaders. Our team enjoyed working together, had fun, developed sufficient trust to explore, but remained largely fragmented – the members seeing themselves as consultants before academics. Our inability to establish enough compelling common ground to fuel our efforts within the university led to a rapid tailing-off of our efforts to create a team strategy, once we'd hit a political barrier. This was an example of idea generation but not implementation.

The prevailing pattern of power relations, underpinned by ideologies, was an important inhibitor to exploration in conversation. One of the themes patterning our conversations throughout this time was the rigid pathway of communication from us at the front-line, to the faculty executive. This is partly described explained in stage 4, above, and was evident from the beginning to the end of the case.

Graham: "You've got the Knowledge Exchange team, then Estelle, Mandy, Pat works through Warwick. Almost a bureaucratic chain of command, of ideas – not so much a chain of command as a reporting and decision-making relationship. And I just don't think that helps."

Some people in the university had a very traditional approach to conversation. It would be carried out through the next person in the hierarchical chain.

Pat: “For some reason, Maurice never engaged properly with Mandy. I think to do with Maurice’s engagement with the world – almost status conscious and works through me.”

Sometimes this suited us, as for example, when we discussed how Pat may shield our more radical work from the executive, to allay their anxieties. Ultimately though, it contributed to our loss of power, as Pat’s contact on the faculty executive found himself applying for a different organisational role, and unable to provide Pat and us with meaningful senior-level influence. Our lack of association with influential leaders at executive level did hinder our connectedness, and we colluded in this pattern because we perceived the risk of challenging it too high. Amabile and Khairi (2008) discuss how success can encourage too much organisational scrutiny of ideas and projects, leading to undue risk-aversion. The implication is that sufficient autonomy is required to protect people involved in novel work, at least until some appropriate time for commercial realising of value. A traditional reading of this case would point to how well we balanced protecting our efforts from organisational scrutiny with making them accessible to important stakeholders. This case presented a deeper set of findings, illustrating the importance of complexity thinking. We sought, and were given, protection from adverse organisational scrutiny. This freedom helped us grow quickly without too much hindrance, and facilitators were able to put their energies and thoughts to imaginative use in work with clients. However, our isolation became more of a problem when we realised we had effectively colluded with a formal, excluding communication pattern and contributed to a lack of widespread political support. At this stage, it was difficult for us to change this pattern because of the risk we perceived in this. What the example points to is the ongoing social dynamics of the participants and how collusion, risk and social control were evolving features rarely discussed but key to actions taken and avoided.

The frustration with this lack of connection was contained in two ideas, the energy for which was ever-present, but which were not implemented. One was the thought of establishing the Knowledge Exchange activity as a separate, autonomous unit, either within or outside the university. The other was that of approaching the university vice-chancellor directly, to discuss how we may enlist organisational support in principle. Both of these were discussed from the start of the case to the end and neither were implemented. We colluded in a pattern of conversational rigidity and repetition. In this instance, we did so because we did not want to put ourselves, or our immediate managers, in a position of risk. And as the pressure on our activity grew through Autumn 2009, when this move would have been most apt, I deemed the risk too high, and the likely reward too low. These were two other ideas generated but not implemented.

Finally, our willingness to work hard for the cause, and to share ideas was affected as we brushed against the prevailing organisational grain, from Autumn 2009 onwards. There was often the potential for verbal conflict, increasingly so, as the work reached a scale that impinged on the everyday practices of departments within the business faculty. I don’t mean to over-state this when I talk of verbal conflict – what I do mean is that there was a distinct bodily feeling of the increase of some reputational threat or repercussion from being associated with Knowledge Exchange work. With a minority of notable exceptions, we failed to involve people from teaching and research, (and many associate suppliers), in Knowledge Exchange work. The relative impermeability of the ideological barriers made it very difficult to use the great

diversity that existed and gave little chance for the differences of opinion being amplified to produce wider change. The impact of this polarisation of difference on idea flow was that it reduced people's will to devote their discretionary time to knowledge exchange work, as well as their preparedness to experiment with new ideas and take risks visible to others in the faculty. In the final few months of this case there began an un-dramatic slow stagnation.

7.13 Final case summary

7.13.1 Competing views of the nature of knowledge

I believe that one of the fundamental ideological battles was around the nature of knowledge, though this was hardly ever articulated clearly. One the arguments suggested that Knowledge *Exchange* implied a swap of knowledge between client and staff, offering learning to be brought back into the university and integrated into teaching and learning. This view suggests that knowledge is an object that can be bounded, stored and accessed. Another view was expressed by one of our heads of department in the Business faculty (already expressed on an earlier page)

Rob: Why might an academic put more value on research?

Rhian: ...Both are ways of generating new knowledge, but they're a different kind of knowledge. For some academics, it's being independent, not swayed by business, standing outside - the traditional role of being in an ivory tower.

This is a view of valuing knowledge from a position where a different knowledge can be seen and described. Again, the knowledge is external to the person, and, in this instance, is best viewed with disinterest. A complex responsive processes view of knowledge reaches a very different conclusion where knowledge is not separated on the basis of a subject-object difference.

"Evolving public communicative interaction of gesture-response triggers shifts in private role plays and silent conversations. There is no storing and retrieving, only perpetual reproduction and transformation of themes made habitual by experience." (Stacey, 2001a: 96)

and later

"...knowledge is always a process, and a relational one at that...Knowledge is the act of conversing, and learning occurs when ways of talking and therefore patterns of relationship, change. Knowledge in this sense cannot be stored and attempts to store it in artefacts of some kind will only capture its more trivial aspects...the knowledge assets of an organisation, then, lie in the pattern of relationships between its members and are destroyed when these relational patterns are destroyed." (ibid: 98)

Harrison et al (2007: 333) recommend a new way of thinking about knowledge for business schools, considering how to serve executive education. In summarising the work of a series of authors, they state:

“What we are recommending is a shift away from the conventional (Western) educational practice that sees knowledge as primarily conceptual, and independent of the context in which it is acquired and used. This shift represents a “shift from Knowledge as a *stored artefact* to knowledge as *constructed capability-in-action*”...learning is viewed as a process that involves becoming a different person, with respect to others and the wider environment..., rather than as the transmitting and receiving of factual knowledge: “(Ultimately, learning is not a matter of what one knows, but who one becomes)”

With such fundamentally different conscious and unconscious images of knowledge, and radical implications for pedagogy, it is little wonder that knowledge became an ideological battleground in this organisational change.

7.13.2 Leadership, innovation and support

The success in growing the work meant that it could no longer continue to operate as it had in the early period: largely under the organisational radar, protected from premature scrutiny. As the Knowledge Exchange work grew it came to the attention of more powerful membership groups within the university. We found it difficult to continue the process of functionalising cult values on this wider scale – the preparedness for explorative conflict was not present. This contributed to the slow stagnation of Knowledge Exchange work, including a considerable fall in the contract value of work carried out, and a loss of status for Knowledge Exchange work within the host institution. The commitment and energies of those directly involved began to lessen as they experienced a fall in wider senior leadership support. Decisions needed to be made about to manage this activity, such as how to resource the work, especially in regard to leadership of the activity.

Graham: “...who is accountable really, for Knowledge Exchange?... Who will make the types of difficult decision that need to be made now?...I sense that there’s no-one really in charge of it...I’ve occasionally stepped in – ‘hold on there’s something wrong here’, call a meeting and get something going...as a result it’s got a bit more discussion going, but it’s still not that sense of: ‘we’ve got a full resolution on this’...The top is saying yay, the bottom, coal face, is saying yay, but the bit in between is either not on board with it or uncomfortable about how this thing operates.”

Decisions were also needed about how the activity could be structured most effectively:

Mandy “...if you look at where we’ve grown and the amount of resource we’ve got, it’s been quite a phenomenal success story. I think we have reached that level, where, if you were a commercial organisation, you’d either implode or find a way of adapting that suits that next stage of

development. We haven't wanted to challenge Heads of Department, or departmental structures, so we've created this behemoth, that's got far too many people involved in administering and managing, and not enough people involved in doing. And the people involved in doing, have to go through these people to get to those people...it's just disconnected and unwieldy."

We had reached the first crisis point of organisational growth described by Greiner (1972), which he labels a leadership crisis. He describes this point as requiring managerial expertise to manage a greater number of employees, as well as introduce business efficiencies to enable the organisation to grow further.

Leadership was present, and absent, at many levels through this case study. The initiators of the work, Pat, Mandy and Estelle took considerable career risks, at a time when Knowledge Exchange was not a recognised route for progression for academics. As the work progressed, and began to span the whole business faculty and beyond, so the issue of a lack of active leadership support at more senior levels came to be seen as vital for the people involved in the work.

Darryl: "I'm disappointed at - I suppose for me it's the incoherent leadership really. I've seen what (*names the vice-chancellor*) said, but I've not seen it flowing down into the faculties."

The broader organisational restructuring, within which our faculty sat, made this Knowledge Exchange initiative less of a priority than it had been previously.

Estelle: "There are mixed messages from the exec. Not so much about whether it is supported – no choice over that - but how high up the agenda is it?"

There was a lack of perceived support for those working 'on the coal face' of Knowledge Exchange. Since the scale of this initiative was new to the faculty, there was likely also a lack of experience in dealing with decisions such as how to accommodate and grow this activity, given the size it had reached. Instead, decisions were postponed and the work began to founder on the pressures already described. My findings confirm those of Aasen and Johannessen, (2009), who state that

"...innovation processes are encouraged based on expectations of improved business performance, yet are inevitably met with opposition because development and adoption of novelty inherently also involves risk. This makes innovation a top management responsibility (P. 221)

Chapter 8 - Cases Synthesis

8.1 Chapter Purpose

In my sense-making, one of the central features of complex responsive processes, is that it insists on staying close to the local detail of ordinary, everyday interactions. The idea of abstracting away from the local detail of cases analysed to provide a 'synthesis' of patterns through a complex responsive processes viewpoint provides a particular challenge. What value is to be gained from this? What use can be made from comparing a collection of narratives and reflections, each based on communicative interactions occurring within their particular contexts, in turn occurring in unique historical contexts, and understood through thinking in terms of temporal responsive processes? The aim of this synthesis is to examine the categories of experiences relating to the three separate case studies in order to provoke more reflections on the two research questions. Also, to consider what this means for the emergence of novelty, and finally, to consider the value of complex responsive processes thinking as a means of understanding the emergence of novelty.

Each of the narratives in the three case studies are ones in which I was directly involved. I have used comments from interviews to provide what I consider relevant contextual information and/or supporting comments to my analyses of sections or of overall cases. In this way I have tried to provide convincing accounts of the three cases, based on my reflections on my experiences.

Stacey (2011) distinguishes between first and second order abstractions. First order abstractions include the categorising of experiences, articulated in narrative form. The narratives already included here represent first order abstractions, selected from the raw material from the experiences of local interaction. Second-order abstractions include the mapping and modelling of relationships between categories of experience. Typically, this seeks to simplify and standardise experience for the purpose of control and improvement.

