

Delicate Balance

What is it like for an organization consultant to work live?

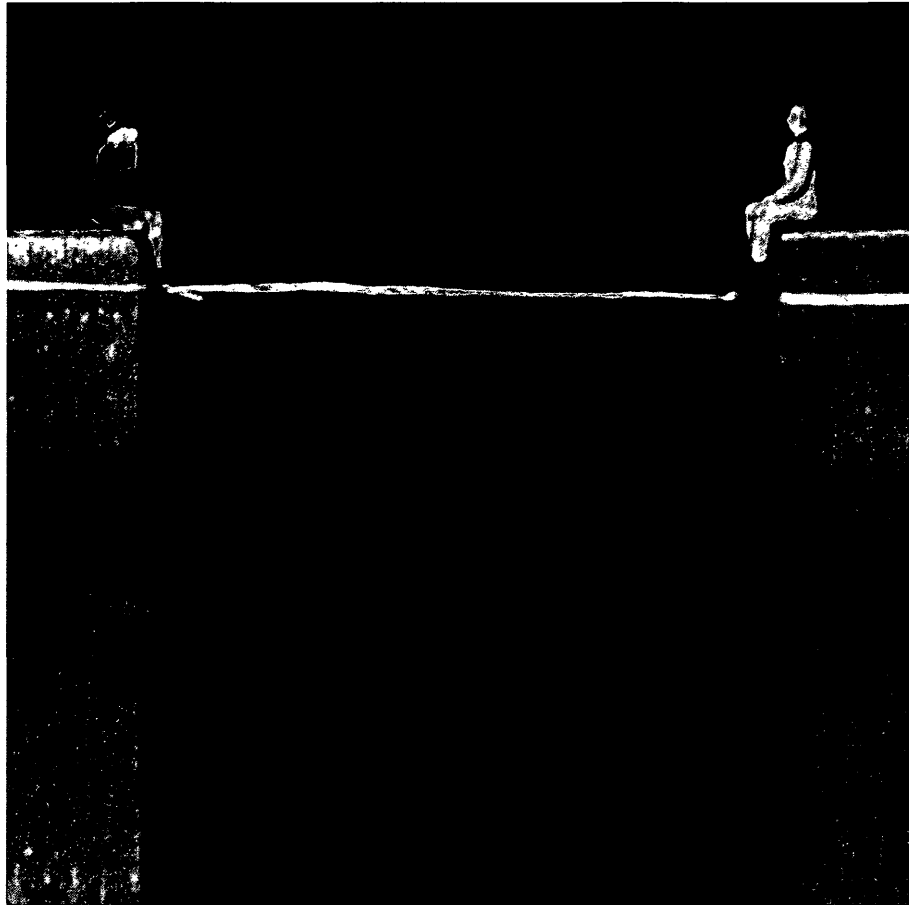
Hartmut Stuelten

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Indeed, it is in the intricate 'orchestration' of the interplay occurring between the outgoing and incoming responsive impressions occurring in each individual that certain (...) transitory understandings and action guiding anticipations become available to us. (Shotter, 2011 p. 60)



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¹ Photograph of a part of a sculpture (twice its original size) by F. A. Mayer titled "Sehnsucht" (Longing), (2011). With kind permission

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(...) a friend is someone whom we can trust to refine our understanding of what it means to live, who can guide us when we're lost and help us find the way along a path, who can assuage our anguish through the reassurance of his or her presence. (Batchelor, 1998 p. 59)

First of all I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people without whom this thesis would not exist.

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And last, but by no means least, **Luang Por Sumedho and Ajahn Amaro** – my spiritual teachers and guides, for showing me that it is indeed possible to live with passionate non-attachment.

May you be safe and protected and free from inner and outer harm.

May you be happy and contented.

May you be healthy and whole to whatever degree possible.

May you experience ease of well-being.²

² Kabat-Zinn, 2005 p. 289

Abstract

People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does. (Foucault cited in Shotter, 2011 p. 1)

In this thesis I aim to shed light on the practice of *working live*³ from *within* the continuous emergence of transitory moments in order to get into aware contact with what I experience in each moment of now and with what I want to contribute to emerge in the next moment. I do this from the vantage point of what I call the *living process perspective*, that is, regarding the 'moving but invisible' (Shotter citing Anderson, *Ibid.*, p. 75) phenomena of human living such as self, mind, present moment, intention, change, relationship, group, and organization as complex responsive self-organizing processes happening within and between human bodies in their local situation in the present. I argue that in contrast to this view the conventional *change methods* treat the phenomena of human living as if they were objects that we possess, can steer and control, thus splitting the experiencer from the experience and not working *from within* what is subjectively happening within and between people *here now* and *next*. I explain that although living and thus changing happens constantly from emerging moment to emerging moment there is a fundamental difference between simply being *situated in the present moment* (as we all are) and *being consciously aware of and engaged with our experiencing in the present moment*. I show that for the process of relating to ourselves, each other and the world at large not to develop into repetitive or *going-through-the-motions* patterns consisting of largely unaware, habitual and self-identical gestures and responses, but become consciously aware of and actively engaged with our actual experiencing of now and next, working from within the process of experiencing itself – a phenomenological-dialogical practice of engaging with our moment-to-moment experiencing I call *working live* – is essential for our relational processes to become 'free-flowing and flexible' (Stacey, 2003b p. 364) and thus remain fresh and alive within the ever-changing process of living. In essence, I demonstrate how the practice of working live can help organizational consultants to engage with the process of living, this continuous flow of

(...) first-time, unique events (...) without "losing the phenomenon", that is, without losing the novelty expressed in first-time occurrence by assimilating it to already existing rules, principles, or conventions. (Shotter, 2011 p. 219, his emphasis)

I describe the practice of *working live well* as a conscious, embodied and improvisational, paradoxical moment-to-moment activity of being choiceful and deliberate while at the same time being spontaneous and intuitive. This is so because the transitory micro and macro outcomes of our individual and collective gestures can neither be controlled nor predicted, but can significantly impact people and the world at large. I then identify and describe the interrelated aspects constituting the essence of the experience of working live well.

³ Taken from the subtitle of the book 'Experiencing risk, spontaneity and improvisation in organizational change: Working live' (Shaw and Stacey, 2006)

I go on to show that through paying conscious attention to one's emerging '*transitory understandings and action guiding anticipations*' (Shotter, 2011 p. 60) it becomes possible to realize that we have much more latitude in each moment as to what to do next than we often realize. I explain that this is so because the continuous and self-organizing social processes of human living have neither fixed, pre-determined and inevitable steps nor final end-states or ideal outcomes, but *are* simply constantly arising and disappearing transitory and unique micro manifestations. That means the process of changing from emerging moment to emerging moment is only conditioned to a certain degree by what has gone on before and by what is anticipated in the future – a phenomenological experience I call the *five movements of the present moment* – and therefore the future 'is partly open' (Griffin, 2007 p. 109) to what we want to contribute to help emerge next.

I conclude the thesis by identifying and describing the five *working live practice routines* of *presencing, raising, thinking, reframing, and nexting*.

I regard this thesis as a useful addition to the still small but steadily growing number of academic publications⁴ related to the practice of working live focusing predominantly on abstract, theoretical reasonings and/or accurate *this-is-what-is-going-on-now* descriptions and therefore see the unique contribution of my *from within* exploration as taking a small step towards offering 'living pragmatics' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 22), that is, being useable by and useful 'for everyday work people who want to inquire into what is involved in having to think 'in the moment', while 'in motion,' both from within the midst of the complexity, and in relation to unique, never before encountered first-time events' (Shotter, 2011 p. 1, his emphasis).

⁴ (Mead, 1967, 2002; Blumer, 1969; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993; Weick, 1998; Barrett, 1998; Varela and Shear, 1999; Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Shaw, 2002; Kaplan, 2002; Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002; Stacey, 2001, 2003a, 2005a+b, 2009, 2011; Stern, 2004; Griffin and Stacey, 2005; Shaw and Stacey, 2006; Shotter, 1993, 2005, 2010, 2011)

PROLOGUE – INTERACTING WITH A CLIENT

Date: September 2012

Participants: My client Sigi*⁵, the newly appointed Director of Strategy at a global technology company, and me. We have worked with each other in a client-consultant relationship on and off for more than 10 years in various different companies.

Setting: Sigi and I are sitting in one of his company's *creative rooms* with large windows looking out over the lush green countryside, very comfortable leather sofas and chairs, healthy drinks, coffee machine, fruit baskets, and, to my special delight, lots of chocolate.

Objective: To help Sigi think through his boss' request to design a *3-day learning programme* for all 150 senior managers to learn about *strategy implementation*.

Context: Sigi and I have been talking for about 30 minutes so far. He has just finished explaining what his boss has asked him to do and why.

Sigi

"What?" He looks at me questioningly with his arms folded across his chest as if he is cold.

Hartmut

I briefly wonder if I should raise the worrying sense of déjà-vu I am experiencing right now. I feel my heart beating slightly quicker than normally. I am aware of my intention to be helpful to him and at the same time not disrespectful. Finally, I take a conscious in-breath and say as kindly as I can, "With all due respect, Sigi, but I feel that your need to establish yourself in this new company seems to cloud significantly how you approach this assignment from your boss."

He looks at me with a slight frown when asking, "How do you mean that?"

I take a sip from my coffee to have a moment to think before answering. "Well, I've heard you say three things so far. Firstly, you feel you need to make a good impression because of being new in this company. Secondly, you do not see a need for a learning programme on strategy implementation because the senior managers you have spoken to seem perfectly capable in this respect. And finally, just because your boss wants a

⁵ All names of persons or companies indicated with * have been changed. Any similarities to real persons, living or dead, or to any real, past or present, companies or organizations are purely coincidental.

programme, you will deliver one despite your professional view that none is needed." I can still feel my heart beating quickly, I think mainly because I am not sure how Sigi will react.

He is looking out of the window now, seemingly deep in thoughts. "You're right, but what else can I do? I am new here; I need to establish myself before I can push back. And upsetting my boss right away doesn't feel like the smart thing to do." He glances down at his shoes now, looking resigned.

He looks back at me nodding, "Yeah, that's exactly how it feels. But I don't know what else to do than to give him what he wants. Do you?"

"It sounds like you feel stuck", I offer.

I wonder if it would be more helpful to him to return the question, but I sense it is too early for that just yet. It might be better to offer a simple thought structure first. After what feels to me like a long time, but has probably only been 10 or 15 seconds, I do decide to make him an offer and see how he reacts to it. "Let's use a few questions to see if we can get you unstuck. Firstly, you seem to continue the pattern we have spoken about a number of times – despite your different professional opinion you frequently tried to satisfy the requests of your bosses rather than serve the business, which eventually left you feeling disengaged and disappointed a few times before."

Sigi is nodding in what I take to be agreement.

"Secondly, it might be useful to think about how you could establish yourself with your boss and your internal clients without acting against your professional opinion. And finally, it might be helpful to reframe the notion of strategy as a fixed thing that can be implemented towards being a theme that organizes people's interactions."

He looks relieved. "Sounds good to me. But let's take a short break before we get into that." He gets up.

I feel a sense of release of bodily tension and get up as well to make myself another coffee. "Coffee?"

"Yes, please", he responds and leaves the room.

While making the coffees I wonder how to approach the conversation about his pattern of dealing with power relationships we have had several times in the past differently. Clearly, Sigi and I have also established a repetitive pattern between us in these conversations that is very likely influenced by the power relation between us. I wonder how my answering his questions helps create this pattern. I decide to raise the issue with him when he is back.

I. SETTING OFF – WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF MY RESEARCH?

- Overview
- In a nutshell: Here now and next
- The fallacy of misplaced concreteness
- The paradox of balancing
- A few words of caution
- Reflection

Overview

It is ironic that it is just this attempt to have a disembodied view from nowhere that leads to having a view from a very specific, theoretically confined, preconceptually entrapped somewhere. (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 27)

In this introductory chapter I outline the focus of my research – What is the issue I address and why? I then talk about the reasoning for choosing the *delicate balance* metaphor, and what kind of experience you might be in for by having opened this document and entered the research I have been involved with for four years. Finally, I make a few comments about the difficulty of using conventional language in writing from an unconventional vantage point about *something* that is not a thing, the paradox of writing about experiencing, and the order in which you might read this thesis.

In a nutshell: Here now and next

I imagine that when you read, possibly even briefly contemplated the title page of this paper a moment ago you were wondering what this thesis might be about. I wonder what you think this first page might hint at in terms of the essence of the work described on the following pages, what you might expect at this very moment, and how your expectations and what else you personally bring to the reading of this thesis might influence what you will discover? Of course, I do not know the answers to these questions, but I do imagine that you are keen to know what I focus on in this ADOC⁶ research. Well, let me answer that question without much further ado. If I were only allowed a few sentences to answer this question, I would say this:

- In my personal experience conventional, positivist⁷ methods⁸ for change in organizations rarely achieve their desired outcomes.

⁶ Ashridge Doctorate in Organization Change

⁷ A positivist worldview claims that 'there is a reality out there to be studied, captured and understood' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 9) with the aim of achieving 'prediction and control' (Ibid., p. 166) while working 'within a philosophy of knowledge' (Maxwell cited in Reason, 1988 p. 3).

- I believe this is so because generally these change methods abstract from lived experience, split the experiencer from the experienced phenomenon, and do not focus on what is actually happening for and between people *here now* and *next*.
- I contend that all phenomena of human living happen in each present moment in each person's local situation, therefore change in organizations also happens *here now*.
- In this research I want to investigate in what way a process view of the phenomena of human living that focuses on what is happening here now and at the same time on what the persons involved want to help make happen in the next moment can facilitate⁹ change in organizations.

The fallacy of misplaced concreteness¹⁰

Out of time we cut "days" and "nights," "summers" and "winters." We say *what* each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstract *whats* are concepts. The intellectual life of man consists almost wholly of a conceptual order for the perceptual order in which his experience originally comes. (James cited in Langer, 1989 p. 9, his emphasis)

There are aspects of actualities which are simply ignored so long as we restrict thought to these categories. (Whitehead, 1985 p. 8)

In my view conventional Western ways of attempting to achieve change in organizations seem to rarely lead to the desired outcomes to a large part because they are predominantly based on *as-if* abstractions (e.g. *as if* an organisation were a machine, or culture were a thing) and do rarely work with what is actually going on in the present moment. The term *abstraction* derives from the word *abstract* originally meaning to *draw away from* and later began to refer to an 'idea of something that has no actual existence' (Retrieved [September 6, 2012] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=abstraction&searchmode=none). Over the last few years I have increasingly noticed that not only I but many of my clients, colleagues, friends and other people I come across seem to have a strong and sticky habit of thinking and talking about on-going, emergent human processes (e.g. relating, communicating, loving, experiencing) as if they were *fixed things* (e.g. our relationship, the present moment, our conversation, their love, my experience) and *themselves* as separate from *their experience* of that particular *thing*, others and the world. It seems that we have indeed become very proficient in dividing

⁸ Positivist methods are characterized by for instance treating organizations as machines or systems, claiming to be able to analyse and understand how *they* function from an objective, detached perspective, being able to determine future outcomes and design and implement a rational strategy containing the 'right' steps towards it.

⁹ I understand the word facilitate as making something easier.

¹⁰ (Whitehead, 1985 p. 7)

... the seamless flow of experience into an experiencing 'subject' and an experienced 'object', or 'grasper' and the 'graspable'. Building on this, [the mind] then generates other forms of delusionary discrimination (...). In this process, language plays a large role. It is suffused with the subject/object distinction and provides concepts under which 'significant' forms can be separated out from the flow of experience and named, as supposedly fixed entities. While all that is actually experienced is consciousness and its mental concomitants, then, discrimination produces the fiction that there are experiences undergone by an 'inner' subject, and are of a separate 'external' world, along with 'inner' feelings and emotions. (...) [but] the flow of experiences is actually neither 'internal' nor 'external' – it just is. (Harvey, 1990 p. 108 – 109, his emphasis)

I have come to regard this separation of experiencer and experience (by which I mean the continuous embodied process of interacting with oneself and others which is 'patterned primarily as narratives of relating' (Stacey and Griffin, 2005 p. 9), as a significant hindrance to penetrate and reframe as-if abstractions in order to get much closer into aware contact with what is emerging at this very moment and that which we would like to contribute to emerge in the next moment. In a very real way, our abstract and divided way of thinking of and working with change is like confusing the reading of a book on, say, consulting with the actual activity of consulting. In my view this habit to 'thing-think' (Hayward, 1987 p. 236) is of course useful in designing and assembling concrete things such as chairs, computers, or cars, but is inappropriate when applied to people and our interactions with each other or what I call the *phenomena of human living*. Human understanding, emotions, thoughts, intentions, interactions and behavioural patterns are neither governed by linear *if this-then that* causalities nor explainable by *as-if* abstractions because these phenomena are not things but on-going processes of interaction that are unpredictable and non-linear¹¹ dynamic, and people's 'reciprocal actions, the totality of their relations to each other, gives rise to something that none of the individuals, considered in isolation, has intended or brought about' (Elias, 1991 p. 10 – 11). In working with change in organizations I see the drawing away from actual lived, local experience as a very useful and necessary move only if it is aimed at recognizing global patterns emerging from people's local interactions.

The paradox of balancing

You will become wire. (Petit, 1985 p. 22)

I think of working live with my clients, that is, becoming 'present in embodied everyday experience' (Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1993 p. 22) as a paradoxical activity because this way of being and working requires me to pay close and sustained attention to the tiny movements of my lived experiencing in each present moment (an activity I have come to think of as *micro-scoping*) while at the same time being aware of the contextual happenings around me and the emerging patterning of my interacting with myself and others (an activity I

¹¹ Unlike linear systems (e.g. a car engine), non-linear processes such as people interacting cannot be broken down into any component parts that are then studied independently from each other and then put back together, because they are more than the sum of their parts and thus the only way to understand them is through understanding the patterns that they produce.

think of as *macro-scoping*). My notion of *micro-scoping while macro-scoping* is comparable to the concept of *figure and ground* in Gestalt therapy in as much as *micro-scoping* is the conscious activity of concentrating on a particular sensation within the constant flow of experiencing where 'the figure emerges from an undifferentiated background of experience' (Mann, 2010 p. 11) and in Herman's and Korenich's view 'is dominant in claiming the person's attention' (1977 p. 12). However, in contrast to the markedly asymmetrical relationship between figure and ground in Gestalt therapy, in the practice of working live paying conscious, simultaneous attention to the seemingly contradictory micro-scoping and macro-scoping activities is essential for sustaining the delicate balance between being here now and next while drawing away from that micro-experiencing to notice context and patterns. Micro-scoping while macro-scoping is a conscious and embodied process through which 'certain (...) transitory understandings and action guiding anticipations become available to us' (Shotter, 2011 p. 60). The partial photograph of the installation of the high wire walkers on page 3 hints at this paradoxical task by drawing our attention to what it might be like to intensely focus on one's experiencing in a particular moment while at the same time being aware of one's broader context.

I am using the notion of high wire walking in combination with my thesis' title *Delicate Balance* as a metaphor to illuminate the paradoxical and extremely subtle nature of the practice of working live. The word *metaphor* derives from the Greek words 'meta- "over, across" + *pherein* "to carry"' (Retrieved [December 12, 2012] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=metaphor&searchmode=none). Using a metaphor thus means to apply selective elements of something to something else 'as a way of organizing perceptions (...) and naming characteristics of an object or experience by asserting similarity with a different, seemingly unrelated object or experience' (Fry et al., 2002 p. 125). In using a metaphor it is important to remember that although it can be useful in illuminating certain aspects of the phenomenon it is applied to, at the very same time a metaphor also hides or distorts other aspects. You might for instance say that the cooking recipe you tried out last night is (in some respects) like a Shakespeare play – full of old-fashioned expressions and thus difficult to comprehend for the uninitiated, contemporary reader. But of course, in other ways the plays of the Bard are very unlike your recipe – for one, they were never intended as direct and effective work instructions for cooks. Thus, one needs to be mindful of the appropriateness of the chosen metaphor to generate useful insights.

The process of walking across a thin wire high up in the air, often without any kind of safety belt or net, as for example Frenchman Philippe Petit did in August 1974 when he walked across a steel cable connecting the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City (Retrieved [December 12, 2012] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Petit) takes a lot of skills, experience, courage, and above all presence in each moment of being on the wire. To stay up on the wire and perform demanding acrobatics, in particular with partners, and/or complex object manipulations (e.g. juggling, spinning plates) requires concentrating for instance on your feet touching the wire, your breathing, your hands, and the tension in your body – all micro-scoping activities – while at the same time being aware of the swaying of the wire, the movements of the people with you on the wire, the objects, the wind, and so forth – all macro-scoping activities. It is of vital necessity for high wire artists if they want to prevent themselves falling (and in Petit's case, dying) to be

present in each moment. When using the expression *being present* I am making an important differentiation between *doing something in the present moment* and *being present*, that is, *working live*. My fundamental assumption is that there is no other moment than *this* very moment...and *this* one...and *this* one...and *this* one...and so forth. Living happens NOW. Whatever we do, we do it now because 'if anything that exists is in some genuine sense temporal (...) then its foothold in reality is to be found in that present within which it not merely was or will be but effectively is, in a full and categorical sense' (Mead, 2002 p. 11). However, the fact that we are always embodied and situated in the present does not automatically mean that we are present, that is, consciously aware of this very moment. In my view, the degree of 'presentness' (Stern 2004 p. xiii) to every emerging instance of now-ness and at the same time to the overall patterning of the past interactions that at this very moment gives rise this particular transitory *micro situation* are the fundamental differentiators between simply *doing something in the present moment* and *working live*. When working in this way with 'feelings and actions taking place in real time, in the real world, with real people, in a moment of presentness' (Ibid.) then 'you and the rigging will become a single body, solid as a rock. You will feel yourself a thing of balance. You will become wire' (Petit, 1985 p. 22).

A few words of caution

I hope I will be able to converse with you (and myself as well, of course) in ways that will make it possible for you to make sense of my rationale, the twist and turns of my story, and my conclusions. As you will discover I am using a variety of more or less explicit forms – narrative, images, reflections, descriptions of consulting situations, quotes, and of course, theoretical deliberations. I very much hope that through your reading, looking at, contemplating and being with this tapestry of different expressions, their resonating with you and the sense you make of them will blend together into an experience you will find engaging and ultimately meaningful. In short, I want to develop 'embodied understanding [that makes] understanding 'habitable' to others' (Todres, 2007 p. 29). But I do realize that a few factors will make this potentially more difficult than we would both wish.

- While reading *my* thesis, you will make *your* own meaning of them, that is, I do not think of you as a neutral or objective consumer of what I have produced, but as a subjective and active co-creator of what you might at this point still consider to be Hartmut's story. I would argue that my story does not have one fixed meaning somewhere deep within it that I can transport from my head into yours through the cunning use of words or images, but that both of us are involved in an interdependent process of ever changing meaning making while writing, reading, reflecting and eventually maybe even talking together about my story and what it means to each of us.
- As I am inquiring into 'working live' (Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 1) I will have to deal with deeply philosophical and thus potentially theoretical questions (such as What do I mean by *live*? What is *better*? What do I mean by *self*?). Yet at the same time my aim lies not in philosophical or theoretical

deliberations for their own sake, but in contributing 'practical knowledge that is useful to people in the conduct of their lives' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p. 2), including my own.

- Writing about working live seems as impossible and nonsensical as 'dancing about architecture'.¹² The only way I can imagine pulling this Muenchhausen-trick¹³ off and facilitating access to new and 'valid knowing' (Ibid., p. 183) for myself, you, my colleagues and clients is to creatively combine Heron's and Reason's notion of an 'extended epistemology' (Ibid.), namely, using the entire spectrum of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing with the advice Varela, Thompson and Rosch offer that 'we need to enlarge our horizon to encompass non-Western traditions of reflection upon experience' (1993 p. 21) because

(...) the descriptions and commentaries on mind that grew out of the [Buddhist mindfulness traditions] never became divorced from living pragmatics: they were intended to inform an individual as to how to handle his mind in personal and interpersonal situations, and they both informed and became embodied in the structure of the communities. (Ibid., p. 22)

- An unusual and thus potentially difficult factor in my researching and writing from a living process perspective is that I attempt to understand the phenomenon and the practice of working live directly from noticing the actual experience of interacting and the resulting patterning rather than resorting to psychological concepts about for instance personality, attachment, unconsciousness, or repression. In other words, I want to explore my question as much as I can from *within* its lived *essence*¹⁴, that is, how it feels to work in the moment rather than to simply theoretically understand *about* the experience from developing or applying abstract, psychological theories. In this I agree with Shotter that

(...) in shifting to a focus upon our conversational talk among ourselves, we direct our attention to a different factors [sic] in our human existence. Instead to events within the inner dynamic of the individual psyche (...) or to events within the already determined characteristics of the external world (...) we attend to events within the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction between human beings. (...) It is within this flow of responsive and relational activities and practices (...) that all the other socially significant dimensions of interpersonal interaction (...) originate and are formed. (1993 p. 6-7)

- A further challenge in attempting to work and communicate from *within* the experiencing process is based on the assumption that 'we can know more than we can tell' (Polyani and Sen, 2009 p. 4) and 'it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their (...) meaning' (Ibid.,

¹² Retrieved [January 29, 2012] from <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/11/08/writing-about-music/>

¹³ Freiherr von Muenchhausen is a fictional character well known in the German-speaking part of Europe based on an animated short film from Hans Held in 1944. Muenchhausen claims he can perform all sorts of tricks and miracles including pulling himself and his horse out of a lake simply by pulling on his own hair.

¹⁴ I use the terms 'within' and 'essence' in a process or phenomenological sense, that is, by being interested in the 'very nature of a phenomenon' (van Manen, 1990 p. 10) and not in an Aristotelian spatial substance sense (Rescher, 1996 p. 29).

p.18). How then can I reflect on, learn from, and talk about subjective experiences that *I know* mainly implicitly without losing 'sight of a pattern or physiognomy by examining its several parts under sufficient magnification'? (Ibid.)

- One of the difficulties in attempting to think and write from within a relatively unconventional vantage point stems from the fact that using nouns (e.g. organisation, group, relationship) seems to be 'the shortest route to a clear-cut philosophy expressed in reasonably familiar language' (Whitehead, 1985 p.209). I wonder and, frankly, worry about if and how I will be able to express my experiencing and learning from a different way of conceptualizing the phenomena of working live while at the same time not losing you, the reader. Should I remind us every time I use a noun such as *group* that there is no such thing as *a group* and what I really mean is the process of *grouping*? Or should I make up new terms (e.g. *macro-scoping*) like Heidegger did (e.g. 'the being-in-the-world'¹⁵) (Fischer, 2008 p. 164)? Or should I just continue using words such as *self*, *organisation*, and *relationship* thus risking being incongruent with the very points I am trying to make? My sense at this moment is that it is best to try to be pragmatic, namely, to use existing words when possible, to create new ones when sensible, and when necessary to stretch existing words as far beyond their conventional meaning as possible.
- Although in living many experiences happen in parallel, writing and reading are sequential activities. The sequencing I have chosen for this text makes most sense to how I personally think, understand and make meaning. However, to me that does not at all mean that you have to read the text in *my* order. If, for example, you are keenly interested in how I work live with my clients and want to know more about that than the short vignette in the prologue could give you, you might go straight to chapters VI or VII, and only then read about my informing theories, research methodology, or evolution of my research question.

Reflection¹⁶

Question: I notice that so far you have not commented on the relevance of the prologue. I think it might facilitate the reader's entering your thinking if you said a few words about that now.

Answer: Through the prologue I wanted to stress that I do not see working live as a one-way interaction between myself and inanimate matter, as the steel cable in my high wire metaphor might suggest, but as an embodied, reciprocal dance with myself and between me and my clients that we all influence and are

¹⁵ Translated by me from the German original 'Das In-der-Welt-sein'

¹⁶ I am using the format of self-dialogue here, a form of conscious soliloquy I have derived from the heuristic, that is, experience-based concept explained by Moustakas as the process of 'disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others' (1990 p. 17) that I am using as a device for reflecting on my writing.

influenced by at the same time, a process Stern calls 'the mutual interpenetration of minds that permits us to say; "I know that you know that I know" or "I feel that you feel that I feel"' (2004 p. 75).

Q: You talk about the *practice* of working live. What do you mean by the term *practice*?

A: In understanding the term *practice* I start from its original meaning, namely, to 'perform repeatedly to acquire skill' (Retrieved [Dec. 12, 2012] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=practice&searchmode=none) and add to that the notion of the term *practice* also referring 'to performance in a range of professional situations' (Schön, 1983 p. 60), for instance architecture, dentistry, music, or organisation consulting. Thus, *practice* for me includes two main elements: Firstly, the notion of embodiment, that is, 'all skills, even the most abstract, begin as bodily practices' (Sennett, 2009 p. 10). And secondly, the element of *deliberate* practice – improving one's performance in a chosen activity 'by concentrating on critical aspects and by gradually refining performance through repetitions after feedback' (Ericsson, 2006 p. 694) and, I would add, after reflection. In other words, simply being engaged in consulting activities is not sufficient if I want to further develop my ability to work live. It is essential to note here that I do not think of practicing as an individual activity that I can engage in by myself, but as a complex social process that happens between myself and the people I interact with. As Stacey writes so succinctly, 'learning is then understood as the emerging shifts in the patterning of human communicative interaction and power relating' (MacIntosh et al., 2006 p. 245).

Q: Sometimes clients and colleagues say that you approach your consulting work too philosophical and not practical enough. Do you agree with that?

A: No, I do not, but I can understand why people say that in particular when they hear me arguing against our conventional "thing-ness" mind-set and talk. However, I do follow Lewin's view that 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory'¹⁷. I would like to think that I try to practice in my work and my research what Varela, Thompson and Rosch refer to as 'living pragmatics' (1993 p. 22), that is, developing and/or using theories to illuminate and improve practice.

Looking back, I believe two men in particular have had a strong influence on me in this respect – a German saddle maker and an American statistician. Watching the first one work, made me sense implicitly that changing happens in the moment and that you cannot know outcomes in advance. From the second one I learned that to understand how changing (or any other phenomenon for that matter) happens explicit and lightly held theories are essential.

¹⁷ (Retrieved [June 5, 2012] from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-lewin.htm>)

Sitting in my grandfather's workshop as a boy of about eleven or twelve years old watching him work with leather was, I think, my first experience of becoming aware that you have to fully concentrate on what was actually going on with that very piece of leather in your hands and improvise from moment to moment if you wanted to produce something of quality. I loved to watch his rough hands delicately and, what seemed to me, magically work the leather into the shape he wanted it in.

Then in the late 1980s as a young novice organisation consultant I attended several of the then famous four-day quality workshops of W. Edwards Deming, a statistician and pioneer of the Total Quality Management movement. Deming helped me to appreciate the importance of theory for practice by maintaining that 'There is a process of change, just as there is a process for (...) growing wheat' (cited in Scholtes, 1988 p. iv).

To come back to what your question might imply which is the concern that I might be inclined to approach this research "too philosophically", that is, not practical enough, I have to say that I am very aware of my intention to produce practical insights for myself and my fellow practitioners, not just intriguing theories.

Q: Finally, let me ask you about Bob Dylan. Why are you using several of his lines as chapter titles?

A: I am not really sure, to be honest. I have always liked Dylan's lyrics even more than his music. Already as a teenager I was fascinated by his words, although I understood them even less than today. For me, there is something about how he uses language that resonates strongly with me and often gives me a felt sense that there is more to the words than first meets the ear or eye; in a way, just as the present moment is much richer than we superficially notice and can possibly ever express. So in a way, Dylan's words are pointers that there is more to be sensed, explored, and understood. To explore this *more* is exactly what I want to do with my inquiry into what is it like to work live.

II. ON GROWING UP – I’D JUST BE CURIOUS TO KNOW IF I CAN SEE MYSELF¹⁸

- Overview
- The soundtracks of my youth
- On becoming an organisation consultant
- The emerging picture of me
- Reflection

Overview

Get your motor runnin', head out on the highway, lookin' for adventure in whatever comes our way. (Steppenwolf)¹⁹

In this chapter I identify the key themes running through my life and my development as an organisation consultant that have a bearing on why my work, its purpose and thus my research question are important to me. Of course the story of my growing up and becoming a consultant you are about to read is yet another slightly different version of an identity construction I have been making for the last 50 or so years. However, this continual constructing of myself does indeed have real and important consequences for me and for those around me in the present because it continually influences how I think and feel about the past and the future, and thus how I act in the present.

The soundtracks of my youth

It was hot in Germany in August of 1969, I was about to turn 13, and my feeble attempts at letting my hair grow were easily swatted by my father’s curt instruction, “You need to get your hair cut.” At the same time on another continent something very different and decidedly more revolutionary was happening. The Woodstock Music and Art Fair was taking place on the fields of a dairy farm close to the town of Bethel in Upstate New York, USA where about half a million people in their 20s gathered together for three days to listen to the, at least according to my 13-year old expert opinion, greatest rock and folk musicians in the world – Santana, Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie, Ten Years After, The Who, Jimi Hendrix amongst them. From what I could gather from the newspaper and magazine articles I eagerly studied about the event most people at the festival seemed to have long hair, smoke mysterious mind-enhancing substances, were wet, muddy, happy and cool, and above all, seemed to do exactly what they wanted to do.

¹⁸ Adapted from a line from the Bob Dylan song ‘Mama, you been on my mind’ from the album ‘The Bootleg Series, Vol. 6: Bob Dylan Live 1964’ (2004)

¹⁹ Line from the song ‘Born to be wild’ from the album ‘Easy Rider’ (1969)

I, in contrast, was sitting in my childhood room in my parent's house decorated with Jimi Hendrix and Che Guevara posters, dressed in mock jeans and a white synthetic T-shirt listening with a rapidly beating heart to the reports and the music from Woodstock on my huge, old-fashioned Loewe Opta Radio. I could not get the line 'looking for adventure in whatever comes our way' from the song 'Born to be wild' by the North American rock group Steppenwolf out of my head. My biggest adventure that summer was going to the cinema with my friends to see the movie Easy Rider in which Steppenwolf's music featured prominently. I felt spectacularly uncool with my short hair and synthetic clothes and wanted nothing more urgently than to be older and cooler, a famous rock musician, but above all, I wanted to get out of here.

Here was the small provincial Northern German town of which my father was the mayor and where my mother worked at home while my brother and I grew up until my parents felt we were old enough to not require her constant presence at home. Thereafter she worked as a theology teacher and later as a social worker. We had our own house with a neat garden in the leafy outskirts of town with potted plants on the windowsills and lace curtains covering the windows. There were Persian rugs on the living room floor, and my brother and I each had our own bedroom. We had German-made cars that increased in size and associated prestige as the years went by. On weekends we had to dress nicely to visit my grandparents or aunts and uncles in nearby villages and were told by my parents to *make a good impression*.

I had an intense feeling of being stuck in a scripted play about a typical German middle class family of that time with its strict rules, endless obligations and an almost tangible sensation of suffocation due to the rigidity and narrowness of how things were suppose to be, and the weight I sensed of the difficult things we did not talk about. I was not sure whom to listen to and believe in – my parents or Steppenwolf.

Thinking back to my growing up now, makes me realize that there have been four *soundtracks* orchestrating at least the first 19 years of my life while living at home with my parents and my brother that still today reverberate from time to time.

- As far back as I can remember I have always been aware of the one maxim my parents espoused, lived by and tried to inoculate me with (and I guess my brother as well). That is, *in life one does not always have a choice – things are as they are!* Even today I remember very clearly that I intuitively resisted my parents' assertion that I would have little choice over how I could live my life. I assume as part of asserting my independence I increasingly turned my parents' belief into its opposite while, without realizing, retaining its distinctly categorical flavour. Whenever someone hinted at the possibility of me having little or no choice in a particular situation or told me to do this or not to do that, my immediate, almost automatic response was (and at times still is): *I always have a choice!*
- I imagine due to the usually considerable degree of emotional energy involved in holding on to my own choices because of my parent's often dramatically different plans for me, once I had formed an opinion or committed to a course of action I usually held onto it very tightly, perceiving these

choices as the only one right way and thus clinging to them as firmly as if glued to me. A habit Ajahn Sumedho²⁰, one of my Buddhist teachers, described in a teaching I attended a few years ago as *'being your opinion rather than having one'*. In other words, I developed a habit of holding on to my views so strongly that I had (and sometimes still have) no distance to them but in a very tangible and fateful way *become* them. I can now see that my behaving from a young age onwards was frequently and strongly influenced by an implicit, binary thinking and acting habit of *it's either my way or I won't play*.