The interpretivist foundation of this research work points to the conceptual limitations of generalising from these cases to other organisations. The aim of this synthesis is not to draw conclusions about what may 'work' elsewhere. First order abstractions necessarily involve immersion and abstracting activities. For example, my immersion in the experiences of the work in each of the cases here provided raw material for me to select categories of those experiences to include in the narrative accounts. My reflections on those events led to me categorising types of experience as relating to 'power relations' or 'trust' or 'diversity', and so on. This has also been a social act, as I have sought to confirm the persuasiveness of my narratives with others who were also involved in those events.

Table 5: Summary - Research question 1: How do conversations between people sustain exploration when ‘acting into the unknown’?

Case 1: Ideas Exercise	Case 2: Children and Young People Services	Case 3: The Business School and Knowledge Exchange
<p>An externally-imposed challenge – the Ideas Exercise - increased the quality of conversational life. However, this increased fluidity of conversation was not, by itself, enough to contribute to the emergence of new meaning, expressed as new and useful ideas.</p>	<p>Trust was an essential, but not sufficient, condition for the risks taken in the final sessions of the programme. By reducing anxiety levels, it made it possible to continue with the exploration of possibilities. This was true for facilitators and participants.</p> <p>The emergence of a common team identity, centred around shared values of clinical excellence for children and young people, provided drive, energy and excitement for improvement.</p> <p>The presence of a formal organisational requirement for creative thinking, to face the challenges described at the start of this case, was not enough to bring about the productive exploration of options. In this example, novelty in conversation only emerged once the group had established sufficient trust and common ground between themselves.</p> <p>The build up of trust through the leadership programme gave a foundation of safety for exploiting differences in personal styles and approach. The discussion and exploitation of personal difference, even in small groups, contributed strongly to resultant change. (However, from a methodological point of view, much of this use of ‘difference’ was reported through interviews and some of it was observed directly. More research is needed to understand how ‘difference’ contributes in practice to the exploration of novel approaches.)</p> <p>The in-the-moment awareness of this spontaneity of conversation reinforced the pattern, as team members enjoyed the experience of being part of the conversation. Positive feedback loops helped reinforce existing strong conversational dynamics.</p> <p>Support from team members, and from senior organisational leaders, seems to have helped people take action in a context of high uncertainty.</p>	<p>The quality of relationships became such that anxiety was lowered sufficient to explore possibilities, and there was at least sufficient trust to continue exploring. Trust was essential, as a means of enabling the exploration of possibilities, whether these turned out to be successful in their implementation or not. (A notable point here is the frequency of people in pairs where the above conditions apply.)</p> <p>Trust by itself was not enough to fuel novelty. Diversity was important – both in the sense of sufficient difference, and crucially, enough common ground, which was often expressed in terms of passion or values.</p>

Table 6: Summary - Research question 2: How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when ‘acting into the unknown’?

Case 1: Ideas Exercise	Case 2: Children and Young People Services	Case 3: The Business School and Knowledge Exchange
<p>High anxiety levels, low trust and low common ground lead to the collapse of a working group.</p> <p>A clash of ideological views made it difficult to reconcile cult values of clinical delivery, with the norm of attending the programme. This contributed to the emergence of inclusion-exclusion dynamics. Concern about the aims of the Ideas Exercise and fears of harmful consequences meant that many course members limited their efforts to producing good-enough ideas. Idea generation was limited</p>	<p>People’s in-the-moment awareness of inhibition in group conversation, became a source of concern and embarrassment as we tip-toed carefully with each other, trying not to make an anxious situation worse. Awareness of the poor quality of conversational life reinforced anxiety and further inhibited conversation.</p>	<p>The quality of conversational life was inhibited when people held ambivalent thoughts and feelings about the growing work. The impact of this was that we avoided holding conversations to broach difficult topics such as how to share work among people, when we have not established criteria for doing so, when faced with increasing workload pressures. We found ourselves in a bind, which became increasingly difficult to loosen, and we contributed to the tightening of this bind.</p> <p>Identity was an important element in The Department’s Strategy work in stage 4. Our inability to establish enough compelling common ground between team members was based on our identities as ‘consultants first, academics second’. We were too fragmented to maintain our resolve once we encountered resistance to our strategy proposal. This was an example of idea generation but not implementation.</p> <p>A critical point in this case was that the prevailing pattern of power relations was an important inhibitor to exploration in conversation. Power configurations were experienced as inclusion-exclusion dynamics in conversations. It was increasingly difficult for members of the knowledge exchange team to challenge this prevailing pattern because of our imagined repercussion for our roles and well-being. As the knowledge exchange activity grew and challenged the prevailing power relations, so this sense of risk grew in accordance. We experienced a sense of stigmatisation as this dynamic grew stronger, and withdrew our efforts and energies so as to protect ourselves.</p>

8.2 Patterns in the Case Findings

As I started on these three cases, I could not predict what lessons would be learnt. It seems obvious to me that this is one of the risks of doing 'live', longitudinal research. Looking back now, I would say that case 1: The Ideas Exercise produced some, but limited, novelty, at least in terms of final ideas. Case 2: NHS Trust - Children and Young People Services was different, with the team choosing a novel approach to their final review day, as well as a wide range of internal process and service user improvements in practice after the leadership programme. Case 3: The Business School and Knowledge Exchange was also instructive because of the initial proliferation of ideas both generated and implemented, followed by a time of gradually increasing stagnation. There was a rise then fall in the amount of ideas being generated and implemented.

I am conscious that the act of summarising leads to the potential for further categorising and abstracting of experiences. Reducing the complexity of experiences leads me to tend to putting types of experiences into 'buckets'. For example, I am using the terms trust, diversity, common ground, conversational liveliness, etc. The question is: does categorising in this way lose the resonant meaning that has emerged from the full narrative? I am trying to guard against the funnelling down of rich experience to fewer words which may supposedly capture useful insights, but also risk losing the essence of meanings.

Further, it is impossible to isolate and contrast the impact of different phenomena such as trust, common ground, difference, values, support, conversational life and so on. In the moment of one's real-life experience, these phenomena are ever-present, influencing and being influenced by each other. There is a limit to which one can perceive the complexity of the dynamics in the moment. For me, it was in the process of reflection and analysis that I grasped their waxing and waning. The temptation then moves to second-order abstracting and to quantifying, measuring, ordering, and producing hierarchies of importance, all with a growing intent to establish control. I find this impulse to be a very 'natural' train of thought, which brings with it the risk of reifying categories, and losing the meaning established by understanding the crucial details of the original local interactions.

8.2.1 Trust and Diversity impact on the exploration and implementation of ideas

In case 2 the build up of trust was followed by the use of difference as well as the emergence of a strong common ground – consisting of shared cult values relating to the provision of excellent clinical care. The presence of trust, difference and common ground were associated with the generation and implementation of new and useful ideas. This set of dynamics was also the case in Stage 2 of case 3, with the leadership programme and coaching/mentoring examples. Where I had direct experience, it was clear that the emergence of trust was a necessary foundation for groups to explore possible options, in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity.

However, while trust was a necessary condition for novelty, it was not sufficient. To turn the foundation of trust into the excitement and hard work needed for seeing ideas through to implementation, what worked in these examples was the presence of different working styles, as well as sufficient common ground, represented as shared cult values. The emergence of a common ground was experienced as a cohesion, or

binding, of groups. In case 2 this was very pronounced and people reified this experience through the collective identity of 'team'. (There is a caution here about noticing difference and diversity. During case 2, I, my co-facilitator and team members experienced the expression of different points of view, which contributed to risk-taking and novel approaches towards the end of the programme. Other reports of team members finding 'difference' helpful came from later interviews. The processes by which 'difference' contributes to the exploration of novel options needs more research and understanding.)

Where common ground was not present to provide a coherence of identity, the presence of trust and difference of styles was not enough to contribute to idea generation and implementation. For example, in the KE strategy narrative in Stage 4 of case 3, we established sufficient trust to explore possible approaches. We generated a lot of ideas. We also had plenty of difference in working styles, though we failed to make the best use of this. What was missing was the sense of a resonant common ground, sufficient to hold us together and maintain our energies when we hit obstacles. An interpretation of this is that without the common ground that gives a group of people coherence and identity, they will fragment and dissipate when they attract inevitable barriers and objections to their ideas. People may also struggle to accommodate differences in personal working styles, since they have no broader aim that unites them and focuses efforts, aiding the acknowledgement and acceptance of sensitive personal differences.

An implication from this finding is that leaders should consider carefully the extent to which trust has been developed by people trying to develop innovative solutions. Under perceived pressures from time deadlines and from the evaluations of significant others, we may be tempted to omit consideration of this so-called softer human relations issue. If it is important for people to explore possible solutions through conversation, this research says trust is likely to be important. Having done this, leaders should also consider the extent of diversity in the group. Is there enough difference to stimulate explorative conflict? Is there enough common-ground to 'bind' people in ways that are meaningful to them and sufficient to withstand the inevitable objections to novel proposals? This is not to imply that these factors are 'controllable' but that leaders should at least attend to their presence or absence.

A further reflection from this research rather than a research finding is that, in these cases, it was easier to establish trust in pairings and small groups than across wider organisational units. It was also easier to establish sufficient common ground in a team than in a wider organisation. How might these dynamics work when the novelty required is on a larger scale, and even spanning across organisations?

8.2.2 The role of wider leadership support

Team members in case two had the explicit support of their immediate Manager and their Managing Director for their efforts to improve service to users. There was also an agreed and widely-understood agenda for change. By contrast, in cases one and three, there was a perceived lack of wider organisational support along and a lack of consensus as to the nature of the change sought. In case three, as the knowledge exchange activity grew and began to clash with existing power interests, the absence of perceived leadership support contributed to a decline in the scale of the activity. Similarly, in case one, the

uncertainty around the purpose of the exercise; the perceived punitive stance from members of the HR department, and the uncertainty surrounding the roles of the two senior directors led to a similar outcome: a minimising of risk-taking as well as a lowering of discretionary efforts and reduced generation and implementation of ideas. These dynamics point to wider patterns of power relations, embedded in contested, though rarely explicit ideologies. The experience of the people involved in cases one and three was that inclusion and exclusion dynamics hindered the development of fluid, spontaneous conversations. While senior leaders cannot engineer innovation efforts in such circumstances, they can be active and visible members of conversations in which they articulate support for innovation efforts. The team in case two perceived they had delegated authority to act, explicit leadership support and perceived fewer negative consequences from taking action in an uncertain context. Appropriate-level leadership is needed to support work, new to the organisation which requires novel approaches. This is a finding supported by previous research (Aasen and Johannessen 2009b).

8.2.3 Positive feedback loops and conversational life

I noticed a positive feedback loop that fuelled both poor and healthy quality of conversational life. Awareness in-the-moment of inhibited conversation and insufficient trust levels generated more anxiety, further inhibition and made fluid conversation very difficult. This pattern is very similar to the notion introduced earlier from Elias (1987) describing the difficulty of taking realistic action in situations of high emotivity. However, the opposite was found when awareness of in-the-moment of spontaneity and fluidity of conversation combined with sufficient trust to support risk-taking in conversation generated more excitement and further spontaneous involvement in conversation. These were not 'sealed' situations, but were open to influence from other factors influencing the conversations. However, in the short term, the positive feedback dynamic provided a source of energy to the conversational pattern.