- Subsequently I would at times perceive someone simply offering a different opinion to mine regarding an issue that was important to me as constituting a personal attack on me. My inner voice in these moments went something like this: *If you don't like my view, you don't like me*.
- I described the context of my fourth soundtrack, that is, *I have the moral duty to help make things better*, in my ADOC Acceptance Paper in May 2009 by writing that when we were

(...) studying Hitler and the Third Reich in school (...) I must have been around twelve years old. We would read accounts and attempts at sense-making of this period, see old newsreels, and once we even visited the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. I remember being completely shocked by the enormity of what had happened only a few years before.

It seems to me that having grown up in Germany during the 1950s and 60s has left me with the enduring question "Why do awful things happen?" and a deep sense of obligation to not tolerate anything I perceive as being unjust and hurtful which has resulted in a deep urge to speak up – often against those who I perceive as having power over others – and help people make things better for themselves.

On becoming an organisation consultant

In one form or another I have experienced organizational life since 1972. Thinking back over these 40 years I can distinguish three main phases that I have gone through in my development as an employee of and consultant to organizations:

1. Pair of hands: Serving time

My earliest experience of organizational life took place in a condom factory. I was 16 and it was my first proper vacation job in order to earn some extra money to renovate my old sailboat. My work consisted of feeding small pieces of black rubber waste into a noisy, oily machine. No one told me what the purpose of my work was and upon asking my foreman simply said, "Never mind. Just don't get your

²⁰ Former Abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Nettleden, England

fingers cut off." A huge industrial-style clock was hanging on the wall opposite to where I was working. Every time I looked up I could not help but notice the clock. I must have counted every single minute during those three seemingly endless weeks. From what I heard during our brief coffee and lunch breaks, so did a lot of my shop floor colleagues. I felt like Charlie Chaplin in the movie 'Modern Times'.

Each summer and winter break for the next 15 years throughout school and university I made similar experiences in offices, construction sites, joineries, taxis, laundries, and bars. The work often felt completely meaningless to me because I rarely understood its purpose in the overall scheme of the organisation. However, most of my colleagues were very friendly towards me, despite their frequent unhappiness about their own work situation.

Looking back now, it seems to me that during this period that felt like serving time in *organizational prisons* I developed the view that everyone in an organisation regardless of their role should be enabled to understand the purpose of their work in order to give it meaning, and should be valued equally as a person and a contributor.

2. Contributor: Working with people for people

When it came to choosing what to study after school, I knew I wanted to work with people, but it had to be outside of these organizational prisons. I therefore decided to study Education, German Literature, and Geography in order to become a high school teacher and work with teenagers. However, before I could start my University studies I had to complete an 18-months period of civil service. I had been granted the moral right to not do the mandatory German military service in an official hearing in which I had to convince a panel of judges that it was *against my conscience* to learn how to kill people. I remember standing in front of the judges saying, "You can do anything you want, but I WILL NOT JOIN THE MILITARY!"

I spent my Civil Service time working at Amnesty International Germany supporting the local volunteer groups, and at the German Red Cross driving ambulances. These experiences showed me a very different kind of organizational life. Here people seemed to thrive on serving what they considered to be a meaningful purpose, were valued for themselves and their contributions, were not used and treated as a pair of hands, and could go about their work largely in a self-directed manner. To my surprise and delight I had now experienced that organizational life could indeed be positive and people could derive a sense of meaning and accomplishment from their work. I subsequently changed my mind about not wanting to work in commercial organizations and decided that I would help to make them better, instead.

Although I had now made the decision to not become a high school teacher, I thought that studying education would still be useful in getting a job in a people development role in an international

company abroad, preferably in the USA (Woodstock and *getting out of here* was still very much on my mind). I was not sure at the time whether that would work or be the right decision, but somehow this direction resonated more with me than pursuing a career in teaching.

I draw two main conclusions from this period:

- I see the refusal to do the military service against my father's expressed wish and against the prevalent mood in German society at the time²¹ as my first adult decision. Deciding to not become a teacher but still get my Master's degree in Education in order to work with people in commercial organizations was probably my second adult decision. Through both acts I learned that based on what I would now describe as a strong 'felt sense' (Gendlin, 2003), this fuzzy bodily sensation of what seems to be right for me in a particular moment, I can develop the strength of conviction and am able to persevere despite resistance, misgivings, and my own sense of uncertainty about outcomes.
- I discovered my passion for working with people and for people. In most of my previous vacation jobs I had worked on my own with concrete artefacts, be that recycling plastic, shovelling sand, stacking bricks, cutting wood, delivering drinks, or filing tax returns in dark basement archives. But at Amnesty International, the Red Cross and the university I discovered that being part of a team working on something that made sense to us, and had a positive, tangible impact on our clients and colleagues made a positive difference to my sense of well-being and fulfilment.

3. Participant-observer-facilitator: Helping to facilitate movement

I have been working as an organisation consultant since 1986. The first half of this time I was employed as an internal consultant and functional manager – Training Manager, Employee Development Manager, Quality Manager, Director of Organisation and Leadership Development – in two large international companies. The second half until today I have worked as an independent consultant (twice) and was a Director, Partner and a management team member in two small, international consulting firms. After my graduation I did indeed leave Germany and lived in the USA, the UK (twice), Switzerland (twice) and Spain. During this time I have worked on all continents for a large variety of companies and organisations within the private and public sector and from a wide range of industries. Since 2011 I am an independent consultant and enjoy, to my own surprise, living again in Germany (although this time in the South) after a 24-year absence. To recount this exciting journey here in detail would be beyond the scope of the purpose of this chapter. However, I do want to highlight a few important points about my development as an organisation consultant that have implications for my research.

²¹ The confrontation between the German state and the terroristic Baader-Meinhof Group (or Red Army Faction) had reached one of its tragic high points in 1976 and so called pacifists with long hair were seen by mainstream society as being suspicious.

- During the **first phase** of my work as a consultant I saw myself as designer and provider of individual development programmes for managers to enable them to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to manage well. At that time I had no explicit theory about organizations at all. My only conscious assumption related to managers. That is, *if managers have the right attitudes, knowledge and skills they will do the right things and the organisation will function well*. Particularly Robert Craig's *Training and Development Handbook* (1987) was one of my main sources of expertise.
- During the **second phase** of my consulting work I focused, in addition to the development of individual managers, on the design of processes that would help the organisation to attract, recruit, promote and dismiss the *right* managers. I still had no explicit theory about organizations. My only conscious assumption still related to managers; it was something like: *If we have the processes to get the right managers into the right jobs in the organisation with the right attitudes, knowledge and skills they will do the right things and the organisation will function well*. Gary Rummier's and Allan Brache's book *Improving Performance* (1995) was my main reference point at this time.
- During the **third phase** of my development as a consulting I had a significant learning experience. I attended a number of workshops by the late W. Edwards Deming, often labelled the *American quality guru*. Deming mainly talked about quality improvement, but he also made comments about people-related topics I had never thought about before that resonated strongly with me, such as "driving out fear", "we should work on the process, not the outcomes of the process", and "it's not enough to do your best; you must know what to do, and then do your best".

Subsequently over time I was getting very involved with the so-called *empowerment movement*. However, just getting people together in *designing-our-common-future-workshops* seemed not sufficient to improve performance. It became clear to me that running workshops without changing what I then thought of as *the system* in which people were operating made things often worse by causing frustration and disillusionment.

I now see organizations as systems made up of complementary parts that convert inputs into outputs through a series of value adding process steps. My assumption about managers was that they could design, improve and steer the system with help from the people working *in* the system often knowing best what was needed to get their work

done even better. I now saw myself as process facilitator – designing and facilitating processes aimed at helping my clients to address change issues that were important to them *without leaving my own fingerprints behind*. I had begun to realize that the only difference that I could ever hope to make was by helping people to think deeper about what was important to them, what action alternatives they had, and to develop their courage to speak more openly, particularly in formal conversational settings. Deming's *Quality, Productivity and Competitive Position* (1982), Peter Scholtes' *Team Handbook* (1988), Edgar Schein's *Process Consultation* (1988), Peter Senge's *Fifth Discipline* (1990), John Kotter's book on *Leading Change* (1996), Marvin Weisbord's books *Productive Workplaces* (1987) and *Discovering Common Ground* (1992), and Carl Rogers' books *On becoming a Person* (1967) and *A Way of Being* (1980) were my main points of reference during this period.

However, without knowing it, I was operating from a Kantian “both...and” position (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 23). That is, I was holding a mechanistic view of *the organisation* and an organic view of the people *within* the organisation – like thinking about a bus in mechanical terms and the passengers inside of it in psychological terms.

- During the **fourth and most recent phase** of my development as a consultant that is largely influenced by my AMOC²² research, I have slowly begun to understand that seeing self, mind, and organizations as on-going complex responsive processes of communicative interaction made it easier for my clients and me to work more closely with what was actually going on in our lived experience. During this time I have also realized that outcomes of human interactions cannot be pre-determined and achieved by using the *right* methods; in fact the whole notion of organizational change to make things better and the role of organisation consultants has to be reframed (I will say more about this later). The books by Ralph Stacey and his colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire had become my new reference points (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2003a+b; 2005a+b; 2009, 2012; Stacey and Griffin, 2005; Fonseca, 2001; Streatfield, 2001; Shaw, 2002; Griffin, 2002; Griffin and Stacey, 2005).

Consequently I began to see the focus of my consulting practice as supporting my clients by facilitating movement and the emergence of novelty. That is, *to support my clients in expanding their feeling, thinking and acting options beyond their routine positioning by encouraging them to reflect consciously and intensely about themselves, other people, their work and organisation, and the world*. My assumption is that the more we can

²² The title of my AMOC (Ashridge Masters in Organisation Consulting) dissertation was: Sweet and Sour: The implications for me as an organisation consultant of seeing self and organizations as processes of emergence (2006).

loosen and broaden our habitual, often unconscious and sometimes repetitive ways of being in and reacting to/acting in situations and thus expand the available repertoire of our feeling, thinking, and acting options in any given moment, the more possible changing, that is, make a different move in that very moment becomes. I now see my role in this process as *participant-observer-facilitator*. This perspective has following main implications for my consulting practice:

- Most importantly, this perspective means that I do not see myself as a neutral outsider or observer who intervenes into an organisation with diagnoses, best-practice advice, and so forth in order to help clients achieve a particular change objective or outcome. Instead, I perceive myself as participating in the on-going process of interacting with and between my clients which I affect with my embodied presence, assumptions, questions, experiences, knowledge, beliefs, awareness, habits, emotions and so forth in some way and with some intention, but in ways that are not controllable and with outcomes that are not predictable. However, at the same time I am clearly not a *normal* participant in this communicative process, but I am being tasked to observe and, if appropriate, to articulate what I notice about our very interaction process in order to help make it as congruent with our intentions as possible. That means that power relations are an important issue in my working with clients.
- I focus on *how things are the way they are now* because 'the paradoxical theory of change holds that the very process of understanding how things are now will result in change' (Mackewn 2004, p. 63 – 65) and therefore I pay very close attention to the emergent and self-organizing process of transformation from within each moment.
- At the same time I focus on the overall patterning these moment-to-moment gestures and responses *within* myself and between myself and others create.

The emerging picture of me

There are no essences inside (...) people that make them what they are. (Burr, 2003 p. 5)

When I reflect on the above story of my growing up and becoming a consultant I can see a clear red thread running through it. It seems obvious that the importance I attach to having and developing choices in life for

myself and others in order to make our process of living subjectively better is a major source of energy behind my work. During the last 26 years I have been involved in countless initiatives and projects intended to help my clients to change towards what they subjectively imagined or experience to be *better* for themselves, their teams, their organizations, their stakeholders or the world at large. I can group what these managers wished to change into two broad categories, namely, what many of them called the *hard stuff*, that is, strategies and processes, and the *soft stuff*, that is, values, attitudes, behaviours and skills.

Clear is also that my continued attachment to the well-practiced binary habits of *It's either my way or I won't participate at all* and *If you don't like my view, you don't like me* makes working with me sometimes difficult because they cause me to sometimes think I know what would be better for my clients, even though they might not agree. Due to this occasional slipping from *holding* a position to *being* that position I do clearly not always help my clients to facilitate movement towards what they perceive as better despite my best intentions. This realization is one of the sparks that started my interest in doing this ADOC research.

Reflection

Question: You have mentioned the notion of *making things better* quite a few times in this last chapter. I am really interested how you think your research contributes to the understanding of organizational consultants of what *better* might mean and, even more importantly, of the possibility of attempting to contribute *making things better* in organizational life.

Answer: I agree that that is a very important and at the same time difficult question to answer. As I have already said the essence of the reframe I suggest in this thesis (and thus part of my contribution) and whose implications I investigate in my research²³ is this: I suggest that becoming more acutely present to and consciously engaged with the process of interacting with ourselves and others in each emerging moment while at the same time recognizing the overall patterning of these interactions facilitates the development of more feeling, thinking and acting options. This in turn makes conscious changing, that is, the deliberate making of different moves in the next emerging moment more possible. But, and here I come to your question, why is that better and what does better mean, anyway?

To answer the first part of that question I need to acknowledge the bias I have about what I personally believe constitutes *better* in the transitory, emerging moments of organizational life. For me becoming consciously aware of and actively engaged with our experiencing of *now and next* is better because then our relational and conversational processes with ourselves, others and the world that *are* the organisation have a chance to become more 'free flowing and flexible' (Stacey, 2003b p. 364) and thus capable of approaching

²³ Throughout the thesis I am using the terms *research*, *inquiry*, and *investigation* synonymously.

the unique, transitory micro-events constituting our subjective process of living freshly from a 'beginner's mind' (Suzuki, 1970 p. 21) and thus choicefully.

Before I come to the question if we can *make things better* in organizations let us explore the notion of *better* in an organizational context a little deeper. As I have already said a moment ago, over the years my clients have had hugely different and contradictory ideas about what constituted *better* for them. However, they all considered one point as being essential. The way things were at that very moment had to change in some way in order for it to be better and they and/or their co-workers would be for instance more inspiring and clearer, more empowering and less directive, more courageous and less anxious, more fulfilled and happy. What became clear to me from these discussions and from the many years of trying to help my clients make things better is that *better* is a process, not a place; a thought, not a thing; a desire, not a destination.

Specifically, I would say that...

- **Better is a generalization** – it is a generalized thought, an abstraction that can and needs to be particularized in a specific way in the very micro moment of interacting in the present. However, particularization is often difficult because in wanting the situation to be *better* we often seem to be predominantly end-result focussed. What I mean by that is that we often seem to forget the process by which we might develop towards what we have defined as better over that better end-result. For instance, we run to get fit, we work hard to get wealthy, we drive to get somewhere, we talk to our employees to get them motivated, rather than to run, work, drive and talk simply for the sake of being engaged in these very activities themselves.
- **Better is relative** – it compares one state or situation with another and thus constantly changes.
- **Better is subjective** – different people have different views about how a better situation would look and feel.
- **Better is socially constructed** – what people consider to be better develops over time between them such as, say, our attitude towards employee involvement, ecology, or investment banking.
- **Better is contextual** – our notion of what a better situation means changes over time and with circumstances. *Better* is not a fixed end state but more like the horizon, something that moves and changes as you change your personal position.
- Finally, ***better* has a shadow side** – in making some things better, we are making other things worse. For instance, from the mid-1980s onwards we were told that the ultimate

purpose of the new mobile communication devices was to increase our connectivity, our convenience, and the speed of our responses in order to have more time available for more pleasurable and important pursuits. Instead, the increased number of these devices in use²⁴ has led to significantly increased email traffic and higher expectations as to the immediacy of one's responses, ultimately causing us to believe we have to answer emails virtually everywhere at any time just to keep up with the avalanche of new mail. The consequence: We are having much less time for other activities than before the advent of these by now ubiquitous mobile communication devices.

In short, *a situation* is not a thing that can be *made* objectively better in any linear causal fashion but is simply a bundle of momentary and fleeting manifestations arising from the self-organizing social processes that we participate in but do not control, and that therefore 'produce (...) *unintended* and unpredictable outcomes (...) [that] cannot be traced back to the intentions of any particular individuals' (Shotter, 1993 p. 39, his emphasis) and thus cannot be steered towards particular, predetermined outcomes. However, I am drawing on Mead when saying that what we can do at any micro moment is to contribute to the possibility of this self-organizing communicative processes developing *roughly* in congruence with our generalized notion of what we individually and collectively believe *better* constitutes by what I call *aware, congruent particularisation*. By that I mean that we can 'be acting with reference to the end; and (...) [we] can embody the end in the steps that (...) [we] are immediately taking' (Mead, 1967 p. 383). In other words, although both intention and transitory outcomes emerge from people's interactions with themselves and each other in each moment, we can indeed at any emerging *now and next moment* 'bring the end into (...) [our] intention, into (...) [our] attitude' (Ibid.) and into our actions.

Q: What do you think is the biggest challenge in this reframe?

A: One main challenge is the fluency of our thing-thinking and –talking habit. Therefore, in my research I am asking what is it like, what does it practically require and what implications does it have for me as an organisation consultant if I change my language and thus my way of thinking, that is, if I reframe *my life* into *living, my relationships* into *relating, my self* into *selfing, groups* into *grouping, and organisation* into *organizing*? In short, a perspective that

(...) invites us to regard what we see when we look about us, not in the light of an aggregation of perduring things but in that of a vibrant manifold of productive activity. It pictures the world not as a museum where objects are displayed but as a show where things happen – a theatre, as it were, in full productive stir. (Rescher, 1996 p.174)

²⁴ 'From 1990 to 2011, worldwide mobile phone subscriptions grew from 12.4 million to over 6 billion, penetrating about 87% of the global population (...).' (Retrieved [March 20, 2013] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_phone)

A second difficult hurdle to overcome in this shift of perspective is that even

(...) the simplest or most pleasurable of daily activities – walking, eating, conversing, driving, reading (...) – all pass rapidly in a blur of abstract commentary as the mind hastens to its next mental occupation. The meditator now discovers that the abstract attitude which Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty ascribe to science and philosophy is actually the attitude of everyday life when one is not mindful. This abstract attitude is the spacesuit, the padding of habits and preconceptions, the armour with which one habitually distances oneself from one's experience. (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 25)

At the core of my ADOC research question therefore is the exploration of what it is like to be more 'present in embodied everyday experience ... [and] ... lead the mind back from its theories and preoccupations, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one's experience' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 22). In short, how can I to help loosen my *spacesuit-ing* habit?

III. MY METHODOLOGY AND METHODS – TO BE STILL ALIVE WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS²⁵

- Overview
- Investigating being here now and next
- Back to *the things* themselves
- My inquiry methods
- Reflection

Overview

(...) to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching (...) is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it (...). (Van Manen, 1990 p. 5)

In this chapter I explore the methodology I am using in my inquiry. I begin the chapter by explaining briefly my understanding of qualitative research as a methodology. Before I outline the relevant aspects of phenomenology for my research, I discuss why I believe hermeneutic phenomenology is the most appropriate methodological stance to investigate what it is like to experience working life as a process. I then cover the various research methods I am using. Finally, I explore the question of generalizability of my research findings and the ethics of my research process itself.

Investigating being here now and next

Indeed no methodological approach to experience is neutral, it inevitably introduces an interpretative framework into its gathering of phenomenal data (...) the hermeneutical dimension of the process is inescapable. But it does not follow from this that a disciplined approach to experience creates nothing but (...) a 'deformed' version of the way experience 'really' is. Thus whatever descriptions we can produce through first-person methods are not pure, solid 'facts' but potentially valid intersubjective items of knowledge (...). No more, no less. (Varela and Shear, 1999 p. 14, their emphasis)

Within the social and organisation sciences the term *qualitative research* is applied to a wide range of inquiry philosophies and methods (e.g. Grounded Theory, Ethnography, Queer Theory, Participatory Action Research) that are all concerned with 'seek[ing] answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 8) and that all acknowledge 'the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape [the] inquiry' (Ibid.) and its outcomes. Lather distinguishes three main theoretical approaches within qualitative research that focus on '*understanding* (interpretive), *emancipation* (critical and feminist are

²⁵ Gadamer (2004 p. 53) expressing very succinctly what I consider to be the essence of working life.

included here), and *deconstruction* (postmodern)' (cited in Merriman, 2002 p. 4, her emphasis). In my inquiry I am taking predominately an interpretive stance because in contrast to an emancipatory or deconstructionist approach this seems the most appropriate and effective way to develop an intimate understanding of *what it is like* to work live in order to develop 'new practical knowledge (...) [and] new abilities to create knowledge' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p. 2) for myself and fellow consulting practitioners about our practice of working live.

Today it is widely accepted that the process and the conclusions of qualitative research studies are emergent, tentative, and subjective because they are understood to be strongly influenced by the researchers' 'set of beliefs and feelings about the world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 19) and that 'It is only possible to do research *with* persons, including them both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, *and* in the action which is the focus of the research' (Reason and Torbert, 2001). However, what is not yet commonly discussed in qualitative research circles is that individual persons, small groups of people, or organizations are not systems (Stacey and Griffin, 2005) that can be understood *from the outside* but are ongoing complex processes of communicative interaction *within* and between people (I will explain this perspective in detail in the following chapter) that can only be understood from within the process of interacting itself. The implication of this view is that qualitative research is not only subjective but paradoxical in that the researcher is inextricably involved in interacting with others, simultaneously influencing them and being influenced by them, while at the same time researching, being mindful of and reflecting on the 'micro detail of his or her own *experience* of interaction with others' (Ibid., p. 9), a paradoxical situation that according to Stacey and Griffin requires 'detached involvement' (Ibid.) and reflexivity.

It is important to note at this point that I am differentiating between *reflecting* and *being reflexive*. The conventional term *reflecting* to me describes a mental distancing process of thinking about something 'that does not necessitate a change in the person reflecting (although the results of our reflections may lead to change)' (Hunt and Sampson, 2006 p. 4). In contrast, I understand *being reflexive* as a paradoxical process of being aware of experiencing 'the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself' (Mead, 1967 p. 134). Being reflexive is therefore an altogether more engaged, interactive and complex social process that rests on the claim that 'the subject of awareness can be aware of itself as it is in the present moment of awareness' (Strawson in Siderits, Thompson and Zahavi, 2011 p. 279) and thus is seen as 'the product of a second-order cognitive state taking a distinct, first order mental state [or object] as its intentional object' (Thompson in Siderits, Thompson and Zahavi, 2011 p. 158). In being reflexive

(...) the individual (...) take[s] the attitude of the other towards himself (...) [so] that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social process in terms of his adjustment to it. (Mead, 1967 p. 134)

I see the ability to be reflexive, to become aware of my embodied experiencing of interacting while interacting with myself and others and the patterns emerging from and organizing these interactions as an

essential feature of my research process and my ability to work live. As Reason and Torbert remind us, 'But for my thought and my body to meet, I cannot be *thinking* about my body, I need to awaken to my body as a sensual/sensuous presence' (2001, their emphasis).

I understand my research methodology primarily as a phenomenologically-based first-person inquiry, that is, a dynamic, reflexive moment-to-moment process of becoming consciously aware of my experiencing and practicing, and 'to foster an inquiring approach to (...) [my] own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting' (Ibid.). In this I am conscious that qualitative research takes place '*from within a social situation* (...) [that] takes into account ... the others in the social situation' (Shotter cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p. 9, their emphasis) and is a 'participative (...) process' (Stacey and Griffin, 2005 p. 10) in which 'knowledge emerges and evolves in a *history* of social interaction, rather than being developed by an autonomous individual' (Ibid.). I therefore would have ideally, in addition to my first-person inquiry process, been able to involve my clients as participants in a full second-person co-inquiry process about our joint practice of working live, a process that

(...) starts when we engage with others in a face-to-face group to enhance our respective first-person inquiries. (...) [where] all those involved in the research endeavour are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision-making contributes to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience; and *also* co-subjects, participating in the activity which is being researched. (Reason and Torbert, 2001, their emphasis)

However, mainly due to time constraints on the side of my clients this has proven to be unfeasible. I therefore had to revert to what I consider a partial second-person inquiry, that is, having conversations with some clients (and colleagues) about their experiences of working live with me and their resonance to and meaning making of various key parts of my writing such as the description of and conclusions about my practice of working live. In other words, although my clients and colleagues have inevitably been active participants in the phenomenon I am researching while working with me, they have not been fully active co-researchers in my research process as described by Reason and Torbert above.

As I have explained before, I believe it to be crucial to use a research methodology and methods that are congruent with my research question. For this reason I am using hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) as a research methodology in combination with aspects from Buddhist mindfulness practices (Buddhadasa, 1988; Silananda, 1990) and body-awareness practices (Gendlin, 2003) in order to become bodily present to my experiencing and at the same time using my *minding process* as 'an instrument for knowing itself' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 24). With the combination of these three phenomenological approaches I am attempting to overcome one of the main criticisms levelled at phenomenology that it is a methodology of pure introspection, of simply 'thinking about (...) thoughts' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 32), of detached observation and description, of taking the *abstract*

attitude to 'look at (...) [one's] own experience as an outside observer would' (Ibid.) thus in a way perpetuating the binary nature of

(...) the positivist paradigm [within organization science] (...) [where the] focus is entirely on truths in the "out-there" world, rather than on awareness and inquiry into the present relationships among the "in-here," subjective world, the "among-us," interactional world, and the "out-there," world we take as our reality. (Reason and Torbert, 2001, their emphasis)

Instead, I am practicing hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology and as an attitude of detached involvement with the intent that my

(...) mindfulness disrupts [my] mindlessness—that is, being mindlessly involved without realizing that that is what one is doing. It is only in this sense that the observation changes what is being observed and that is part of (...) open-ended reflection.' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 33)

All qualitative research methodologies are informed by the same fundamental phenomenological principle (Merriam, 2002) of being interested in describing and understanding the 'phenomena of everyday experience' (McLeod, 2011 p. 25). But why, you might wonder, have I chosen hermeneutic phenomenology as my particular research methodology and not such qualitative inquiry approaches as grounded theory, case study, autoethnography, or narrative analysis?

The verb *analyse* originally means 'loosening' and to 'examine closely' (Retrieved [February 2, 2013] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=analyse&searchmode=none). Since the purpose of my research is to examine the phenomenon of working live, that is, being here now and next from *within* my own experiencing of the phenomenon *itself* I need a research methodology that facilitates this process of getting as close as possible to my experiencing of working live and of *loosening* the *elements* of this experience in order to understand its constituting qualities intimately. In my view, hermeneutic phenomenology is a well-suited research methodology for this task for three main reasons:

- Firstly, because it specifically facilitates a focusing 'on the essence or structure of an experience' (Merriam, 2002 p. 7) and thus supports 'a change in the nature of reflection from an abstract, disembodied activity to an embodied (mindful), open-ended reflection (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 27), a process in which 'reflection is not just *on* experience, but reflection *is* a form of experience itself' (Ibid.).
- Secondly, hermeneutic phenomenology supports my investigation of the present moment well due to its single focus on 'the study of things as they appear in consciousness' (Stern, 2004 p. 8) and its intentional disinterest in 'how these things were formed or popped into the mind and (...) [in] any attempt to explore the external reality that may correspond to what is in mind' (Ibid.).

- And finally, I consider hermeneutic phenomenology an appropriate research methodology for my question because of the importance it gives to the phenomenon of time and its view of the present moment as ‘our primary subjective reality’ (Ibid.) where

‘time in *experience* is quite a different story from a clock in linear time. To start with, it does not present itself as a linear sequence but as having a complex texture (...) we shall refer to as the *three-part structure of temporality*’ (Varela and Shear, 1999 p. 112-113, their emphasis).

Finally, let me briefly come back to the question I raised earlier in passing. Why have I decided against using grounded theory, case study, autoethnography, or narrative analysis, all qualitative methodologies that at first look might appear to be suitable to my research due to their focus on understanding how ‘individuals experience and interact with their social world [and] (...) the meaning it has for them’ (Merriam, 2002)? As I have said before, the main purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology research is the ‘attentive practice of thoughtfulness’ (van Manen, 1990 p. 12) to study of the essential qualities or characteristics of a specific lived experience that make this experience into this particular type of experience. For instance, what are the *essential* experiential *what-is-it-like* aspects that are particular to parenting, gardening, writing a research paper, or singing in the shower? I have considered but eventually disregarded the above four other methodologies because their particular foci seem inappropriate for or incongruent with my specific inquiry question (although as you will see later, apart from grounded theory, I am using a few selective elements of the other three):

- Grounded theory: Its main aim is ‘to derive inductively from data a theory that is “grounded” in the data’ (Merriam, 2002) and it is therefore in my view not suitable to my inquiry because I do not aim to develop a new theory but understand and describe a particular practice more deeply which I believe is ‘useful because it directs attention to what we are already doing, matters which are rarely reflected upon’ (Stacey, 2012 p. 37).
- Case study: This is not a research methodology as such ‘but a choice of what to study. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case’ (Stake in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 435). However, not everything is a case – in order for a human phenomenon to be considered a case it needs to be specific and frameable. ‘A doctor may be a case—but *his doctoring* probably lacks the specificity, boundedness, to be called a case. (...) The case is a specific One’ (Ibid., p. 436, his emphasis). Thus, I believe that the phenomenon of *working live* is too unspecific and general to be considered a case.
- Autoethnography and narrative analysis: The main aim of these two biographical methodologies for researching and writing lies in ‘connecting the personal to the cultural’ (Ellis and Bochner in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 733), that is, being interested in what way factors such as ‘gender, class, and “family beginnings”’ (Denzin cited in Merriam, 2002) as well as ‘beliefs, values, and attitudes shape

the behaviour of a particular group of people' (Merriam, 2002) or of a person. I have disregarded both methodologies for my research because, as I have outlined before, I am interested in understanding the essential *what-is-it-like* characteristics of a particular human phenomenon – being here now and next – and not *why* I feel, think and act how I do in general or in a particular moment.

When saying that I want to produce practical insights for myself and my fellow practitioners this of course immediately raises the question of the generalizability of my research findings. If I want to gain 'a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience' (van Manen, 1990 p. 9) and through that process 'offer (...) the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact' (ibid.) with the phenomenon I study the qualitative question of "Did I achieve that well enough?" seems a legitimate and useful one.

First of all, I do not believe that my research findings enable me 'to make grand truth claims about the nature of reality' (Langdrige, 2007 p. 157) in general or about organizational consulting practices of working live in particular. I say this, firstly because my insights are derived from only a very limited number of personal practice situations. Secondly, and more importantly, my inquiry methodology is a very personal, phenomenological process of taking my own experience of working in the moment seriously and 'as we proceed through the research process our humanness informs us and often directs us through such subtleties as intuition and 'aha' moments' (Myers, 2000) thus leading to highly subjective and contextual insights. Given this subjectivity and relativity how then can I know if what I conclude is generalizable in some way and useful to others, and not a result of an overactive fantasy?

As I have just said, it is very clear to me that my findings cannot be used as scientific generalizations, that is, findings generalizable 'from the study sample to the entire population' (ibid.) of organizational consultants and managers. Instead, I am very much convinced that the findings can be used as 'naturalistic generalizations' (Stake and Turnbull, 1982), that is, 'self-generated knowings (...) that come when, individually, for each reader, each practitioner, new [vicarious] experience is added (...) which interacts with her existing naturalistic generalizations, formed previously from her particular experience' (ibid.) with the aim to improve one's practice.

Because I agree with Stake and Turnbull that good qualitative '*Research can evoke Vicarious Experience which leads to Improved Practice*' (ibid., their emphasis). I would offer the following four criteria as indicators of the degree to which my findings can be generalized naturalistically and thus might be of use to fellow consulting practitioners:

1. Quality of being present

For this first point I draw on the writing of Marshall and Reason about the researcher's 'quality of being (...) *there*, '*there*' as an awake, choiceful, reflective human person, rather than as a researcher working strictly in role and with techniques to follow' (2007, their emphasis). For me *the quality of being present* refers to the degree I show up in my working and writing and to the degree I am reflective about my perspectives, emotions, actions, claims, and conclusions. In short, it asks to what degree am I working and writing live?

2. Degree of vicarious experiencing

The second indicator of the quality of my research is derived from the question to what degree does my thesis provide 'enough in-depth particulars' (Melrose, 2009) about examples of working live that my 'readers are not placed to observe for themselves, but who, when reading the descriptive account, can experience vicariously the various perplexities' (Stake and Turnbull, 1982). Therefore, I would ask if I am providing enough sufficiently detailed descriptions of encounters with my clients so that you as a reader are able to get a vivid, bodily sense of these situations without having been there.

3. Coherence of writing and conclusions: I want to make my writing and my findings internally coherent and transparent, that is, 'free of inner contradictions' (Kvale cited in Lavery, 2003 p. 22) so that I account well for my positions and you, my readers, are thus able to follow the conclusions I draw. In short, I want you to be able to 'trace (...) [my] movement throughout the research process...' (ibid. p. 22-23) so that you can follow my rationale, my arguments, and finally, my conclusions easily.

4. Resonance with conclusions: This last indicator links directly to points two and three in that it asks to what degree you, the reader, resonate with the conclusions I draw from my research. I think Langdrige's point that 'knowledge that is valid is self-evident, in that if someone experiences something as self-evident, then someone else is not likely to experience it as absurd' (2007 p. 155) explains what I mean by resonance well. This implies that one way of making my conclusions useful is an on-going resonance checking process through conversations and reflections about my writing between myself, my co-researchers, and in a way with you, my readers, because '...although texts (and, hence, all data) can be read in multiple ways, interpretations of the text are not limitless' (Ricoeur cited in Landridge, 2007 p. 157). When this is done, 'the insight is self-validating and if done well, others will see the text as a statement of the experience itself' (Lavery, 2003 p. 23).

Finally, let me move on to the question of ethics of your research and the question of what I am doing to minimize the risk of your co-researchers getting negatively affected by your research process? I have tried to be as mindful as I can to conduct my research in such a way that it and I have not harmed my co-researchers

and others I write about in any way. In order to achieve this I have been mindful of the four ethical principles of the British Psychological Society of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity (Retrieved [June 2, 2012] from http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/code_of_ethics_and_conduct.pdf) (Langdrige, 2007 p. 62-63). In particular I have asked my sixteen co-researchers to complete a Research Participant Consent Form (see Appendix) addressing the confidentiality and anonymity of personal details and interview content, the possibility of withdrawing their consent at any time without any explanation, and the offer to inform me as soon as they feel that the inquiry affects them negatively. Additionally, I have anonymized all other client and company names, and contextual details of the real consulting situations I describe throughout this thesis so fundamentally that they are not recognizable by anyone.

Back to the things themselves

(...) phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (van Manen, 1990 p. 9)

The 'term "phenomenology" is a compound of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos* ... [that] signifies the activity of giving an account ... of the various ways in which things appear' (Sokolowski, 2000 p. 13). In my opinion van Manen's above quote expresses well the common thread that runs through the numerous different proponents, approaches, and perspectives that constitute the phenomenological movement and thinking (Moran, 2000; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), that is, the understanding of everyday lived human experiences from the perspective of the subjective experiencer rather than from a detached, *objective* theoretical, natural sciences perspective – a move that Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological movement, called 'back to the things themselves' (cited in Moran, 2000 p. 107) in the first edition of the Second Book of his Logical Investigations published in 1901. Let me highlight the aspects of phenomenology that have particular relevance for my research:

The phenomenological reduction

Husserl studied mathematics and logic before he became fascinated with philosophy and passionately interested in understanding subjectivity and intentionality, a concept he adopted from Brentano (Mautner, 2005 p. 288). However, when he spoke about logically investigating experiencing he was neither interested in the theoretical knowledge we might have about something nor in what he termed the 'natural attitude' (cited in Cerbone, 2006 p. 22) and Merleau-Ponty almost 50 years later the 'practical or utilitarian attitude' (2004 p. 31), that is, the opinions, presuppositions, biases and preconceived ideas we have about this *something* in the process of going about our daily routines. Instead, Husserl and the phenomenologists who came after him, such as Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Ricoeur were all interested in consciously and critically examining and deeply understanding the essence of our lived, subjective experience.