8.3 Making a novel contribution to knowledge

This work has produced a novel contribution to the research field by focusing on the local detail of communicative interaction between people engaged in unusual organisational challenges, all of which required new and useful ideas. By working with detailed narratives which have been written to illustrate pertinent social dynamics in the three cases, I have drawn attention to how ordinary, everyday conversations in different settings have led to the exploration of possibilities and to the blocking of possibilities. Conversation itself paradoxically affects and is affected by patterns of power relations, trust, differences and common ground, and by perceptions of risk and safety in a context of unpredictability.

Through taking a complexity approach, it has also shown how ideas can emerge, be developed, implemented and adopted further without any single person being in charge of this process. Similarly, it has also shown how the exploration of ideas may be curtailed because of a range of factors intended by no-one. There are three ways in which this research had made a specific contribution to knowledge.

1. This longitudinal research has been unusual in that it has concentrated on both the personal and social dynamics of real people in health and education sector organisations who are trying to explore ideas and turn them into action. To my knowledge, this research has extended the application of complex responsive processes and focus on the detailed, lived experiences of people in the health and education sectors, who are taking action in situations where creativity and innovation is required.
2. The findings here have also contributed to understanding how conversational practices, and the contexts in which these are held, impact on the exploration and implementation of ideas. In particular this research has found a pattern of dynamics between trust and diversity – comprising both sufficient difference and sufficient common-ground between organizational members - that has contributed to the quality of conversational life, and which has had an impact on people’s willingness and efforts to explore and implement ideas. Trust was a necessary foundation for the exploration of ideas. However, for ideas to be implemented in these contexts of uncertainty and risk, trust alone was insufficient. What was essential was a combination of trust combined with Stacey’s paradoxical concept of diversity - sufficient common-ground and sufficient difference between organisational members. Where trust and diversity were present, exploration often flourished in conversation, with ideas being generated and implemented in several settings.
3. Finally, this research has made a methodological contribution through using Stacey’s five areas for focusing attention and applying these directly to cases requiring novel thinking and action. My view about the outcome of this experiment is that the framework, built on a wider complex responsive processes theoretical base, has provided a depth of compelling detail and insights which would not have been obtained through traditional lenses from the domains of creativity and innovation. I provide four instances in the section below to illustrate this point.

8.4 The value of taking a Complex responsive processes view

8.4.1 Example 1: Collusion in preserving power relations

Complexity is understood as a movement in time which is paradoxically stable and unstable, known and unknown, certain and uncertain, all at the same time. Healthy human relating has these characteristics, whereas relating which loses these can become ‘stuck’, habitual and inappropriate for dealing with the fluidity of ordinary, everyday life (Stacey and Griffin, 2005b). I think here of how, throughout case 3, those involved consistently discussed approaching senior leaders for help and support in our efforts but never did. Wider organisational support did have an impact on the eventual reduction of effort, will, risk-taking and the diminishing exploration of novel approaches. A mainstream reading of this may focus on Mumford et al’s (2002) concept of organizational outreach, through which leaders place an innovative activity firmly in the realm of the wider organisation’s strategy and goals. This would help gain support for continuity of the activity.

A complex responsive view brings something different to the analysis, as we see how individuals effectively colluded in the maintenance of prevailing patterns of power figurations. Through the lens of the living present, insights form showing how people involved made the decision not to challenge existing power patterns and therefore not to approach and talk directly with senior leaders. I did so because of the potential negative consequences for me and others in doing this. I selected accounts from the past and constructed imagined scenarios of the future, which affected my actions in the present. This happened through 'shadow' conversations with others. The lived reality of this was messy, with wonderings of what may happen if we took risky action into the 'unknown' immediately countered as we imagined a 'known' response. Concerns for our reputation and career prospects, as well as for those of intermediate managers whom we may bypass, immediately came to mind and acted as a self-regulating device, whether privately in my own mind or spoken publicly with others. The point being: we were complicit in reproducing existing patterns of power relations, for better or worse. This dynamic held over a period of two and a half years, albeit sporadically. A reading of the case from the mainstream literature would not show this insight, but a complex responsive processes approach does. It raises the question for situations where novelty is being sought: how can people notice conversational patterns which they are reproducing, and which may be unhealthy for themselves and others in the organisation?

8.4.2 Example 2: Local interactions emerge without a blueprint

People interact with each other in ways that are *self-organizing and emergent*. Coherence arises through their interactions, based on local organising principles, and through these local interactions a widespread coherence emerges. This happens without a blueprint or plan for this wider patterning to take place (Stacey and Griffin, 2005b). In case three, stage 1 I describe an example of working with Neil and Cheryl on a leadership programme. The outcome was judged to be successful by Cheryl, the client, and the process of working with Neil and Cheryl was instructive. From a mainstream literature point of view, I may focus on concepts from Ekvall's (1996) theory of a climate to support creativity and innovation. This is an approach which looks at environmental factors within the organisation that inhibit or support idea flow. In particular, I would point to the concept of freedom to act and make decisions, and illustrate how Cheryl quickly granted this authority to Derek and me. I would also look at the concept of idea time and relate this to our efforts in the design of the programme. These concepts would no doubt lead to a prescription for repeating such dynamics in other settings.

From a complex responsive processes point of view, the focus is much more on the lived experience of working with Neil and Cheryl. Through iterations of experience together there emerged a pattern of working whereby we introduced real, timely and relevant challenges to the group, in the hope of helping them grow stronger. We brought these challenges from the organisation 'onto' the programme. There was no blueprint for doing this, and, indeed, we had accepted the programme with its already-designed structure at short notice. However, our way of working, as a group of three, emerged without planning or foresight, but as a jointly constructed outcome of our experiences in working together. Differences between Neil and me were instrumental in us considering new approaches to this programme, as we both found ourselves considering methods which were new for us. Novelty arose from unscripted local interactions and developed a pattern which became repeated several times through the programme. This raises the matter

of how little control was enjoyed by any individual contributor, but how control became experienced more as interdependence with accompanying enabling and constraining attributes. From this viewpoint, the replicability of the experience is impossible to conceptualise and enact, though learning did take place between the people involved.

8.4.3 Example three: The evolution of a Social Object

Social objects can and do *evolve*. As manifestations of generalisations, cult values and social objects are never sustained in the same way, though they have the characteristics of seemingly stable social phenomena. They are subject to ongoing negotiation and difference, expressed through conversation. The non-linear nature of human interaction means that gestures and responses are never predictable, and spontaneity, improvisation and difference may mean that small differences are amplified and these social phenomena change (Stacey and Griffin, 2005b). In case one, the leadership programme itself can be viewed as a social object, where types of behaviour can be anticipated fairly accurately in advance, based on the presumption of a common-enough understanding of how one is required to behave at such events. In case one, the programme itself changed with the introduction of the Ideas Exercise and changing views as to what was now expected. A mainstream reading of this may use Wallas' (1926) evocation of the creative process. In particular, the first stage of preparation may be cited here, since the group experienced confusion as to the exercise's aims and the Director's intent. A clarification of what was required from key stakeholders may be prescribed as a necessary step in focusing actions and reassuring participants. Oldham and Cummings (1996) argument that the work itself must require novel ideas could be included here and, in the absence of compelling reasons as to why creative ideas were needed in the first place, we may infer that this argument needed to be won before the group channelled its creative efforts more productively.

From a complex responsive processes view, instead we focus on the impossibility of foreseeing the interpretations of gestures and responses. A finance director's wish, mediated through communication by course trainers, was interpreted by the group in unanticipated ways. Subsequently, conflict, negotiation and the amplification of small differences, in a context of broader ideological incompatibilities, resulted in a pattern of inclusion-exclusion dynamics which had a detrimental effect on the motivation for idea generation and idea development. A small change contributed to a much broader change though it cannot be said to have intended or designed these larger changes. This raises the issue of how can people remain involved in conversation with each other, trying to understand each other's wishes and intents?

8.4.4 Example 4: What is an idea?

Traditional models of creativity and innovation processes assume or state that ideas flow through various conceptualised stages, being generated, refined, developed and improved ready for survival once they encounter the challenges of implementation and wider adoption (Wallas, 1926, Spearman, 1931, Osborn, 1953, Young, 1965, Koestler, 1969, Tidd et al 1997). This thinking reifies the concept of idea and its struggle, bringing to my mind salmon swimming upstream to spawn... In effect these models reify the concept of the idea, focusing attention on the idea's struggle for survival at various points of challenge.

As a reflection from this research, rather than an instance from a particular case, the complex responsive approach treats ideas differently. The approach does not pay attention to the entity of the idea but to the experiences of people involved in interactions in a context of acting 'into the unknown'. The focus here is on the people and the attractor patterns or themes that emerge, are sustained and may wither in conversations. It must have some reference to a perceived challenge or opportunity and, presumably must engender excitement or resonance about problem-solving. From a complex responsive processes viewpoint then, an idea can be defined as: the joint creation of meaning, new to the particular context, which is perceived by the people involved as having potential to solve or contribute to solving a perceived problem or opportunity.

8.5 Summary

This chapter has drawn together a set of findings from this research. It has discerned a novel contribution to knowledge and also reflected on the role of the complex responsive processes in helping us understand the messy lived realities of people engaged in innovation activities. The final section of this paper focuses more on my reflections on my experience of having done this research.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

In this chapter I reflect on several aspects of learning from this doctoral research. I review the contribution to knowledge this research has made, as well as the limitations of the research, and the questions it raises for further research. I reflect on the contribution realised by taking a complex responsive processes approach to understanding innovation in these cases. I consider what have been the generalisations across the three cases in this study and the implications of these for both my practice and further research.

9.1 A contribution to knowledge

As a reminder, my two research questions were:

- How do conversations between people sustain exploration when ‘acting into the unknown’?
- How do conversations between people revert to habitual and repetitive practices when ‘acting into the unknown’?

This is not to suggest that stability is ‘bad’ for the emergence of new meaning, understood as “innovation”. Cases 2 and 3 highlighted examples of the emergence of new meaning in their contexts, and I was involved in conversations characterised by the simultaneous presence of both stability and novelty. My interpretation of this was that talking about familiar conversational themes, in ways that are understood and accepted by participants, provided a familiar-enough grounding for further conversations to take place, and which sometimes led to new and original conversational themes being developed.

Phillips and Pugh (2000) describe the various forms of making an original contribution to knowledge. Here is my summary of the original contribution to knowledge from this research identified in the previous chapter:

This longitudinal research has been unusual in that it has concentrated on both the personal and social dynamics of real people in health and education sector organisations who are trying to explore ideas and turn them into action. To my knowledge, this research has extended the application of complex responsive processes and focus on the detailed, lived experiences of people in the health and education sectors, who are taking action in situations where creativity and innovation is required.

This research has found a pattern of dynamics between trust and a paradoxical concept of diversity comprising both sufficient difference and sufficient common-ground between organizational members. In this research, trust was a necessary foundation for the exploration of ideas. However, for risks to be taken and ideas to be implemented, in these contexts of uncertainty and risk, trust alone was insufficient. The quality of conversational life flourished where both trust and diversity were present, and ideas were explored and implemented in several settings. To my knowledge, this is the first time this piece of knowledge has been articulated.