Thus, in order to understand the essence of a specific lived experience Husserl's view was that our natural attitude had to be suspended and with it everything we know, think, believe, assume and feel about this particular experience. He called this move away from the natural attitude towards a phenomenological attitude the 'phenomenological reduction' (Sokolowski, 2000 p. 49) and termed the method whereby to achieve this reduction 'epoche' or 'bracketing' (Langdrige, 2007 p. 17). However, in my experience bracketing is not at all possible in the sense that Husserl intended, namely, to approach an experience from a *pure*, pre-reflected perspective. Instead, I agree with van Manen that we are not able to 'take hold of a phenomenon and then place outside of it one's knowledge about the phenomenon' (van Manen, 1990 p. 47) because 'understanding takes place only in the context of an existing tradition, every act of understanding already presupposes a certain amount' (Moran and Mooney, 2002, p. 312) most of which is tacit knowing that would be impossible to put into words. I do, however, think it is very useful in experiencing and grasping the essence of a given phenomenon to as far as possible become aware of my biases, views, opinions and so forth.

Intentionality

The term intentionality is used very differently by phenomenologists than we conventionally use it in everyday life, that is, indicating an intention to do something, for instance to get together with the intention to bake a cake or watch a movie. In contrast, in phenomenology intentionality is generally understood as having 'to do with the directedness or *of-ness* or aboutness of consciousness, i.e. with the fact that when one perceives or judges or feels or thinks, one's mental state is about or of something' (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008 p. 109).

Seen this way, we are always conscious of something, at least when we are not sleeping. Phenomenology aims at describing and interpreting a specific something as it appears in our consciousness so that we may understand our 'lifeworld – the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it' (van Manen, 1990 p. 9). It is important to note here that *pre-reflectively* in this context means that I aim not to distance myself from my experience while having it and I do not perceive my experience as a separate object that appears in my consciousness, rather, 'my intentional experience is lived through, but it does not appear to me in an objectified manner, it is neither seen or heard nor thought about' (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008 p. 54) from a detached observer perspective but from an involved participant position. This is the point, I believe, where mindfulness meditation closes a gap in the practice of phenomenology because it greatly supports the development of awareness, since

(...) as the meditator again and again interrupts the flow of discursive thought and returns to be present with his breath or daily activity, there is a gradual taming of the mind's restlessness. Eventually meditators report periods of a more panoramic perspective. This is called awareness. (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 26)

Hermeneutic phenomenology

The particular form of phenomenology I am using in my inquiry is called *hermeneutic phenomenology* – a phenomenological perspective first conceptualized by Husserl’s student Heidegger around 1925. The ‘term ‘hermeneutic’ comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuin* which means to ‘interpret’ (Moran 2000, p. 271). When the method used in phenomenology is interpretative, it is called hermeneutical; in contrast to transcendental phenomenology, which is exclusively of descriptive nature. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology

(...) is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her lived experience (ibid. p. 36).

In my view Heidegger has conceptualized three very helpful moves in facilitating Husserl’s call to go back to the things themselves:

- His first important insight was that when we interpret something, we do not just do it explicitly with language, but also by how we implicitly relate to it through our actions (Moran, 2000 p. 235). Hermeneutic phenomenology starts from the embodied nature of our experiences and holds that

(...) the (phenomenological) “facts” of lived experience are already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the “facts” of lived experience need to be captured in language (...) and this is inevitably an interpretive process. (van Manen, 1990 p. 180-181, his emphasis)

- Heidegger’s second important insight is that every question we ask already carries within it our assumptions, presuppositions, biases, cultural and historical perspectives and so forth so that ‘every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought’ (Moran, 2000 p. 236) and ‘We therefore disclose the answer in the light of what we already know’ (ibid. p. 237).
- The third important point Heidegger made about the study of human experiencing is his notion of ‘thrownness’ (Cottingham, 2008 p. 115), that is, that we are thrown into the world and each situation without any prior ‘neat objective classifications and comfortable explanations’ (Ibid.) – we are ‘simply *there*’ (Ibid., his emphasis) In other words, given that we are here now, what are we to do next?

As we have seen, hermeneutic phenomenology posits that we cannot *not* make meaning of our lived experiences and thus

(...) the reflective-interpretative process includes not only a description of the experience as it appears in consciousness but also an analysis and astute interpretation of the underlying conditions (...) that account for the experience' (Moustakas, 1994 p. 10).

I see hermeneutic phenomenology both as a disciplined, reflexive practice and a delicate, subjective art 'that require[s] interpretation and understanding whereas natural science involves for the most part external observations and explanations. "We explain nature, humans we must understand." ...' (Ibid., p. 181). Add mindfulness meditation and Gendlin's focusing method (2003) to this and I believe I have a very powerful reflexive-interpretative tool to investigate the phenomenon of working live, because

(...) embodying is where being and knowing meet, or as Gendlin says: 'The body knows its situation directly' (...) and further: A living body knows its environment by being it' (cited in Todres, 2007 p. 20-21).

Hermeneutic phenomenology seems to me to be especially suited to my inquiry intention – to deeply understand what it is like to work live and to make meaning out of mine and others' rich and full descriptions of this particular experience in a way that 'reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper manner' (van Manen, 1990 p. 10).

I believe that Heidegger three insights have great significance for my inquiry, and although I use them in my research as guiding principles, I base my inquiry methodology on the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective of van Manen, that is, 'to do human science research is to be involved in the crafting of a text (...) as approachable in terms of (...) structures of meaning, or themes' (van Manen, 1990 p. 78). I do feel van Manen's approach is more experientially grounded and focused on investigating the essence of lived experience than Heidegger's more philosophical approach and thus more appropriate to my inquiry.

My inquiry methods

Having given a brief review of my methodology I now want to explore the methods I am using in my inquiry that, I think, are congruent with it. In general, I am using an *awareness dance in two movements* that I visualise as resembling the form and delicate balance of a mobile by Alexander Calder, the American sculptor. For me, the mobile is a fitting metaphor for the various methodological elements and activities that constitute my inquiry. As with the mobile, these elements are always in slight movement, they can have different qualities, shapes, sizes, colours and weights and at the same time I want to balance them out in order for my inquiry to become a complete figure around my question as its centre of gravity.

- The first movement is a continuous shifting of my awareness between 'inner and outer arcs of attention' (Marshall cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p. 433). By *inner arcs of attention* I mean the practice of reflexivity, of being consciously aware of noticing what I perceive is

going on *within* my body, e.g. thoughts, judgments, assumptions, somatic sensations, breathing, emotions. By *outer arcs of attention* I mean being consciously aware of noticing what I perceive as going on *outside* of my body with other people and the world.

- The second movement is a continuous shifting of my conscious awareness between 'action and reflection' (ibid. p. 434). By *action* I mean the phases in my *consulting-researching process* in which I am actively engaged with others, e.g. in daily client interactions, in interviewing co-researchers, in writing emails; by *reflection* I mean the phases in my *consulting-researching process* in which I am 'stepping back to ponder the meaning to self and others in one's immediate environment about what has recently transpired' (Oliver, 2005 p. 31), e.g. through writing or meditating.

I am, of course, aware that both movements are not as binary and delineated in life as they appear in words on paper, but I know from the work on my two previous Master's research projects that, as a general guide to what to pay attention to when and how, they will be important and useful. With that, let me now move on to the principal research methods I am using.

Theory grounding

What I call *theory scanning and grounding* is an important research method for me and at the same time an essential preparatory practice for working live. It involves studying new and existing texts on my informing theories that I will explain next. Theory grounding also involves, as pointed out above, a becoming conscious of my biases, assumptions, judgments and so forth caused by being informed by these theories in order 'to hold them deliberately at bay and even turn this knowledge against itself (...) thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character' (van Manen, 1990 p. 47). My rationale for continuously focusing on my theoretical studies is my assumption that being knowledgeable in my informing theories provides a solid and increasingly intuitive basis for my research and equally importantly for improvising in order to work well in the moment – just as knowing the fundamental structure of music allows jazz musicians to improvise together.

Working with my clients

Not surprisingly the main method of my inquiry is my consulting work. In particular during the last 12 months I have been doing more work than usually in order to have sufficient opportunity to experiment with and further develop my various working live practices. I have noticed that it seems to be easier for me to experiment more freely in my consulting in the context of my research than previously when I was *just* working. Without a doubt my research question enables me to focus my attention and curiosity more sharply. In all of this I am trying to be very mindful of Heidegger's observation that we 'disclose the answer in the light of what we already know' (Moran, 2000 p. 237)

and what we seek, which can easily lead to ‘inattentional blindness’ (Retrieved [March 12, 2012] from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Inattentional blindness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inattentional_blindness)), that is, by focusing too much on the aspects I am researching and/or working with miss other relevant, new aspects.

I have debated long about whether it would be useful to video- and/or audio-record working sessions with my clients in order to have sufficient material to conduct a thematic analysis to understand the structure of the experience of working live as a whole, that is, ‘to describe how the elements of the phenomenon function constitutively; how they interrelate to form the unity of the experience’ (Reed cited in Todres, 2007 p. 8). In the very beginning of my research I did record a few of my client interactions and upon reflection came to the following conclusion: Recording the work felt incongruent with my attempt to work live because firstly, it drew my clients’ and my own attention too much to ourselves for us to act naturally, and secondly, it produced a mountain of material that I do not have under normal circumstances. Thus, I decided to work and research with what I have at any moment – my clients and myself.

Apart from the very process of working with my clients there are two related pre- and post-activities I would like to especially highlight here, that is, *warming up* and *replaying*.

- ***Warming-up***

10 or 15 minutes before I am about to start any type of work with a client or colleague, be that a call, a meeting or a workshop, I routinely spend a few quiet minutes by myself figuratively speaking to *warm up*, namely, to visualize what I want to pay attention to during our time together. These *visualizations* are not conventional visualizations in the form of detailed visual, kinaesthetic, or auditory details, but are attempts at (again) making explicit to myself (in silent words) what my general intentions or action guiding anticipations are for the upcoming interaction. This activity is inspired by the assumption that ‘our positive images of the future lead our positive actions (...) much like a movie projector to a screen’ (Cooperrider and Whitney cited in Holman and Devan, 1999 p. 258). Although of course I am not always able to particularize my anticipated intentions in the interactive process with my clients, the process of visualizing my intentions, or maybe better, of making them explicit to myself beforehand seems to enable me in the heat of the moment to be more able to remind myself of what matters to me while working live.

- ***Replaying***

By *replaying* I do not literally mean to replay a video or an audio recording but the process of reflection, that is, mentally replaying an event in order to develop insight from it. After each significant piece of work, that might be a call, a meeting, a coaching session or a workshop, I

take some time to reflect on what has happened in general, if and how well I was able to work live, and what I want to pay attention in future. In addition to my on-line notes, I often use feedback from clients and colleagues as input for this reflection process.

I use two specific, slightly unusual methods for my reflections – running and micro-analytic mapping. Every time I experience a subjective now-moment while working I produce a micro-analytic map and a short description afterwards to investigate this particular moment in detail. I will explain this method in chapter VII using three different examples.

In contrast, running as reflection might need a few explanatory words right here. I usually run 3-4 times a week (early in the mornings before meditating) for approximately an hour. Since I am a very slow runner (sometimes people late for a bus or train overtake me despite carrying briefcases or bags) I can think while I am running. Actually, I am using the term *think*, but my process is a lot less active than the word implies. Therefore Claxton term ‘attentive resonance’ (1998 p. 165) is a much more apt way of describing this reflective process because in my running-reflection process ‘knowledge does not become the object of explicit thought; rather it implicitly dissolves itself in a gathering of the situation as a whole ‘ (ibid.) – similar to what happens during my focusing processes, which I will describe in a moment.

This is a process I cannot force to speed up. As soon as I try too hard, it slips away. Therefore, I often simply start with a question (e.g. What happened in that meeting?), an assertion (e.g. Jazz improvisation is the wrong metaphor for working life), or an image or feeling I had during the particular piece of work I want reflect on. However, not every time I try this my minding process cooperates. Sometimes, ‘the thoughts that occur to me while running are like clouds in the sky. (...) They come and they go, while the sky remains the same sky as always. The clouds are mere guests in the sky that pass away and vanish’ (Murakami, 2009 p. 17). At other times, however, my mind seems to be able to focus and responds to my various different prompts by suddenly producing an image, word, or idea that makes sense to me and highlights an aspect that I had not seen before. The biggest challenge then is to not forget my mind’s *gift* until I am back at home and have scribbled it down. Later on, I reflect on the input from my run and what it might say about the piece of work I am reviewing. In using this active resonance process for my reflections I have come to realize that to

(...) change (...) the nature of reflection from an abstract, disembodied activity to an embodied (mindful), open-ended reflection (...) is not just *on* experience, but (...) is a form of experience itself (...) (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 27, their emphasis)

Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is one of my *inner arc* methods. The specific form of meditation I am using in this is based on a Buddhist practice called Anapanasati²⁶. This simple, ancient method (Buddhadasa, 1988; Silananda, 1990) of observing one's breath, body and mind operating is based on the Buddhist teaching of the four foundations of mindfulness²⁷ which explains the four aspects²⁸ one can pay attention to in order to become aware of one's various processes of living:

- Breathing and bodily sensations
- Feelings
- My thoughts and thinking patterns
- Nature of reality

The aim of this observation is simply to become aware of what is, that is, notice the patterns of my internal states, thoughts, intentions, assumptions, and habitual reactions in order to develop concentration and practical insights (such as noticing how quickly I have negative bodily reactions by the mere thought of an activity I dislike).

During my meditation sessions, or *awareness training sessions* as I like to think of them, I sit as motionless as I can on my meditation cushion for 30 minutes every day (on the few days I do not find the time, I meditate whenever it is possible in a taxi, train, or plane on my way to or from work). I start each session with becoming aware of my breathing, then I slowly move my attention through my body from head to toes (a so called body-scan) as if saying hello to each part of it. Then I move back to my breathing, noticing its ease or strain, speed, and rhythm. In Anapanasati meditation the breath is used as the *anchor object* in order for one's attention to not get swept away by the constant flow of body, feeling and mind sensations.

Using this method, I am of course noticing (and I am saying *of course* because amongst meditators this is well known) the tendency of my *mindings process* to randomly jump from one locus of attention to the next, from phantasies, to dreams, to the past, to the future, to theories, to memories and so forth without pause or rationale – like a monkey jumping rapidly from branch to branch or a movie projector, always one step ahead of what is actually happening in the present. To be sure, this process goes on all of the time; however, by paying conscious attention to it the process becomes much more obvious and eventually slower than in the normal busy-ness of my working and living and I am able to notice and examine my thinking, feeling and acting patterns more acutely.

²⁶ Pali for 'to recall anything at all with (...) [mindfulness] while breathing in and breathing out' (Buddhadasa, 1988 p. 30)

²⁷ The complete name of the teaching is The Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness or Maha Satipatthana Sutta in Pali (Silananda, 1990 p. 13)

²⁸ Body (Kaya), feeling (Vedana), Mind (Citta), and Dhamma (Buddhadasa, 1988 p. 31) that is, 'the ultimate truth of all nature (...) all conditioned things are impermanent and in endless flux, (...) all concocted things are inherently unable to satisfy our desires, (...) all things are not-self, (...) everything is void of selfhood' (Ibid. p. 37)

I think of my meditation as an activity not unlike that of a constantly rotating radar antenna that notices all movements, say, around a ship, without commenting on them in any way. While I am concentrating on my breathing, inevitably a particular sensation will draw my attention away; so I concentrate on that particular sensation to get into as much contact with it as possible. For instance, when I notice a pain in my back, I try to feel its quality, its vibrations, its ebbing and flowing, and how it changes once I pay attention to it. I notice my thoughts about it, such as *Go away*. As every sensation, it eventually passes or is drowned by a new, more immediate one; finally I come back to my breathing, and the whole process starts again.

To be very clear, the point of my mindfulness meditation sessions is neither to have no thoughts at all nor to get into their content, but to 'develop mindfulness of and insight into (...) [my] situation as (...) [I] experience it here and now' Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 72). I find that simply (I wish it were that simple) noticing my thoughts and any other sensations that appear like, say, on a video camera, without comment, attachment or pushing away is an effective way to develop the strength of my awareness and concentration. After the meditation is over I make notes of my relevant insights for later use in my research and consulting work.

Focusing

I am using focusing as my second *inner arc* method. Focusing, originally developed by philosopher and psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin 25 years ago (Gendlin, 2003 and 1996; Weiser Cornell, 1999 and 2005), is still a relatively unknown embodied way of knowing in which I pay attention to a bodily *felt sense* that I cannot quite express explicitly or concisely in words, images, sounds or gestures... yet.

Focusing begins with that odd and little known "felt sense", and then we think, verbally, logically, or with image forms- but in such a way that the felt sense shifts. When there is a body shift, we sense that our usual kind of thinking has come together with our body-mind, and has succeeded in letting body-mind move a step. (Gendlin, 2003 p. 165, his emphasis)

Gendlin describes this focusing process as dwelling in a state of being 'body *and* mind before they are split apart' (ibid. p. 165) that puts us 'in touch with what the body already knows and lives' (ibid.) but that we are not yet able to express. Focusing is a very effective way to get at the 'more' (Todres, 2007 p. 21) – those rich, additional aspects of an experience that are nearly *un-expressable* in conventional language. Imagine sitting in a comfortable chair reading an interesting book. This *whole* experience is more than its constituting elements and sensations, namely more than the feel of your body pushing into the cushion of the chair, more than the weight of the book in your hands, more than your eyes moving across the page, more than your hand turning the pages, more than the sense of suspension about what will happen next in the book's plot, and so forth. As Gendlin always stresses 'A felt sense is

not a mental experience but a physical one. *Physical*' (Gendlin, 2003 p. 32, his emphasis). In this situation

(...) the body functions (...) as a background knowing of how the situation is as a whole before perceiving its distinctions. (...) Without such an intimate connection before separation, the meanings of language would have no 'about'. (Todres, 2007 p. 21)

If you want to read an example of a focusing session now, simply turn to chapter VII, page 151.

Writing

I am finding that both journaling in the moment and the more formal writing of this thesis are rich sources for my first person inquiry. I experience the very process of writing as an on-going reflexive process and practice through which I gain deeper insights and understanding rather than simply capturing what I think I already know as extremely useful in the sense that when I write I "'word the world" into existence' (Richardson cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 923). For me the process of crafting my words is a process of discovering and developing what I think. In my writing I experience some of the stages of phenomenological writing that van Manen mentions (2002 p. 1-8). I do experience 'seeking' (ibid., p. 1) the right place as very important in order to 'enter' (ibid., p. 2) the reflective, almost meditative mood I need in order to create a text I find worthwhile. In my case, the *right* place for my writing is my simple, white desk in my study that is empty of clutter to help me get into a calm, focused writing mood. At the same time I have all of my books and articles close enough next to me so that I get to them easily. The implication of all of this is that I cannot write well while I am travelling. And secondly, I do experience 'touching' (ibid., p. 6), that is, being touched by words and sentences I have written that resonate keenly with my felt sense. In a way, I am trying to write *from within* my felt sense, namely, to write words and sentences that intellectually and bodily resonate with me.

Conversational second-person inquiries

I have conducted semi-structured second-person conversations over the phone with five consulting colleagues whom I consider to have experience of my inquiry topic and the interest and ability to reflect upon this experience with me. The purpose of the interviews was twofold: 1. To gather 'experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding' (van Manen, 1990 p. 66) of the experience of interacting with generative intent. 2. To use the interview, or better perhaps, the conversation as an opportunity to explore the phenomenon of working live directly rather than only access the memory of it. The conversations lasted about 60 – 90 minutes. Based on these conversations I developed the first version of the *working live* account.

Collaborative resonance conversations

I believe that the process of describing and understanding experiencing is a relational activity that happens between the experiencer/s and the researcher, that is, the co-researchers who are both influenced by the research process and at the same time are influencing it. In other words,

Understanding is participative, conversational, and dialogic. ... it is something that is *produced* in that dialogue, not something *reproduced* by an interpreter through an analysis of that which he or she seeks to understand. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 p. 195, their emphasis)

I have conducted *collaborative resonance inquiry* conversations with the five consulting colleagues whom I have interviewed into the meaning we are making together of my (preliminary) descriptions of the emerging essence of our experiences of working live. The main purpose of these conversations was to see if and in what way how I describe the experience of *working live* resonates with my co-researchers' lived experience. Based on the various resonance conversations I produced the *working live* account you will see later.

Feedback from clients and colleagues

I have asked eight clients and seven colleagues of mine to describe in writing how it is to work with me, what the results of working with me have been for them and their organisation, and what in their view I need to pay more attention to in working live.

Shadow consulting

I have involved Dr. Mike Curry, a former consulting colleague, University lecturer, and good friend of mine as a *ruthless companion* in my writing process. Mike's role has been to read the various chapters and then we debated the issues that were not clear to him, confusing, or contradictory. We called his role *ruthless companion* because I had asked him to both walk next to me on my research path in order to honestly challenge me.

Reflection

Question: I notice you neither mention nor explain many of the phenomenological key concepts such as Noesis, Noema, or Dasein to name just a few. Why is that?

Answer: You are absolutely correct. I do not mention some of the core concepts and most of the vocabulary of hermeneutic phenomenology, because I do not think it is relevant to my research to explain the entire history and particularly the wide range of technical vocabulary or methods of hermeneutic phenomenology in detail, but rather I wanted to bring out the particular key aspects that I think are relevant to my inquiry, namely, the phenomenological reduction, intentionality, and why I think hermeneutic phenomenology is the most appropriate methodology for my research.

Q: But wouldn't Heidegger's notion of Dasein²⁹ be of particular importance to your interest in the phenomena of human living, as you call processes such as relating, selfing, presencing, or grouping.

A: Potentially it could have been, but I am very doubtful about the sense as far as I understand it of his move to define Dasein as a noun and not as a verb. His claims that 'Presence exists (...) as independent entity next to everything that exists' (Fischer, 2008 p. 197)³⁰ and that 'is-ness or Being must belong to or be 'in' things' (Edwards, 2004 p. 37) make no sense to me. I feel that this is a classic case of misplaced concreteness and *as-if* abstraction that I think is very unhelpful in understanding the essence of the process of living and the practice of working live, or anything else concrete like trees or hammers for that matter. Seeing Dasein in this way is completely contrary to the Buddhist notion of emptiness or non-self that informs my research and my consulting practice, which I will describe later. That is, the Mac I am typing these words on does not have an inherent Mac-ness or Dasein somewhere deep within, over, under, below or behind it. In short, in my view Dasein or presence is not a thing existing independently of any phenomena, therefore trying to find and define *it* would be Sisyphean work.

²⁹ Literally translated meaning 'Presence'

³⁰ Translated by me from the German original: 'So existiert das Sein (...) als unabhängige Grösse neben allem Seienden.'

IV. MY THEORETICAL GROUND – THE LIVING PROCESS PERSPECTIVE

- Overview
- Process philosophy
- Social constructionism
- The present moment
- The complex responsive process perspective
- The non-self teaching
- Improvisation
- The living process perspective
- Reflection

Overview

And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings, all the sorrows, all the pleasures, all the good and evil, all of them together was the world. All of them together was the stream of events, the music of life. (...) He saw all of these forms and faces in a thousand relationships to each other, all helping each other, loving, hating and destroying each other and become newly born. (Hesse, 1957 p. 110)

In this chapter I turn my attention towards what I have just called *theory grounding*. That is, I am exploring my assumptions and pre-understandings about the field of study in which my research question is located. Although, as you will see, these theories come from very different disciplines and might therefore not readily seem to be congruent, but on closer examination, I think, highlight useful and different aspects of the very same phenomenon, that is, human living as emergent process.

I show how the above perspectives provide a useful way of understanding and potentially changing our process of human living based on being able to notice and describe what is going on directly from *within* our lived experiencing – I call this the *living process perspective* – without having to revert to *as-if* abstractions as explanations. Seeing for instance my *self* not as a precious, fixed *thing* I have somewhere deep within my body that I need to keep safe and happy, but as a mental activity I perform implies that changing is possible in each moment of living.

I am focusing on the following particular theories because, although looking at different phenomena of human living, they come to the same conclusion, that is, *reality* is fluid and transitory *manifestations* of any phenomena of living occur in the present moment between people in their local situation. The theories complement each other very well due to their temporal focus on the various aspects of the process of human living, namely:

- **Process philosophy:** The *phenomena of (human) living* as on-going emergent processes of interaction which create more interaction in the future and out of which overall patterns emerge.
- **Social constructionism:** *Reality* as a dynamic process of constructing what we think of as real and good through language and action between ourselves over time.
- **Complex responsive process perspective:** *Mind, group, organisation, communication and relations* as continuous, non-linear dynamic processes of people responding to their own and other's verbal and non-verbal gestures out of which patterns emerge over time.
- **Non-self teaching:** *Self* as an on-going conversational and psychological process.
- **Present:** The *present moment* as an on-going, embodied and subjective process of becoming and disappearing.
- **Improvisation:** *Change* as a continuous and spontaneous relational process between human bodies of arising and ceasing in each present moment.

All of the above theories and perspectives take a temporal process view rather than a spatial one and understand the phenomenon they study as constantly emerging, self-organising patterns of interaction in the present moment. Thus, all (apart from a particular aspect of Whitehead's thinking which I will come to shortly) explain the phenomena of (human) living from *within* the process of experiencing and interacting itself without reverting to abstractions such as Freud's *superego*³¹, Senge's *mental models*³², or Kotter's *forces of inertia*.³³ To be sure, I am using these theories and perspectives simply as inspirations and analogies to aid my investigation of the phenomenon and practice of working live rather than as literal instructions or like-for-like comparisons. Therefore I only highlight the key aspects I consider relevant to and useful for my research rather than describe and dissect them in their entirety.

Process philosophy

The human psyche is an organized complex of processes, and our affective and cognitive human experience typifies the processual nature of things. Reality, as we human do and must come to experiential terms with it, is nothing but a structured manifold of processes. (James cited in Rescher, 1996 p. 14-15)

³¹ Retrieved [March 5, 2013] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Id,_ego_and_super-ego

³² Retrieved [March 5, 2013] from http://changingminds.org/explanations/models/senge_models.htm

³³ Retrieved [March 5, 2013] from <http://www.kotterinternational.com/our-principles/changesteps/step-2>

When in the 6th century BCE Heraclitus of Ephesus taught about the impossibility of stepping into the same river twice because in his view there was neither a permanent object to step into, nor a permanent subject that could perform this stepping into he started a way of thinking about the world as constant, ever changing micro- and macro-processes of emergence (Mesle, 2008) which an impressive succession of Western philosophers such as Leibniz, Hegel, James, Bergson, Dewey, Whitehead, and Sheldon (Rescher, 1996 p. 7; Gray, 1982) have elaborated on ever since. Despite many differences in emphasis process philosophers do agree on 'the ubiquity of change' (Rescher, 1996 p. 166), namely, the world is not made of fixed substances, but is a fluid process; it is not a gigantic warehouse formed by time and space filled with things that are separate and unchanging, but the world *is* a continuous relational process of arising and ceasing.

The main reason Whitehead's process philosophy is of interest to me, of importance to my research and why I thus begin the review of my theoretical ground with it is that it highlights the fundamental processual nature of all phenomena and in so doing draws attention to the 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' (Whitehead, 1985 p. 7), in my view one of the main hindrances to being present in each moment.

According to Rescher (1996 p. 27) process philosophy offers two interrelated perspectives on the notion of fluidity, an epistemological and an ontological view. The latter sees 'the supposed predominance and permanence of "things" in nature (...) as a misleading delusion' (Ibid., p. 28) and argues instead that 'process is the most pervasive, characteristic, and crucial feature of reality' (Ibid.) and that nothing in the world, be that elephants, eggs, economies, or experiences are independent, self-contained, unchanging *things*, but that all phenomena are interrelated, continuous processes of emergence. In short, 'the notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject (...) is completely abandoned' (Whitehead, 1985 p. 29).

To this ontological perspective Whitehead adds an epistemological position when arguing that he regards the consideration of the 'idea of a "thing" as necessarily involving a recourse to processual ideas' (Ibid.) because the 'actual world is a process, and (...) the process is the becoming of actual entities' (Ibid., p. 22) in each present moment. What I understand Whitehead to mean with *actual entities* or *actual occasions* are certainly not fixed objects but successions of transitory manifestations (be that a car, a handshake, a smile, or a sense of anxiety), 'momentary events' (Griffin, 2007 p. 133) or 'momentary drops of experience or feeling' (Measle, 2008 p. 95) that constantly arise and cease and vary greatly in length depending on what one looks at. For instance, 'Whereas there may be over a billion such events occurring in each second at the subatomic level, events at the level of the human mind may occur at a rate of about a dozen per second' (Ibid.). In short, according to Whitehead every being *is* its process of becoming.

The term *process* is defined as 'an integrated series of connected developments unfolding in conjoint coordination' (Rescher, 1996 p. 38). That means a process is 'not a mere collection of sequential [unconnected] presents but (...) exhibits (...) a spatialtemporal continuity' (Ibid., p. 39) in which past, present and future are seen as being closely interrelated in that thoughts, feeling, actions, and other states that arise in each moment of *now* are significantly influenced and conditioned by what has happened before and by

what is anticipated next. However, 'the past does not fully determine the present, [and] the present does not fully determine the future' (Griffin, 2007 p. 109). The resulting freedom of choice 'in the present means that the future (...) is partly open' (Ibid.).

After this brief review of what I understand the fundamental perspective of process philosophy to be let me now move on to the aspect of process philosophy that has particular relevance to the phenomenon of working live and thus to my research – Whitehead's *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*. With this term Whitehead referred to the error of treating a phenomenon as a concrete, physical entity, or real event that is not concrete and tangible, but an abstraction, belief, or idea. Another word for this phenomenon would be *reification*. In referring to this misleading *thing-thinking* habit Rescher writes that

'(...) one must heed the distinction between the domain of facts with which a theory deals and the domain of facts to which a theory belongs, (...) Meteorology deals with the weather, but is not itself a meteorological phenomenon.' (1996 p. 167)

Equally, a map of the Alps shows the surface of that particular part of the earth, but is not itself the actual surface of the earth; psychology deals with the mental functioning and behaviours of people, but psychological theories of relating themselves are not relational processes. Granted, these examples are all very obvious; it becomes of course more subtle and thus difficult to avoid seeing the world in reifications when we think and talk about ordinary and invisible phenomena of living such as *our* relationship, *our* love, or *the* meaning as if they were objects external to us. If it is a misleading delusion to see tangible objects such as, say, plants, computers or human bodies as separate, fixed things then I would argue that *nouning* intangible phenomena, that is, labelling and treating relational processes between people such as relating, loving, meaning making as objects is an extremely unhelpful way of thinking and acting in relation to the process of living and changing. I am saying unhelpful because in my view this way of *thing-thinking* leads us away from noticing our experiencing of and working with our *actual occasions* in the present moment towards thinking, conversing and acting based on futile, abstract notions of thing-like qualities such as stability, predictability, and controllability. A typical example of this way of thinking and conversing is this short fragment from an article in the Guardian Online saying that 'it is taking those in charge of the global economy a long time to master the controls' (Retrieved [January 30, 2012] from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/economics-blog/2012/jan/29/global-economic-crisis-policymakers-apocalypse?intcmp= 239>). When hearing and reading such comments based on our nouning habits, I often wonder

What if there were no nouns? Would our world remain composed of distinct and separate things? What if our only language for describing the world were dance? The movements of the body are continuous, and it is difficult to separate the flow of action into discrete, noun-like entities (...). (Gergen, 2009 p. 30)

In my experience nouning is also widespread amongst managers in organizations. Almost every day I hear comments such as this one from a management team meeting at Rico*, a global chemical company: "We need to increase the level of commitment of our managers to and the acceleration of the move towards

greater independence of the operating units". The fateful consequence of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is that it causes us to conceptualize, mostly without noticing, human phenomena as objects and thus causes us to approach them, again, without noticing, in a spatializing and mechanistic way of attempting to manipulate *them* from the outside. We thus might attempt to increase the *level of commitment* like we would approach the increase of the water level in a bathtub – by turning the water on, setting it to the right temperature, leaving it running for a certain period of time while doing something else, checking on the water level periodically, then finally turning the faucet off. This might mean, as was the case at Rico, delegating the *commitment problem* to the HR department to develop a list of commitment principles, associated behaviours and measurements based on *best practices* from *exemplary* companies that was then approved by the management team, and subsequently *cascaded down the organisation* through a *commitment road show*. But when approaching any processual phenomenon of living in this *thing-thinking* way, 'there are aspects of actuality which are simply ignored so long as thought is restricted to these categories' (Whitehead, 1985 p. 8). In Rico's case it was ignored that the phenomena labelled *commitment*, *acceleration*, *move*, and *independence* are not objects that can be manipulated from the outside but are non-linear dynamic social processes between people. The resulting inappropriate mechanistic way of trying to change the specific patterns of interacting between the people within Rico that had emerged over quite some time caused many managers to react negatively to being told to *increase their commitment*. Thus, after a short while the management team began to contemplate again the next *change initiative* that *this time had to work*.

The two key insights emerging from Whitehead's thinking about the fallacy of misplaced concreteness that have particular relevance for my investigation of the practice of working live are:

- Because how we think and talk influences how we act (Mesle, 2008 p. 8), conceptualizing the world (including our bodies and mind) as on-going, interrelated processes of emergence raises our awareness of the 'ubiquity of change' (Rescher, 1996 p. 166) and the importance of paying attention to our participating in the becoming of an 'actual entity' (Whitehead, 1985 p. 29) or transitory occasion *here now*.
- The insight that we are participating in the process of emergence of transitory occasions 'whose reality is always that of the present' (Mead cited in Rescher, 1996 p. 97) and in which 'the past merely serves as a generative condition of the present' (Ibid.) and thus the future 'is partly open' (Griffin, 2007 p. 109) draws attention to the possibility of us deciding how we might act from *within* an actual occasion *next*.

A few critical comments

My main critique of Whitehead's thinking in relation to his notion of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is the incongruence of his reasoning, namely, he argues that a divine entity called God gives energy and direction to a continuous, self-organizing process of the emergence of transitory occasions that give rise to further transitory occasions. Thus, he performs a 'Kantian split' (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 50) by explaining the process of human interaction (and any other interaction with and within the natural world) at any given, transitory moment both from a 'transformative teleology' (Ibid. p. 52) in which interaction in the present simply creates more interaction in the future (out of which patterns emerge over time) without an overall master plan or endpoint and the forming of people's motivations and intentions from a position that might be loosely described as a 'formative process with a subordinated Adaptionist Teleology' (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 47) in that 'God is (...) the source of *inspiration* for the world's agents' (Rescher, 1996 p. 161) and their 'prehension of the primordial nature' (Griffin, 2007 p. 44) of 'the world's arrangements [having] (...) *worth and value in and of themselves*' (Rescher, 1996 p. 161, his emphasis). He goes on to say that the 'teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty' (cited in Griffin, 2007 p. 44) and that without

(...) the intervention of God, there could be nothing new in the world, and no order in the world. The course of creation would be a dead level of ineffectiveness, with all balance and intensity progressively excluded by the cross currents of incompatibility. (Whitehead, 1985 p. 247)

I strongly disagree with the above claims that there exists a final state of the complex, continuous movement of gestures and responses (i.e. beauty) and that this end state can be known in advance and steered towards by a divine force. To argue that a higher order force, a 'benign intelligence' (Rescher, 1996 p. 162), that is both influenced by the self-organizing process that *is* the world and stands outside of it to give energy and direction to it is in my view fundamentally incompatible.