Finally, this research has made a methodological contribution through using Stacey’s five areas for focusing attention and applying these directly to cases requiring novel thinking and action. This framework is founded on the many aspects of theory from complex responsive processes and has provided a depth of compelling detail and insights which would not have been obtained through traditional lenses from the

domains of creativity and innovation. This is the first time this framework for focusing attention has been applied in this way to understanding creativity and innovation in an empirical setting.

9.2 Limitations of the research

The research produced here took place in United Kingdom public sector organisations. The research makes no claims for a generalisability of results, but it must also be pointed out that organizations in health and education may attract people with an unusual homogeneity of values. If so then the findings here, which detailed the criticality of having sufficient common-ground, often based on shared values, may be difficult to repeat elsewhere. How easy is it to establish a common ground, to fuel energy for improvement, in other sectors?

Also, though some direct evidence was observed of how difference between people aided the exploration of novel options in group discussion, many comments about the use of difference were obtained through interviews. More examples are needed through direct participative involvement to understand how difference between people contributes to the emergence of novelty.

9.3 The value of complex responsive processes for understanding creativity and innovation

In the previous chapter, I gave some examples of specific instances when this approach has brought a different reading of narrative, with the likelihood of different foci for ongoing attention. More generally complex responsive processes theory has proven to be a useful lens for making sense of innovative activities in organisations. The emphasis for me as a researcher has been on my simultaneous involvement in and detachment from ongoing work in which novelty was both an already-existing aspect of the situation and an expected 'output' from the ongoing work. Through paying attention to processes of human communicative interaction and noticing the patterning of these conversations, as well as the contextual factors affecting them, I have gleaned insights as to the nature of conversations which sometimes support the exploration of new meanings and sometimes characterise conversations that revert to already-understood habitual meanings.

From a methodological angle, the conceptual framework I have used in this research has, I believe, been tested for the first time. It is not a management tool, or a prescription for an organisational ill. Its utility lies in focusing attention on areas central to complex responsive processes thinking. In this study, all parts of the framework were useful, though some were more prominent than others. For example *The Quality of Diversity* item appeared often in analyses of cases or sections of cases. By contrast, *The Quality of Unpredictability and Paradox* appeared much less frequently. Possible explanations for this include the genuine idiosyncrasies of the cases and/or my data-perceiving and/or data-sifting capacities as a researcher. Overall, I believe the framework has merit as a 'containing device' which allows the depth of complex responsive processes theory to be brought to bear.

9.4 What I learnt from this research: generalising from the particulars

9.4.1 As a learning researcher

There were several key aspects to my learning through this research. First, doing the research was not a neat, linear experience. My research questions were influenced by my experiences in having started the cases. Data collection took place over the life-time of the cases. I noticed emerging ideas and patterns, wrote them down and these influenced my subsequent perception of 'data'. Data collection influenced my perception of data trends which influenced further data collection! What I collected was not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but my notes comprised my sense-making reflections from actively-constructed conversations of which I was a part.

Furthermore, I note from a journal I kept to record reflections on methodology that: "The ethnography – my experience of it – has changed my focus." This refers to the challenge given to me in progression exam from Ann Parkinson: "What are you passionate about?" At that stage I was pursuing this research from a more positivist, or realist, position. I think she detected some tension in my thinking. She certainly got me thinking about my research. Another note in the same journal concludes: "I am passionate about the micro-processes of relationship." By this time I had been introduced to complex responsive processes and was on more solid ground.

I found that through the process of interviewing I became clearer at knowing and getting what I wanted. This included both becoming clearer about the data itself and becoming more relaxed about allowing people's stories to go where they may, in the knowledge that, usually, they would touch on relevant issues. If they genuinely did not, we would start again, with a request from me for another story example.

As a part time researcher I realised that this type of explorative research can produce an intimidating amount of data for analysis. Being open-minded about types of data to collect was sensible but had its repercussions in sheer volume of data to sift through and analyse. I began to realise that my style is to accept open-endedness and ambiguity, and I feel quite comfortable with this in many situations. However, having deadlines for data analysis provided a greater impulse for me to focus and that included sharpening the research questions, as well as the items that were critical for inclusion and those less important. I also learnt the value of selecting a conceptual framework as a means for selecting 'relevant' data. Through all this I learnt something about me and which aspects of the research process felt more and less 'natural'.

What is relevant here is that I run a business and have a family. Our two children were three years old and just-born as I started this research. Life is full. I learnt that, as well as focusing on criteria for inclusion and exclusion of data, the only way to proceed with a large volume of data is *one step at a time*. This sounds a cliché but it came to be a very motivating mantra for me. The value was huge to me of discovering that I was making progress. Repeated early morning sessions of 06.00 – 07.30 soon proved their cumulative worth.

I also became convinced of the value of keeping journals. Not only for the discipline of keeping field-notes to aid later reflections, but because keeping autoethnographic-style notes prompted several insights that may not have occurred otherwise. For example, during case 3, as we entered the phase described as *Stagnation* I noticed how I was more reluctant to share and my ideas. My energy and motivation declined and I'd often leave work feeling tired. I was less interested in submitting and raising ideas because of an increasing ambivalence about the work. I wondered if this was true for other people, talked about it with some close colleagues and found it was for some people more than others. It is difficult to observe the absence of behaviours, so this insight may have been lost without the discipline of keeping a reflective journal.

My feelings were frequently ambivalent about doing 'live' research. On reflection, I suspect it is something of a baptism of fire to apply complex responsive processes thinking as a doctoral student. It was certainly a challenge: exhilarating at times and captivating. While I was aware of doing what I could to reduce risks to my colleagues, I also exposed myself to risks. Any research that provides useful insights from a complex responsive processes approach is bound to raise risks for the researcher. My Director of Studies gave good advice in calling an end to the research in case 3: emotions were beginning to run high.

9.4.2 Changing practice as a working consultant

What am I trying to achieve as a practicing facilitator and consultant in my work? I have considered this question for the cases described in this research, while, at the same time, noticing with heightened awareness my work with other group cases in my ongoing practice. I am trying to help people continue their exploration together in conversation, so as to help them create new and useful thinking. I am also trying to help people pay attention to what helps them continue to explore options in their conversations. Also, I conceive of my work as involving drawing people's attention to what contributes to them having the will to take risks, show courage and give support to each other to experiment with new approaches. That is, having had some initial idea, what affects their choices to experiment and try it out?

Often, this work is taking place in situations where people have no 'script' or blueprint for action, and they are improvising as they go along. Sometimes the mere mention to the group of this requirement for improvising seems to lift some weight from their shoulders. As if they were labouring under the illusion that the answer must be 'out there' and their inability to discover it somehow reflected their own incompetence. More often now I simply tell people that what they are doing is new to their organisation and they are working together to craft something between themselves.

In the three cases, one commonly observed phenomenon was that when anxiety levels were too high, this inhibited exploration in conversation. It made it impossible to have a measure of spontaneity, and thereby use any potential diversity present. Talk often drifted on the tide of an uncomfortable cautiousness, and awareness of this pattern made me and other people yet more anxious, and so tightened the bind of the process. In other words, awareness, per se, wasn't always a good thing! Sometimes, when anxiety levels were too high, a break from collective conversation was necessary before we could look with some

detachment at the processes of working together and how these were affecting our practice. I have described in some detail that trust was required for ongoing exploration and that sufficient trust and diversity were required for ideas to emerge and be implemented. In my role as consultant I have noticed complex responsive processes impact on my thinking in several ways. First, I think more fundamentally now about relationships between people. In work situations where people have no script for action I am more attuned to the presence of anxiety and trust and try to be mindful about what helps people simply bear anxiety enough and continue talking.

Stacey (2011) indicates that how organisations view paradox has powerful implications for creative novelty. He describes paradox as the presence together, at the same time, of self-contradictory, essentially conflicting ideas, none of which can be eliminated or resolved (2011: 36). He contrasts this with people viewing their situation as involving dichotomies, dilemmas or dualities. For example, if the view is that a paradox must be resolved, and their tension released, the underlying paradigm is one which promotes stability, regularity and predictability. If we accept that paradox cannot be resolved, only lived-with, then we may tolerate organisational circumstances of simultaneous regularity and irregularity, stability and instability, predictability and unpredictability at the same time. Stacey argues that such an acceptance can lead to creative novelty and this has a strong intuitive appeal for me. My thinking here has changed so that I consider more than I did previously how people are actively ‘framing’ the demands of their situation. Why do people describe their situation as involving, for example, a dilemma – involving equally unappealing choices? On a recent programme, a senior manager described the difficulty she faced in having to implement changes with which she did not agree, when at the same time she knew it was her responsibility to do so. The dilemma was: how to implement changes with which I don’t agree *or* to avoid doing so and punish myself for not meeting my obligations... This kind of either/or thinking was also encountered at the start of case two and, with my increasing awareness of it, I find it associated with ‘stuckness’ and, for the people concerned, a feeling of being ‘torn’ between opposing choices. My experience of such framing is that it reduces the energy for exploring options for change. In my practice I encourage people to notice that they are making an active framing of the situation, and to pay attention to the effect of doing so on their capacity for exploring new meanings. I also encourage them to consider alternative framings of their situation, such as accepting prevailing paradoxes, without attempting to ‘solve’ them.

I have also paid more attention to the work of Isaksen et al, (2011) who talk about *Janusian Thinking*:

“...he had to look in two opposing directions at the same time. As the god of doorways, he looked outside and inside at the same time.” (p: 23)

The authors link this *active and simultaneous consideration of opposites* (p:23, *ibid*) to be a significant part of understanding the creative process.

In summarising what value I may bring through doing my work, I separate out three conceptual levels. First, sometimes it is apt to be task-based and provide a suitable task-focus for the group to do the work. This could mean ‘real’ work activities brought by the group, or activities designed to elicit some meaningful learning. Secondly, reflection-based work focuses on thinking about how we are doing the work together and what we’re noticing through this reflecting. Here, people are likely to notice patterns of behaviour and

maybe underlying thoughts, and to decide to what extent these patterns are serving them productively or not. For example, in the Chairs Exercise in case two, several group members expressed impatience with their habitual caution and unwillingness to 'seize the day'. They galvanised group members and, somehow, this made a dramatic difference to the group. Thirdly, reflexivity-based work attends to the patterns of what we're noticing when we're look at how we are reflecting on doing the work. For example in case three, stage four, the attempt to create a set of priorities for our knowledge exchange activities foundered when our team encountered significantly different wishes in other parts of the organisation. The patterns of our regular talks about this helped us generate the insight that our real battle was with others in the broader organisation. This was a reflection on our practice. We then failed to explore in any sustained way the uncomfortable question of *were we really prepared to do something about this?* Our reflexivity – a turning back on ourselves – stopped at the point where we may have explored why we honestly were not prepared to take the risks involved. For me, these three levels are conceptual ones rather than perceptual. When an activity is happening, I may have thoughts about more than one level at the same time.

These levels are also generalisations and making them specific has to be negotiated in particular contexts. I am also more attuned to the likely pattern that the proclaimed need for novelty likely arouses uncertainty and, in turn, anxiety. My experience is that people will most often avoid the active processes of reflecting on their work and how they are doing it, unless they have a powerful and urgent reason for doing so. Leadership programmes can provide this reason. They can be a forum for conversations to take place, once sufficient trust exists. (They can also be a place of unacceptable power differentials which can raise fear levels and inhibit conversations – see below in this section.)

This research has made me think more about change itself. I have reflected that perhaps I have been guilty of being swept along previously with the notion that change was exciting and to be embraced, as long as it wasn't too punitive for me and others. The world of learning and development – my field of work – is concerned with change for people. It is often justified by reference to necessary organisational change for survival. Now, I consider change more at the level of personal and collective identity. I recognise that change brings ambivalent feelings for many people, and often brings disruptions in how they see themselves, and how they see themselves in relation to others. Change may well disrupt their network of work colleagues. I wonder about the ethics of learning and development professionals bringing people together for change programmes and often leaving people to adjust afterwards, on their own, to the (perhaps unexpected) consequences of those programmes.

The research has changed me to some extent. I have appreciated the value of writing. I have had a growing sense, through the processes of reflecting and writing, that I was becoming myself – or some version of myself I had previously imagined I could become. A quote came back to me from a newspaper interview with Zadie Smith:

"The very reason I write is so that I might not sleepwalk through my entire life." (Smith, 2011)

Finally, I have a changed view of power. I understand it now from Elias (1991) point of view as being a relational concept. Power is not power unless recognised by the people involved. And the basis of power is need. As an illustration, I was co-delivering a recent leadership programme in the United States. Day 1 had

finished and had been mixed. We had asked a group of 30 or so people to work on a 'live' case study for an overseas school in Kenya. There was some pressure on the group because they were due to present their ideas to the Kenyan client on the following day. The overall group had divided themselves into 5 working groups, and we had encouraged them to collaborate since tasks overlapped with each other to some degree. We had told the group that, at the end of tomorrow, there would be a process of feedback-giving and receiving between themselves. They would choose the areas on which they wanted feedback. A small number of people in the room seemed to be uncomfortable and maybe suspicious of our approach. There was a generalised feeling of anxiety in pockets of the room.

I fell asleep that night and woke up at 04.00. I had awoken from a dream in which I got 'stuck' in a tight, revolving door, carrying on my shoulders a friend's child. We were now stuck, with him sitting on my shoulders and no room for manoeuvre. It would be very uncomfortable, even scary and no wonder I awoke. As I thought of going back to sleep, the leadership course came to mind with its unsatisfactory outcome from that day. I suddenly thought that these people felt trapped on this course. Their organisational client was in the room, two consultants had appeared from the UK, whom they did not know, and pressure was building for tomorrow. They were trapped in an anxious situation, which, to make matters worse, was a leadership programme for aspiring senior leaders: they could not leave for fear of embarrassing themselves and upsetting their career chances. I recognised the power we held and which I had previously not acknowledged. I wrote some notes with ideas as to how to reduce the pressure for them tomorrow. With my co-trainer, we took some steps around this immediately with the class, and the day was markedly more comfortable. I believe that thinking about complex responsive processes has made me more attuned to power in relationship.

9.4.3 Gaps in the research - further issues for investigation

I started this research, placing it within the domains of "Creativity" and "Innovation". I think of these terms now, from a complex responsive processes view, as being reifications, along with their accompanying concepts of "ideas", "generation" and "implementation". Having completed the research I think much more centrally about humans conversing with each other, the quality of that conversation and whether or not people remain in the conversation. I also see the emergence of innovation as being much messier, less linear and more paradoxical than I had done previously. The focus shifts to the micro-level as we take part in a think about the intricacies of human communication. In this messiness there are patterns to be found. Taylor (2011) refers to how communication practices build a transactional constituency, brick by brick, like all regular ongoing processes, exhibiting regularity, recursivity, and pattern (p: 1289).

It is important to note that little research has been done in the overlapping areas of complexity and the empirical study of the practice of innovation. I do not propose that a single, unifying theory will emerge from pursuing research that builds upon this work. What is striking though is that there are some consistent themes emerging through two or more of these cases: power in relationships; identity and belonging to more-or-less-clear membership groups; the paradox of new meanings emerging through conversations that were simultaneously characterised by sufficient stability; common ground, often based on values, providing

a coherence for a group of people, and its absence contributing to fragmented efforts; in cases one and three innovation resulted in constraint, as wider power configurations made themselves known, dampening the effect of the recent innovation; leadership itself and its absence or presence, whether more locally or in the wider organisation; and finally, courage, often bolstered by support, was a regular theme when people were taking steps into what was, for them, the unknown.

While these were the consistently recurring themes, this research has highlighted several other questions which emerged unexpectedly and could not be answered satisfactorily. First, it is striking that quite a number of changes were associated with people working in pairings where trust was present and people reported differences in work styles and approaches. Is there something about a pairing being a pragmatic way of people providing support to each other when working on novel organisational challenges?

On the issue of scale, two of the three cases here involved comparatively small groups of people. In case three, innovation stagnated when ideological differences made collaboration difficult. More research is needed with larger groups of people to understand how complex responsive processes can aid our understanding of innovation attempts. This could involve intra-organisational initiatives as well as collaborations between people across organisations. In practice, this research may best be achieved through a research team, commensurate with the scale of the work.

Though two of the three cases in this study were set on leadership development programme, this research did not set out to understand how leadership development programmes act as a specific context for aiding people's innovation efforts. However, given that leadership development programmes have become an increasingly common part of business faculty offerings (Gill, 2004), there is merit and opportunity in understanding how they may provide space and time away from work pressures to help people consider the health of their current conversational patterns.

I find myself wondering about use of tools like creative thinking aids and their compatibility with complex responsive processes. I wonder how it is that, while being sceptical about the claims for these tools to bring results in predictable ways, I have sometimes seen them produce good results for people. I view management tools more now as ways of getting people talking, which may or may not bring positive results. I am more mindful of the spontaneity and fluidity of conversation to which the tool may contribute.

Finally, in summarising the overlap of leadership, complexity and innovation there are some key points to emphasise from this research. First, it points out the importance of appropriate-level leadership support for innovation. When people are working on novel challenges, without a script or blueprint that guides them, they are likely to experience anxiety as they act in a context of uncertainty and unpredictability. They are also likely to brush against the grain of vested interests of existing power configurations, which, in turn, will produce conflict and disagreement. Leadership support is likely to be important here. On the other hand, this research confirms the findings of Fonseca, (2002) and Aasen (2009b) who conclude that innovation is essentially unmanageable. A complex responsive process view brings to one's attention the multitude of conversations that are taking place – only a proportion of which we could ever attend and influence. It raises our awareness of how managers will inevitably be involved in and excluded from the shadow conversations which are an inevitable part of the emergence of difference in organisations. More

fundamentally it points out how no-one, leaders included, can 'control' the responses to their gestures in the never-ending swirl of conversational activity. The research has pointed to the essential interdependence of people in organisations, and has shown how ideas can emerge, be developed, implemented and adopted further without any single person being in charge of this process. Similarly, it has also shown how the exploration of ideas may be curtailed because of a range of factors intended by no-one. The question to guide further research is: how can leaders aid innovation efforts, with an enlightened acceptance of their own limitations?

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Appendices listing

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Appendix 1: Case 1: Leadership Development Agenda

Dates	Module title	Facilitators
29th August 08	Myers Briggs Feedback	Richard and Rob Sheffield
1st September	Myers Briggs Feedback	Richard
5-9-08	Programme introduction	Rob Sheffield & Richard
8-9-08	Leadership and management skills	Rob Sheffield & Richard Stone
17-9-08	Getting the message across in meetings and presentations	Rob Sheffield & Richard
26-9-08	Time management, delegation and coping with stress	---
8-10-08	Performance management	Internal staff
16-10-08	Team Development	Rob Sheffield
21-10-08	Planning staff development	Rob Sheffield & Richard
28-10-08	Recruitment and Selection	Internal staff
3-11-08	Appraisal Review process	---
14-11-08	Creative problem solving and decision-making	Rob Sheffield
18-11-08	Managing Finance	Internal staff
25-11-08	Managing Diversity	
1-12-08	Building a business case	Aileen and Rob Sheffield
16-12-08	Presenting a business case	Rob Sheffield
15-01-09	Programme review	Rob Sheffield & Richard

Appendix 2: Case 2: Leadership Development agenda

Element	Date
Days 1 and 2: Strategic leadership (1 st action learning set on day 2)	23-24/03/09
Day 3: Innovation and creativity	22/4/09
1 st Coaching day	13/5/09
Day 4: Writing a business case	4/6/09
Day 5: Leading my team (2 nd Action learning set in p.m.)	30/6/09
Day 6: Managing organisational change (3 rd Action Learning set in p.m.)	23/7/09
2 nd Coaching day	August 2009
Day 7: Partnership working	1/9/09
Day 8: Programme review - Planning ongoing team and personal development	30/9/09

Appendix 3: Case 2: Information and Consent form: - Children and Young People's Services

Information and background: Creativity and innovation have become hot topics in organizational life in advanced western societies. The unrelenting emphasis on performance improvement, driven by customer and patient demands, government targets, increased competition and market deregulation expectations, all combine to 'push' for frequent, and sometimes radical, changes in products, services, processes, as well as organizational forms. The majority of research in this area has focused on creativity at the individual level, or on strategic innovation at an organizational level. Additionally, much research has concentrated on idea generation, rather than generation and implementation. Little has been researched about the way in which innovation actually develops in organizational contexts. How does creativity and innovation emerge in organizations on important tasks, under real pressures?

My aim is to research into how people work together, in teams, when the task itself requires creativity - novel and useful ideas. Creativity may be needed through different stages of the work schedule: spotting opportunities; framing and defining problems; generating potential solutions; planning to implement; overcoming objections and gaining buy-in from important stakeholders. Creativity and innovation are likely to introduce elements of anxiety into work, partly through the demands of completing a challenging task, and partly through the likely upheavals to ways of working during implementing new and unfamiliar tasks. I'm interested in:

- The extent to which the quality of relationships impact upon the quality of conversations.
- The thoughts and emotions experienced in this work
- The extent to which people contain the anxieties of not-knowing, and either stay focused 'on-task' or, exploring new possibilities, or get diverted into less productive activities.
- What new and useful ideas emerge? When are these implemented, and when not?

This case study: From March – September 2009, --- has been working with the --- Children and Young People Services leadership team on a leadership development programme. The team itself has already stated "creativity and innovation" as being an important theme. Given a context of increasing expectations and the potential for increased rate of change, this is an apt case from which to study the inter-personal processes that help and hinder creativity and innovation. To prepare for our meeting, here are some likely areas we will cover. Any illustrative stories and examples you have, from your own experience, would be especially welcome.

- What has been your own experience of how the team members have worked together?
- What have been the highs and lows during the programme?
- How far have relationships between people helped creativity and innovation?
- How far have relationships between people hindered creativity and innovation?
- What examples do you know about of actual ideas emerging?
- Reflecting on these instances, what seemed to help?

We will elaborate upon and explore areas that seem fruitful, but these points may help you prepare as you wish. December 2009

CONSENT FORM

Project title: How complex organisational processes help and hinder creativity and innovation

Name of researcher: Rob Sheffield

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet, dated December 2009, for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary, that I will discuss what I want, and can withdraw if I choose.