Social constructionism

(...) every way of speaking embodies a different evaluative stance, a different way of being or position in the world. It is this that keeps everyone in permanent dialogue with everyone else. (Shotter, 1993 p. 183)

The simple, yet momentous, argument of social constructionism is that 'reality is socially constructed' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967 p.1) and that 'different people in different positions at different moments will live in different realities' (Shotter, 1993 p. 17). Therefore, there is no discoverable, objective reality, knowledge, meaning or truth that exists independently of the individuals involved but we humans *construct* what we think of as reality, knowledge, meaning and truth between ourselves over time. Consequently, there is not *one* objective Truth, but many different, equally valid subjective truths that are being created between people in their social interactions with each other over time. Viewing the world from a social constructionist

position does however not mean to deny the existence of objects such as trees, rocks, books, or phenomena like fear, love, or illness but to understand that 'specific agglomerations of "reality" and "knowledge" pertain to specific social contexts' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967 p. 3, their emphasis). Thus, what we perceive as real and good is always constructed over time, is relative, and contextual, and thus more fluid and malleable than we conventionally might think. Stems (2001 p. 294) points out that there is no single, unified social constructionist position but rather a family group of related but differentiated perspectives that have evolved since Berger and Luckmann published their influential book. Despite their differences all of these perspectives agree that

(...) the assumption of an already stable and well-formed reality 'behind appearances', full of 'things' identifiable independently of language, must be replaced by that of a vague, only partially specified, unstable world, open to further specification as a result of human, communicative activity. (Shotter, 1993 p. 179, his emphasis)

The various social constructionist perspectives can be grouped along a continuum from *weak* social constructionism on one end to *strong* social constructionism on the opposite end of the continuum (Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 198). A strong position would regard any construction of a particular situation as feasible due to the 'enormous latitude in accounts of our world' (Gergen, 1999 p. 231) we have and because there

(...) is nothing about 'what there is' that demands (...) particular accounts; we could use language to construct alternative worlds in which there is no gravity or cancer, or in which persons and birds are equivalent, and punishment adored. (Ibid., p. 47, his emphasis)

In my view, especially when considering that what we regard as reality 'is often a much more disorderly, fragmented, and heterogeneous affair' (Shotter, 1993 p. 18) than we like to believe, a strong social constructionist position can lead to the problematic situation where we treat everything as entirely relative, arbitrary, and disembodied, and thus rendering the possibility for any kind of joint action virtually impossible. If we were to use any word to describe anything in any way and consider any explanation as equally appropriate as any other where would that leave our embodied intuition and felt sense of what we regard as an appropriate action in a particular situation and context? Shotter refers to the same problem by writing that

Although *vague* and amenable to an indefinite number of descriptions, the only partially specified events in the social constructionist's open, unstable world, cannot allow or afford just *any* description; many are arguably false. They are not 'afforded' either by the events themselves, or by the background circumstances of our lives. (Ibid., p. 181, his emphasis)

He adds that many descriptions can be considered false because they ignore

(...) our spontaneously responsive, living, expressive bodily relations to our surroundings, *and*, the internal relations already existing between the bodily activities occurring between us and the others and otherness around us. (year unknown)

In contrast, a *weak* (or moderate) social constructionist perspective means that some interpretations of a given phenomenon or situation are seen as more appropriate than other interpretations, because for instance they are based on and/or resonate more with our lived experiencing. For instance, it seems intuitively more appropriate to me and *afforded by the circumstances* to comfort a small child when she accidentally cuts her finger than lecturing her about Hippocrates' view of the benefits of blood letting. Pinker refers to this weak interpretation of the notion that reality is socially constructed by writing,

(...) some categories really are social constructions: they exist only because people tacitly agree to act as if they exist. Examples include money, tenure, citizenship (...). But that does not mean that *all* conceptual categories are socially constructed. Concept formulation has been studied for decades by cognitive psychologists, and they conclude that most concepts pick out categories of objects in the world which had some kind of reality before we ever stopped to think about them. (2002 p. 202, his emphasis)

Searle comes from a *weak* social constructionist perspective when arguing that 'ontologically subjective entities, such as mental states, depend on subjects for their existence, whereas ontologically objective entities, such as electrons or mountains, do not' (cited in Rust, 2009).

Within the spectrum of the various weak social constructionist perspectives (Searle, 1996; Holstein and Miller, 1993) I regard Shotter's notion of 'knowing from within' (1993, p. 18) as having particular importance for my research and my practice of working live because of its focus on how we distance ourselves from our experiencing through the illusion 'we have of persons, as (...) self-enclosed (...) atomic individuals, possessing an inner sovereignty, each living their separate lives, all in isolation from each other' (Ibid., p. 45). Instead Shotter proposes an alternative view that our 'primary human reality is conversation' (Ibid., p. 49) and that in participating in these complex responsive conversational processes we 'find (...) [ourselves] immersed 'in' an already *given* situation, but one with a *horizon* to it, that makes it 'open' to (...) [our] actions' (Ibid., p. 39, his emphasis).

What I understand Shotter to mean with *given situation* is not an externally produced, stable circumstance but a specific transitory status quo that has emerged at this particular present moment from within the process of communicative interaction with ourselves and others, this complex iterative process in which 'an utterance is always produced in response to previous utterances (Ibid., p. 180, his emphasis). In other words, this is the transitory situation we find ourselves in at any given moment of time based on what has happened before that 'cannot be traced back to the intentions of any particular individuals, it is *as if* it has a 'given', a 'natural', or an 'externally caused' nature; though, to those within it, it is 'their/our' situation' (Ibid., p. 39, his emphasis). However, as is well known if one wants to continue to participate in a particular conversation or belong to a particular social grouping it is not possible to say anything to anyone at any time or to do anything

that can be thought of. This, I think, is what Shotter means by *horizon* or 'organized practical-moral setting' (Ibid.). Although our very own relational processes that we influence and are influenced by at the same time, that enable and constrain our next possible actions at the same time, continually lead to transitory situations in each present moment that "invite' and 'motivate' (...) [our] next possible actions' (Ibid., his emphasis) not *everything goes* in any given situation because 'In such [conversational] processes (...) people mutually judge and correct both each other and themselves as to the 'fittingness' of their actions to what they take their reality to be (Ibid., p. 40, his emphasis). In short, 'what is possible between us is what we (or our predecessors) have 'made' possible' (Ibid., p. 23, his emphasis) up to this very moment.

The second important aspect of Shotter's version of social constructionism that is of particular relevance to my research and practice of working live is his view that words do not have static, predetermined meanings that we need to learn and understand properly to be able to communicate effectively – a position Shotter calls 'referential-representational' (Ibid., p. 8) – but that we 'perhaps should see the *use* of a word as a *means* (but only as *one* means among many others) in the social making of a meaning' (Ibid., p. 28, his emphasis) – a position he refers to as 'rhetorical-responsive' (Ibid., p. 6). In short, rather than words being container-like carrying specific, context-independent, fixed meanings *within* themselves 'they work to *specify* meanings only within' (Ibid., p. 180, his emphasis) a given conversational process where 'such responsive meanings are always first 'sensed' or 'felt' from within a conversation, that is, they are embodied as vague, unformulated 'intralinguistic tendencies', and as such, are always amenable to yet further responsive (...) 'development' or specification (...) (Ibid., his emphasis).

To summarize, the key aspect of Shotter's rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism that has particular relevance to the phenomenon of working live and thus to my research is his notion of *knowing from within* a conversational process or situation based on his view that 'the roots or foundations of our actions are to be found within ordinary people's everyday activities' (Ibid., p. 30). Shotter calls this phenomenon 'a third kind of knowledge' (Ibid., p. 19) which he distinguishes from our conventional notions of 'theoretical knowledge (a 'knowing that') (...) or a craft or skill ('knowing how') (Ibid., his emphasis). *Knowing from within* is a contextual, everyday, embodied, social, and constantly emerging languaging and acting process that enables us to treat 'activity and flux as primary and (...) the achievement of stability as problematic' (Ibid. p. 179).

A few critical comments

Although Shotter writes about the 'constantly emerging languaging and *acting* process' (Ibid., my emphasis) we are involved in, at all times in his writing he pays disproportionately more attention to the aspect of languaging. As we will see later, much like Stacey and his colleagues in their writing about the complex responsive process perspective, Shotter pays noticeably little attention to people's pre-languaged, bodily experiencing and acting despite writing that the obvious 'next step [in the growth of a noncognitive, non-Cartesian, rhetorical, social constructionist approach to psychology] is a growing interest, not in the mind or

the brain, but in the living body – or more correctly, in the unreflective bodily activities of the whole person’ (Shotter, 1993 p. 30). However, Shotter only hints at this development and practice in his writing but does not follow his thinking through in a way that has for instance been pioneered by Gendlin (1978) when exploring and writing about a body-centered process called focusing that is grounded in our bodily *felt sense* that, when consciously worked with, facilitates ‘the bringing-up of bodily sensed knowledge’ (Ibid., p. 25) and acknowledges that what ‘is at first sensed unclearly and holistically is more basic than the thoughts, feelings, and ways of acting that are already formed, already cut out into existing patterns’ (Ibid., p. 160).

The present moment

A present (...) is (...) the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have lead up to it and which by its change, continuance, or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed. (Mead, 2002 p. 52)

The present moment is of course of paramount interest and importance in an investigation of what is working live like. In drawing especially on Varela et al. (1993), Mead (2002) and Stern (2004) I regard the following aspects as important considerations when thinking about our human experiencing of the *present moment*:

1. **Our embodiment:** Our human ‘mind only exists in an embodied state (...) [and our] mind processes are distributed throughout the body’ (Watson, 2008 p. 21) because bodies are ‘both (...) biological and phenomenological’ (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. XV) processes of emergence forming an ‘interdependent relationship between embodiment, emotion and environment’ (Ibid., p. 23). Time in these processes of emergence is understood as a label we conventionally attach to the continuous ‘becoming and perishing’ (Mesle, 2008 p. 43) of phenomena and not as an actual existing ‘fixed background or framework separate from the events that happen within (...) [it] as if time and space form a bottle around us that would still exist if all events disappeared’ (Ibid.). How we individually experience the *passage of time* is thus highly subjective.
2. **Constantly emerging now-ness:** Interacting with ourselves, others and the world at large happens in the very moment of ‘present nowness’ (Varela and Shear, 1999 p. 111) in which we are participating in it. I cannot experience the *original* moment of my relating and acting before or after it happens because the ‘only time of raw subjective reality, of phenomenal experience, is the present moment’ (Stern, 2004 p. 3). This means that the moment of

(...) “now” does not stand still, but always divides a different set of events into the past and future: in each new “now” there are events in the past that in previous “nows” had not happened yet, having at most been anticipated as probable event. (Griffin, 2007 p. 107, his emphasis)

Thus, not only is this process of constantly emerging moments of now-ness a relational process because it happens within and/or between myself and others, it is also relational in that it

(...) arises out of (...) the process of readjustment that emergence involves (...) [whereby] the new objects enter into a relationship with the old (...) [and] [t]he determining conditions of passage set the conditions under which they survive, and the old objects enter into new relationships with that has arisen. (Mead, 2002 p. 73)

This means that the

(...) reference that is found in (...) [the past] is not to events having a reality independent of the present which is the seat of reality, but rather to such an interpretation of the present in its conditioning passage (...) It is course evident that the materials out of which the past is constructed lie in the present. (Mead, 2002 p. 57)

3. **Circular structure:** Our experiencing of the present moment has a 'circular notion of time in which expectations forming in the present about the future affect the iteration of the past that is forming the expectation of the future' (Stacey, 2003a p. 145). Mead, Stern, Stacey and Thompson all echo this conceptualization of the present moment and thus build on Husserl's notion of the 'living present' (Mead, 2002 p. 57; Stacey, 2003a p. 146; Thompson, 2007 p. 326) as having a temporal duration and structure that Varela calls 'the three-part structure of temporality' (Varela and Shear, 1999 p. 113), that is, 'what is just-past and what is not-yet accompanies every moment of perception' (Russel, 2006 p. 132), by saying that

This future-of-the-present-moment is part of the experience of the felt present moment because its foreshadow, even if vague, is acting on the present instant to give directionality and, at times, a sense of what is about to unfold'. (Stern, 2004 p. 27)

4. **Duration:** Finally, it might be helpful here to have a sense of how long in terms of elapsed time a presenting now-moment usually is, regardless of how long it might subjectively feel to us. Stern's research based predominantly on neuroscientific findings suggests that a present moment lasts between 1-10 seconds because

It takes a certain amount of time for incoming stimulation to reach consciousness. (...) [that] is thought to arise, in neural terms, through the process of reentry (...) when a group of neurons is activated by an incoming stimulus, they may send a signal to another group of neurons. The second group then reactivates (...) the first group and a reentry or recursive loop is created. (...) This combination of an

experience plus a second or third experience about the original experience is what opens the door to the phenomenon of consciousness. (Ibid., p. 52)

According to Stern, these 'islands of consciousness' (Ibid., p. 21), these 'small but meaningful affective happenings that unfold in seconds that make up now' (Ibid., p. 8) and that appear when an event is sufficiently different, special or 'value-laden' (Ibid., p. 52) are connected by periods that can last several seconds or minutes of which we might be aware of at the time but because they are not value-laden enough they do not enter consciousness and are therefore not retained by our long-term memory.

In summary, for me the main challenge regarding my research raised by the above points is framed by the fact that 'we are subjectively alive and conscious only *now*. *Now* is when we directly live our lives' (Stern, 2004 p. 3) and that we

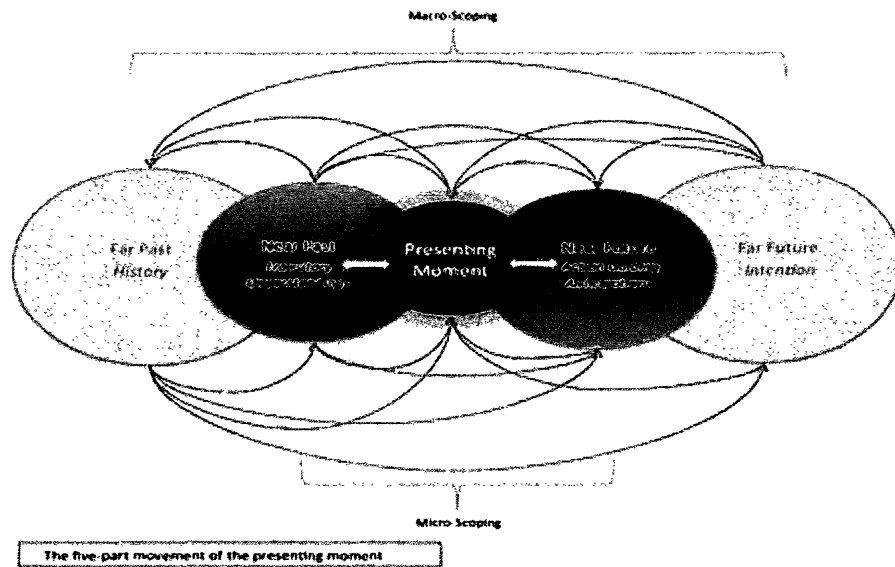
(...) are not contemplating an ultimate unchangeable past that may be spread behind us in its entirety subject to no further change. Our reconstructions of the past (...) are always subject to conceivable reformulations, on the discovery of later evidence. (Mead, 2002 p. 57)

I take this to imply that my recapitulating of, reflecting on, and documenting continually emerging moments of present now-ness will inevitably be post-hoc, subjective and incomplete – 'once or twice removed' (Stern, 2004 p. 3), but more importantly, will always be subject to further reformulation at some future date. Thus, it seems to me the best I can achieve in inquiring into and describing instances of working live is to produce transitory artifacts and insights that are of 'this present, (...) [realizing] that a later present would reconstruct (...) [them] from the standpoint of its own emergent nature' (Mead 2002, p. 59). In short, 'the present moment is not the verbal [or written] account of an experience' (Stern, 2004 p. 32).

A few critical comments

My comments in particular about Varela's and Stern's thinking about the structure of the present moment is not so much a critique of their thinking as it is a realization based on my own experience of an important omission. Both Varela and Stern, echoing Husserl, Mead, Stacey, and Thompson, talk about the three-part structure of the present moment. However, on close examination I have come to think of the present moment as being a continuous *five-part micro movement*. I have chosen the musical term *movement*, that is, 'a major structural unit perceived as the result of the coincidence of relatively large numbers of structural phenomena' (retrieved [January 12] from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movement_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movement_(music))) in order to highlight the *fluid, yet holistic* nature of the presenting moment. What I mean by *fluid, yet holistic* is that in each emerging presenting moment (as shown in the illustration below) which is rich with large amounts of stimuli I am experiencing not only the echo of my subjective, immediate or *near past* (say, the just passed 1-

10 seconds) and my intention for and anticipation of the immediate or *near future* (say, the next 1-10 seconds), but also the shadow or energy of my subjective *far past* and my intentions for and anticipations of the *far future* impact on and influence my experiencing of each emerging presenting moment which at the same time impacts on and influences my perception and construction of my near and far pasts and futures.



In my experience, the additional elements of *far past* and *far future* provide a useful contextual framing for understanding my experiencing in each presenting moment that is missing when perceiving the present moment as only consisting of the conventional three-part structure.

The complex responsive process perspective

In fact, emergence means the exact opposite of 'just happening anyway'. (...) There is no mystery in emergence; it is precisely the product of many, many local interactions. (Stacey, 2012 p. 15)

Essentially I derive my perspective about mind and human groups from Ralph Stacey and his colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Stacey, 2003a+b; 2005a+b; 2009, 2012; Stacey and Griffin, 2005; Fonseca, 2001; Streatfield, 2001; Shaw, 2002; Griffin, 2002; Griffin and Stacey, 2005) who see *them* not as things or fixed, material entities but as activities of relating, as processes of on-going communicative interaction of bodies in their local situation in the present moment out of which patterns emerge over time.

Individuals from this standpoint 'are then thought of as social not because of representations of social relations in their minds but because the processes of mind are the same processes as social relating' (Stacey,

2003a p. 2). Stacey goes on to say that, 'Individual and social are simply two aspects of one process – they are the singular and plural of relating between human bodies' (Ibid.) For me this means that I do not see my clients and myself as *being* a group that influences how we interact with each other, but our interacting *is* the group in the present moment, that is, our interacting does not create a system, entity or whole behind, above, in addition to or as a result of our interactions; our interactions simply create more (patterned) interactions in the future. In this sense, we *are* not a group, we are *grouping*. In other words, a group is not a purposeful entity that enables joint action, like a car carrying a family from A to B, but the joint action itself *is* the group (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). The conventional term *group*, just like the conventional term

...'organisation' is a 'social construction'; it is a mental construct created in the meanings people make together, some formalised in brands, logos, contracts of employment, and some negotiated in the informal conversations which are the stuff of organisational life. It is not held by any one individual but is constantly being re-created through the conversations and interactions that people experience together. This is a process view of organisation, which argues that an organisation, unlike natural phenomena, has no essential qualities, nothing that makes it an object in its own right worthy of a noun 'organisation' to describe it. (Critchley and Stuelten, 2008)

The first source of this way of understanding individuals, human groups and their interactions stems from the work of social psychologist Mead who held that 'It is absurd to look at mind simply from the standpoint of the individual human organism; for although it has its focus there, it is essentially a social phenomenon' (Mead and Morris, 1967 p. 133). Mead goes on to say that 'We must regard mind ... as arising and developing within the social process, within the empirical matrix of social interactions' (Ibid., p. 133). It is important to understand that conversing and relating does not exclusively happen publicly between people, it also happens silently. Stacey draws on Mead when describing these private conversations that *are* the individual mind as being the equivalent to the conversations between people. The individual mind, or *minding process* in my thinking, is thus seen as a silent conversation 'of voices and feelings, more or less hidden from others (...) [that] (...) arise in relationships between people, while being experienced in their bodies' (Stacey, 2003b p. 330 - 331).

The second main input for the complex responsive process perspective comes from the understanding of sociologist Elias of the individual and society as an interrelated, emergent relational process rather than as a meeting of static, isolated objects. Elias explains this view by saying that 'people – unlike billiard balls – evolve and change in and through their relationships to each other' (1991 p. 25). Stern describes the same phenomenon as Mead and Elias, albeit a few decades later and with the help of the latest neuroscience findings, by observing that 'When two people cocreate an intersubjective experience in a shared present moment, the phenomenal consciousness of one overlaps and partially includes the phenomenal consciousness of the other' (2004 p. 125).

The third element constituting the complex responsive process perspective are analogies based on the findings of the complexity sciences about the paradoxical patterning of interactions, self- and emergence, the

paradox of predictability and unpredictability, and the importance of diversity for the emergence of novelty (Kauffman, 1996; Gribbin, 2005).

I see the key aspects of the complex responsive process perspective and the practical implications for my clients and myself as an organisation consultant as follows:

We are all participants and interact locally in the present moment

An organisation is not a fixed entity or thing but a constant, complex process of gestures and responses between people which create more interactions. Although our interactions create patterns over time, they do not add up to a *whole*. There is no stable or bigger *thing* behind peoples' interactions. There is not *the company* that does something to people, there are only individual people relating to each other. Managers and consultants who perceive themselves as standing (at least temporarily) outside of *the system* in order to work *on it* are also understood as constantly participating in the process of relating. If there is no system, you cannot stand outside of *it* and work *on it*. There is no *away from* the constant process of relating; we are all participants in it all of the time. That means for me as a consultant that I am not an intervener in someone else's process, but I am simply participating with my clients in a process of relating while affecting it in some way with my very presence and being affected by it at the same time.

All of our gestures and responses are personal, embodied moves that we make in the present moment. We can only experience our relating to each other while we are doing it, we cannot experience it before or after. I visualise the present moment, or what Stacey refers to as the 'living present' (Stacey 2003b, p. 146), not as a simple, featureless point in the flow of time, but as a continuous, iterative temporal *quantum movement*. Our forming of expectations about the future in the present moment is formed by the past and at the same time forming the past that is forming the future in the present moment (I will say more about this in a moment). This embodied *here-now* perspective implies that we can explain our interactions with each other from within the interactions themselves without having to escape to another, imagined higher *level* of explanation such as *my family, our team, our culture or the company*.

Behavioural patterns emerge without a master plan and are paradoxical

You can neither completely predict how I will respond to your gesture, nor can you absolutely determine beforehand how you will react to mine. You can never tell me what meaning I make out of what you do because it only emerges from my response to it. All you and I can ever do is make intentional gestures to each other in the *here and now*. *Here* in this context refers to each person's local, embodied situation from which he or she relates at any moment (the *now*) to another person who in turn responds from their local situation. Although no grand master plan exists and no one is

in control of the totality of people's local interactions, through the multitude of local interactions global patterns emerge.

Self-organising patterns of interaction of people in their local situation are paradoxical due to their nature of no one being in control. As soon as we relate to people, we form these relationships and at the same time are formed by them, thus we constrain and enable others in our relating to them and are constrained and enabled by them at the very same time. In the terminology of the complex responsive process perspective this phenomenon is called *paradoxical*, referring to an apparently self-contradictory statement about a situation containing conflicting states (e.g. knowing and not knowing at the same time) that cannot be eliminated or resolved, only held in awareness.

Therefore, although managers are in charge, that is, officially responsible for their part of the organisation's operation, they are seen as being *in control* and at the same time *not in control*. From this perspective, my clients and/or I as a consultant act on the expectation of an outcome, at the same time knowing that this specific outcome is very unlikely to materialise, requiring us to work with whatever the actual, transitional outcome turns out to be. This simultaneous knowing and not knowing of what is happening now and might happen in the future can easily create anxiety, particularly in managers and consultants who perceive themselves as being in charge and in control of delivering specific, pre-determined outcomes.

Deviance creates novelty

Because our relationship is not a thing, but a continuous process in the present moment that is full of countless minute variations, it can never be exactly the same. I might say exactly the same words to you today as I did yesterday, but because it is 24 hours later and I have not slept well last night, I might say them ever so slightly differently, and you might make a slightly different meaning out of them today. Too little diversity, as in this example, makes no noticeable difference and our relating might feel stuck in a recurring pattern. At the same time too much diversity is counterproductive to any kind of joint action. By amplifying or introducing differences, existing patterns are disturbed and new ones have the possibility to emerge; however, which new ones cannot be predicted.

Our talking is powerful action

People's relating in organizations organises itself by narrative themes that appear in a multitude of different forms (e.g. rituals, rumours, discussions, presentations, visions). Since the organisation *is* the patterns of people's conversations, *it* changes as the conversations that people have with each other and thus the power relations between them change. Power and intention, for example, are themes that emerge out of our conversational relating. No one simply *has* power or intention; both emerge in the process of our relating. Therefore, what people talk and not talk about in

organisations, how, and who is included in and excluded from these conversations is of paramount importance to organizational change.

Some of the themes that organize people's conversations in organisations are seen as *legitimate* themes that are talked about openly (e.g. the company vision), others are seen as *shadow* themes that are only talked about in confidence around the water cooler between people who trust each other (e.g. the view that the CEO is incompetent and should be replaced).

If 'the impossibility of not communicating makes all two-or-more-person situations *interpersonal*, communicative ones...' (Watzlawick, P., J. B. Bavelas, et al., 1967 p. 70) how then do I conceptualize from a complex responsive process perspective that 'primary human reality' (Shotter, 1993 p. 40) called communication, how *it* works, and how we make meaning between ourselves and others? In contrast to the conventional view of communication as a linear, cause-effect based transmission of meaning from one person's brain into another person's brain through the skilled use of precise symbols (e.g. words, bodily gestures), I view communicating and meaning making as an on-going, non-linear dynamic, collaborative verbal and non-verbal process of gestures and responses in the present moment out of which global patterns emerge over time (Mead and Morris, 1967; Shotter, 1993; Stacey, 2003a; Stewart, Zediker, et al., 2005; Pearce, 2007). As I have said before, no participant can be outside of this paradoxical process, we all influence and shape it and at the same time are influenced and shaped by it.

As a consequence of this view it is obvious that 'No one person can completely control a communication event, and no single person or action causes - or can be blamed for - a communication outcome' (Stewart, Zediker, et al., 2005 p. 34). We all influence the process of communication between us and at the same time are influenced by it. There is no *away* from communicating; even not talking, responding through silence or not showing up to an agreed meeting, means to communicate. As Watzlawick, Bavelas, et al. observed, we cannot say 'that "communication" only takes place when it is intentional, conscious, or successful, that is, when mutual understanding occurs' (1967 p. 49, their emphasis).

A key outcome we are creating in our conversing with each other is meaning (by *meaning* I of course do not mean a thing, but a psychological sense or process). Sometimes we are able to create mutual meaning; but often we make different individual meanings from an encounter with one another. In order to create coherent, joint action a certain degree of mutual meaning is necessary. The absence of mutual meaning can be divisive and disastrous as evidenced for instance by the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Therefore Pearce suggests that 'Rather than "What do you mean by that?" the relevant questions are "What are we making together?" "How are we making it?"' (2007 p. 30 - 13).

In summary, in my view the theory of complex responsive processes has great relevance for my inquiry into working live because it takes a temporal perspective of understanding organizations as the constantly

emerging, self-organising processes and patterns of interaction in the present moment in which the individual is 'the singular, while the group is the plural of the same phenomenon' (Stacey 2003, p. 323). This leads to its particular potency in explaining *what is going on* from *within* the experience itself without reverting to a different *level* of interpretation such as *personality, family, group, or organisation*.

A few critical comments

Although Stacey and his colleagues describe organisations as processes of people relating, for me they do not thoroughly enough explore the fact that this relating happens *within* and between human *bodies*. In my view the 'complex responsive way of understanding human action and interaction' (Stacey, 2003a, p. 117) overly focuses on theorizing about mind processes despite acknowledging that 'it is the *organism's* selective action into its world that shapes the brain connections through self-organizing processes forming emergent patterns' (Ibid., my emphasis). I am thus missing, just as in Shotter's writing, an exploration of our bodily experiencing that is not mind, such as offered by Gendlin in his body-awareness process called focusing (1978) in which he explores a mode of awareness he calls 'felt sense' (Gendlin, 1978 p. 32) of a 'situation or person or event' (Ibid.) that

(...) is not a mental experience but a physical one. *Physical*. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time – encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail. (...) A felt sense does not come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling. (...) It is an unfamiliar, deep-down level of awareness (...). (Ibid., p. 32 – 33, his emphasis)

My second criticism is not a critique of the theory of complex responsive processes itself, but a concern about the way Stacey and his colleagues present it in a way that makes it seem superior to any other way of understanding organisations and organizational life because in a lot of their writings they invest a large proportion of the available space to identify problems with and inconsistencies within the writing of other organizational theorists (e.g. Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003b). But nowhere in their writing have I found any hint that they might understand their own theorising as simply another possible construction of organizational life.

The non-self teaching

Currently, we believe that what it is to be a person, is that we possess an inner psychic unity (which we call our 'self'), and that it is from our self that all our motivations issue, and that it is within our self that all the reasons for all our actions can be found. If the account here is correct, then we are corporately and incorrigibly self-deceived in these beliefs. (Shotter, 1993 p. 95, his emphasis)

The next perspective that is of importance for my research is the Theravadin³⁴ Buddhist teaching of non-self³⁵ (Rahula, 1974 pp. 51-66; Silananda, 1999; Bodhi, 2005 p. 341-342), 'the most important (...) and distinctive' (Silananda, 1999 p. 15) teaching of Siddhattha Gotama Sakyamuni (also called *the Buddha*³⁶), a man who 'left society to look for salvation beyond its boundaries' (Gombrich, 1988 p. 18), taught others 'who [had] renounced all familial and social ties' (Ibid.) and eventually founded 'an institution consciously and carefully designed to a particular end (...), the monastic Order' (Ibid.). You might wonder why I introduce what might in the first instance appear to be a religious view into my research. But is Buddhism really a religion or is it rather a philosophy, and does it matter either way for my purposes? Academics and Buddhist practitioners have long discussed this question very controversially (Herbrechtsmeier, 1993) and I suspect this discussion will not lead to an agreement any time soon, if ever. Therefore, I do not think that an exploration of these various viewpoints would be helpful here. However, what I do consider important at this point is for me to articulate my personal position specifically about the Theravadin Buddhist non-self teaching because as I have just said above, from what perspective I argue does have an impact on my researching a particular instance or type of lived experience. Such a phenomenological inquiry of and from within an experience would in my view be incongruent with and in no way be facilitated by understanding Buddhism as a religion and the Buddha as a deity. I agree with Elliott that Gotama was simply a very accomplished practitioner and teacher 'who walked away from Hinduism's 30,000 deities (...) and whose original followers did not consider him a deity. Originally, Buddhism was not a religion'³⁷ and Gotama was not a Buddhist, but an empiricist interested in investigating his first-hand experiences of the present moment in order to understand the causes for his identification with and attachment to what he considered pleasant thoughts and states, and his aversion to what he considered unpleasant ones. I subsequently understand Theravada Buddhism in general and its non-self-teaching in particular as first-person, empirical practices (Gombrich, 1988 p. 61) of observing and letting go of one's identification with transitory conditions, namely, the content of one's moment-to-moment experiencing and minding processes (e.g. "I like that piece of music." "I disagree with your opinion." "I am stupid, slow, or wonderful." "My knee hurts." "I want a coffee now."). This practice is based on the realization that any identification with phenomena that are impermanent, that is, constantly arising and ceasing, and without inherent essence creates 'deep-seated suffering' (Siderits, Thompson and Zahavi, 2011 p. 5) if we attempt to hold onto and/or increase what we experience as positive states or circumstances and get rid of what we experience as negative states or circumstances. Ajahn Sumedho³⁸, one of my Buddhist teachers, explains this mental suffering as starting as

³⁴ The oldest and by many scholars regarded as the most conservative of the Buddhist monastic schools existing since sometime between 550 – 450 BCE. (Gombrich, 1988 p. 32). The other, later school is called Mahayana.

³⁵ Found in the teaching called *Anattalakkhana Sutta* in Pali (The discourse on the non-self characteristics), the language in which the Buddhist scriptures were first written down since the 3rd century BCE. (Retrieved [September 8, 2012] from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.nymo.html>)

³⁶ A word in Pali meaning *The Enlightened One* (Walpole Rahula, 1974 p. XV); has lived and taught in what is now South-Eastern Nepal in the 5th century BCE (about the same time as Heraclitus).

³⁷ Willis E. Elliott: Basic Buddhism a philosophy, not a religion. (Retrieved [March 4, 2013] from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/basic-buddhism-a-philosophy-not-a-religion/2011/07/08/gIQAblkZ3H_blog.html)

³⁸ Former Abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Nettleden, England

(...) soon as I've grasped one perception and I'm jumping for joy at the sunshine then the unpleasant thought arises that it may not last. Whatever you're attached to will bring on its opposite. And then when things aren't going very well, the mind tends to think, 'I want them to get better than this.' So suffering arises wherever there is this grasping of desire.³⁹

Siderits, Thompson and Zahavi clarify the cause for this suffering by explaining that

(...) rather than say that our mistake lies in identifying with the wrong thing (e.g. the body), or the wrong kind of thing (e.g. a substance), (...) [Buddhism] locates the error in identification as such.' (2011 p. 5)

In summary, Ajahn Sumedho describes the essence of the Theravadin Buddhist practices in the following way:

Our tendency is to try to become something, and so we set a goal, create an ideal of what we would like to become. Maybe we think society should be other than it is. People should be kind, generous, understanding, loving, there should be brotherhood and people shouldn't be selfish. The government should have wise leaders, the world should be at peace and so forth. But the world is as it is at this moment in time and things are as they are. When we don't understand this then we are struggling. So listen inwardly to yourselves, to the constant crying, 'I am this way, I am not this way,' and penetrate this 'I am, I am not' with awareness. (...) We have the ability to contemplate the nature of things, this ability to say, 'This is the way it is'. We can notice 'the way it is' without adapting a personality viewpoint. So with the breath of the body, the weight of it, the posture of it, we are just witnessing and nothing, observing how it is, now, in this moment. The mood of the mind, whether we feel bright or dull, happy or unhappy, is something we can know - we can witness. And the empty mind, empty of the proliferations about oneself and others, is clarity. (...). The more we really look into the habits we have developed, the more clear things become for us. So we must be willing to suffer, to be bored, and to be miserable and anguished: it's an opportunity to bear with these unpleasant mental states, rather than suppress them. Having been born, this is the way it is, at this time, at this place. (...) Gotama the Buddha was one whose wisdom came from observing nature, the conditions of mind and body. Now that's not impossible for any of us to do. We have minds and bodies, all we have to do is to watch them.⁴⁰

Let us now move our attention more specifically to the non-self teaching for which I mainly draw on the interpretation of Silananda (1999), a Theravadin Buddhist monk and one of the most prolific teachers of the last 60 years. In traditional Western thinking there is a tendency to conceptualize the *self* as a private and mysterious entity containing *the real me* somewhere deep inside our independent and separate bodies that is not context-dependent or relationally-derived but autonomous, enduring, and separate from other humans and the more-than-human world. From this spatial *thing-thinking* view of self, we would answer the ontological question about what kinds of beings we think we are in the following way: We are independent beings that *possess a fixed self, like a cherry stone somewhere deep within themselves* (Silananda, 1999). In contrast in early Theravadin writings⁴¹ human beings are described as 'an organism, comprised of both physical and mental factors and processes, [that] lives in a dynamic equilibrium with its environment, both

³⁹ Retrieved [March 6, 2013] from http://www.amaravati.org/documents/the_way_it_is/07twi.html

⁴⁰ Retrieved [March 6, 2013] from http://www.amaravati.org/documents/the_way_it_is/07twi.html

⁴¹ By 'early' I refer to the Pali literature emerging in India around the 3rd century BCE.

shaping and being shaped by that environment as a response to various sets of conditions' (Segall, 2003 p. 11). In other words, an *individual* is seen as a social phenomenon and 'there is no doer apart from doing, and no experiencer apart from the experiencing' (Silananda, 1999 p. 22). According to the non-self teaching humans consist of five interdependent elements or *aggregates*:

(...) (1) corporeality (material process and form); (2) feelings; (3) perceptions; (4) mental formations; and (5) consciousness. (Ibid., p. 23)

The implication of this view is that I do not *have* a self, but that my *sense* of 'self is momentary, coming into existence with each occurrence of cognition in a mental stream and then going out of existence, ordinarily to be replaced by another' (Siderits, Thompson and Zahavi, 2001 p. 5). 'There is nothing apart from the five aggregates (...) which are interacting and dependent on each other. No director, no doer, no experiencer, and no essence can be found' (Silananda, 1999 p. 23). In short, the *self* we experience is not a stable entity we *have* inside of our bodies, but only a psychological sense we continually create from moment to moment. Batchelor explains this notion of fluidity and emergence very succinctly by writing, 'I am who I am not because of an essential self hidden away in the core of my being but because of the unprecedented and unrepeatable matrix of conditions' (1997 p. 79) that exist in each moment. He continues, 'There is nothing thinglike about me at all. I am more like an unfolding narrative' (Ibid., p. 82). From this perspective, the *me* (as well as the *mine*, *myself*, and *I*) is understood as an activity we are engaged in, a constant mental process of construction due to countless knowable and unknowable causes and conditions that come together in one moment and change again in the next. Our sense of self does not exist independently of them, but we continuously and mostly unconsciously construct it as reaction to them. Self is thus an on-going mental and emotional activity that we are engaged in that could more appropriately be called 'selfing'⁴² (Olendzki, summer 2005 p. 26).

Let me pause here for a moment to draw attention to the fundamental difference between the *ontological* self the non-self teaching is referring to and the *psychological* self (Aronson, 2004 p. 64-90). By psychological self I mean the beliefs, views, and sense that we have about ourselves as persons. In contemporary psychology this psychological sense of self is generally considered to consist of two interrelated aspects: *self-image* –how we see and describe ourselves– and *self-esteem* –how we feel about ourselves (Woods, 1995 p. 163). This psychological self plays 'a major role in how we behave and give unity to our functioning' (Pervin, 2003 p. 261) without which we would not be able to function at all in the world.

To be sure, the non-self teaching is *not* aimed at this psychological self, this *sense of self*. Instead, the non-self theory refers to the *ontological self*, 'the feeling or belief that there is an inherent, ontological core at the center of our experience that is separate, substantial, enduring, self-identical' (Safran, 2003 p. 52) which we

⁴² *Akamkara* in Theravadin Buddhist terminology meaning *I-making or Having or making the feeling of I* (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1994 p. 125).

usually tend to think of and describe 'in spatial terms: as an entity with boundaries, layers, and a core, much like an onion or a building or an archaeological dig' (Epstein, 1997 p. 138).

This is where the non-self theory offers a radically different perspective. "Self" (...) is a name or designation only, not a "thing" that exists and can be found' (Safran, 2003 p. 52, his emphasis) and the terms *I*, *me*, and *myself* I am using in my thinking, conversing and writing is a convention and habit rather than an existing, real phenomenon. From the temporal process perspective of the non-self teaching there is no *I*, *me* or *myself* – all there is, is a seemingly continuous stream of experiencing which 'is created only in our minds' (Silananda, 1999 p. 52). My experience of, say, sitting behind my desk and typing these words on my Mac is not experienced by a thing with a self called *I* or *me* that has this experience, but *I am* this experience. In other words, to use words such as *I*, *me*, *mine*, *myself* is 'simply a convenient way of referring to a particular collection of mental and physical states' (Harvey, 1990 p. 51).

In order to illustrate the very unique perspective the teaching about non-self is proposing, let me invite you to a little thought experiment. You are probably sitting in a chair while reading these lines. What do you think makes your chair a chair? You might point to its four legs, its seat, its backrest and its two arms-rests. Now imagine cutting off some of these parts. Would it still be a chair if you were to cut off one of its armrests? Or both of them? Or maybe even its backrest and two of its legs? At some point in this disassembling process, the question will arise, when does the chair stop being a chair? Or does it maybe have somewhere *deep within* it a stable core, an essence or inherent *chair-ness* that will always remain intact? I don't think anyone would make that claim. But according to the non-self theory that is precisely what we do if we view self as a fixed, spatial entity or essence somewhere within us. Here is where the non-self theory offers a different explanation. It argues that there is no stable, findable *chair essence* or inherent *chairness* that exists independently of the elements that make up what we call *a chair*. Your chair only exists as a result of numerous activities, parts and materials coming together in one place at the same time. There is nothing else either *within* the chair, or *under*, *above*, or *behind* the multitude of causes leading to its existence. They *are* the chair. The chair does not exist independently of them; it is *empty* of an independent, stable self or essence. That is why the term *emptiness* is also often used to describe this notion.

In summary, I see the relevance of the non-self teaching for my research as this: The non-self teaching argues that the ontological idea of carrying a core essence within us called *self* is an unhelpful illusion because (1) it gets in the way of becoming aware of the constant process of our experiencing of ourselves, others and the world at large mainly due to our desire 'for things to be permanent' (Silananda, 1999 p. 41) and (2) the process of 'represent[ing] yourself to yourself as independently existing' (Safran, 2003 p. 52) can cause an often unconscious tendency to overly focus on *myself* in order to protect, enhance, or pamper *my self*. In my personal experience these *ontological selfing moves* exaggerate my sense of distance to my experiencing of myself, others, and the world and consequently severely impairs my ability to be here now and next. If I feel I have *a self* to protect, enhance, or please, it is very difficult to work with any degree of non-judgmental awareness. Here, the non-self teaching acts as a powerful reminder that *I am* not the opinions, preferences,

dislikes, or biases I hold, but they are simply thoughts, emotions, and impulses that, like all phenomena of living, arise in one moment and cease in the next. In short, the non-self teaching offers a method of becoming aware if and when I identify with and thus become attached to the ever changing phenomena of living such as *my* opinions, preferences, dislikes, or biases.

A few critical comments

Although I very much like the *experience-able* nature of the non-self teaching, I would like to briefly highlight two aspects that I see as difficult and potentially problematic. Let me start with what I perceive to be a potential problem. I see a definite possibility that a misunderstanding of the notion of *everything being empty of an independent, enduring self* might lead to an abdication from living our lives actively and creatively. We might think since everything is empty anyway then 'I do not need to struggle to find out who I am, what my desires and aspirations are, what my needs are, what my capabilities and responsibilities are, how I am relating to others, and what I could or should do with my life' (Safran, 2003 p. 37). Clearly, this is quite the opposite of what this particular teaching is aiming at – recognizing that we have a choice of how we *self*.

My second point has to do with what I experience to be the difficulty of the practical day-to-day implications of the theory. It seems to me that applying a non-self perspective leads to a paradoxical situation where I want to develop and maintain a healthy psychological *sense of self* in order to function in the world and at the same time I want to let go of my habitual creation of a *self-thing* in order to not become my positions but rather become aware and alive to my moment-moment everyday experiencing. A while ago I heard someone express this paradox beautifully by calling it *empty of self and at the same time full of being*.

Improvisation

(...) the central theme (...) is the living bodily responsiveness continually occurring spontaneously (...) (Shotter, 2011 p. 75)

"There is no way I will stand up in front of 200 senior partners and just talk. You know how critically important it is that they all get my message. I need to make sure I cover all of the relevant points properly. And I can only do that if I write my speech beforehand, not if I just wing it." The empathic way in which my client Gus*, the managing director of a professional services firm, spoke and looked at me left little doubt that he was finally getting impatient with my repeated encouragements to speak free and personal at the upcoming annual partner's meeting, aided at best by a few scribbled bullet points. I had argued that especially because he wanted his comments to *come straight from the heart* and *connect with the partners as people* he needed to speak spontaneously from within the emerging situation between him and his

colleagues at the moment of speaking rather than 'playing (...) [himself] in an anticipated situation' (Shaw in Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 10). However, all along he had been adamant that such an *unprepared appearance* would be unprofessional and very likely a waste of everyone's time.

I have had countless similar conversations with clients who believed that whenever a conversation, a speech, a meeting, a conference, or even an entire organizational change process was of critical importance and thus *had to be successful* – was an *occasion that counts* as a client once described it – its flow and content had to be carefully pre-planned, pre-scripted and sometimes even rehearsed. They all seemed to agree that to improvise in the moment constitutes an unprofessional move to be avoided at all costs, at the most only used when something did not go *according to plan* and one thus had no other choice but to make 'the best of things, while awaiting a return to the way things should be done' (Montouri, 2003 p. 245). Important, impactful interactive situations with others, according to this rationale, seem to require a carefully designed and adhered to script much like a scene in a Shakespeare play.

The word *improvise* derives from the Latin *improviso* meaning *unforeseen* or *unexpected* and later from the French word *improviser* referring to theatre or music meaning *to compose* or *say extemporaneously* (Retrieved [March 8, 2013] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=improvise&searchmode=none). For many centuries improvisation has been a widely accepted and celebrated practice in the performing arts such as music, theatre, or dance of 'reacting in the moment and in response to the stimulus of one's immediate environment and inner feelings' (Retrieved [March 10, 2013] from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Improvisation>). For instance, in music improvisational practices date back to the 5th century, in theatre to the 16th century. Based on this long tradition, Johnstone, one of the world's pre-eminent theatre improvisation teachers, advises his students to not try to be clever and pre-plan every move but act 'without thinking first' (1981 p. 91). He argues that an

(...) artist who is inspired is being obvious. He's not making any decisions, he's not weighing one idea against another. He's accepting his first thoughts. Striving after originality takes you far away from your true self, and makes your work mediocre. (Ibid., p. 88)

Spolin, another well-known authority on theatre improvisation, adds an additional perspective – the notion of *certainty* – by writing that in making the constantly emerging present moment real 'by touching it, seeing it, feeling it, tasting it, smelling it (...) there is no absolutely right or wrong way to solve a problem (...) [because] with intuitive awareness comes certainty' (Spolin, 1999 p. 6-8) about what move to make next.

MRI brain scans of musicians improvising have confirmed the phenomenon of *acting without thinking first* by showing that

The brain turned off areas linked to self-monitoring and inhibition and turned on those that let self-expression flow. In addition, the brain regions involved with all the senses lit up during improvisation, indicating a

heightened state of awareness—the performers literally taste, smell, and feel the air around them. (Retrieved March 10, 2013 from http://www.peabody.jhu.edu/past_issues/fall08/the_science_of_improv.html)

However, despite this long tradition of improvisation in the arts and a sizeable number of academic papers and books having been published about improvisation in organizational settings since the early 1990s (Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002 p. 100-104) the conventional myths amongst managers in organizations still seems to be firstly, that getting things done and having impact on others requires a pre-meditated and carefully constructed and adhered to approach, and secondly, that improvising is not a legitimate managerial behaviour (especially in critical or important situations), is ineffective, and does not require any particular skills (Ibid., p. 29).

In incorporating the original notion of *responding extemporaneously to the unexpected* Hatch defines the term *improvisation* in an organizational context as ‘intuition guiding action *upon something* in a spontaneous *but historically contextualized way*’ (cited in Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002 p. 29, his emphasis). This definition points at an essential characteristic of the improvising process, that is, whatever one does next does not take place in a vacuum in which everything is possible, but, as I have tried to show with the five-part movement that *is* the subjectively experienced presenting moment, that which has happened before and what one anticipates to happen in the future influences in some way what one in each presenting moment intuitively considers to be possible to do or to happen next based on the

(...) momentary knowledge that one can only have *from within* one’s active, ongoing relations with the others and othernesses in one’s surroundings, and which disappears as soon as one’s active involvements with them cease. (Shotter, 2005 p. 163, his emphasis)

This willingness and ability to act spontaneously guided by one’s intuition in each emerging presenting moment emerges from the

(...) *relationally-responsive*, “transitory understandings” [that] happen spontaneously, as a result no doubt of the countless hours of training we have had in our prior involvements in our culture. We do not have to ‘work them out’, self-consciously and deliberately. (Ibid., p. 165, his emphasis)

Thus, improvisation is a *simultaneous* process of thinking and doing (Baker et al., 2003). I agree with Shotter’s observation that to a significant degree ‘our daily lives are not rooted in written texts or in contemplative reflection, but in oral encounters and reciprocal speech’ (1993 p. 29). Some of these communicative encounters are more formalized, repetitive and predictable than others that are more unprecedented, surprising, and unpredictable. Shotter thus distinguishes between ‘a set of relatively stable centres of well ordered, self-producing (...) institutionalized order (...) [and] zones of much more disorderly, unaccountable, chaotic activity’ (Ibid., p. 17-18). His notion of these ‘two basic kinds of activity’ (Ibid., p. 17) is expanded by Moorman and Miner into ‘a continuum upper-limited by spur-of-the-moment action and lower-limited by entirely planned action’(cited in Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002 p. 107) along which the degree of intuition

and spontaneity decreases. In other words, we are always improvising together, albeit to significantly differing degrees of being consciously aware and actively present to ourselves, each other, and our surroundings within each moment of now-ness. Even the most routine daily exchanges between, say, you and your local newsagent that might go something like this – “Morning.” “Morning, Dave.” “All right?” “Yeah, thanks. You?” – ‘are never exact repetitions, but rather small iterations; there are always tiny differences which may amplify in further iterations, creating significant novelty’ (Shaw in Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 2) in the longer term. In other words, the degree of being actively present or ‘the quality of self-consciousness’ (Ibid., p. 10) in each encounter influences the degree to which it is possible for us to respond freshly and choicefully to the evolving situation and to thus potentially influence the emergence of novelty because to act and ‘to talk in new ways, is to ‘construct’ new forms of social relation, and, to construct new forms of social relation (...) is to construct new ways of being for ourselves’ (Shotter, 1993, p. 9) and with each other.

In contrast to scholars who ascribe an agentic and spacial dimension to improvisation by claiming that *it* occurs at different *levels*, that is, individuals, groups or organizations *do it* (Leone, 2010 p. 10, retrieved [March 10, 2013] from [http://www2.druid.dk/conferences/viewpaper.php?id=501578 &cf=43](http://www2.druid.dk/conferences/viewpaper.php?id=501578&cf=43)), I draw on Shotter and Shaw in particular when understanding improvising as a temporal relational-responsive process between people that produces ‘*unintended* and unpredictable outcomes (...) [that] cannot be traced back to the intentions of any particular individuals (...)’ (Shotter, 1993 p. 39). In short, although the degree to which we are able to speak and act extemporaneously, this degree of ‘body-in-life’ (Friis in Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 89), emerges between people and changes significantly from moment to moment, we are ‘always (...) *improvising* together’ (Shaw in Shaw and Stacey, 2006, p. 2, her emphasis) because people are continually ‘(...) *responding* to each other’s utterances in an attempt to link their practical activities in with those of the others around them’ (Shotter, 1993 p. 1, his emphasis).

In summary, the view of improvisation as a relational-responsive process of being aware of and present to ourselves and each other while finding a way forward together from within each emerging moment of now-ness has great relevance to my research because it encourages me to pay attention to what degree the conversations I participate in are alive, create novelty, and are thus helpful to us in knowing ‘which of a possible plurality of future next steps should we take for the best (...) for us’ (Ibid., p. 18).

A few critical comments

I think it is important to highlight an aspect of improvisation in an organizational consulting context that in my view has not received enough explicit mentioning in both Shaw’s and Shotter’s writing, that is, the paradoxical nature of improvisation. I am with Shaw in believing that improvising well (or working live well) ‘does not imply impulsiveness, thoughtlessness, lack of intention and anticipations’ (Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 10) but I would stress that it requires *being intuitive and spontaneous and at the same time acting purposely and choicefully*. The reason I think being explicit about the importance of holding this paradoxical position is essential for working live well is that it allows me to be aware of my subjective experiencing in each emerging

moment while at the same time being choiceful of if and how I express the content of this awareness to the clients I am with at that very moment so as to act as much as possible in congruence with my short- and long-term future intentions and anticipations.

The living process perspective

(...) I hope the switch from past ways of thinking about thinking – of it as entailing inner calculations, computational, or information processing operations – to thinking of it as entailing inner, multivoiced dialogues, requires a considerable number of changes in we how *orient* or *relate* ourselves to the new, one-off events occurring (...) that we must cope with. (Shotter 2011, p. 103, his emphasis)

In Hesse's Indian story *Siddharta* (1957), a young Brahmin son leaves his ancestral home to find enlightenment by following a variety of teachers only to realize as a very old man that the river he eventually ends up working on as a ferryman teaches him the most important lesson of all which Hesse called the 'simultaneousness' (ibid., p. 122) of all phenomena. By that I take Hesse to mean that everything is in constant flux, is constantly changing, is influencing and influenced by everything else, at the same time, and most importantly perhaps, this constant movement is not directed at reaching a particular state or perfect endpoint, it simply leads to more movement in the future, there is no 'mature or final state, only perpetual iteration of identity and difference, continuity and transformation, the known and the unknown, at the same time' (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 52).

Shotter in citing Anderson sees the phenomena important to people in their ordinary living (as opposed to, say, in researching the Higgs boson or in building quantum computers) as falling into three categories:

(...) (1) *the frozen but visible* that we can describe in terms of *nouns* as being *either* of this kind of thing or of that: (2) *the living (moving) and visible* to be described in terms of *verbs* and *both-and*; and (3) *the living (moving) but invisible* that can be described in *neither* this way *nor* that way, that as feelings of 'something' can only be *alluded* to (...). (Shotter, 2011 p. 74-75, his emphasis)

A *building* thus may be seen as belonging to the first category, a *river that flows* to the second, and *making meaning or reaching agreement* to the third category. What I call the *living process perspective* focuses on this third group of social phenomena such as *realitying, minding, selfing, presencing, relating, communicating, grouping, organizing, and changing*. I use the term *living process perspective* as a 'conceptual prosthetic(...)' (Shotter, 1993 9. 11) for combining these elements that all highlight the very same essential perspective: The *living* and *invisible* aspects of human living are embodied, emergent and self-organizing social processes we influence and are influence by at the same time rather than stable objects independent of us that we *possess* and control, and can manipulate from the outside at will.

I am drawing on Stacey's notion of *shifting the focus of attention* (2003b p. 415 - 423) when saying that the main consequence of arguing from the living process perspective is a refocusing of attention rather than a making of *prescriptions for application* because to pretend to be able to offer how-to-act instructions in a complex, self-organizing process of 'pluralistic, changeable, incomplete [and] contested' (Shotter, 1993 p. 11) social events and situations would be incongruent with the very notion of a self-organizing process creating transitory outcomes in which each present moment is simply the most current iteration and 'what is still developing (...) remains open to yet further development' (Shotter, 2011 p. 75). Thus to prescribe 'how that self-organisation should proceed and what should emerge from it' (Stacey 2003b, p. 415) would make no sense. Focusing my attention based on the insights from the living process perspective, that is, of having 'to think in the moment, from within the midst of a special kind of dialogical uncertainty due always to having to act in relation to the activities of others' (Shotter, 2011 p. 103) leads me to be interested in the following five phenomena while working with my clients and researching the practice of working live:

- **The quality of being aware** – The extent to which my clients and I are aware of our 'transitional understandings (of where we are now placed in the ongoing scheme of things) and [our] action-guiding anticipations (as to where next we might go)' (Shotter, 2011 p. 75) and recognize the overall patterns emerging from these perpetual in-the-moment gestures and responses.
- **The quality of selfing** – The extent to which my clients and I act without being attached to ourselves, our views and perspectives, and our intended outcomes.
- **The quality of languaging** – The extent to which my clients and I use process-thinking and – languaging in our conversing with each other.
- **The quality of conversing** – The extent to which my clients and I raise shadow themes that organize our interacting with each other, usually without being spoken about openly.
- **The quality of acting into the unknown** – The extent to which my clients and I act spontaneously and intuitively without being able to control or predict the outcomes of our actions.

Reflection

Question: What do you see as your major point of common critique of the elements you combine into the living process perspective?

Answer: The one major drawback I think the six perspectives, and thus my living process perspective to some extent, have in common, namely, they fundamentally argue against what at least most of my clients would implicitly perceive as *real* and *practical*. These theories contradict our conventional experiential and explanatory frames by claiming that literally everything most people implicitly think of and approach as stable, definable, and sharply distinguishable things, in other words, as just *there* and just *so* – reality, organizations, groups, mind, self, relationships, intentions, feelings, the present moment – are not things at all, but continuous social processes we all participate in out of which patterns emerge over time of which no one is in control.

Most people I have spoke to about this have responded pretty much in the same way: “Come on, get real. Just look around you. Organizations and groups for instance are surely there, they are tangible, have buildings, names, members, their productivity and engagement can be measured, some of them even win World Cups. Or reality for that matter; you can definitely see and touch it. Or organizational culture, are you really telling me that that’s just a fantasy? You really need to become less theoretical, Hartmut!”

So, what I am critical of in all of the six perspectives is that they largely shy away from helping to illuminate what we are to do differently once we have realized that to think for instance of identity and relationships as something we have, our selves as being within us, or being able to deliberately implement our new organizational values are conventions rather than tangible facts, are *as-if* abstractions we confuse with the complex responsive process of living. In particular process philosophy and social constructionism fail to take the next step in turning their particular insights from simply being accurate and intriguing this-is-how-it-is descriptions towards becoming ‘living pragmatics’ (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 21) being useable by and useful ‘for everyday work people who want to inquire into what is involved in having to think ‘in the moment’, while ‘in motion,’ both from within the midst of the complexity, and in relation to unique, never before encountered first-time events’ (Shotter, 2011 p. 1, his emphasis). This is precisely the *next step* I want take with my research, of course, keeping very much in mind what I said earlier about the nonsense of making how-to prescriptions for a self-organizing process.

Q: You mentioned earlier briefly that you think free-flowing, flexible, and *from within* conversational life in organizations is *better* in some way than the ritualized and often lifeless *legitimate ‘about’ communication* (Shotter, 2011 p. 2) we witness so much in organizational settings. Why do you think that?

Answer: I do believe that individuals and organizations alike have a greater chance to stay fresh, adaptable, and remain engaged in the long run when their interactions (and in that I include private, silent conversations with oneself, that is, thinking) ‘flow freely and [do] not get caught in repetitive themes’ (Stacey, 2003b p. 380). As I have said before, every human phenomenon such as, say, relating is a continual process of emerging and changing in the present, albeit at times the changes are too small to be perceived and to make a difference to the established pattern. In these cases we speak of *repetitive themes* leading to *stuck*

patterns. Finding new ways of 'how we might act next in relation to the particular difficulties we might face in each unfolding-moment by unfolding-moment' (Shotter, 2011 p. 2), that is, for different relational patterns to emerge communicative interaction needs to flow freely in order to enable the introduction and utilization of differences.

Q: What role would you say does choice play in this free-flowing conversational life?

A: The living process perspective has three implications for how I understand change, or better *changing*, that derive from the insight that the phenomena of human living (e.g. personality, self, relationships, values, culture, organizations, group, mind) are not stable and unchangeable *things we have* or *are in*, but continuous processes of gesturing and responding we participate in with others (in *others* I include the silent conversation of the various *inner* voices constituting our minds or minding process) in each present moment, and therefore...

- Changing of how one participates in this process is possible.
- Changing of how one participates can happen in each present moment.
- Changing of how one participates requires paying sustained attention to the moment-to-moment complex responsive process of people interacting with each other in the present in their local situations and at the same time to global patterns emerging from these local interactions. In short, changing of how one participates in this self-organizing process requires an awareness of one's '*transitory understandings and action guiding anticipations*' (Shotter, 2011 p. 60) because although very often people 'know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (Foucault cited in Shotter, 2011 p. 1).

Q: I think we both agree that choice is not something one simply has, right? But like intention, choosing emerges in the interaction between people. How then can I *have a choice*?

A: Yes, you are right. No one simply has choice, power, or intention. All of these are themes emerging in our interacting with each other in each moment. In this process of interacting we are making myriads of choices all of the time, unconsciously and consciously, and because of our co-existence with other people, our beliefs, assumptions, norms and values we perceive 'a certain scope and certain limits' (Elias, 1991 p. 53) within which we feel able to choose.

My assumption is that the more we can reframe our as-if abstractions and loosen our habitual, often unconscious ways of perceiving our options and thus expand the available repertoire of our thinking, feeling

and acting alternatives in any given moment, the more possible a free-flowing and flexible conversational life in organizations becomes. The more we recognize the living and invisible phenomena that we conventionally refer to as things as processes (of local interactions creating global patterns), the easier it is to become aware of and be present to our subjective experiencing in each moment and thus be in a position to have choices, albeit within one's own horizon of what one considers possible, about how to act now and what we want to contribute to have happen next, that is, to the development of the overall patterning of our interactions. In other words, consciously making fresh choices in each moment is extremely important for life in organizations to not get stuck in repetitive, life-less routines.

V. FIRST INQUIRY CYCLE: THE EVOLUTION OF MY QUESTION – SHEDDING OFF ONE MORE LAYER OF SKIN⁴³

- [Overview](#)
- [My first shift](#)
- [My second shift](#)
- [My third shift](#)
- [Reflection](#)

Overview

(...) it is not until I have identified my interest in the nature of a selected human experience that a true phenomenological question is possible. (van Manen, 1990 p. 42)

In this chapter I describe what I call my *first inquiry cycle*. As you might imagine my inquiry into my research question took a number of turns to finally settle on what it is today, namely: *In what way can a process view of the phenomena of human living that focuses on what is happening here now and at the same time on what the persons involved want to help make happen in the next moment facilitate change in organizations*. At the end of the chapter I describe the two claims I make going into my 2nd inquiry cycle.

Rather than describing my first inquiry cycle in a lot of detail, I highlight what I perceive as the major turning points or shifts towards more clearly articulating the experiential essence of my question. In order to achieve this I use the *phenomenological reduction* (Velarde-Mayol, 2000) I have described in chapter III.

My first shift

During the last few years I have increasingly begun to ask myself if my clients and I are really making things better? When looking more closely and critically at what we had actually achieved, I began to realize with disappointment that we had not very often made things better.⁴⁴ Granted, every so often we did achieve some improvement results, sometimes getting closer to or even achieving what we had envisioned as being *better*, but more often our efforts created unintended, at times even negative, consequences that did not get us any closer to what we had set out to achieve but rather left many people within the organizations

⁴³ Line from the Bob Dylan song 'Jokerman' from the album 'Infidels' (1983)

⁴⁴ A study by McKinsey & Company found that around 60% of change initiatives did not achieve their intended outcomes. (Organizing for successful change management: A McKinsey Global Survey," *The McKinsey Quarterly*, Web exclusive, July 2006). Another study from Mutaree Consulting and the Bundeswehr Universität Muenchen (2012) found that 40% of change projects did not at all or only partially achieve their intended outcome objectives. (Retrieved [August 21, 2012] from (<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/karriere/veraenderungsprozesse-in-unternehmen-warum-widerstand-zwecklos-ist-1.1443380>))

disappointed and cynical. Increasingly I started to wonder why our efforts so frequently did not lead to their intended outcomes and what I could do about that. Granted, working from a complex responsive process perspective instead of from a conventional, mechanical as-if perspective had already greatly helped my clients and me to understand better how we participate in the way our interactions and we ourselves were changing. However, increasingly I began to think it was not enough for my clients and me to simply ask the question 'How do we participate in the way things change over time?' (Shaw, 2002 p. 171) while acknowledging that whatever our intentions are, the way things change is always surprising, unpredictable, and not a direct result of an individual's intentions. I started to wonder if there was something *more* I as a consultant and we together could do to help to increase my clients' chances of changing towards what they consider to be *better*.

Reflecting again and again on Griffin's and Stacey's comment that 'organizations have to be understood in term of one's own personal experience of participating with others in the co-creation of the patterns of interaction that are the organization' (2005 p.2) in early 2009 I become increasingly interested in how to better facilitate movement in organizations. Thus I had a simple question: *What is the inner work of interacting generatively?* I distinctly remember writing the question down in my journal, looking at it for a long moment, then leaning back in my chair feeling a keen sense of release in my body accompanied by the thought 'Yes, that's what I want to find out.'

In trying to define what I meant by the term the *inner work* I wrote in my ADOC Acceptance Paper in May 2009 that

By 'inner' I mean the psychological processes, such as sensing, awareness, thinking, reflection, intuition, feeling that take place 'within' us. The fact that I have chosen the term 'work' signifies my hypothesis that the more conscious we want to become of these inner processes, the more deliberate psychological work is required of us.

What did I mean by interacting generatively? I wasn't too sure. All I knew at the time was that I was interested in finding out if my clients and I could do more to make things better, hence the term *generatively*. But I only had a fuzzy feeling about what exactly I meant with that term that I could not put into words accurately. The feeling I had about the term *generatively* felt 'meaningful, but not known' (Gendlin, 2003 p.10) yet and had to do with being positive and constructive, with my actions being helpful to myself and others, and with making something better than how I had found it – whatever the *it* might be. When I looked up the term *generative* in Chambers Dictionary of Etymology I found it explained as 'to bring forth, beget, produce, and create' (Barnhart, 1988). So, it did indeed seem to be about producing or creating something, but the Chambers did not say anything about that this something having to be good or positive. Next I consulted Erikson's work on the stages of psychosocial development where he defines *generativity* as being

...primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation ... And indeed, the concept generativity is meant to include such more popular synonyms as *productivity* and *creativity*, which, however, cannot replace it. ... the ability to lose oneself in the meeting of bodies and minds leads to a gradual expansion of ego-interests and to a libidinal investment in that which is being generated. (1977 p. 240, his emphasis)

Again, Erikson's explanation was not really explicit about whether the result of generativity could be positive or negative and yet still be called generative. However, it seemed to me that *guiding the next generation* means focusing on growing and flourishing in a positive sense, and acting on behalf of a larger purpose, not just narrow self-interests.

Finally, I found a quote from Gergen (cited in Klimek, Ritzenhein, Sullivan, 2008 p. 10) in which he says 'that most social science theory lacked "generative potency" meaning the capacity to challenge prevailing assumptions ... and to offer fresh alternatives to contemporary patterns of conduct'. Here *generative* seemed to have a hint of a qualitative aspect by introducing the idea of offering fresh alternatives.

I was very aware that the notion of *generatively* – meaning to *make something better for myself, others and the world at large* – clashed with the view of the complex responsive process perspective that we cannot control the outcomes of our intentions and actions, because meaning and outcomes arise from people's responses to each others' gestures. How then could I or anyone else make something better? Suddenly it was clear to me that I needed to think about and inquire into *generative intent* rather than *generatively*. It seemed to me that whether what I did had generative outcomes was something I could not control, whereas I have personally experienced that it is possible to act with *generative intent* towards others and the world. Although I felt quite pleased about this fine-tuning of my question, the complex responsive process view that one does not simply have intent, but intent arises between people, still bothered me slightly.

A few weeks later when reading about Merleau-Ponty's point that 'to view our experience in a new light, not relying on the fully formed categories of our reflective experience, but developing a method and a language adequate to articulate our pre-reflective experience' (cited in Moran, 2000 p. 402) I realized that my notion of *inner work* was just that - a fully formed category, an abstract concept that would get in my way of describing and understanding the experience of interacting from an embodied perspective. I realised then that in order to understand the essence of the phenomenon of interacting with generative intent I would have to apply Husserl's 'bracketing' method (cited in Langdrige, 2007 pp. 17) and reframe the *inner work* part of my question in order to get back 'to the things themselves' (Husserl cited in Moran, 2000 pp. 107). Van Manen's comment that 'to do phenomenological research is to question something phenomenologically and, also, to be addressed by the question of what something is "really" like' (1990 p. 42) supported this conclusion. Consequently I decided to reframe my question to *What is it like to interact with generative intent?* I now felt that I had come a little bit closer to articulating my question phenomenologically.

My second shift

A few weeks later I co-facilitated an AMOC workshop with a colleague of mine. As part of the workshop I talked about phenomenological research and my own research question. We then asked the participants to interview each other in pairs about “what it is like to interact with generative intent?” When the pairs reported their findings about the essence of generative interactions they all talked about feeling positively energized, more capable and confident, fulfilled, and buzzing. This strongly resonated with my own experiences of generative interactions. However, although the workshop and my session had gone really well I left Ashridge with a faint but noticeable sense of doom in regards to my question. I did not really want to admit it to myself at the time but in hindsight I realize that I had begun to worry that the essence of what it is like to interact with generative intent was obvious and already well known by everyone who had ever had such a generative experience, including myself.

“When I listen to you talking about your question and your interest in it I wonder if what you are really interested in is how to be generative in situations that are not.” I had come to this meeting of my ADOC supervision group in the hope that my colleagues might be able to help me think more deeply about how the notions of intent arising between people and interacting with generative intent might fit or not. However, something entirely different and unexpected happened. Instead of gaining insight into the possibility to act with generative intent my three colleagues caused me to redefine my research question yet again. I do remember very clearly that as soon as I heard the above comment I immediately resonated very strongly with it. Excitedly I responded, “Of course, this is exactly what I want to know!” And indeed, there it was - what finally felt like the essence of my question: *What is it like to interact with generative intent in situations when I don't feel generative?* I think the strong resonance was due to the fact that I have experienced many times in the past that I was not able to act with generative intent because my attachment to my own views, particularly if I felt not seen or hurt by clients and colleagues, can become so strong, my reasoning so inflexible and my empathy non-existing.

When I now explained my research question to friends, colleagues and clients they did not simply say “Oh, how interesting” as before but got visibly excited and said something like “When you have the answer please let me know.”

My third shift

Maybe not surprisingly the writing and discussing of my ADOC transfer paper led me yet again to an important new insight that has occupied my thinking, working and researching since then. At the time I described this insight as follows in my transfer paper:

I now have a strong sense that my various informing theories might complement each other in an interesting way. In short, there is the move away from the 'fallacy of concreteness' towards the phenomenon of lived experiences, that is, from abstractions to life processes in the theory of non-self, in the theory of complex responsive processes and in rhetorical-responsive social constructionism, and finally, of course in phenomenology. (2010)

In my consulting practice I was therefore increasingly beginning to be interested in reframing or, maybe more accurately, retraining my 'thing-thinking' habit (Safran, 2003 p. 88) into a fluid process of experiencing the now-ness (unfortunately another thing-word) of the constantly flowing of the process of living, in particular, the process of working as a consultant with *what is emerging* in any given moment. It seemed to me at that point that I was at a crossroad with my inquiry. I was still interested in the question of what it is like for me to interact generatively in moments in which I do not feel generative, at the same time I was increasingly intrigued by the notion of experimenting with reframing my abstract attitude in relation to the phenomena of organizing and living. Thus I was beginning to be intrigued by the question of *what is it like to work live*.

Throughout this part of my inquiry phase I realized that certain of my moment-to-moment moves have created a habitual reacting pattern that can best be described as impatient, covertly aggressive, and attached to my view. In those situations my behaviour is more influenced by how I feel about what I think my clients have *done to me*, rather than by what I intend to help happen next. The following vignette of a very short incident with my client Ivan*, the Director of Organisation Development at an international technology company, illustrates this phenomenon well.

Out of the corner of my eyes I notice Ivan standing up from his chair in the back of the workshop room I am working in with a group of 16 senior managers on the topic of leading. "Will you not do a feedback round now?" he says loudly in the middle of me wrapping up this weeklong workshop, that is the final of four such events during the last 18 months. I feel an instant irritation, turn towards him and hear myself answer immediately with what feels like a rather sharp and aggressive tone, "No!" "Why not?" he responds equally quickly. I have the peculiar sensation of watching the following words shoot out of my mouth seemingly without my thinking/reasoning faculties being involved, "Because I am facilitating right now!" While I hear myself say this sentence, I notice myself wondering where these words and its cutting tone come from. However, without thinking about it further or saying anything else I turn back to the group while Ivan sits down again, visibly shaken.

Because no one is in control of our communicating with each other and because instances and patterns of feeling, thinking and acting emerge out of our gesturing to each other that are influenced by the continuous meaning we make out of this gesturing, it seems of particular importance to be mindful of what *moves* I can make to increase the probability that the patterned communication and meaning makings I am part of evolve towards what I hold as *good* and *useful* for all involved. Stewart, Zediker and Witteborn suggest a simple, yet

difficult move by saying, 'Whenever you face a communication challenge or problem, the most useful question you can ask yourself is, 'What can I help to happen next?' (2005 p. 47) – a practice they call 'nexting' (ibid.).

Pearce describes the main challenge of nexting as one of differentiating 'between feeling that one has to do something "because of" what has already happened (...) and what one has to do "in order to" bring something else about' (2007 p. 164). It seems to me that a crucial consideration in nexting is intention, that is, the question of "In the service of what is what I am trying to help happen next?" I have chosen this particular interaction to show the other, possibly even greater, challenge to *next* good enough, that is, the speed and stickiness of my amygdala-based responses or, as Kahneman might say, my "System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control' (2011 p.20).⁴⁵

Consequently I paid increasing attention to the very micro-moment before and during which I am gesturing, in particular in situations in which I am *being affected by the past while attempting to act with generative intent for the future*.