3. I understand that direct quotes may be used when the research is written up, although they will be anonymised.

4. I agree to my interview being taped

5. I agree to take part in the above research

Printed Name of participant :

Date:

Signature:

Printed Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

(One copy for the participant and one copy for the researcher.)

Appendix 4: Case 2: Examples of changes implemented between September 2009 – January 2011**(illustrative, not comprehensive)**

Ref:	Description Idea or change
1	A service user offering. Revised speech and Language service which won a competitive tender process. Includes the workforce plan, telephone advice line, and the web site. (Eleanor and Mia)
2	Change in content and frequency of the leadership team meeting. (Mia)
3	Administrative process change - focused on safety for Health Visitor staff and families. Multi-agency risk assessment – cases with high risk for domestic abuse. (Izzy)
4	Introduction of a common staff development process. Group supervision using action learning sets. (Izzy)
5	Efficient service offering, with cost saving benefits: revised proposal for bedded respite unit. (Fiona)
6	Service offering simplification, using common paperwork across organisational units. “aiming high “project: children with disabilities, Young people going into adult services. Common approach for staff and parents meaning no need to use new file.
7	Service offering. Healthcare plans and competency development for nurses. Being piloted.)
8	Internal process improvement leading to better service to clients: HPV process. (Angela)
9	Introduction of common staff development: Process Group supervision using action learning sets. (Paula)
10	Administrative process improvement. Record keeping of training database for staff in children and family services (Paula)
11	Administrative process improvement. Record keeping and role definitions and training for staff. Health records for client contact from health visitors and school nurses. The conditions under which nurses could do a healthcare plan. (Lorrie)
12	Administrative process improvement. Introduction of resourcing process, for deciding what staff are needed, hours of staff, bands of staff in which geographical areas... Caseload waiting system (Trish, Mia and Lorrie)

Appendix 5: Case 3: Examples of changes implemented during case period (illustrative, not comprehensive)

Ref	Description Idea or change
1.	New Client service offering. New Msc programme. A partnership programme, cross-faculty, with input from health and social care clients.
2.	New Client service offering. Leadership programme with double accreditation. Parallel offering between HR and OS departments. Optional crossover for participants. Action learning mixed with classroom days.
3.	New Internal collaboration. Leadership development programme. Co-designed and co-delivered by OS and HR business faculty departments
4.	Administrative process improvement. Sharepoint for sharing materials.
5.	Client service improvement. Swipe card access for associates to executive development rooms.
6.	Internal administrative resource improvement. New colour printer
7.	New Client Service offering. MSc Coaching and Mentoring and executive development short course offerings.
8.	Change in resource allocation. Creation of internal suite of rooms to be executive development centre
9.	Change in resource allocation. Creation of a series of KE-dedicated roles, from October 2007 – ongoing.
10.	Role and structure change. Definition of OSKE roles
11.	New external collaboration. Setting up of an preferred suppliers network
12.	Communication events. Running of associate learning days
13.	Long-term collaboration between Health/Social care and business school faculties.
14.	Client Service offering. Collaboration between business faculty,, health and social care faculty Exeter University and the Kings Fund
15.	Introduction of new diagnostic in programme evaluation (SOQ)
16.	Training of internal staff in the SOQ

Appendix 6: Case 2: journal notes converted to analysis document

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document titled "process_reflections_transcripts - Microsoft Word" with the "Table Tools" ribbon active. The document contains a table with the following structure:

Doc title	Timing & quotes, inc. significant non-verbatim	Specific stories/narratives relating to idea generation, development and implementation and/or contextual pressures.	My interpretations of meaning of the data	Stacey analytical framework 1. Participation 2. conversational life, 3. how lived with, 4. diversity 5. unpredictability and paradox	Connection to other relevant theories	Other notes
	people in the team who do absorb the work and take it on? Are those people feeling taking it on without acknowledgement and without efforts to make improvements by band 8. I wonder what's being talked about, a risk of communication channels being blocked by fear of raising these things.					
Reflections days 1 and 2	18.40: Other reflections, 1 - observations at level of relationship. - and - There was a lot of laughter, and maybe humour. More than in other group. Could help with spontaneity -- be a route but I doubt it's manageable and controllable. 2- another thought is around issue of trust. Trust in order to take risks and try things out. And what relationships do I notice so far? - and - have worked with each other before - done training. Got sense in 1 st ALS			Humour - spontaneity linking to conversational life. risk-taking and experimenting. Below - diversity between - and - re: approach to idea generating.	Connect with Ekvall and others on humour and spontaneity. Goleman and 'leadership that gets results' and active style of manager.	

The status bar at the bottom indicates "Page: 9 of 38" and "Words: 9,040". The taskbar shows several open applications including "Full_draft - Micro...", "process_reflection...", "Document2 - Mic...", and "Capture a Screen ...". The system clock shows "11:38".

Appendix 7: Case 2, interviews transcribed and converted to analysis document

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document titled 'Wlits_PCT_IV_transcripts'. The ribbon includes Home, Insert, Page Layout, References, Mailings, Review, View, Acrobat, Design, and Layout. The font is Calibri (Body) size 10. The document contains a table with two main sections. The top section has a header row with columns for 'I/ycp code', 'Timing & transcription notes, inc. significant non-words, and timing locators', 'Record of specific stories/narratives relating to idea generation, development and implementation and/or contextual pressures.', 'My interpretations of meaning of the data', 'Stacey analytical framework', 'Connection to other relevant theories', and 'Other notes'. The bottom section contains a table with a single row of text. The text in the first column includes: 'it feels slightly better governance wise, I suspect that at the time we didn't feel we had the security in the organisation, when we were bringing 3 orgs together.', '26.00, [ycp]: can we take a few things bit by bit...for example, can we take the business case...the results came through, you'd got it...how new and different was it to have to go through that process?', '-: It was new to the org, not just the team...it was the first biggie for the organisation, and a real tester. I felt that I had this org eye looking at us, and success or failure.', '28.40: [ycp]: was it more good pressure or more undermining?', '-: no it was good, it taught me a huge amount: commissioners as customers – they hold the purse strings.', and '30.08,,: the 1st intro I had to a business plan was on the leadership course... I felt completely overwhelmed by what was expected. But -, you never, ever indicated that there was any pressure on me at all...we work quite differently... has this very, clear process we had to follow. I never thought about that, I'd have been dithering around.' The other columns in this section are empty.

I/ycp code	Timing & transcription notes, inc. significant non-words, and timing locators	Record of specific stories/narratives relating to idea generation, development and implementation and/or contextual pressures.	My interpretations of meaning of the data	Stacey analytical framework	Connection to other relevant theories	Other notes
				1. Participation; 2. connections life; 3. connections how lived with; 4. connections 5. unpredictability and paradox:		
I/V1	<p>it feels slightly better governance wise, I suspect that at the time we didn't feel we had the security in the organisation, when we were bringing 3 orgs together.</p> <p>26.00, [ycp]: can we take a few things bit by bit...for example, can we take the business case...the results came through, you'd got it...how new and different was it to have to go through that process?</p> <p>-: It was new to the org, not just the team...it was the first biggie for the organisation, and a real tester. I felt that I had this org eye looking at us, and success or failure.</p> <p>28.40: [ycp]: was it more good pressure or more undermining?</p> <p>-: no it was good, it taught me a huge amount: commissioners as customers – they hold the purse strings.</p> <p>30.08,,: the 1st intro I had to a business plan was on the leadership course... I felt completely overwhelmed by what was expected. But -, you never, ever indicated that there was any pressure on me at all...we work quite differently... has this very, clear process we had to follow. I never thought about that, I'd have been dithering around.</p>	The business case example	Nice exchange here, between – and -. Indicative of the nature of the relationship between them, and	<p>Anxiety - See the bit about pressure from - and from -.</p> <p>Diversity – here - point about "we work quite differently".</p> <p>- providing sufficient structure and - providing ideas.</p>	I/me – seeing oneself as an object (the org. eye below, Baby P)	Interview exchange here per se is good example of reason for choosing to interview in pairs. Gives something over and above the 'data' from a single person. Makes the interview a source of data itself, not merely data mining.

Page: 5 of 85 Words: 21,129 75%

Appendix 8: case 3: journal notes converted to analysis document

Document name and source	Time period covered	Data Themes covered	CRP (and other theory) links	Other notes
			Link here to two occasions on the day where spontaneity emerged: -'s constellation and my comment at the end that led to the umbrella concept.	
7 th December 2007-two month review of progress	October – December 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of topic areas. • A first KE meeting in October 2007. • Number of e-mails, and implications for quality of conversation • Limited degree of exploration of possibilities • Sheer busyness 		It's a summary reflection on the first two months. Lists activities. Multiple conversations. The impossibility of being involved in all of them, or even knowing what's happening.
UWE KE project – January 08	24/01/08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My reflections: it does feel good, most of the time, to have an active role in the KE group. It does confer a sense of identity. Some words from - to our KE group have stuck with me: <p>"I can look after the internal bureaucracy, so that you don't have to get involved. That's where I can add something valuable"</p> <p>"I want you to make something happen."</p> • What are some of the values of the group? I sense a reluctance to become embroiled in the internal systems and processes of the school. Are these abstractions? Saying more, I really mean we're avoiding the opportunities to bump up against reasons why our work may not be so valued. I sense this in me. So, something in our group that values independence and different-ness. A will 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something here about belonging. Also about different roles, and different focus – to be fair, PC 'stuck' to this to a high degree. • Values of the group, and link to ideology that separates us. • The ongoing issue of leadership, and clarity and visibility of leadership. • The issue of choosing, clarifying, prioritising. Such neutral terms, for the evaluative process of rating some tasks as more important than others. Actually a normative process, which carries a political edge to it. • Leadership and the moment: (Griffin, 2005 Page 10) what is being mutually recognised is the ability of the leader to articulate emerging themes, or deconstruct and present anew a theme that has become highly repetitive and so help the group to take the next step. • Foucault's view, (1964, as described in 	

Appendix 10: Case 1 - "How far does my write-up of the case resonate with your own experience?"

(Individual person's comments are separated by italics and non-italics.)

Sorry for delay...meant to read this ages ago...top of the head comments:

- Wow – I never knew what levels of excitement/anxiety were going on behind the scenes or that a quick feedback email could be of such use. No wonder you were pleased to receive it!
- Love your style of writing – it is engaging and the story really unfolds, as well as clear analysis, though have to admit to being more interested in the story!
- Does this story resonate? Yes....and makes more sense now that I have the full picture. Did you as programme lead deliberately withhold some of the difficult background on this ? And if so, was that so as not to make me and -- too anxious? Or have I just forgotten (it's a long time ago now)
- I can recall doing the spaghetti exercise with the group together with you and I can remember a sense that either the exercise wasn't quite right or there was a slight degree of tension, though I think people did enjoy it. Perhaps they were wondering what on earth they were doing in the room. Anyway, I know that this was my first bit of work with you so I was anxious about my own performance and hadn't really clocked perhaps as much as I might have done had I been more relaxed or not working with you for the first time....you were lovely of course in terms of being encouraging and relaxed yourself.
- The group that came up with the ---they really struggled to get going. In the end I think it was one of the guys who saw this an opportunity to get something he'd had an idea for a while off the ground....i.e. there were one or two who had more energy for this in their group. This is hazy, so can't vouch for its reliability!.
- I think our exercise (me and Rich) on values hit gold, because it created meaning for people – they could start to voice why they come to work and start to make some linkage with the programme. Totally agree that they felt they were treated like children by -- (and they were). It raises all sorts of issues about the commissioning process and our scope for giving people what they need rather than necessarily want. You did a great a job in managing these tricky dynamics.
- There was definitely a sense of fear around the creative ideas thing, not least because it was called 'dragons den' (was it not?)...the symbolism of this could perhaps be picked up on? Ie something riding on outcomes and not just the process (which I think you mention)
- I am reminded of the messiness both of the learning, as well as the creative process!