This moment of ante-narrative is the key moment for acting wisely. It is a moment in which we need to bring the best that we are into contact with the best understanding of the situation we can get. And then we act, and hope it is enough. (Pearce, 2007 p. 122)

Through all of this I realized that *being affected by the past while attempting to act with generative intent for the future* and *acting with generative intent while not feeling generative* describe the very same phenomenon, and more importantly, this paradoxical phenomenon is a consequence of working in the moment. I also realized that in order to investigate if *changing for the better* is at all possible if seeing human phenomena such as thinking, relating, and organizing as processes I had to pay attention to a way of thinking, talking and acting that uses a *macro mode* to study global patterns and at the same time a *mirco mode* that pays close attention to small units of lived experience, to our embodied 'momentariness' (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 72). I consequently changed my question one more time towards what it is today: *Working live: What implications does a process view of human living have for me as an organisation consultant in facilitating change in organizations?*

Reflection

Question: Did you expect your original research question would change so significantly throughout the first 18 months or so of your research process?

⁴⁵ 'System 1' is the term Kahneman uses to refer to the cluster of our brain activities that originate 'effortlessly (...) impressions and feelings (...) [and] perceive the world around us, recognize objects, orient attention, avoid losses and fear spiders' (2011 p. 21).

Answer: No, not really. I did expect a certain narrowing down and sharpening of the question, but I was indeed very surprised by the many twists and turns. Then again I have had so many conversations about the various incarnations of my question, have read a lot, contemplated the various versions again and again and again that my understanding of my question has almost inevitably evolved. But the main difference in getting to the essence of what I am really interested in, I am convinced, has come from being and working with the various versions of the question in my consulting practice, a process Moustakas calls 'indwelling' (1990 p. 24) which in a way has been a journey of a

(...) phenomenological reduction [that] is not only a way of seeing but a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings. (Moustakas, 1994 p. 92)

I suspect that the first version of my question – the inner work of interacting with generative intent – would have led to an examination of psychological theories that might explain the *inner work* in different ways. But I feel that by using the phenomenological reduction, that is, the very process of understanding our everyday lived human experiences from the perspective of the subjective experiencer rather than from a detached, *objective* theoretical natural sciences perspective has enabled me to make the important shift in the understanding of my question from a mainly abstract, theoretical position towards a more embodied, experiential position and to get somewhat 'away from distraction and misdirection of (...) [my] own assumptions and preconceptions, and back towards the essence of (...) [my] experience about the phenomenon at hand' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009 p. 14).

Q: Do you see a red thread at all when you look at the first and the last version of your question?

A: Yes, I do. The motivation behind my consulting work and thus all versions of my research question is helping my clients to create movement towards whatever we might define as *better*. As I have pointed out before, the initial spark to start my research was my unease with the notion that when we see organizations as complex responsive processes of interacting and only ask 'How do we participate in the way things change over time?' (Shaw, 2002 p. 171) but not *What can we do to help things develop towards better?* When you look at the first version of my question – *What is the inner work of interacting generatively* – and the last version – *What implications does a process view of human living have for me as an organisation consultant in facilitating change in organizations?* – The red thread to me is clearly the question if and how it might be possible to more consciously contribute to things changing for the better while at the same time acknowledging that intentions emerge between people and outcomes are not predictable.

Q: Talking about *better*, do you have a sense what you mean by *better*?

A: At the moment I only have a very vague sense what better might mean that I have hinted at before. My reasoning starts with Stacey's point that 'Organisational change is the same thing as change in the patterns of talk and therefore the patterns of power relations' (2003b p. 363). Better in this context for me then means that our processes of relating to each other that *are* the organisation do not get stuck in repetitive, anxious or *going-through-the-motions* patterns, but become more *alive and real*, that is, 'free-flowing and flexible' (Ibid., p. 364). The associated claims I am making are:

1. Paying close attention to the moment-to-moment complex responsive process of people interacting with themselves and each other in the present in their local situations and at the same time to the global patterns emerging from these myriads of local interactions is beneficial for working with change in organizations.
2. Experience-based explanatory and conversational frames and processes that do not only rely on pre-designed agendas, events, or development and change interventions with pre-determined outcomes enable my clients and me to get into aware contact with what is emerging at this very moment right here and thus with that which we want to help make happen next.

VI. SECOND INQUIRY CYCLE – THE PHENOMENON OF WORKING LIVE

- Overview
- What do I mean by working live well?
- Living with paradoxical tensions
- What is it like to work live? – Dissecting subjective now-moments
- What sense am I making of my subjective now-moments?
- How do others describe their experience of working live?
- What is it like for consulting practioners to work live well?
- Reflection

Overview

Guess what? When it comes right down to it, wherever you go, there you are. Whatever you wind up doing, that's what you've wound up doing. Whatever you are thinking right now, *that's* what's on your mind. Whatever has happened to you, has already happened. The important question is, how are you going to handle it. In other words, what's next? (...) In every moment, we find ourselves at the crossroad of here and now. But when the cloud of forgetfulness over where we are now sets in, in that very moment we get lost. "Now what?" becomes a real problem. (Kabat-Zinn, 1994 p. xiii, his emphasis)

In this chapter, my second inquiry cycle, I explore the phenomenon of working live in detail before I then turn my attention to my practice of working in this way in the next chapter – my third inquiry cycle. As you notice I am distinguishing between the *phenomenon* of working live – what the experience is like – and the *practice* of working in this way – how to work live well.

I begin this chapter with an exploration of the phenomenon of working live from several different, interrelated perspectives. I investigate the paradoxical tensions that appear when working live, look at the micro-structure of very small instances of subjective now-moments, summarize how the phenomenon of working in the moment is described in academia, and finally attempt to amalgamate the experience of myself and of five consulting colleagues I have interviewed about "what is it like to work live?" into a vignette that hopefully resonates with fellow consulting practitioners.

What do I mean by *working live well*?

live (adj.)

1540s, "having life," later (1610s) "burning, glowing," (...) Sense of "containing unspent energy or power" (*live ammunition*, etc.) is from 1799. Meaning "in-person" (of performance) is first attested 1934. (www.etymonline.com)⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Retrieved [May 25, 2012] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=live&searchmode=none

I feel a keen sense of excitement as I am now turning my attention to the phenomenon of working live, the core focus and purpose of my inquiry process. Of course, all of the other pieces of my inquiry captured in this thesis, for instance the evolution of my research question, my personal history, the passion for my work, or my informing theories have all been important to work on during my research. But the phenomenon of working live, what it is really like, how it feels, smells and tastes to work in the present moment is what I am keen to understand and shed light on now.

What then do I mean by *working live well*? Let's start by examining the term *working* first. A good friend and fellow consultant asked me the other day, "Why are you not inquiring into *being in the moment*, why are you so interested in *working live*?" I told him that the reason I am interested in inquiring into *working* is threefold. Firstly, since I am earning my living as an consultant I am very keen to constantly sharpen and develop my personal practice of consulting further; secondly, for me the word *working* suggests a directional intention of working *towards* something that the word *being* does not convey in the same way; and finally, my clients pay for my consulting services, that is, for working with them on a personal or organizational leadership issue that is important to them and that they want to make better, whatever they might subjectively define and perceive as better. In short, the term *working* in my research context means... *Being engaged in consulting activities with and for my clients to help them address personal or organizational leadership issues that are important to them and that they cannot address alone.*

How then do I define the term *live*? First of all, I use *live* as an adverb to qualify the verb *working*. *Live* in this context for me means to work in the present, in person, now. I am agreeing with Kabat-Zinn that in 'every moment, we find ourselves at the crossroad of here and now' (1994 p. xiii). The only moment we can ever experience is *this* very instant of *now-ness* and, due to the fact that we are all embodied, we are experiencing this moment *here*, wherever *here* might be. You are reading these words *now* in whatever place you happen to *be*. So, one important element of what I mean by *live* is that everything that happens, is happening now – every moment of our living (and dying) is happening *live*, that is, in the 'subjective, psychological, process unit of which one is aware' (Stern, 2004 p. 25).

But although everything is happening live in every moment (even the DVD of the Jimi Hendrix concert from 1969 you are watching *now* or the day dream about owning that lovely cottage in the South of France you are having *now*) that does neither mean we are aware of these moments of *now-ness* nor if we are that we really make contact with and address what is going on in a particular moment. Let me explain what I mean by both of those points.

As most of us have probably experienced, we often go about our work or our private activities in an absent-minded way due to our tendency to multi-task. For instance, imagine trying to cross a busy street being late for an important meeting while attempting to compose your opening remarks you will have to make in a few minutes while being on your mobile phone to an irate client. ALL AT THE SAME TIME. At best, you will perform these simultaneous activities at a superficial level of consciousness and performance, but

you cannot be fully aware of all of them because our brain can only ever fully concentrate on one 'effortful' (Kahneman, 2011 p. 23) sensation or task at any one time. In short, if we are not aware of what is going on right now, we will have very little chance to know what to do next because 'Before we can play (experience), we must be free to do so. It is necessary to become part of the world around us and make it real (...)' (Spolin, 2000 p. 6-7).

My second point is slightly more difficult to explain because it is relative and very contextual. What do I mean by addressing each emerging, subjective experienced now-moment⁴⁷ well? Imagine you are a member of a functional management team, say, in Human Resources. During a management team meeting you are having a difficult conversation with your boss about an additional, tricky project she is asking you to take on. You feel that your current workload is already way too high. In fact, very frequently during these last several months you have worked late into the night, which has begun to cause serious frictions with your partner. Your perception of your boss is that she is a workaholic mainly interested in fostering her own career who likes to delegate risky, political tasks and projects to others. Now she looks intently at you and says, "Don't let me down. I need YOU to get this sorted for me immediately!" You are acutely aware that this is a pivotal moment in your conversation. You feel your heart beating quickly and your throat constricting. You think, "How dare you pass your problem to me again?" You also notice your management team colleagues looking at you expectantly. You are conscious of the time passing and you wonder what to do or say next knowing very clearly that 'it is not possible to talk freely and openly to just anyone, in any situation, about anything one likes, in any way one chooses, and still survive as a member' (Stacey, 2003b p. 364) of an organisation. So there you are in this 'effortful' (Kahneman, 2001 p. 23) moment wondering what to do next. In short, the most appropriate "'Now what?'" becomes a real problem' (Kabat-Zinn, 1994 p. xiii). What do you do next? Do you agree to her request or do you tell her what you perceive as is going on here?

I would suggest that when trying to define the term *well* in the context of working live one question is particularly crucial – What do I want to contribute to help emerge next? I conceptualize the notion of *well* in this context in two interrelated ways. Firstly, *well* means achieving significant congruence between my 'transitory understandings' (Shotter, 2011 p. 2), that is, what I subjectively perceive as *going on* for myself and others in a given moment, and my 'action guiding anticipation' (Ibid.), that is, asking from *within* my transitory understanding, what do I want to help emerge next? Secondly, the term *well* has specific relevance in relation to my action guiding anticipation in terms of my intention of *why* I want to do *what* I want to do next. In other words, am I about to do something next with the intention of it being in some way helpful in keeping or making the relational process between myself and my clients fresh, fluid and dialogic (Shotter, 2011 p. 214), that is 'coming into living contact with an other's living being' (Ibid.) or am I acting *because of* something I perceive as having happened (to me) in the past or in the just-gone moment? As Mead observed 'in order to move from one's own concern to more generalized interests' (cited in Aboulafia, 2001 p. 28) we need to have 'a sensitivity to the interest of others (...) in selecting courses of action (...)' (cited in Aboulafia, 2001 p. 29). In this context I find Elias' notion of the We-I balancing, that is, 'the answer to the question "Who

⁴⁷ I have taken the term 'subjective now' from Stern (2004 p. 14).

am I?" both as a social and as an individual being (Elias, 1991 p. 183) and its continuing tilting 'more and more towards I-identify' (Ibid., p. 196) interesting because it provides a useful metaphor for thinking about the balancing between selfing and acting with generative intent. In other words, if I am not able to take the perspective of others and do not understand the overall patterning of our past interactions which have lead to this very moment of now-ness, I have very little chance of knowing what best to contribute to help emerge next. If unaware in this way, I might simply react based on what Pearce calls the 'logical force' or the 'perceived oughtness' (2007 p. 120) of the situation, that is, 'our sense of "oughtness"; our sense that, if he, she, or it has done "this", then we may, must, or must not do "that" (Ibid.). I agree here with Shaw that

Our blindness to the way we participate in fabricating the conversational realities of organizing is compounded by the difficulties we have in *thinking from within, in thinking as participants, in thinking in process terms, above all, in thinking paradoxically.* (2002 p. 20, her emphasis)

Putting together the various aspects of what I have just said about the terms *working, live, and well* my definition of the term *working live well* is... *engaging in consulting activities for and with my clients to help them address issues that are real and important to them and that they feel they cannot address alone while at the same time being aware of my subjective experiencing at a particular moment and expressing it congruently and with generative intent.*

Living with paradoxical tensions

The special feature of this kind of process (...) is that in its course each of the partners forms ideas that were not there before, or pursues further ideas already present. (...) people change in relation to each other and through the relationship to each other (...) they are continuously shaping and reshaping themselves in relation to each other. (Elias, 1991 p. 25)

As we have seen before, the process of interacting is paradoxical. As soon as you and I interact with each other, we both form and influence that interaction and at the same time are formed and influenced by it. None of us can control or stand outside of our communicative process control or design *it* from the *outside*. As soon as we interact with others in whatever way, we form, influence, enable and constrain that interaction through our words, actions, and our bodily presence or absence, and at the same time we are formed, influenced, enabled and constrained by it.

The notion that paradoxes can never be resolved, only lived with, leads to a view of organisational dynamics couched in terms of continuing tension-generating behaviour patterns that are irregular, unstable and unpredictable, but lead to creative novelty. (Stacey 2003b, p. 12)

For instance, *working live well* requires me to accept my clients' legitimate need to increase the certainty of their success (how ever they might define that term) by working with me that often manifests itself in them asking for thoroughly pre-planned, predictable (and thus often life-less, *going-through-the-motions* meetings,

workshops, and change processes) while at the same time advocating that changing our thinking, feeling and acting patterns happens in the very moment of noticing thus necessitating working with what is actually going on between people now.

This paradoxical tension and the four others I am about to describe are not the only paradoxical tensions I have experienced while paying close attention to what it is like to work live, they are simply the ones I personally find most challenging. Examples of others I have experienced are: Wanting to please while trying to make a difference, maintaining relationships while challenging perspectives, or being close while keeping distance.

The English word *paradox* derives from the Greek word 'paradoxos' meaning 'contrary to expectation' (Barnhart, 1988). A paradox, thus, refers to a situation in which two seemingly contradictory statements are both equally true at the same time, which, quite easily, can be experienced as being contrary to what is expected based on conventional wisdom. For instance, managers are often expected by the shareholders of their organisation to be in control of their operation, they are usually not expected to be in charge and *at the same time* not in control.

It is very important to note that the terms paradox and dilemma refer to very different phenomena, which often get confused. *Dilemma* refers to a situation that offers a choice between two options, often both of them perhaps difficult or unpleasant, but a dilemma can be resolved by making an *either - or* choice between the available options. In contrast, a paradox describes a situation where two seemingly contradictory statements are true *at the same time*. Due to their at-the-same-time nature paradoxical situations cannot be resolved through an either-or choice, but can only be held in awareness.

During the last few months while consciously experimenting with working live and paying very close attention to how I participate with others in the constant process of interacting I have noticed a very challenging phenomenon, that is, four interrelated *paradoxical tensions*. I prefer to call these phenomena *paradoxical tensions* because firstly that is precisely how they feel to me, and secondly I do not think it would add value to my what-is-it-like inquiry to have a theoretical discourse about self-reference, infinite regression or circular definition paradoxes (Retrieved [October 5, 2011] from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox>).

I have come to understand that it can be rather trying, confusing and at times even anxiety provoking to cope with the continuous tension created by constantly being exposed to two seemingly opposing, mutually exclusive positions at the same time that cannot be eliminated. We cannot change the fact that both of us influence and at the very same time are influenced by each other when we interact together. Just like gravity, whether or not you agree with the theoretical concept or even know of its existence, when you parachute from a plane, you will fall back down to the ground, unless of course, you hit a tree first. The main challenge is holding these positions simultaneously rather than believing you can get rid of the tension they cause by treating them as a dilemma and thus making an illusionary *either - or* choice. The two below quotes from

Kahneman illustrate very well what has become clear to me about what it is like to be exposed to paradoxical tensions, namely, holding them takes mental and emotional energy, in difficult moments actually quite a lot, because

Whenever you are conscious (...) multiple computations are going on in your brain, which maintain and update current answers to some key questions: Is anything new going on? Is there a threat? Are things going well? Should my attention be redirected? Is more effort needed for this task? (2011 p. 59)

Actually, I am just realizing that *holding the tensions* is not at all the correct expression; we are not actively *holding gravity* either but we do very definitely feel its effect on us for instance while making the (mostly unconscious) effort of holding our bodies upright while standing or walking. In a way, my experience with living with the paradoxical tensions is very similar; I do not have a choice because they are simply there but at the same time I could very easily either by choice or default exclusively be aware of and focus on one side of the paradoxical tension. In the, albeit mistaken, hope of easing the experienced tension in this way I might actually contribute to making the situation worse – I imagine not dissimilar to a tightrope walker who would only concentrate on the left end of the balancing pole. It is thus more accurate to say that it requires mental energy to resist that most alluring and deceptive inner Siren call that claims that collapsing paradoxical tensions will ease the uncomfortable sensation of tension you are experiencing right at that very moment.

(...) the idea of mental energy is more than a mere metaphor. The nervous system consumes more glucose than most other parts of the body, and effortful mental activity appears to be especially expensive in the currency of glucose. (...) The effect is analogous to a runner who draws down glucose stored in her muscles during a sprint. (Ibid., p. 43)

So, let us now look at the paradoxical tensions that are an integral element of the phenomenon of working live. They are:

- Having intentions while having no control over outcomes
- Not knowing while knowing
- Participating while observing
- Holding views while not being attached to them

1. Having intentions while have no control over outcomes

...living with both sides of the control paradox at the same time. This means acting on the basis of an expectation of an outcome, knowing full well that it is unlikely to materialize, requiring me to be ready to handle the consequences whatever they may be. (Streatfield, 2001 p. 7)

I imagine most of my clients would say that they pay my consulting fees to ensure or at least make it more likely that with my help they achieve whatever they have subjectively defined and/or experience as better. In conventional business language they would describe my task as making sure their desired objectives or outcomes are demonstrably achieved. Unfortunately in lived experience this is not possible. Given that I view communicative interaction between people as paradoxical and non-linear dynamic even though I do have the intention to support the achievement of my clients' objectives at the same time I have no control over whether that will really happen. The same of course is true for my clients. In other words, we both have to live with the paradoxical tension of having intentions while having no control over outcomes. Consider my brief interaction with Celeste*, the new Global R&D Director at a global life-sciences company.

We had just met for the first time about 45 minutes ago in her extremely cooled down, ultra-modern office to talk about a proposal her assistant had asked me to produce. Celeste looks at me and shakes her head in what might be frustration or anger; I cannot really tell which. The request I had received "because we have heard a lot about your innovative approach to change" was to help Celeste think through what role she and her newly established global R&D management team might play in helping her company to become more innovative. I come to today's meeting with the intention to encourage her (and her colleagues) to think beyond their professed notion (as outlined extensively on the company's website) of seeing innovation as being a top-down, highly structured and measured process basically consisting of a few smart people having brilliant ideas towards seeing innovating as an on-going communicative process between a wide range of people from within and from outside of the company of utilizing differences to disturb current and develop new patterns of thinking about and working with innovating. I am still wondering why Celeste seems to be so emotional when she says very patronizingly while glancing at her watch, "Quite frankly, I cannot use any of what you have just explained. What I need is a state-of-the-art, fast, agile and measureable innovation process, not the unstructured getting-everyone-involved-encounter-groups you are proposing. We need more Apple, not more Civil Service. I think we're wasting our time here!" She glares at me. For a long moment I don't know how to respond because I am too taken aback by the content, but even more so by the unexpected harsh tone and the finality of her statement. Eventually I manage to respond while getting up slowly, "Well, I guess in that case I don't think I can help you." She gets up quickly saying, "Correct!" We very briefly shake hands and say curtly goodbye. When I am closing her office door I see her sitting at her desk again absorbed in typing rapidly on her computer. She does not look up again.

Sitting in the taxi on my way to meet with Celeste I had reminded myself of my intention to not sell my consulting services to Celeste but to encourage her to at least for the duration of our conversation look at innovation from a different perspective, namely, the complex responsive process perspective. As you have seen from the above scene, my intention to explain an admittedly unconventional approach in order to have Celeste at least begin to sense the potential value of exploring this alternative further led to a very different

outcome. At least in the context of our meeting; if the different view I advocated led to making a difference to her thinking at some later stage as Bateson says I do not know.

I have so far repeatedly used the term *having intentions*, which is albeit a conventional but strictly speaking an incorrect expression. When I say I am *having intentions* I do not mean developing and pursuing fixed, exactly thought-out and -through, step-by-step pre-determined moves or agendas, quite the opposite, really. I do mean being constantly aware of a general and possibly vague, shifting sense of what we aim to do and achieve together; much more a feeling than a plan, a sense a colleague of mine refers to as *going roughly west*. I think Shaw describes the same notion very aptly as “feeling my way forward’ in a web of shifting circumstances that I am participating in creating – as I suggest we all do all of the time’ (2002 p. 62).

My view of intention as emerging in and from the interactions between people is influenced by Mead’s view of the mind as ‘arising and developing within the social process, within the empirical matrix of social interactions’ (1967 p. 133). For Mead, the mind is not an individual object that I have,

(...) but a social phenomenon (...) [that is caused by] the processes of experience that the human brain makes possible (...) only for a group of interacting individuals (...) not for the individual organism in isolation from other organisms. (Ibid., p. 76)

Intention then arises between people in their gesturing and responding to each other, and meaning ‘is not a physical addition to that act and it is not an “idea” as traditionally conceived’ (Ibid.). In following Mead, Elias and Stacey I see intention, or more accurate, intending as a thought or theme that emerges in and organises the complex reciprocal gesturing process between people and gives rise to patterns and consequences none of the individual participants have intended or caused alone. Intending is paradoxical in that while your interactions with others do give rise to something that none of the involved parties has either intended or single-handedly brought about at the very same time you can at any given moment ‘be acting with reference to the end; and you can embody the end in the steps that you are immediately taking’ (Mead, 1967 p. 383). In other words, although both intention and outcomes emerge from people’s interactions with each other, you can ‘bring the end into your intention, into your attitude’ (Ibid.) and also into your action, I would add. To be clear, by *end* I do not propose a ‘formative teleology’ (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 200 p. 52) leading to some sort of final, fixed end state, and I do not think that Mead did either. Rather, I am referring to the ‘*action guiding anticipations* as to “where’ we might go next’ (Shotter, 2011 p. 25) – a practice, as we have seen before, Stewart, Zediker and Witteborn refer to as ‘nexting’ (2005 p. 47).

Because of the influences and constraints introduced into the interaction by the other participant/s we can neither completely predict nor determine how someone will respond to our gestures and vice versa. From this perspective intention can be seen as one of many possible themes (power and anxiety are other examples) that emerge in and organize communicative interaction between people.

2. Not knowing while knowing

If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. (Suzuki, 1970 p. 21)

The above statement and the beginner's mind notion, we discussed in the methodology section, both point to the importance of thoroughly understanding a situation before thinking, I have seen this before, I know what is going on here and therefore I know what to do next. I have noticed when I am able to hold out just a little bit longer and do not jump to conclusions too quickly often new and/or more helpful and appropriate possibilities, explanations and ways forward emerge - just like in the following case.

I am sitting in a circle of chairs surrounded by the European team of 15 HR operations managers of a financial services company trying to come up with a vision statement for their function for the next five years. Outside of the window I can see a lake shining silvery in the beautiful early winter sunshine and in the far distance the snow-covered mountains are clearly visible. I notice feeling slightly bored with the conversation, because I have witnessed similar ones numerous times over the last three decades. I am also aware of an urge to be in nature right now. Instead, I have been listening for the last hour or so to several people speaking emotionally pretty much at the same time without seeming to listen to or at least without building on each other's comments. Like me, my client Ronny*, the European HR operations director, has been silently listening to the conversation with only an occasional, short interjection.

I think back to a few weeks earlier when he had asked me to facilitate this workshop in order to help him and his team *to think more strategically* about their future. "We definitely need to develop a vision and continue the process of thinking about the future we have started 9 months ago", he had said to me then. By now it had become clear to me that the majority of the team members did not share his view about the feasibility of developing a vision statement before important strategic questions having been answered by the senior management of the company.

During the last hour a number of times different team members had asked me if I thought they needed a vision now to which I had always replied that I did not know their situation well enough to be able to answer that question in any meaningful way. I could tell that this was clearly an answer they neither expected nor wanted to hear from their facilitator. Although I was indeed convinced they should and could develop a vision without further input from the board I kept that opinion to myself because it felt to be more important at this moment to give them the time to collectively make up their own mind.

After another 30 minutes or so of discussing the advantages and disadvantages of producing a vision statement now Karen*, a recent team member, suddenly says, "Listen, if I hear us correctly,

we seem to think it's right to postpone this vision work until we have a number of questions answered by the senior management." She proceeds to read out the notes she had made about their questions. There are lots of nods from her colleagues; then, a few minor additions are made to her list. Now everybody seems to lean back in their seats with what I feel is a relieved 'we've finally made a decision' feeling. I also feel pleased because I have a sense that this is the right decision for the team. "Good decision. Well done, everybody. Thank you!" says Ronny with a smile towards me. "Let's have a coffee break."

In general, I was convinced that their HR functions needed to have a clear view of what strategic outcomes (i.e. vision) they wanted to produce in the long-term. Also in this instance I did think the team could have developed a tentative version of their vision based on the expertise in the room. However, I thought at the time (and still think) that would have felt wrong for them. Therefore, I did try very hard to stay with their process longer than I would have done in the past, in particular in the hope that they would be able to come to a conclusion that felt right for them if they had sufficient time to discuss. Thus, *not knowing while knowing* for me means not jumping to conclusions too early despite possibly having prior, potentially valuable and relevant experiences, competences and knowledge.

3. Participating while observing

(...) the willingness to allow what happens in a situation to matter to oneself and to be impacted by it, (...) [and] to share oneself in a situation. (Bugental cited in Mearns and Cooper, 2005 p. 37)

Participating while observing sounds very easy to do. In a way, don't we do that all of the time even when we are not working as organisation consultants? I would argue what we usually do in the normal course of our lives is to indeed perform both activities – without being aware of it. However, in this paradoxical situation I am interested in being aware of both of these activities at the very same time.

It is 7 a.m. and I am sitting quietly with my eyes closed in my hotel room trying to concentrate on my breathing while visualizing my intention for the upcoming day of facilitating the first retreat of Manfred*, the Corporate Head of Sustainability of a global manufacturing company, and his three senior managers. My focus for our day together is to help them to reflect on and converse about the strategic focus of their function and their practice of working together. I want to do this work with the intention of observing, commenting on and facilitating their process while at the same time participating in their discussions by offering my own knowledge about sustainability and working together as a functional leadership team. In other words, I want to act as what I have called earlier a participant-observer-facilitator.

It is around lunchtime now and for the last hour or so my clients and I have been discussing the necessity for and importance of having a common understanding of what sustainability means for them. I realize that I am finding it difficult at the moment to balance between participating in the discussion and observing/facilitating it, because I do have a very clear view about how important it is in my experience to have a leadership team speak with a coherent voice if it does not want to create unhelpful confusion within their function or organisation. I realize that this is the familiar *not knowing while knowing* tension again, this time however, my clients expressly want my opinion and not just my facilitation and observation/feedback skills. I realise that I am constantly flip-flopping between offering a perspective based on my experience and then being quiet, apart from a few occasional remarks while observing their process of working together. While I am observing them and me it is relatively easy for me to notice what is going on *inside* and *outside* of me, but while I am expressing an argument which I want to craft carefully, there is very little else I seem to be able to pay attention to at that particular moment. I notice a rising sense of frustration about my apparent inability to observe while participating.

Why do I find it so difficult to perform two demanding activities at the same time, in this instance talking and at the same time being aware of myself and my surroundings? I wonder whether Kahneman is correct when pointing out that effortful activities interfere with each other.

The often-used phrase “pay attention” is apt: you dispose of a limited budget of attention that you can allocate to activities, and if you try to go beyond your budget, you will fail. It is the mark of effortful activities that they interfere with each other, which is why it is difficult or impossible to conduct several at once. You should not compute the product of 17 x 24 while making a left turn in dense traffic... (2011 p. 23, his emphasis)

Or have you ever succeeded in running very fast and at the same time rehearsing a complex argument in your head? Well, if you haven't I can tell you that at least I have found it to be an impossible task, which seems to make participating while observing a very difficult task, indeed. My only idea at the moment is that I might be able to reduce the effort required to perform these two tasks by increasing my proficiency in them. Much like performing multiple tasks when driving a car becomes easier with practice, but then again, one usually isn't aware of any of them.

4. Holding views while not being attached to them

I can still have views and opinions and preferences (...) But it's in a perspective through awareness; I don't go grasping those views and then judging everything through that divisive process of “I'm right, you're wrong.” (Ajahn Sumedho, 2007 p. 191)

My client Ricardo*, the Marketing Director at a global manufacturing company, looks at me with what seems to be only barely hidden annoyance about his colleague Daniel* who has just come back into the meeting room from seeing Pedro*, their boss, the Chief Operating Officer. I am here

today to help Ricardo, Daniel, and their colleague VJ* and a few of their team members to think about the focus and content of a document outlining their view of the strategic direction of the Marketing department for the next few years which is supposed to serve as an input for their upcoming conversation with the newly appointed CEO. Ricardo and VJ are very keen to present their views about the state and the priorities for their function and the company as candid as possible to enable a frank and *real* conversation. Although Daniel did not object to their intention of being as open as possible, his agreement during the last 1.5 hours of discussion had seemed lukewarm at best. About 15 minutes ago the secretary of the COO had called with the wish to speak to one of them to give additional input to the document – Daniel had volunteered to go. He was back now.

“Pedro does not want ANY controversial points in the document.” he is saying forcefully. “We can add these points verbally, he said, but there should be nothing in writing that could be seen as critical or problematic.” Ricardo immediately and sharply counters, “But why? That makes no sense!” Before Daniel can respond, I say, “I agree with Ricardo. I think if you want to make a difference then you need to talk to the new CEO about what you truly believe are THE important issues.”

The discussion went on for a short while with Ricardo, VJ and me all emphasizing the importance of having their very first conversation with the CEO based on their honest views and not on a sanitized, politically correct version. But Daniel simply repeated increasingly adamant that Pedro did not want anything potentially controversial or negative in the document and that it made no sense to even try to convince him otherwise. Eventually Ricardo and VJ relented and agreed to produce a *safe* version that Pedro could agree with. I was still convinced that this was the wrong first move to make if they wanted the new CEO to understand clearly how the professional Marketing people assessed the current situation and what they would recommend for the future. Therefore I pointed out to them that they were making an important choice with their decision which might have unintended consequences in the future (e.g. the CEO not trusting them if he found out that they wrote a document against their better judgment). But although Ricardo, VJ and I think even Daniel saw the validity of my argument, they seemed to see it as more important for them at this point to not upset their boss than to openly share their perspectives with the CEO.

I could fully understand and appreciate this view, because I saw it as a typical example of how ‘legitimate and shadow themes’ (Stacey, 2003b pp. 364) influence organizational living. Some of the themes that organize people’s conversations in organisations are clearly considered legitimate topics of conversation (e.g. the Marketing vision), but others are seen, often implicitly, as illegitimate or *shadow themes* (e.g. that and why an important market development process had not been followed in the Headquarters) that one only talks in confidence about with people one trusts.

As I have said before, I do at times have an unhelpful (in regards to working as a participant-observer-facilitator) tendency to hold my perspectives as firmly as if they were tattoos I *have* rather than temporary, contextual positions I think and speak *from*. During these last few months I have realized that the more I am able to work from a position of *passionate non-attachment*, namely, taking ownership and accountability for espousing a certain perspective or point and at the same time not being attached to it by realizing that it is just a temporary thought arising from a certain situation that has no more validity or substance than any other thought about the matter at hand.

What is it like to *work live*? – Dissecting subjective now-moments

I now shift my focus dramatically from exploring the phenomenon of working live at the macro level of the ubiquitous paradoxical tensions we have just seen to exploring what is it like to work live at the micro level of just a few seconds.

In this endeavour I am using a micro-analytic mapping technique that I have adapted from Stern's 'micro-analytic interview' method (2004. p. 15) as a way of exploring 'the smallest remembered happening, feeling, thought (...) [and] action' (Ibid. p. 229). To begin the exploration and articulation of what it is like for an organisation consultant to work live I want to dissect three small episodes from my consulting practice that have happened during the last few weeks. On the micro-analytic maps shown below I distinguish between what I was doing, thinking and feeling. Additionally, the feeling dimension has a scale from LOW – HIGH to allow me to record the intensity of the feeling that can be physical and/or psychological. Finally, I attempt to recall how long each of these remembered sensations lasted and capture this on the Duration axis. I then use the completed maps as a basis for describing the same episode in writing. I have realized the different activities of drawing and writing help me to recall more of the minute detail of a given moment of subjective now-ness as when using either one method exclusively.

Subjective now moment 1: I disagree...

The context

I am sitting in a conference room of a very contemporary looking boutique hotel attending a meeting of the Executive Committee of a Nordic insurance company. Most of the thirteen committee members (one woman, twelve men) sitting around the large rectangular of tables look very serious and have said nothing for the last hour or so which leaves me with a slight sense of disorientation. The huge room we are in with its white walls decorated with black and white photos of famous people feels anonymous and cold to me, and despite the whiteness of the walls creates a somewhat subdued atmosphere. But then I think that maybe it is not the room which creates this particular atmosphere but the silent and serious individuals in the room. There

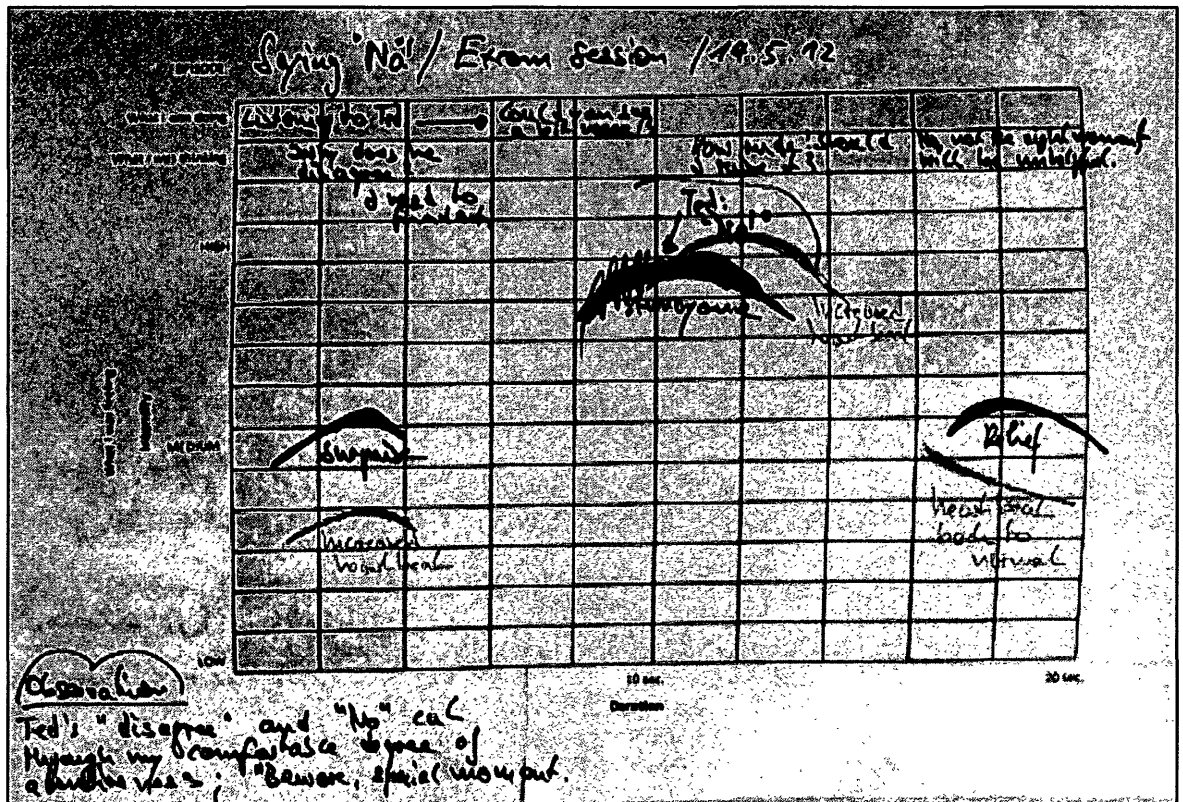
seems to be a tangible sense of lifelessness about the group. However, like me, most of them seem to be listening attentively to the presentation of four of their senior business managers they have invited to present their views about the allegedly inconsistent leadership practices across the various parts of the business. I am very aware of my keen interest in what the senior managers are saying. The chairman of the Executive Committee had asked me to attend this presentation in order to facilitate a discussion about it and to add my own observations about the leadership practices of the organisation. Despite the sense of lifelessness in the room I personally feel awake. I notice that my shoulders feel slightly tense. I breathe consciously for a moment to relief this physical tension but it does persist.

The stimulus

After about 45 minutes of the presentation I am aware of Ted*, one of the committee members, saying to Casey*, one of the senior managers who had just explained a particular conclusion, without looking at him, "I disagree with what you just said."

Recall and visualisation

Back in my hotel room a few hours after the meeting I analysed the above subjective now- moment in detail by firstly drawing a micro-analytic map and then describing the situation in writing:



I listen to Ted saying, "I disagree with what you just said." I immediately feel a sharp increase in my level of attentiveness. I think, "With what do you disagree and why?" I have a strong impulse to interrupt his continuing talking to ask him but I decide to let him finish first. When he does, I ask him right away, I think politely, "Could you say a bit more about what exactly you disagree with and why?" He looks at me for an instant and says, "No!" I feel an acute increase of my heartbeat immediately followed by thinking, "How rude." I then notice a strong, rising sense of annoyance manifesting itself as pressure in my chest area and an equally intense impulse to react. I think, "Should I raise this with him?", then, "I really don't like this guy's behaviour." I think, "No, not the right moment. Will not be helpful for the group. Have to let it go." With that thought I notice a sense of relief within my body and a slowing of my heartbeat back towards its normal rate.

Sense making

When looking at both visualisations of this particular subjective now-moment I am noticing the following:

- Although I cannot remember anything in particular about the first 45 minutes of the meeting, I felt generally attentive before this particular moment of now-ness that began for me when Ted said to Casey, "I disagree with what you just said." This sentence immediately triggered a heightened sense of awareness within me, almost like an alarm saying, "Be aware, something special or different is happening right now." I wonder if this is similar to the well-known sensation during meditation where I am moving between radar-like noticing of my environment, my breathing, my bodily sensations and my thinking and then laser-like awareness as soon as something special in these four areas draws or sparks my attention. To use a mechanical analogy, I wonder if we all develop and hold physical and psychological tripwires that get triggered by certain events? I also wonder about the difference between being conscious and being aware.
- I generally agree with Stern's notion of an event being noticed because it is sufficiently different and special but I am not sure I agree with his concept of an event being 'value-laden' (Ibid., p. 52). I do not believe that an event can be loaded with anything since it is not a thing; I do think that this micro-event initiated a response within me because it had something to do with me and was thus meaningful to me in some way. In this case, I probably perceived Ted's disagreement without any accompanying willingness to explain it as rude towards the senior manager he was addressing and as unhelpful for himself, the committee members and in particular to their four guests because I see my purpose in facilitating group conversations as helping to make the implicit and/or the unspoken/unexplained explicit.
- My experienced feelings seem to 'trace a time-shape (...) of analogic risings and fallings (Stern, 2004 p. 16) but I do not yet know if that is significant in any way.

- I seem to not be aware of any psychological or physical sensations I might be having while I am speaking.
- As soon I had decided on a course of action that made sense to me, in this case not to respond to Ted's "No!" to me in any visible way, I felt a sense of relief throughout my body, in particular in my stomach, almost as if signalling, "Now that I know what to do, I can relax again."
- There is a significant difference between the actually elapsed time and my felt-time sense of this moment, that is, the latter felt much longer than 20 seconds.

Subjective now moment 2: I will come back to you...

The context

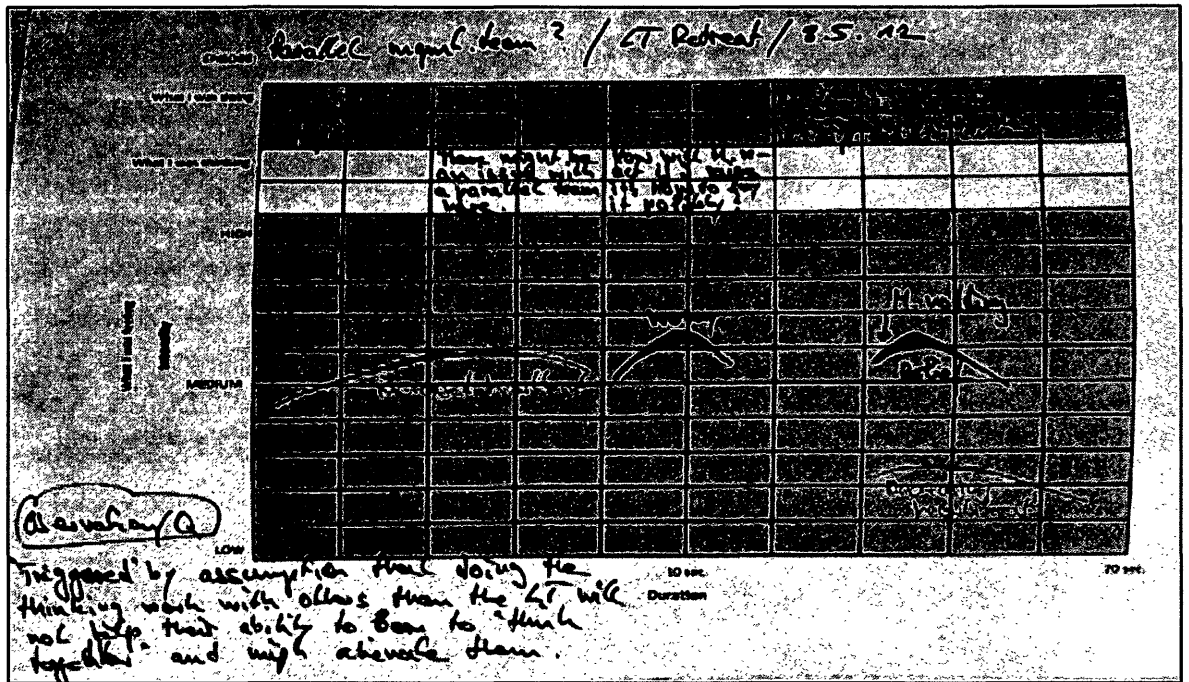
This is the second time during the last six months that I am facilitating a one-day retreat for Manfred, the Head of the Sustainability function and his management team consisting of three other managers (whom we have all met before). The purpose of these retreat days is to allow them to step back from their day-to-day activities in order to learn how to think and converse together about strategic issues they face as team and as a function. We are sitting at a round table in a sunny room overlooking a beautiful mountain lake discussing the focus of the upcoming retreat for their entire function (approx. 30 people).

The stimulus

Manfred says to his managers, "I will discuss the flow of the function retreat with the Head of Sustainability Management, the Head of Strategic Initiatives and the Communications Manager and will then come back to you."

Recall and visualisation

On the flight back home I produced these two accounts of this subjective now-moment:



I listen to Manfred saying to his managers, "I will discuss the flow of the function retreat with the Head of Sustainability Management, the Head of Strategic Initiatives and the Communications Manager and will then come back to you." I feel my heartbeat increase slightly. I think, "There might be an issue here with a perceived parallel management team." "I need to raise this, but how to do it politely without embarrassing him?" I notice my worry about embarrassing him in front of his direct reports. I take a deliberate in-breath and say, "Manfred, I am wondering about the perception that your management team colleagues here might have about you building up a parallel management team with your three newly hired staff managers." Halfway through my sentence Manfred starts nodding in seeming understanding and I feel a sense of relief. He then says easily, "Yes, I understand that completely. How could I use my staff managers so that they are helping us doing our work instead of doing it for us?" I notice my heartbeat slowing while feeling pleased and thinking "Seems to have been the right thing to do."

Sense making

When looking at both the drawn and written account of this particular subjective now-moment I notice the following:

- As in the first episode, I cannot remember anything in particular about the conversational flow or content leading up to Manfred's first comment about his staff team, but I did feel attentive before he made that comment that immediately triggered a heightened sense of awareness within me. As before I had a sense of shifting from radar-like noticing to laser-like awareness.

- I think Manfred's comment about asking his staff team to work out a proposal sparked my attention because it was sufficiently different and special in the sense that it clashed with my assumption that in order for the management team to develop their ability to think together they actually have to do *thinking work* together, not just give feedback to someone else's thinking. That means the spark did not have an emotional/bodily source, but was cognitive, experience-based, that is, rather than feeling a strong and immediate embodied sense of surprise and annoyance as in episode 1, I had a thought.
- As before, my experienced feelings rose and fell and I was largely unaware of them while speaking.
- Again, as soon I had decided on a course of action that made sense to me and that seemed to work with Manfred I felt a sense of relief throughout my body, in particular in my stomach.
- As in episode 1, my felt-time sense of this moment seems markedly longer than the 20 seconds that had passed on my watch.

Subjective now moment 3: I am sorry, but...

The context

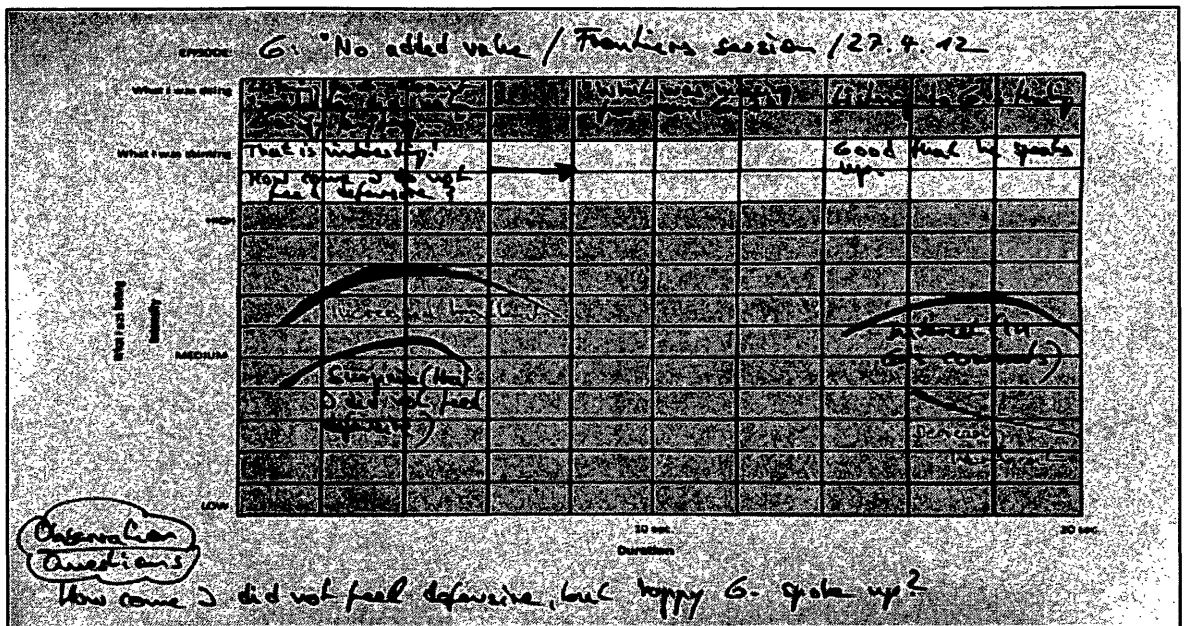
It is the morning session of the second day of a 3-day workshop with a group of 12 senior managers of a large global media company, I am facilitating with a colleague. We are sitting closely together in a tight circle of chairs. At the moment the participants are reflecting together on the first workshop day that had been focussed on innovation by discussing the question "What has become clearer to me about innovation?" I feel very relaxed in this group of senior managers and facilitate the conversation by very occasionally asking a brief probing or clarifying question. So far, several people have mentioned how valuable they have found the time to think they had yesterday.

The stimulus

Then Gloria*, who sits next to me on my right says, "I am sorry, but yesterday's session did not clarify or add anything to what we already know about innovation."

Recall and visualisation

In the evening I wrote this description and drew this micro-analytic map of the interaction with Gloria:



I hear Gloria, who sits next to me on my right, saying, "I am sorry, but yesterday's session did not clarify or add anything regarding innovation." I feel my heartbeat immediately increase and notice being surprised thinking, "How come I do not feel defensive?" I have a sense of a collective holding of breath in the room in anticipation of my reaction. I feel calm and genuinely interested in Gloria's reasoning and thus ask her, "What was missing for you yesterday that would have made it more useful?" I look at her while I listen to her response and notice my inner agreement with most of her points. I feel glad and grateful that she is raising this (for her and us) possibly uncomfortable issue. I notice my heartbeat slowly decreasing back to its normal rate and sense a general relaxation amongst the group.

Sense making

When reflecting on the above accounts I am noticing the following:

- As in the first and second episode, I cannot remember anything in particular about the conversational flow apart from the participants appreciating the thinking time, but I did feel generally attentive before Gloria made this comment that immediately triggered a heightened sense of laser-like awareness within me.
- I think Gloria's comment caused my shifting from radar-like noticing to laser-like awareness firstly because it was sufficiently different from the preceding appreciative conversation about having thinking time and secondly, because I thought at the time that it was courageous of her to raise a topic that could potentially be controversial. So, on this occasion the spark did have an emotional/bodily source and at the same time was cognitive, experience-based, that is, I was feeling an immediate embodied sense of surprise that I did not feel defensive (as in other similar situations

before) and at the same time I intellectually appreciated Gloria's courage and input as to what was missing for her on day 1.

- As in the two previous examples, my experienced feelings rose and fell and I was largely unaware of them while speaking.
- As before, my felt-time sense of this moment seems markedly longer than the actual seconds that this interaction lasted.

What sense am I making of my subjective now-moments?

Contemplating the countless micro-analytic writings and drawings I have made over the last few months about my subjective now-moments (of which the three ones above are typical examples) I first of all notice that all situations follow a very similar sequence:

- Being *woken up* from my *standard level* of consciousness or attentiveness to a sharply elevated level of sudden alertness or awareness by an event that seemed to have a special meaning or connection either to me personally, such as feeling excluded and insignificant when my polite and reasonable (at least according to my perception) question was answered with a decisive "No", or to me professionally, for instance when I was noticing an incongruence between Manfred and his team wanting to learn to think together and then him suggesting to delegate the thinking work to others outside of the team.
- Then, wondering what exactly to say or do next and how, and then finally worrying whether expressing my intuitive impulse would be helpful to the process we were engaged in at the time.
- Finally, a palpable sense of relief after having decided roughly what to say or do (or not) next and taken the perceived risk to follow through on that decision.
- I also notice an apparent slowing down of the subjectively experienced time. As soon as I was/had *woken up*, the next 20 seconds or so felt like an eternity. This allowed me to not experience a sense of having to rush my thinking in order to know what to do next, but to have enough time to consider my next move.
- I am quite puzzled by the realization that I do not seem to be aware of (or at least I cannot remember) any thoughts or feelings while I am speaking. I do know from my meditating practice when I am sitting quietly for 30 minutes or so that there are a multitude of simultaneous sensations

chasing each other in my body and mind at any one time. I wonder if Kahneman refers to the same phenomenon when writing about walking uphill deliberately at a brisk speed that

As I speed up, my attention is drawn with increasing frequency to the experience of walking and to the deliberate maintenance of the faster pace. My ability to bring a train of thought to a conclusion is impaired accordingly. (2011 p. 39)

It seems to me that in my case the effort it takes me to articulate improvised sentences intended to raise a potentially difficult to hear *shadow theme* in an appropriate way requires so much mental effort that I cannot notice (or at least remember) anything else while doing it.

- I am very aware that the experience of spontaneity, risk and uncertainty is a key theme running through all three episodes. As I have outlined in the chapter on my informing theories, Jazz and theatre improvisation provide useful analogies for the practice of working live. However, I am convinced now that Spolin's claim that 'there is no absolutely right or wrong way to solve a problem... [because] with intuitive awareness comes certainty' (Spolin, 1999 p. 6-8) and Johnstone's notion that an 'artist who is inspired is being obvious. He's not making any decisions, he's not weighing one idea against another. He's accepting his first thoughts' (1981 p. 88) is not appropriate advice for organizational consulting situations because it seems to me that the potential risk for working in that way for clients and myself is much too high. Thus I am now convinced that working live well does not simply require acting 'without thinking first' (Ibid., p. 91), but requires *being intuitive and at the same time acting purposely* to have a chance to act congruently with my intentions (unlike in the situation of working with Ivan that I explained earlier).

How do others describe their experience of working live?

(...) for everyday work people who (...) [are] having to think 'in the moment', while 'in motion', both from within the midst of complexity, and in relation to unique, never before encountered first-time events. (Shotter, 2011 p. 1)

Not a great deal has been written by other organisation consulting practitioners about working live from the phenomenological perspective of what it is really like. For sure, what little has been produced is recent and largely very insightful such as the reflective accounts of consulting interventions or projects that were based on being present and working live (Schein 1987, 1988; Weisbord and Janoff, 1995; Shaw, 2002; Kaplan, 2002; Stacey 2003a; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2004; Griffin and Stacey, 2005; Stacey, 2005a+b; Shaw and Stacey, 2006; Shotter, 1993, 2010, 2011) and the very small number of accounts describing the implications for organisation consulting of applying analogies from jazz or theatre improvisation (Weick, 1998; Barrett, 1998; Kamoche, Pina e Cunha and Vieira da Cunha, 2002).

Since I want to understand the experience of working live from the subjective perspective of the involved experiencers rather than from only reading or writing *about* it from a largely theoretical perspective I am turning to the reflective writings of Shaw, her colleagues, and their students at the Complexity and Management Centre at the University of Hertfordshire. As expected, Shaw and others do write very fluently about the twist and turns of their interventions and offer insightful explanatory frames based on the perspective I also take in my own consulting practice, that is, of explaining interactions between people not 'from psychologizing about personal attributes (...) [but from] noticing the patterning of (...) interaction' (Nolan in Stacey, 2005b p. 84) in what they call 'the living present' (Shaw, 2002 p. 46). But contrary to my expectation even these accomplished 'artists of the invisible' (Kaplan, 2002) write relatively little about their actual personal, subjective experience of working from that orientation. So, how then do Shaw and her colleagues describe their experience of working live? They write that it feels like this:

Presence, energy, and spontaneity

- 'During this session I was very aware of Terry' (Stacey, 2003a p. 150)
- 'being present' (Williams in Stacey, 2005b p. 135)
- 'I felt more relaxed and much more present.' (Christensen in Stacey and Griffin, 2005 p. 93)
- 'simply and spontaneously being me' (Johnson in Stacey and Griffin, 2005 p. 162)
- 'I tried to stay focused and attentive' (Scanlon in Stacey, 2005b p. 56)
- 'I feel some exhilaration, a sense of freedom' (Williams in Stacey, 2005b p. 128)
- 'My compulsion to ask this question' (Williams in Stacey, 2005b p. 128)

Care, attentiveness and choicefulness

- 'As I speak, I am in touch with the idea that this intervention is reckless' (Ibid.)
- 'I felt very concerned' (Stacey, 2003a p. 150)
- 'This was not taken up. I did not push.' (Scanlon in Stacey, 2005b p. 57)
- 'I was starting to pay increasing attention' (Scanlon in Stacey, 2005b p. 69)
- 'I find myself wondering what to do.' (Walker in Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 115)
- 'I am aware of sensing something odd.' (Shaw in Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 3)

Worry, anxiety, confusion and irritation

- 'worrying about control again' (O'Flynn in Stacey and Griffin, 2005 p. 119)
- 'Thinking about all of this raises my anxiety about how I will manage the day' (Ibid.)
- 'I experience a strong sense of anxiety as I wondered whether or not to say something.' (Scanlon in Stacey, 2005b p. 71)
- 'I was very disappointed at my inadequate understanding (...) and I strongly disliked the feelings of incompetence this lack of understanding left me with' (Stacey, 2003a p. 146)
- 'I too felt dissatisfied with them' (Stacey, 2003a p. 147)

- 'I can feel some tension in my stomach' (Shaw, 2002 p. 87)
- 'I was feeling a distinct sense of confusion' (Ibid., p. 114)
- 'Puzzled, I try another tack.' (Ibid., p. 15)
- 'I feel pressure to go along with her' (Ibid., p. 87)
- 'feeling irritated at this' (Ibid., p. 56)

All of these experiences are useful reminders to me that it is only too human to feel at times anxious, irritated, confused and tense when working live with others. After all, 'In the final analysis we're all the same' (Murakami, 2009 p. 48).

What is it like for consulting practitioners to work live well?

"The simpler we make things, the richer the experiences become." But only if we remain active, only if we try, only if we risk... (Messner cited in House, 2010 p. ix)

I will now come to the last element of my inquiry into the phenomenon of working live, that is, my conversations with five fellow consultants whom I know well, have worked with often and whom I consider to have experience of my inquiry topic and the interest and ability to reflect upon this experience with me. The purpose of these approximately 60 – 90-minute semi-structured second-person inquiry conversations was twofold:

- Firstly, to gather subjective material from practitioners who have direct personal experience of the phenomenon of working live to allow me to broaden and supplement my own personal experiences.
- Secondly, to identify the key elements that make this particular experience what it is to allow me to understand its essence and other consulting practitioners to hopefully resonate with it.

In the following I describe a fictitious incident of working live as an organisation consultant in which I attempt to amalgamate all of the rich details of the five actual stories my colleagues told me plus my own experience of such moments. In writing a fictitious account rather than describing a *real* event I am following van Manen's advice that 'We are less concerned with the factual accuracy of an account than with the plausibility of an account – whether it is true to our living sense of it' (1990 p. 65). This account is an attempt to articulate the key ingredients constituting the experience of working live, those extremely sensation-rich moments lasting around 20 – 30 seconds. Most importantly, both the composite account and the list of key ingredients you see here are a result of several resonance check conversations with my consultant co-inquirers.

Working live with Umberto* and his team – A composite based on real-life experiences of working in the moment

The context

I am facilitating a ½-day conversation between Umberto, the Director of Corporate Strategy of a global life-science company, and his four managers (two women and two men) about a redesign of their strategy process the CEO has asked him to do. We are sitting at a round conference table in a sun-lit room overlooking other modern office buildings. So far the conversation has been lively and positive without anything that sounded or felt remotely controversial to me. Since the beginning of the meeting about an hour or so ago Umberto has done most of the talking, sounding very self-assured. It seems to me that his managers don't really dare to say much other than to second Umberto's points. The atmosphere between them feels very autocratic to me.

The situation

"What do you guys think we need to improve in our strategy process? I actually think it's working quite well." I notice that Umberto is again answering his own question and wonder if I should raise this now. But I decide to wait a little longer to see if one of his team members will raise the issue of Umberto's domination of the conversation. I feel no pressure to help produce a specific outcome regarding the strategy process, but I do want to help them to have a genuine conversation. I wonder if I should have prepared a little more to better understand their strategy process. But then, just for a brief moment I feel liberated by not being over-prepared and having to remember all sorts of details. This way I can concentrate more fully on...

I feel a sudden impulse almost like a small but sharp electric wave rising from my gut to my chest and head. Something in the way that Renata*, the most junior of the five, has started to speak haltingly as if unrehearsed without looking at anyone feels different.

I feel my heartbeat and energy increasing while the time seems to slow down. I listen intently to Renata saying, "I don't know..., actually I do know, but... I am not sure if I really want to say this. Well... actually I think that..." She falls silent. I notice that Umberto, who is moving nervously in his chair next to me, is about to say something, so I touch his arm briefly and gently shake my head, saying, "Just hold on." He looks at me with what I take to be either impatience or irritation. Renata continues after a moment's pause. "What I want to say... for quite a while already... is that... I don't really feel we are working well together... at all." She looks at me as if seeking approval. I think, "Yes, this feels real and new."

Despite my heart beating quite strongly now, I feel strangely calm and focused. For just a second I wonder what to do or say next, then hear myself saying, "Before we all jump on Renata and respond,

let's take a moment and notice what you are feeling and thinking right now. Then you'll all have a chance to speak." Umberto looks at Renata as if he is about to explode, but then he seems to think better of it and plays nervously with his black fountain pen instead.

No one speaks. I feel a keen curiosity about what will happen next, but have no fear or anxiety at all. I notice a strong sense of connection to them and empathy for the difficulty of the situation. In a strange way I can feel my body energy flowing quickly at the same time I feel very calm and grounded in our collective silence. I clearly notice my intention of helping as much as I can to treat Renata's comments as a useful revelation, rather than as an aggression or accusation. I look around the table at the five of them and smile at the few who return my gaze. Then I look at Umberto again and wonder what it would be like to work for him. It would be stifling, I think. I notice feeling for him. A short moment later I say, "OK, before we hear your reactions, ladies and gentlemen, Renata, could you please say a bit more about what you just meant by not working well together? In what way, specifically?"

The key ingredients constituting the experience of working live I have tried to express in the above account are the following:

1. A *trigger event* (lasting 1 – 2 seconds) that seems to have some special significance for us (for instance a word, a gesture, a look, a memory, or a realization) pierces through our personal *routine* or *default* degree of consciousness into awareness. One of my interviewees said about such a special situation, "I could feel a small explosion in my gut and head" (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., May 16). Another one described it as, "The situation called out to me to do something about it. Something wanted to be said" (A. Thum, 2012, pers. comm., May 9).
2. A very tangible bodily sensation such as increased heartbeat, a sense of aliveness, an energy surge, or anxiety that seems to be initiated by this trigger event. One interviewee described this sensation as, "I was having a sense of increased speed in my body and felt an opening around my heart space with the energy rising from the heart to the eyes that were getting a bit watery" (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., May 18).
3. A significant increase in the degree of our attentiveness and alertness, a sharpening of the focus of our concentration and at the same time a strong sensation of being calm, competent, and grounded that one of my interviewees described as, "My alertness had suddenly risen due to the apparent misunderstanding and potential for confusion" (T. Atterstam, 2012, pers. comm., May 16).
4. A keen sensation of the subjectively experienced time slowing down markedly. One interviewee said about this, "It probably took no more than 5 – 10 seconds, but it felt like a long time" (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., May 16).

5. A strong sense of connection to myself and at the same time to the other people who are part of a particular subjective now-moment. One of my interviewees described this sensation as, "Feeling we were all humans in that moment, not just roles anymore" (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., May 18); someone else said, "With my thoughts, intention and action I felt connected to the group and at the same time I was connected to myself in relation to experiencing my bodily sensations" (A. Thum, 2012, pers. comm., May 9).

6. A noticeable and conscious intention to help make something generative happen next. One interviewee described this as, "My challenging him was about revelation, not aggression. I wanted to help him see himself better" (R. Dickson, 2012, pers. comm., May 18); another interviewee said, "My action was motivated by not wanting to embarrass her in front of her boss and colleagues" (T. Atterstam, 2012, pers. comm., May 16).

7. A palpable sense of bodily relaxation after having decided what to do (or not to do) next. One of my interviewees describes this feeling by saying that, "I felt happy with myself for noticing the situation" (T. Atterstam, 2012, pers. comm., May 16); another one said, "I felt really relieved when I started to talk for real" (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., May 16).

Reflection

Gravity is relentless, ruin a misstep away. I have learned to accept the fear, let it pass and not paralyze me. Once it washes through me I possess something powerful: the confidence to act. (...) Action is the message. Success is found in the process. (House, 2011 p. 220)

QUESTION: I wonder where you are now metaphorically speaking after having spent quiet some time investigating and writing about the phenomenon of working live?

ANSWER: I feel that I have made some real progress in understanding the phenomenon, but I have also directly experienced that '[U]nderstanding something is not the same as explaining it' (Steiner cited in Kaplan, 2002 p. 15). I now know that working live is a very concrete and distinct phenomenon, yet very subtle, much like eating an apple is a very distinct and subtle sensation that is probably equally difficult to describe adequately in words.

Q: I understand that and yet your fictitious account does resonate with me and with your co-inquirers. How would you summarise your sense to date about what it is like to work live succinctly?

A: I would say this: Working live is an improvised, delicate, and paradoxical process of micro- and macro-scoping activities, that is, of being intuitive and spontaneous while being reflective and choice-conscious and at the same time of paying attention to your experiencing in a particular moment while being aware of emerging patterns and contextual happenings. It is a continuous and conscious process of moving, of gesturing and responding to oneself, others and one's environment in the pursuit of realising and working with what one subjectively experiences here now and what one wants to help make happen next. The main challenge in this process is that when you focus too much on the future, you lose your ability to be here now, and when you focus too much on one particular moment, you lose your perspective of what next. So, working live in my experience is a very delicate and continuous act, a constant search to *stay on the wire*, of consciously being here now and next.

Q: You write about a *trigger event* that brings about these intense intuitive moments of heightened focus and energy. What are these trigger events?

A: First of all, trigger events are not physical containers that *carry* meaning. Secondly, it is clear to me now that not everything that happens or, maybe more accurate, that I perceive as happening has the same importance for or impact on the involved people. Also in this sense the term *trigger event* is incorrect and misleading because it is not like, say, a desk lamp in your study that you simply switch on to have more light while reading. In working live we are very much part of creating and resonating with something that we perceive as happening, *something* that has for whatever reason a particular meaning, importance or weight for us that it might not have for other people. In other words, we are triggering or creating the event as much as the event is creating our particular sense of self in that very moment.

Q: It seems that in those moments in which we resonate with something that happens, there is a sharp, noticeable shift or increase of our attention level. What do you think that is?

A: I really don't know yet, but my hypothesis is that it might have something to do with what I described earlier as the difference between or, maybe more accurate, our shifting from an expansive radar-like scanning of ourselves and our environment to a sudden noticing or experiencing something that is special or different in some way and thus *triggers* an exclusive laser-like concentration or awareness. However, the main problem of course with the binary notion of shifting *between* radar and laser is that it is in conflict with what I have just called the double paradox of focusing on micro-scoping and macro-scoping activities at the very same time.

Q: So, it would seem then that this last point leads to some interesting new questions for your next inquiry cycle. If so, what are they?

A: That is correct. Although I feel that I do have found some answers, I definitely have a few new questions. Specifically, I am keen to investigate two topics next: Firstly, I want to shed more light on the phenomenon of shifting from implicit consciousness to awareness and on the double paradox of micro-scoping while macro-scoping. What exactly is that and how does it work? Secondly and most importantly, I want to investigate my own practice of working live, namely, what do I think I do when I work here now and next?

VII. THIRD INQUIRY CYCLE – MY PRACTICE OF WORKING LIVE

- Overview
- The ROCKET Project: An example of how I work live
- Propositions about my practice
- My working live practice routines
- The voices of my clients and colleagues
- How does my way of working compare to that of other organisation consulting practitioners?
- Reflection

Overview

Of course the point isn't (...) whether it is possible for "someone", but for you. The climbs we do are really manifestations of who we already worked to become; of the skill, knowledge, intuition, experience we already accumulated by years of practice. (S. House, 2012, pers. comm., June 11)

In this chapter I turn my attention to the investigation of what I term my *practice* of working live. By the term *practice*, which originally meant 'to perform repeatedly to acquire skill' (Retrieved [June 7, 2012] from http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=practice&searchmode=none) I refer to the methodological aspects of my consulting practice. I am using the following consulting interaction – The ROCKET* Project – because it has gone on for a considerable length of time and thus gives me the opportunity to paint a more complete picture of the various elements of my practice of working live. Based on the insights from the ROCKET project I then develop a number of propositions about my particular style of consulting practice. I conclude the chapter with a detailed description of my specific consulting routines.

My intention with this chapter is not to give recommendations, recipes, or prescriptions to other consultants; I do not for a moment believe that advising is possible given that I hold the view that meaning and action emerge in a particular moment and situation between the very people interacting with each other then and there. Although I do not believe that there can be specific how-to instructions about dealing with emergence and improvisation in consulting live I do nevertheless hope that my reporting back from the *field* about my experiences will reveal some general principles that might be useful to others in further developing their own practice of working live. In short, 'my hope (...) is that it inspires a few to go simply, and (...) to see for themselves' (House, 2011 p. xi).

The ROCKET Project: An example of how I work live

I feel I know Garry*, the CEO of ROCKET, quite well due to having worked with him extensively over the last two years, both as an organisation consultant and facilitator to his management team, and as a coach to him personally. Garry is around 50, has a quick mind, is an avid reader of books on management and leadership, and seems always interested in learning about and experimenting with different perspectives on and approaches to leadership and organisation change. From what he has repeatedly told me in the past, he values the difference I bring in terms of my theoretical perspective, experience, and personal consulting approach (by that I think he means my directness and informality). When I told him about the feedback I had received from another CEO about what it is like to work with me and what the results have been – ‘dramatic revelations, especially when [you are] being more rather than less judgemental...’ (J. Mash, 2012, pers. comm., June 2) – he smiled and replied, “I couldn’t agree more.”

The request: A new set of leadership principles

I take another sip of coffee and contemplate Garry’s email again after having just finished a call to his assistant agreeing a date to meet with him in the coming week. In his email Garry asks me to come and see him as soon as possible to help him work on what he calls “the introduction of a new set of leadership principles for ROCKET.” I notice that I am particularly struck by this wording as if ROCKET were an actual space rocket in need of a new set of boosters. I find myself wanting to go through a phenomenological reduction to reframe Garry’s request in a living process-based way. That, I believe, would enable him to express the lived quality of the phenomenon he wants to work on more precisely than his current abstract language allows.

As I contemplate Garry’s notion of a *new set of leadership principles* lots of thoughts rush through my head. I am aware of how pleased I am that Garry is asking for my help again. I also notice how uncomfortable I am with the notion of a *new set* as if one could take out the old batteries from a radio and put new ones in. But above all I am very conscious that I do not think of leadership principles as *things* that an individual or a group of people can identify and then permanently *hold* and deliberately *implement* when deemed appropriate but rather as espoused generalized individual intentions (i.e. thoughts) that get ‘particularized’ (Griffin and Stacey, 2005 p. 102), that is, enacted by people in the iterative interactions with others in a particular situation at a particular moment.

I look out of the window in front of my desk and watch the passing early summer clouds for a moment, then I get up from my chair, walk over to my bookshelf and take out the book ‘Complexity and the Experience of Leading Organizations’ edited by Griffin and Stacey (2005) to remind myself of what they say about values. After a short while I find the quote I am looking for that I think expresses well how I think about (leadership) principles. Principles just like...

Values cannot be prescribed or deliberately chosen by anyone because they emerge, and continue to be iterated, in intense interactive experiences involving self-formation and self-transcendence. To claim that someone could choose values for others would be to claim that this someone could form the identity, or self, of others and form the self-transcendence of others. (Ibid., p. 104)

Then I note in my journal...

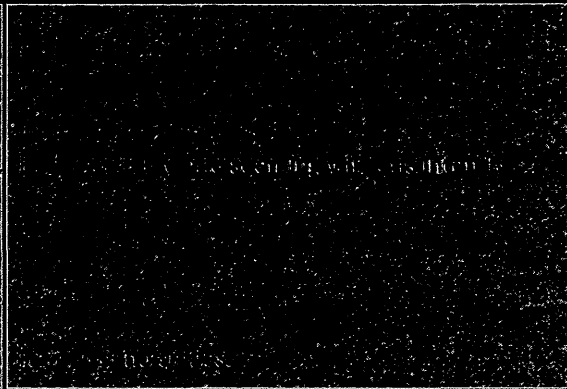

I notice a sense of growing clarity about how I want to approach the meeting with Garry. I see its main purpose as exploring and possibly reframing his request. I want to try to understand what Garry thinks he and ROCKET need, why and to what end, and how he wants to go about it while being aware of my biases caused by this framing and more importantly by my living process perspective. In other words, until Garry has had a chance to articulate his request and his current thinking about it (if necessary with some probing questioning from me) I will use Husserl's bracketing technique to attempt to keep my living process bias at arms length. However, that might be difficult to do because I already experienced a very distinct micro now-moment when reading about "the introduction of a new set of leadership principles" triggered. I think by the tension between Garry's mechanical metaphor and my living process framing.