As promised, I have read this again today. As I mentioned to you this morning, there are some details I was not aware of – either because they link to aspects prior to my involvement or indeed because I was not so finely attuned to them as you were on the day. Notwithstanding this, there are a few things which come to mind which I will share. Ignore as appropriate!

I remember thinking at the time, that there was a clear issue around identity – in that for the most part, participants did not see themselves as 'managers' and there was a disconnect between Organisational and individual perspectives/ expectations of the role. This was evident by the overwhelming feeling that what they were doing was in addition to their role rather than an integral component. (There are of course also the

real issues of number of days over a short time & discretionary effort etc but you illustrate this several times in the piece). This was evident by the ‘them and us’ emotions which is still evident quite widely within the NHS at junior levels.

There is so much shouting out about the culture of the organisation isn’t there? Trust, suspiciousness, style of approach etc. The identity issue, the organisational culture paradoxes and the HR Dept’s sheep dip approach to ‘training’ rather than development reinforces some of the dissonance between message and medium.

There are several really important details you missed in your description of the venue (talk about message and medium!!) –the tea urn experience and the creaky door to name a couple! In seriousness though, one exercise we did introduce to try to support their identity with the Directors/Organisation and help them prepare for the presentation was to ask them to express what they knew as facts re the Directors attending and also, what would they want to hear from the presentation, what were their ‘buttons’ motivations etc.

Really excellent read Rob! For what it is worth, here are some observations, in no particular order of importance:

What made the differences in behaviour here?

- The core ideas?
- The mix of personalities?
- The mix of skills?
- A mix of disciplines?
- All of the above?

I recall the idea of presenting to an audience of senior managers in a ‘dragons den’ style set up was part of the original concept by the FD, together with the £20k ‘prize’ for successful business cases. My recollection was that it was this key idea that spooked the bulk of the group – rather more so than the idea of just presenting per se, or even of winning the possible £20k. The money idea was almost irrelevant to them – I don’t think this was a key motivator to them. However, I think the Dragons Den concept was a key *demotivator*. DD is a show that has connotations of humiliation and fear for entrepreneurs who get their presentations wrong. I wonder if the fear of failure, and fear of being aggressively interviewed by ‘dragons’ were the main demotivators? Once this idea and its attendant language was abandoned by the FD and MD after specific representation by you, the group seemed much more amenable to doing a presentation – as the prospect of failure and humiliation were diminished (or at least mostly diminished). You also promised to be on the panel, and these two ideas greatly appeased the group. They felt comforted that they would get support from a friendly ally, and they were less in danger of being humiliated.

One thing I was unsure about from the article was – what were the aims and objectives of the development programme in the first place? Aims – i.e. broad intentions. Were these to just give them extra knowledge as part of a general ongoing educational uplift strategy? Objectives – i.e. ‘SMART’ ... We know specific and

measurable development goals are based on proper TNA's, career conversations with their line managers, formal assessments, succession plans, key career stages triggers etc. Were these done for this group? I never got the clear message they were. I felt very unclear about the reason for their attendance – other than - it felt an imposed and forced attendance based on nothing more concrete than 'the HR teams bidding' – rather than the real needs of the attendees. This is why I personally felt unclear and unhappy about the programme – and we chatted a lot about this lack of clarification and the mechanisms for nomination. I don't doubt many of the group needed leadership development – but assessing need and evaluating learning were never properly set up or carried out.

'Trust' is a powerful lubricant in a group. Without it, communication becomes stuck. So trust is an important key element for group creativity and problem solving. I also believe there are two additional important elements that can play a key role in group dynamics but these are individually based – i.e. 'courage' and 'relational skill'. In groups, the presence or absence of 'trust' will play a significant role in the ability of a group to explore the unknown and the uncertain. However, an individual may also affect the quality of communication by having the *courage* to speak out and talk about 'the elephant in the room', to confront sticky issues etc. This individual (or individuals if you're lucky) also need 'relational skill' to do this well – a key missing attribute with --! Whilst he had some form of 'courage', it was often mis-applied and clumsily operationalised (in the main I think due to his lack of experience but more because of his low EI). Whilst -- and -- tried to keep the group moving, they lacked the courage to confront --, her issues, or their own needs, and they lacked the skill to do these tasks well. So in summary, my thinking is that group exploration needs: Trust (group element), Courage (individual element), Relational Skill (individual element)

At --, the way this programme was 'devised', 'sold' and 'delivered' concerned us both. It seems that a lot of training in organisations is variously viewed as Remedial – so attendees are treated like wayward children who need coercing (*e.g. how the organisation see's it – hence the clumsy efforts over attendance*)

Punishment – for not being better at what they do, so 'training' is seen as punishment by some for not being good enough (*e.g. how the attendees see it – hence in part, the reluctance to engage with --*) Rather than: Based on real need – so it's about applied learning to specific roles. 'Training' of course is only a subset of 'Development' - i.e. so where were the other support mechanisms? Coaching, Mentoring, Websites, Books, etc?

Also – our experience of the so called 'training facility' was very revealing about their attitude to development!!! There were so many rules when using their training facility. It really did feel 'remedial' at times! Locked doors that you couldn't get into /out of easily, no provision of simple tea making facilities (we had to bring our own tea, milk, sugar), we weren't even allowed to use cups upstairs, and there was a constant lack of pens, paper, or much help at all from the -- staff!! What does this set up say about the culture and mind set of those tasked with Learning & Development at --

My main topic of interest here is relational psychology as you know. So I was fascinated by your very thorough and insightful account of the experience. My thoughts here are - I wonder to what extent did 'personality' play on the success of the groups? I was only there a couple of times for the presentation prep but I was the one who sat in on the Sound Stage Group. Here are my observations: There were 3 of them –

2 ladies and 1 gent. I can't remember their names but I do recall the guy was a very hyper active /creative type. In psychological terms, I'd describe his personality as an Expressive / ENFP/ Resource Investigator. He was a very likeable chap and he was constantly on the go, brimming with energy and suggestions, and often made comments or took the lead on various tasks. He was the clear leader in this group from both an ideas point of view and a relational point of view. The other two were anxious Amiables / ESFJ's / Team Workers / Implementers. Good folk who preferred to follow rather than lead.

They were rolling along well, with the guy suggesting this and that when about half way through the prep work he got a message that his pet dog had escaped. He was very anxious and continued for a short while before deciding that he couldn't go on and simply had to go and find his dog, there and then. He excused himself and promised the group that he'd be back later. He never came back. Soon after he left, the other two gave up. The key idea was his and they didn't feel they had the vision or the drive to continue without him. In fact, they got very anxious about it and when they realised later in the afternoon he wasn't returning, they said they would prefer to join another group as they simply could not go ahead to present without him. I left them to make contact with the guy in the interim and offered to do some telephone facilitation if all 3 of them they could get together on the phone. They never came back to me so I assumed that the ladies got hold of the guy and they did their prep work well enough on their own. The point I am making here is that individual personalities (and skill) played a key part in the group dynamics which you refer to on Page 9 e.g. *"some were excited by the possibilities, some dissented, some were worried"*...

Appendix 11: Case 2 - "How far does my write-up of the case resonate with your own experience?"

Dear Rob, how strange! I have just been re-reading it as suddenly realised I'd missed the timescales - apologies. Am halfway through and certainly names need to come out but yes it is certainly resonating with me and interestingly now we are in the next organisational change it is proving very interesting and useful.

Dear Rob

I am so sorry that this has taken an age to come back to you. This is a fascinating and interesting read and some very interesting conclusions. I found your thought processes easy to follow as well as your reasoned conclusions. It did appear to tie in well with my reflections on the course and how useful the techniques and thoughts were in facilitating the same process on change management for the new SLT team. It gave me confidence that I could facilitate change within my own team, although I would have liked you and Jane to have facilitated that as I am less skilled and too closely involved...but hey I have had a go at it.

Notes for Rob

What I notice reading this perhaps for the third time – each time I realise afresh what an interesting process it was working on this programme – and how great to reflect on it at different times because of Rob's research. I view the story with a systemic lens and with the analytic tool of the four underpinning orders used in constellations. Order of **time** – for this team and over the course of the programme - importance of the impact of the past and the anxiety about the future, making being in the 'now' difficult for them. Hence the stuckness.

Give and take – between us – between the participants and between the organisation and the participants – the value invested in them through the programme, for example and as the cuts started to bite – this value seemed to increase somehow.

Belonging – creating a sense of what it might mean to belong to the development programme: we perhaps (I?) had different expectations about this than they did at the start – hence some of the difficulty. I think we all also wrestled with what it meant to belong to this team.

Place – geographical issues – the distance across Wiltshire County and the attendant attention on isolation, different practice and culture in different areas; hierarchy – formal and informal; different kinds of status depending on length of service, age, experience, closeness to Val etc

Importance to me of the importance of the work – this team is concerned essentially about the life and sometimes the death of babies and children – and certainly about their health and well-being. There is scarcely anything more fundamentally important in society in my view: at some level I admired these professionals and their commitment and values.

Grief curve this model of looking at change I realise now might have been helpful we were working with the team as they made their way round the curve.

My power – expressed relationally – importance of our friendship (me and Rob) and mutual respect. Reassurance of doing this tough work with someone so reliable and so non-judgmental.

Man/woman, mother/father dynamic. We must have been seen as a pair by the group in fantasy and reality. In addition there was a marked absence of maleness in the group of managers and therefore as I think of it now there must have been for me a sense of smugness – I have the only available man!

The effect of the risk taking we showed in the chairs exercise – was unconsciously responded to by the group – also taking risks and more engaging in more disclosure and honesty.

Geographic distance – a disadvantage – but means that if people travel together they talk in the car – like me and Rob – but I imagine those from the south also travelled together.

Essence of the work they do – supporting children – very female activity - all female team – I mirror the role of a female health professional – trying to do the best for them but from a place of superior ‘education’ and expert knowledge. (They do this for parents maybe)

Reinforcement of the importance of the ability of facilitator team to engage deliberately and consciously in good **process** – realisation of how key this is – (ref experience of it not happening on the Revitalizing Leadership prog – and how important it is for the forthcoming ATL prog)

Oxytocin – only know in terms of childbirth! (Seems significant in terms of other things I’ve mentioned)

Between me and Rob : trust and openness – being able to say anything – however stupid or shaming – and be received fully and without negative judgement. Rob always calm – never cross – always able to find a learning outcome.

What were our creativity scores? How important is the propensity and orientation of the facilitators to innovation, creativity, uncertainty and risk? In terms of difference and diversity – how different were we? It feels that other than our gender we were pretty similar.

Sadness and envy that you, Rob, were making all these notes and making meaning from the experience – touches into my envy of people doing PhDs - my desire for one and a growing acceptance that now it is too late to test my intellectual and discipline capacities.

In terms of your questions – the chapter seems more than right: it rings true. And I can’t see or sense any ethical issues (once names are totally removed).

Hi Rob, Sorry for the delay. The implementation date for our revised service is September 1st so things are a little hectic here. I have read the document and have no problems with what you have written. It has been thought provoking reading it and realising just what a hard time we gave you both!

Sorry for the delay in responding...Anyway, yes, I've read your paper and it was a 'hefty' read at times but seems correct to me.

Hi, Good to see you again on Tuesday. The article is interesting and it is fascinating to see your write up of everything after the event. I think I agree with it. My only reservation about looking at it so closely is I think a few conclusions have been drawn, correctly from your perspective, but there was perhaps a bigger picture for some on the course and I'm not sure you were aware of it all. Having said that perhaps you don't need to

be, we were/are who we are as a group/ team and were moving on from that time and are certainly more cohesive now.

Thanks for the other day. It was good for us all to meet up again. I have no concerns re anonymity. There are a few names in which need to be taken out but otherwise from my perspective there is nothing I am concerned about. I think your analysis of the course is good. At the outset I would have said that we were quite a supportive team but having read your document I can see that some of us were close and therefore felt more comfortable but for others they hardly knew anyone. I agree that there were a lot of private and personal issues going on which we needed to grapple with and therefore a lot of focus at the beginning was about protecting ourselves, being guarded concern re exaggerated hierarchy etc. I am not sure when the turning point was, you feel it was the goldfish bowl exercise, true that was a cathartic point but I think there was a general evolvment over the whole course. I feel we are a much more cohesive team although we have lost some key members it will be interesting to see how this programme equips us for what I believe is an even greater challenge as we move towards working with --.

Appendix 12: Case 3 - "How far does my write-up of the case resonate with your own experience?"

How fascinating to read the whole story from before my arrival...it really is a rich story of innovation and its messiness. There is something v powerful about having your life/work experience reflected back to you. You must have found it v difficult to gain perspective and distil? Harder than the other case studies? You have certainly handled the difficult material with considerable sensitivity and for this I think you should get the Nobel peace prize in advance of war breaking out! It's interesting looking at those critical moments and thinking...what would have happened if?..... I was amused by your observations on our 'ritual sniffing and politeness' by the way. Also in your final discussions where you talk about our chickening out of going to the top and over managerial heads.....a key factor in the context was the shift to 'bean counting' in the university culture. This form of systemic measuring had an immediate impact on what was measured and valued and KE was halved in value. You mention this, but I wonder whether in the final analysis this is a form of systemic power that had a huge impact and still does on stifling any KE creativity? We are doing activity that is literally invisible in the university's system of currency? Also early on when you first talk about going over the heads of managers, I don't really get a sense of why it was so important from your text, i.e. why there was consideration of the block of middle managers? In fact thinking about it, middle managers are the always the classic block to innovation in large organisations....something to do with their difficult roles in the middle of the sandwich. You can tell I'm into systems thinking...I realise this may not be central to your themes...but can't help positing! And to add....that we as a KE team went through a classic 'norming' and perhaps half a 'storming'...but then as you describe got somewhat derailed by bigger powers that be as well as our differing motivations and needs. Fascinating and will be more so when you rejoin us and we revisit this with a view to thinking about what do next as a reduced team of 3 in a much tougher context!

wow, it's quite something to see a chapter of life written in so much detail. It reads very well. So, first things first – I am happy from an ethical/inclusion point of view. Yes, it resonates and I think you've done really well to identify distinct phases to the process. I think you're right to highlight the ideological struggles that featured overtly or less so in our conversations – and in the end this was a major source of conflict. What emerges for me is at various points you 'out' an unspoken issue in a meeting or conversation – and there must have been loads more amongst us all. Hope all continues to go well.

This case write up resonates very well with my experience and no ethical problems with any of it.

What an interesting story / chapter in ---'s journey / commentary..! Will you be sharing it with your colleagues at the university (in the fullness of time)? In answer to your questions – yes, it does resonate with my experience and I don't have any ethical issues with it.

I'm impressed with your paper – both the fine detailed observations and your academic analysis. I particularly like your style of discourse and your honesty. Most refreshing given the state of -- today. I'm ok with the data that mentions me – on a rationale level at any rate. On a personal level though, I do feel emotional about it. The strongest feeling is one of sadness. I had forgotten the details of the prep work for that very strange presentation. I had forgotten that people had criticised the work I did on trying to

establish a broader 'vision' paper, and I had forgotten it had been excluded from the final draft paper.

What's interesting are -- comments some months after:

-: "For me it's: where is your passion in this? What is it you want to make happen...I miss not feeling that from the team."

-: Not feeling...?

--: "That people want to make something special of their own...not finding the wherewithal within what we're creating, to hang on to that...I find responsiveness there, and willingness to help each other there. A will to make this good...but I'm missing a little flair of creativity, innovation...I'm missing it."

I've often mentioned a favourite old proverb of mine in conversation: "*The people without a vision perish... (or cast off restraint)*". Thus for me, establishing a shared vision is a key principle for groups of people who seek to work together. Exeter University once said; "*vision is ... an enticing glimpse of a future state*" ... so without one, ... people WILL get distracted, bored, wander off, etc. I think that is exactly what happened to us. The university couldn't give us a vision for KE, neither as a picture or as a strategic plan, and we didn't fully establish a shared vision amongst ourselves. We did try but the one we had, was dropped. We *did* produce some first steps - a pragmatic 'action plan' – but, that wasn't a vision. I think your analysis exactly described the '*fast start that fizzles*' outcome described above. I can't recall all the things I did at the time but I do vaguely recall my intentions were to try and create a bigger picture for our audience, rather than simply just a KE plan. I believed our topic had to engage them, and show them a positive 'picture' of an enticing future state for --- – one that was being built by KE staff together with our academic colleagues so that there was a shared reward. Somewhere along the way, it was dropped ('pictures' and all) and all we had left to present were details of work done and our concerns about the future. I appreciated the frankness in your notes too. I had not recognised that others and you had perceived me to be "hard to contain". One big need I have is a vision and a sense of purpose and for my part, I don't believe we ever got that fully established. I can be pragmatic like the best of them but I know this is not my best modus operandi when I don't have a clear longer term purpose *as well*. Right now, I am operating entirely like this but this is alien to me. It feels like I am just reading water and good ideas and innovation of the kind -- spoke about are just passing me by. I guess I am waiting for something to happen. Normally, I like to be part of something that makes things happen. I hadn't realised I was silent on the criticism of the work I did on vision. I guess I didn't know what to say, given that everyone else on the team wanted to focus solely on the pragmatic. I think I understood why, given the limited time we had, but I am sure I felt even then, that that was going to be a mistake. I had seen this as an essential piece of our challenge – that we had to convince higher management that we had 'bought' into -- bigger picture and vision statements (even if later on, we discovered they were more rhetorical). Without that positioning, my fear was that we would be seen as a group with a much smaller and more selfish mindset. I therefore found the analysis of other people's perceptions of the KE team fascinating. I had been very busy over that period and had not appreciated that our academic colleagues were already variously and to varying degrees jealous, annoyed, irritated etc about our role. I knew this was exactly the phenomenon I witnessed at -- – academic staff were quietly hostile to the growing success of the -- unit. But there, -- and her team had spent years bringing

huge fees into the university. They had been given free reign and had proved very successful because of it. I had seen us merely at 'step 1' with -- and thus I didn't think we were successful enough to warrant the negative views towards us. I always thought it was a shame that academic staff resented their business colleagues at-- . I'm surprised at how early this emotion developed at --. So, many thanks my friend for sharing your paper with me. Lots of very interesting 'lessons' there for us all and I wish you all the best in your submission.

It resonates - I didn't realise so much of the day to day activity of the KE team was part of your study (i.e. the strategy meetings) so perhaps an ethical issue there about methodology. I had assumed my interview would be the focus of data along with others' interviews --- I was surprised by your reflections and found myself thinking it would have been useful to have them at the time as they could have helped us act differently - I am thinking here of the power loss issues. My biggest ethical difficulty with this case study relates to your supervisors as also being part of the case. I don't think you make this clear.. there is a point where you quote a supervisor but don't acknowledge they are also part of the KE group. I think this should be made clear. More broadly my doctoral studies were based in a study at -- and it was recommended that the whole thing should remain confidential for 5 years. As you are associated with the University it would be possible to identify individuals even though they are anonymised. I suggest you take advice on this.

Just finished reading through your extract this morning. I have to say I found it very interesting and informative and it brought up lots memories and feelings about this period and the development of the work. To answer your specific questions -- I think your write up of the -- work, although from your perspective, was pretty much as I remembered it as well. It was interesting to revisit this work and look at the process of getting it done. I guess also, as it was at an early stage of the development of KE it did seem reasonably problem free and we could just concentrate on delivering the work and used both our previous experience and imagination to the full. Having -- as the client was a great bonus also, however, I think the style of the course fitted in with her hopes of what courses could deliver. I don't have any ethical problems with any of the parts that refer to this work. I read through the rest, and again, interesting, but rather salutary reading particularly around the different notions of knowledge and learning. I like the Chia, Harrison and Leitch quote at the end. This would be more my position as well. I wasn't aware how difficult it became to keep the spirit of KE alive but also try and find acceptance within -- and I think your write up illustrates some of the difficulties, even when support, enthusiasm and some success exists. I liked the emphasis on the quality of conversation and how there seemed possibilities when that could be open and frank . It sounded as though that became more difficult as time went on and different interests emerged. Anyway an interesting account of this period . Hope it goes well from now on and that you get it finished soon

Hi Rob, This is a huge piece of work! I am astonished at its size considering it is only one of your case studies! I have skim read it: only ethical issue is the use of --' initials. The fascinating thing for me is how little of what you have written I would have remembered: what was deeply meaningful and emotional at the time, has

been put to the back of my brain and memory and largely ignored. Reading it brought back the late nights, the tensions of having deadlines to deliver something I thought was impossible, the terror of having to defend something I felt was not up to scratch and in some areas did not really understand.. all of this angst, which seemed so important at the time, now faded into a vague memory! It has also made me realise how much of my working environment has changed. So, I need to read it carefully, but the initial response is that as an exercise I think it is fascinating and shows the power of recording events and keeping a journal. The word, "resonate," is interesting, as your writing provoked memories to surface and the experience of designing the – stuff...were with me again in all their sharp definition, but all the meetings we had as a group are more vague and fuzzy. Some resonates closely and others are like reading a novel or watching a play - I recognize the players but not necessarily the way you read the roles they are playing. I remember feelings of enjoying working in the group, excitement and frustration but reading your descriptions and analyses felt as if I was reading about someone else!