The scoping meeting: What is this really about?

Early in the morning four days later I use my meditative mood facilitated by jogging through Munich's largest park to visualize today's conversation with Garry and remind myself of my intention to approach this first conversation about ROCKET's leadership principles as an exploration of Garry's thinking so far and if necessary as a tentative reframing from a potentially relatively abstract, engineering-influenced thinking to a living process perspective. I haven't worked with Garry in about three months and notice how much I look forward to seeing him and to speaking with him again.

A couple of hours later Garry and I are sitting in his office on modern black leather sofas drinking coffee and eating chocolate which starts to feel almost like a ritual because we have been engaged in it every time since I first visited him here two years ago. Somehow, at least for me, it creates a sense of familiarity and closeness between us. For a short while we chat about what has happened for us during these last few months. Finally I say,⁴⁸

⁴⁸ I use a table format for this conversation to make it easier to show the succession and patterning of both Garry's and my words, gestures and reactions. As you can see, I show our conversation (excerpts based on a recording; translated by me from the original German) in black font and everything else in red.

Hartmut	Garry
<p><i>"So Garry, tell me about your idea of implementing a set of new leadership principles for the company. I am particularly interested in what you mean by the term leadership principles, what you think the need you perceive is, and what the end result of having new leadership principles would be. And of course how you think I can help."⁴⁹</i></p>	
<p>I look at him in anticipation and notice how curious I am about how he will reply. I feel (⊕)⁴⁹ my heart beating a little faster than usually and have a fuzzy sense that this conversation will be pivotal for experiencing and experimenting with my practice of working live. I consciously breathe in and out a few times while reminding myself of my intention to help Garry explore and possibly reframe his thinking.</p> <p>I nod at him while being aware of the brief mental images and positive sense I have of the senior managers I do remember from ROCKET's annual management conferences I have facilitated twice so far.</p>	<p>Garry looks out of the huge panoramic window of his office that allows a breath taking view of the still snow-covered mountain peaks in the distance. He seems deep in thought.</p> <p>After a short moment he turns his eyes back to me and replies, <i>"As you know, at the moment we have operations in 21 countries around the world with about 2000 employees. Each of these legal entities is managed by a country CEO and their management team which adds up to about 130 senior managers, including me and my corporate management team."</i></p>
	<p><i>"I strongly believe that if we want to really become the company of choice for all of our various stakeholders⁵⁰ globally as we say in our vision all of us senior managers need to live by or role model if you want the same principles such as spending time with our people, valuing their opinions, being open to feedback and so on."</i></p>

⁴⁹ (⊕) – indicating a distinct micro now-moment I was aware of and remember: I will only indicate when I consciously experienced a micro now-moment, but not dissect each of them as I have done in the previous chapter.

⁵⁰ As defined in ROCKET's vision document, by *stakeholders* Garry refers to employees, colleagues, customers, suppliers, the parent company and society at large.

<p><i>"Listening to your examples, Garry, it sounds to me as if you are talking about the behavioural patterns of leaders rather than leadership principles. Is that right?"</i></p> <p>I notice a keen sense of curiosity (⊕) about his possible irritation. I wonder for a short moment if I should reflect to him what I perceive as his irritation or rather bring up the point that I do think the words we use influence greatly how we act. I have an intuition that it is important to clarify Garry's and my thinking about words before we go any further in our exploration of his issue. With this decision, I feel a slight sense of tension.</p>	<p>Garry shakes his head several times and the tone of his voice takes on a slight sense of irritation when he replies. <i>"I don't know, Hartmut. I think that's just arguing about words, isn't it? What's the big different between principles and behaviours anyway?"</i></p>
<p><i>"Actually, I do believe that the words we use influence greatly how we act. My sense is that when we talk about behaviours such as listening to others, we talk more directly about how people act and the patterns that emerge from these actions. When we talk about principles, say, honesty, we talk about an abstract concept that cannot be observed directly."</i></p>	<p><i>"Maybe you're right. I guess... what I am really after... is that all of our senior managers, no matter where they work in the ROCKET world, behave thoughtfully and consistently."</i></p>
<p>I feel a bodily sense of relief due to his positive reaction. <i>"Is that the outcome you're after by raising the topic of the consistent behaviours of leaders?"</i></p>	<p>He responds quickly and passionately. <i>"Definitely! Everyone, well... at least for a start every senior manager would act according to a common set of</i></p>

<p>I notice my silent disagreement (⊕) with Garry's term "common set of behaviours".</p> <p>I have an intuitive, but still fuzzy sense of how a process might look by which more consistent behaviour patterns could have a possibility to emerge over time amongst the 130 senior managers. But it seems too early to talk about that right now.</p>	<p><i>behaviours. We wouldn't have this unhelpful inconsistency all over the world; our stakeholders would pretty much have the same experience no matter with whom they deal."</i></p>
<p><i>"You talked about new leadership principles in your email. What is your thinking behind this notion of new?"</i></p> <p>I feel a knee-jerk response of being a bit offended at hearing Garry say this because I do think that we would need to start with how senior managers behave now rather than making lists about how they should behave.</p>	<p>Garry nods.</p> <p><i>"Well, maybe the principles or as we now started saying the behaviours as such don't need to be new. I guess what I mean with 'new' is that the consistence of how we, 130 senior managers behave across the world will be new to everyone in ROCKET. Right now senior managers pretty much behave the way they want. But we have never discussed or agreed on our behaviours collectively. That needs to change in my view!"</i></p>
<p><i>"You have just mentioned consistency, just to be clear, what do you mean by that?"</i></p> <p>I feel quite pleased that Garry can define the term consistency so clearly and apparently easily. I think now is the right time to raise the question of process.</p>	<p>Garry looks at me somewhat impatiently but he does smile when he replies, "Man, what kind of questions are you asking me today? Let me think... what I mean by consistency is simply that I want all of us senior managers to always behave in similar ways so that we become more predictable for the people we interact with and create more impact across ROCKET."</p>
<p><i>"Have you thought about how you want to go about achieving this increased collective consistency?"</i></p>	<p>Garry nods vigorously. "Yes, I have. That's where you come in, Hartmut. I want you to run a session for my global management team during one of our</p>

<p>... (⊕) ...</p>	<p><i>next meetings to agree on the leadership behaviours or whatever we end up calling them. After that you and I should run one-day or so communication workshops for all local CEOs and their management teams to cascade the principles down.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Garry, I think to involve all senior managers is a good idea and important in stimulating more consistent patterns of behaving. But based on having been involved in this kind of culture development process several times before, I honestly do not think that having a few people identify the desired behaviours, then communicate them to the rest of the managers and expect them to simply change their own behaviours accordingly is realistic.”</i></p>	<p>Garry looks increasingly confused or maybe impatient while listening to me.</p>
<p>... (⊕) ...</p>	<p><i>“But this sort of cascade process is exactly how we have done such global things in the past, for example with our corporate values.”⁵¹</i></p>
<p><i>“I know. And what did the values cascade process achieve? As soon as I say this (⊕) I feel it sounded leading which I suppose was my covert intention because as far as I had heard ROCKET’s corporate values process did not achieve what was intended.</i></p>	<p>He looks out of the window again for a short moment, then replies in what sounds like a somewhat deflated tone, <i>“Well,... actually not very much if I am totally honest. Even I have a hard time remembering the values, never mind living them each day. Most people probably don’t even remember them at all”</i>, he says, shaking his head in</p>

⁵¹ ROCKET is part of a Holding company that has attempted to implement “Corporate Values” for all their companies.

	<p>what looks like frustration. <i>"But what can we do instead? Do you have any suggestion, Hartmut?"</i></p> <p>He almost pleads with me now.</p>
<p><i>"Actually I do, but it might sound a bit wired or even scary to you."</i></p>	<p><i>"Go on."</i></p>
<p>I am not quite sure where to start. <i>"Fine. Do you remember that we have spoken several times in the past that seeing organizations not as linear machines but as complex on-going processes of interaction or communication between people of which no one person is in control is more helpful in supporting organisation change?"</i></p>	<p>He focuses intently on me and listens with apparent interest. Once or twice he nods.</p> <p>Garry nods again. <i>"Yeah, I remember that and think it makes sense to me, at least intuitively."</i></p>
<p><i>"Right. Now, although no one is in control of these interactions behavioural patterns emerge nevertheless over time. These patterns emerge because people's interactions are organized by themes; in Rocket's case one organising theme for example is the relationship between ROCKET and its parent company."</i></p>	<p><i>"Well, as we all know these parent guys are only here to make lots of money... personally."</i></p>
<p>I smile back at him but then turn serious again. <i>"Well, at least that's what lots of people within ROCKET seem to believe and thus it serves as a powerful theme almost like a magnet that influences how people think, speak and act within ROCKET in regards to your parent company; and I would guess vice versa as well."</i></p>	<p><i>"Yeah, I can see that, but what does this have to do with achieving more consistent leadership behaviours within ROCKET?"</i> He seems to get impatient now.</p>
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<p> <i>"I think it points at a number of things that will be useful in achieving your objective. Firstly, it highlights the importance of stimulating a company-wide, open conversation about the behaviour of leaders that involves all 130 senior managers. Secondly, it means that the conversation needs to start with how and possibly why senior managers behave as they behave today. Thirdly, it points at the importance of creating an atmosphere for this conversation in which people feel they can speak as openly as possible about what is actually going on right now."</i> </p>	<p> <i>"Are you telling me that we would have to bring everybody together? You can forget that, we won't be able to do that before next year's management conference. And we can't wait that long."</i> He speaks very forcefully and definitely now. </p>
<p> I wonder (⊕) why he sounds so forceful but decide not to mention it because I feel it would divert our conversation towards a tangential issue. <i>"I know there is that budget freeze. And I wouldn't want to bring everyone together even if that were possible. I think it makes a lot more sense, at least in the beginning of the process, for each of the 22 management teams to have their own conversation about the behaviour of leaders within their own particular situation and context. Of course this also means that although we might have an intent for these conversations, no one can predict or control their outcomes."</i> </p> <p> Immediately I notice (⊕) myself thinking whether Garry is really speaking about the teams or rather about himself. My hunch is that Garry is anxious </p>	<p> <i>"That all sounds interesting"</i>, he says with a slightly patronizing tone in his voice, <i>"but I don't think the teams would be able to handle these open discussions about the behaviour of leaders. They expect clear directions from me."</i> </p>

<p>at this point because he is not used to such an open and highly symbolic conversational process involving all senior managers. I briefly wonder if I should raise this hunch or not. I feel my heart beating faster thinking about his potential reaction. I decide to raise my hunch.</p>	
<p><i>"Well, I guess anybody not used to this sort of process of 'just talking' would feel a bit anxious about it. I think we can deal with the potential anxiety of the 130 by involving them closely from now on in the design of the process and possible by having someone in the room who facilitates the conversations. But how about you, Garry, I imagine you too might feel some anxiety contemplating to launch such an open-ended, relatively structure-less conversational process?"</i></p> <p>I feel a sense of relief that he is able to talk about his anxiety with me. I am glad I shared this with him.</p>	<p>Garry nods but seems to be elsewhere with his attention.</p> <p>He seems to hesitate for just a second before saying, "I am, well... yes, actually I do feel a bit anxious. Quite a bit, actually, if I'm totally honest. What if they don't talk with each other or come up with the wrong answers? How do we prevent that? And..." long pause. "I don't want to look stupid launching something that doesn't get us anywhere."</p>
<p><i>"I think I know what you mean by not wanting to look stupid; I don't want to look stupid either or waste your money and everybody's time."</i> I pause for a moment to gather my thoughts. <i>"In my experience, we need to keep three things in mind. Firstly, we will need to be very clear about what we are trying to achieve and what needs to happen to work in that direction. Secondly, I don't believe there are any wrong answers when people explore how and why the situation is as it is. We do however need to make it as easy for them as we can to speak as openly as possible with each other about what they consider their behaviours. And finally, quite honestly since you have never been part of a live process like this,</i></p>	<p>Garry nods.</p> <p>Garry is taking notes in his Moleskin.</p> <p>At this point Garry nods thoughtfully and says more to himself than to me, "I see."</p>

you will have to trust that I know what I am doing. Do you think you can do that?"

Without hesitation Garry nods while saying, "I think so. Yes! Let's try it. What do we need to do next?"

At this point I suggest to Garry to ask the members of his global management team who happen to be in the office today and available right now if they would join us for a preliminary design discussion. After a short break, Matt*, the ROCKET Human Resources manager, and three other of Garry's six team members join us. Following Garry's brief summary of the key points of our discussion and our conclusions so far (that the four of them seem to support surprisingly readily), we spend the next hour or so sketching out a conversational process for ROCKET's 130 senior managers intended to facilitate their exploration of how they currently behave with each other, their employees, customers and others stakeholders. The core aspect of this process is that during the next six months all 22 management teams (Garry's global team plus the 21 country management teams) get together for a one-day *Conversation about the practice of leading (CPL)*⁵² in ROCKET. Garry will participate in all of these conversations; I will facilitate the first ten or so until Matt feels able to facilitate the rest of them by himself. Once the teams have had their conversations all of them will get together for a large group conversation about insights, patterns and necessary next steps. We conclude our meeting with the agreement that the tentative (*tentative* in the sense that we realize that once people get together to converse about anything, in this case about how they see and understand their practice of leading, what exactly they talk about emerges in the moment between them despite individual intentions) focus of these conversations about leading is the exploration of the following topics:

- The importance of the practice of leading for ROCKET and its stakeholders
- The role of senior managers in leading
- Personal examples of and insights from gestures or *moves* individual senior managers have made with generative intent towards their stakeholders
- Collective patterning of these individual moves
- Behaviours senior managers want to amplify, namely, pay more attention to in the future

On seeing me off Garry says, "Thank you, Hartmut, that was a very useful meeting. We've made a lot of progress today. I am looking forward to this process. And I am slightly scared about it as well." We shake hands. I feel pleased about his sense of progress and empathize with his sentiment of being scared of not knowing how the process will emerge and what outcomes will emerge.

⁵² We define the term *leading* as 'behaving with generative intent towards others in order to stimulate movement'.

The summary email: My attempt at being explicit

Once back home in the evening I write in my journal...

I feel quite pleased about the meeting with Garry and his managers. I have a sense that he/they genuinely think this open conversational process will achieve more than the traditional cascade job. I think I/we worked with what was in the room (e.g. Garry's anxiety) and I followed my intention to explore and help to reframe. I'm also quite happy about the reframes/de-abstractions we did - from leadership principles to behaviours/actions of leaders.

But he/they probably still are worried about its looseness and strangeness/unfamiliarity to them. I might need to keep explaining what we are doing and why. And listen to their worries!

The only potentially important reframe issue I did not raise is the question of "managers" VS "leaders" - my notion that it is more useful to talk about (senior) managers who lead (or not) rather than use manager and leader as synonym. Is this maybe just my hobby horse? Why did I not raise this question? I guess my sense was that Garry had had enough discussion about words for one day. Or... Actually, I think I was just too afraid to risk upsetting him. But what bad could have happened anyway? Well... I could not have gotten a potentially very interesting and lucrative assignment!!! At least that I think was my mental construction at that moment.

There were a number of micro now-moments I was very conscious of that had all the typical markers I have described earlier: A trigger event, a tangible bodily sensation, a significant increase in my degree of alertness, a sense of time slowing down, a keen sense of being connected to myself and the other/s, an attempt to *next* with generative intent, and finally, the sensation of a release of bodily tension.

After this short reflection I decide to write an email to Garry, Matt and the other senior managers we met with today summarising my understanding of our conclusions, the agreed next steps, and equally important, the underlying theoretical perspectives we discussed that inform how we want to approach the *CPL* sessions:

- The view that the behaviours of senior leaders are not *things* we *carry* in our heads to use in the appropriate moment like hammer and nails when hanging a picture on a wall but rather micro gestures that happen between people in their local situation in each present moment creating patterns over time. Consequently, making lists of how one should or would behave is not helpful. In contrast, explicit conversations about current behaviours of senior managers and their patterning are indeed useful as a potentially powerful organizing theme because the paradoxical theory of change (Mackewn 2004, p. 63 – 65) posits that the very process of exploring how things are now is change. In short, 'Organisational change is the same thing as change in the patters of talk and therefore the patterns of power relations' (Stacey, 2000 p. 363).

- Two principles from Appreciative Inquiry: Firstly, what we pay attention to we get more of (Holman and Devane, 1999 p. 257-258) and secondly, that it creates more positive energy amongst people to amplify what is already working well rather than to exclusively address what is not (Ibid.).
- The quality of engagement: The importance of including ROCKET's stakeholders in the conversations about the senior managers' behaviour.
- The quality of conversation: The importance of helping the legitimate themes that organize the senior managers' experience to be sustained and potential shadow themes to be openly spoken about.

In the email I also raise the importance of being mindful of the accuracy of our language, namely, it would in my view be more close to people's lived experience and thus more useful for our process to talk about *generatively intended behaviours of senior managers towards ROCKET's stakeholders* rather than to use the abstract and ambiguous term *leaders* and *leadership principles*. During the following days I receive affirmative comments about the points I raised in my email from Garry and his four colleagues.

The CPL design: A process of just talking

During the next few weeks Garry, his COO, three of his Country CEOs, Matt – the CPL steering team – and I met several times to develop the conversation process in more detail. In particular, we paid great attention to its informing design criteria. Garry and his colleagues concluded that they wanted a process that would...

- Involve all 130 senior managers in a very condensed period of time and at the same time has a long-term “viral effect” across the whole .
- Offer practical peer-based support to senior managers in role modelling generative behaviours.
- Be thought-through and deliberately crafted beforehand and at the same time improvisational and working with *what is* in the moment.
- Create positive energy and engagement, rather than deplete it.
- Be in itself a lived manifestation of what they want to achieve.
- Be a clear symbolic experiential shift for ROCKET's senior managers that signals from the very beginning that something very different is going on.

I supported the steering team in their design discussions as *participant-observer-facilitator*, that is, by helping them with their group process, by challenging their thinking and reframing activities, by reminding them from time to time of their espoused process principles, and finally, by making content suggestions for the entire CPL process, the flow of the individual sessions and the subsequent large group conversation with all 130 senior managers. At the end of our design discussions we had developed a simple five-step process:

Step 1: Web-based group conversation with all 130 senior managers to invite and excite them to participate in the CPL process, and to explain its rationale and flow.

Step 2: Individual preparatory conversations between each Country CEO and Garry, Matt and myself to answer any open questions, address concerns, and clarify the role of the Country CEO in his team's CPL session.

Step 3: The 22 management teams conduct their CPL session.

Step 4: Group conversation with a nominee from each of the 22 management teams to discuss their CPL session process insights (i.e. "What did you notice about your CPL conversation?") as start of the planning for the large group CPL conversation with all 130 senior managers.

Step 5: The CPL Forum – Large group CPL conversation with all 130 senior managers to identify and discuss common content, patterns, and process insights from their individual country management teams' CPL session.

The CPL invitation: The first ever virtual, inclusive conversation

To be congruent with the intent to have a conversational process directly involving (in the first instance) all 130 senior managers, I suggested to Garry and the steering team to issue their invitation to participate in this process not as usual in an email or letter but in a virtual web-based large group conversation. They immediately liked the idea. To this end we organized a 90-minute web conversation that was attended by about 115 of ROCKET's senior managers⁵³. At the start of the conversation Garry explained the focus and rationale of the intended CPL process (as shown below) and I talked briefly about its philosophy, flow and required tasks of the participants during the next few weeks. These are the key points Gary made⁵⁴:

◦ On behalf of the steering team I would like to thank you all for taking the time to participate in this, our first, global management conversation session. We are having this web-based conversation today because we would like to invite you all to participate with me during the next six months in a global process we call *Conversations about the practice of leading in ROCKET*, short *CPL* process. Both in a one-day CPL workshop that will hopefully happen in each of your operating units and in the subsequent large group conference in the summer we want to explore the question how do we as senior managers behave in ways that create positive engagement and movement within ROCKET and for our external stakeholders.

⁵³ Garry spoke to all those managers who could not join the large group conversation personally.

⁵⁴ He had asked me to prepare some key 'talking points' for him.

- I believe very strongly that if we want ROCKET to really become the company of choice for all of our numerous stakeholder groups globally while at the same time focusing consequently on our triple bottom line⁵⁵ targets all of us individually and collectively need to consistently role model constructive or generative behaviours such as spending time with our stakeholders to develop relationships and understand their views and needs, explaining our views and being open to others' opinions, being courageous to challenge conventional wisdom and the hierarchy and so on. After all, because of our hierarchically elevated position and possibly because of who are as people others look at how we do what we do – constantly.
- This very CPL process we are initiating today itself already challenges some conventions. As we all know from our own experience, the traditional way of attempting such a company-wide process would be a top-down information cascade that would involve someone like me to talk and show slides for most of the time; then there would be a Q&A session during which hardly anyone would dare to ask questions, issue challenges or offer different perspectives. I think it's probably fair to say that all of our collective experience suggests that this "mechanical" one-way approach is not conducive to having real human contact and meaningful conversations that result in connections and insights.
- Therefore, I am convinced we need a different approach, one that is grounded in real life and allows us to explore together our daily individual practice of leading. I think individual and collective development is an interactive, complex and unpredictable process rather like football where you make a move, then wait for your partners to respond to your move, and subsequently you in turn respond to their moves and so on. Hence it is this collective pattern that emerges from the thousands of daily interactions of all of us 130 that I would like us to attempt to evolve towards more consistency and generativity.
- I strongly believe that we as a global group of highly competent and committed senior managers have most of the wisdom, skills, and knowledge we need to develop ourselves and our company further. Therefore, *Conversations on the practice of leading* is a process that allows all of us to develop ourselves by discovering and building on what we already do that works well, and to improve what does not.
- Therefore, the day we will have together in your country management teams will start with helping us to deepen our understanding of how "things are now." These insights will then allow us to amplify existing positive and productive behaviours and interactions. Hence a virtuous cycle emerges which in the end will hopefully result in a development of the patterns of our interactions towards more consistency and generativity in the experience of our various stakeholders.

After I had explained the underlying theoretical perspectives (as describe above) and the five-step flow of the CPL process Garry then opened the (virtual) floor to a general discussion that turned out to be highly participative and constructive. Due to the relative unconventionality of our invitation approach and the CPL

⁵⁵ Triple bottom line at ROCKET means 'People, Planet, Profit'

process as a whole I was not surprised when many people raised similar questions and concerns as Garry and his global management team colleagues had done during our initial meeting: Isn't the CPL process too loose? What do you mean by generative? What if people come up with the wrong answers? Will *just talking* result in anything? Don't I need to give the right answers as a boss? Although we were neither able nor inclined to answer any of these questions fully, based on the participants' reaction we seemed to at least be able to explore them together to a degree that created enough trust and security for them to be able to say to themselves and us, "O.K., I'm not sure how this will turn out but I'm willing to give it a try." At the end of the session most participants expressed overwhelmingly positive reactions about their first virtual large group conversation in particular and the CPL initiative in general. Garry, his steering team colleagues and I were very pleased about these reactions.

Back at my desk at home I note in my journal...

I think we achieved what we wanted – to raise interest, increase clarity and to allow many views to be heard fully (I'm sure a small minority of people did not share their thoughts) and explored as much as our limited time allowed. My underlying intent in this was to contribute to an atmosphere of curiosity and inquiry rather than of advocacy and defence in particular from Garry, the design team members or me. For instance, during the only subjective micro now-moment I experienced someone asked me, "Isn't this just some sort of weird new-age type process in which we'll all hold hands, drink tea and feel good about ourselves but nothing concrete comes of it?" Rather than getting upset or into an argument with that person, I said, "Yes, I can see how all this might sound a bit strange. Could you say more about what you base your comment on? How have you come to this particular view?" Not surprisingly to me he could not back up his question (actually, it wasn't really a question, anyway) with any more thoughts or arguments. After a little poking from me to express his personal feelings about the CPL process it turned out that he was simply afraid of the novelty and predictability of such an open just talking process, but was willing to try nevertheless.

The first CPL workshop: The difficulty of expressing lived experience

Four weeks after our web-based group conversation Matt and I co-facilitated the first CPL country management team workshop.⁵⁶ Because I knew from the numerous conversations I had had with ROCKET senior managers over the preceding weeks that many of them were anxious about what they perceived as exaggerated *looseness* of the entire CPL process. Many half jokingly referred to it as the 'just talking process'. Therefore, I suggested to Garry and Matt that the structural elements of the CPL process (e.g. written invitation, agenda items and timings, work instructions) had to provide some sense of stability and predictability for the senior managers through their relative degree of *tightness*.

Because we did not want the CPL workshop participants to discuss the Pros or Cons of the various workshop topics prior to attending it, but to come without additional preconceived ideas about what might happen

⁵⁶ Over the following two months Matt and I co-facilitated eight more sessions in Europe, the Americas and Asia. Garry participated in all of them and has done so with almost all of the remaining 14 sessions facilitated by Matt since then.

during our day together we had asked the Country CEO not to send out an agenda with his and Garry's co-invitation to his management team members for their CPL workshop. We therefore very purposefully showed a detailed agenda (see below) right at the beginning of the workshop to address the unsettling assumption of many team members that we had no plan at all and *just wanted to talk*, which of course we definitely did want, yet at the same time we did have a plan that we were very willing to have modified based on specific needs (which happened quite frequently) or abandon completely if necessary (which did not happen). While explaining the intended flow of the day at the beginning of this first workshop I pointed out that because we were solely interested in providing an opportunity for genuine conversations about the practice of leading the workshop agenda was not fixed but rather a lightly held potential guide for the day's conversations.

The practice of leading @ ROCKET

CPL Workshop Agenda

Time	Theme	Objective	Method	Responsible
08:00	The case for practicing leadership at ROCKET	Deepened understanding of the importance, function, and state of leadership within the 'ROCKET world'	Plenary ⇒ Presentation and dialogue with participants.	Garry
08:45	Generatively intended behaviours	Common understanding of what is meant by 'behaving with generative intent towards your stakeholders'	Plenary ⇒ Dialogue with participants.	Hartmut
09:30	BREAK			
10:00	Personal experiences of generatively intended behaviours	Deepened intellectual and emotional understanding of generatively intended behaviours	Pairs ⇒ see separate instruction sheet	Hartmut
12:30	LUNCH			
13:30	Behavioural patterns	Understanding of the behavioural patterns emerging from our examples and our daily practice	Plenary ⇒ Dialogue	Hartmut
14:45	BREAK			
15:15	Insights and next steps	Deepened awareness of the insights from today's conversations Common understanding of the next organisation-wide activities	Plenary ⇒ Individual reflection ⇒ Dialogue	Hartmut and Garry
16:00	END			

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In my view the CPL workshop consisted of two essential conversations: Firstly, the exploration of personal experiences of senior managers' generatively intended behaviours towards others (see work instructions shown below) and secondly, the inquiry into patterns formed by the multitude of these individual interactions.

Exploring the practices of leading

Reconvening in the plenary group at _____.

The purpose of this section is to explore examples of generatively intended behaviours of managers within ROCKET towards their stakeholders.

The process of this section is...

In pairs...

- Share a personal experience with your partner of when you have witnessed (what you perceived as) a generatively intended gesture/behaviour from yourself or another manager towards others (e.g. colleagues, employees, customers). Be as precise as you can: How did it look and feel? What happened as a result?

In the plenary...

- Explain the essence of the behaviours you discussed to your colleagues.
-

The inquiry into generatively intended behaviours of senior managers was influenced by the two notions from Appreciative Inquiry I have mentioned before: What we pay attention to we get more of and focusing on what is currently working well creates more positive energy amongst people than looking at what is wrong or broken. As you might easily infer from the way the work instruction for this conversation is phrased Matt and I attempted to encourage the senior managers to focus in their conversation on very specific, real life examples. Clearly the phrase *generatively intended* is an ambiguous and thus potentially confusing term that needed further elaboration in the workshop. When trying to define this term I roughly said the following: By *generatively intended behaviour* we mean a gesture you make in a particular moment *to help bring about new perspectives and possibilities for someone else rather than acting mainly out of self interest*.

When the senior managers came back together in the plenary after their inquiry into generatively intended behaviours to share their findings and insights we realized that it had been even more difficult for them to be specific in their examples than Matt and I had anticipated. Again and again during their reports back I found myself asking probing questions with the intent to help them think more deeply and describe their identified behaviours more precisely rather than using overly abstract terms. One such occasion towards the end of this particular workshop segment triggered an anticipated yet still challenging subjective micro now-moment for me:

I ask Joe* who had just shared his and his partner's behavioural examples in the plenary group, "You just said you 'communicated well' with one of your direct reports. Could you be more precise than 'communicated well'? What exactly did you do in that moment?" "I think it's pretty clear what we mean", he immediately replies sharply while looking at me directly with what I perceive as challenge, "I don't understand why you are always belabouring every point we make. For me it's clear!" I feel an instant constricting of my stomach and an increased heartbeat. Then I notice a sense of irritation about what I perceive as a snide comment about me. For what seems to me like

a long moment I am struggling to formulate a generative response in my mind and not to follow my intuitive, bodily urge to make a retaliatory wisecrack. Finally (it's probably only been a few seconds since he finished speaking) I say, "Yeah, I can imagine that my constant prodding over the last 90 minutes or so has been quite laborious. But unfortunately to make a personal experience explicit to people who haven't been there seems to always require more words than we need ourselves as the experiencer. That is the challenge with what is called implicit understanding. Can I read you a short quote that demonstrates this pretty clearly?" I address this last sentence not just to Joe but to the whole group of ten or so team members. Most of them nod encouragingly; when I turn back to Joe he also nods slightly and says, "Fine with me."

I then read the following quote from Gendlin's chapter in the book "Ten years of viewing from within: The legacy of Francisco Varela" (Petitmengin, 2009) that examines the progress that has been made since Francisco Varela and a number of his colleagues from around the world first started their inquiries into 'first-person approaches to the study of consciousness' (Varela and Shear, 1999). I had brought the book along to this (and each subsequent) workshop because I thought it might be useful at some point in explaining the notion of *implicit understanding*.

One sensation can also change our understanding of the whole situation, for example one smell: ('Oh!...'). Laid out in words it might be 'Oh! That's the sauce burning! I left it on the stove when I went to answer the phone, and I don't have more stuff to make the sauce again, and there isn't any time to go to the store, and...' Only the 'Oh!...' has actually occurred, but the '...' includes much more: who is invited for dinner, and why, and what sort of reactions they are likely to have, and many past events with them, and what could still be cooked, and much else. All of that is implicit and understood in one 'Oh!...' (Petitmengin, 2009 p. 334).

I put the book down and ask them what they think about the quote. After a few humorous comments and laughing about the underestimated dangers of home cooking we have a lively discussion about how much unspoken and unknowable detail is implicit in our words and how difficult they have therefore found it to be specific in describing the behavioural examples in their paired conversations and now in the team conversation. When someone says, "being specific in articulating our behaviour examples feels like archaeology where the scientists use small brushes to clear traces of sand from a fragment of a vase or skeleton" everyone nods or mumbles in agreement.

I want to give Joe another chance to formulate his *communicated well* example more precisely and closer to his lived experience; therefore I say, "Keeping this metaphor in mind, let's get back to Joe's communication example for a moment. Joe, how would you describe your behaviour in your example after our Gendlin discussion?" I look him encouragingly wondering how he will react. He thinks for a moment, looks at the colleague he had been paired up with earlier, then says, "Well... when I think about it again now... I might say something like... I asked good questions to

understand my direct report. Yeah,I think that's the essence of it, really." "OK. And what kind of questions did you ask, Joe?" I inquire cautiously. "Hmm... I think... well, I think I asked open-ended questions to explore." I say, "So, if I understand you correctly you asked open-ended exploratory questions with the intention to understand your direct report's perspective. Is that right?" "Yeah, that's it!"; he nods. I smile at him while feeling pleased about his improved accuracy of expression. "Thanks, Joe. I think we can work with that."

After more than two hours of this investigative-type of conversation about their examples of generatively intended behaviours the team concluded the following:

- The isolated behavioural examples by themselves are much less meaningful than the subsequent conversation about them because the talking seems to lead to a deeper individual and collective understanding of the phenomenon of generatively intended behaviour.
- The notion of *generative intent* is very difficult to understand and to judge, particularly in others, but again the very fact of talking about the phenomenon is useful.
- In order to get a more complete picture about the current practice of leading amongst the senior managers it is important to not just talk about examples of generatively intended behaviours but also about non-generatively intended behaviours, that is, self-serving or careless behaviours of senior managers.
- It would be useful to investigate the thinking in the management team about the relationship between intention and outcomes.

Based on these conclusions the team decided (after a brief consultation with Garry, Matt and me) to postpone the discussion planned for the afternoon about the patterns arising from the numerous generatively (and non-generatively) intended behaviours to their next regular management team meeting and instead talk about examples of non-generatively behaviours and their thinking about the relationship between intention and outcomes⁵⁷. With that we all went for a well-deserved lunch.

After the workshop I note in my journal...

The afternoon sessions went very well in terms of people's engagement and their increased focus on and ability to be specific in what they said. They came up with quite a number of behaviours from themselves they judged to be non-generative in their intent for instance due to not wanting to admit a mistake, wanting to look good in front of a parent company representative, personal anger and frustration. They concluded that it is only human to sometimes have generative intent and sometimes not. But they also thought that on balance the behaviour of them as senior managers should definitely be based on generative intent. After being asked by me to make a gut assessment about the current

⁵⁷ The conversation about both of these topics became a standard feature in all subsequent CPL workshops; the session on patterns was postponed to the large group CPL conference and additionally very often to the country management teams' regular team meetings.

state of affairs, they concluded that at the moment their behaviour had a 60%-40% ratio between non-generative to generative. This, they want to at least reverse.

The inquiry into their thinking about the relationship between intent and outcome seemed to be equally insightful for them. After some difficulties to get into the conversation that we eventually overcame by me sharing my thinking about the paradoxical tension I call *having intentions while having no control over outcomes* they had a lively and controversial conversation (mainly about the degree of control that was possible; a few said almost none, a few said quite a lot, most felt they had a lot less outcome control than they conventionally assumed. Their conclusions:

- 1) They agreed with the existence of my paradoxical tension.
- 2) They felt that generative intended behaviours can lead to destructive outcomes as much as non-generatively intended ones can cause productive outcomes.
- 3) Therefore, the key implication for their practice of leading was the realisation that since they generally had so little control over outcomes they had to constantly cycle between being aware of one's intention and the current status of any given situation/interaction.

My micro-now-moments

While exploring generatively intended behaviour examples during the morning I experienced the "implicit understanding" micro now-moment and another to me well-known type of micro now-moment (that these days does not happen too frequent I believe due to my increased awareness of the difference between *reacting because of* and *acting in order to*). A manager who seemed to be oblivious to what her colleagues were working on during the morning session and spend most of this time on her BlackBerry came to Matt and me at lunchtime and said that the morning had been "too slow" for her. I immediately felt defensive (and not generative!) and said, "Does that mean that you already knew about all of the behaviours your colleagues talked about?" When she answered "No," I was thinking "So what on earth are you then talking about?" but said "It would have been good if you had mentioned something while it was happening during the morning and not afterwards when we cannot do anything about this anymore." She nodded, saying "Fine" and left us looking dejected.

I now think that my sudden defensiveness probably had to do with the fact that I was upset with myself for not having addressed her seemingly mental absence during the morning despite having noticed it and my growing sense of irritation about it. Interestingly, during the afternoon's session she left her BlackBerry mostly untouched on the table and listened and participated more actively. Maybe an example that my not really generatively intended behaviour did have a constructive outcome?

The CPL Forum: All senior managers in one room – for the first time ever

Five months after my initial conversation with Garry the CPL Forum took place on two courts of an indoor tennis center we had rented in order to have lots of space and light for all of the 130 senior managers from around the world to work comfortably together. The Forum was a one-day large group conversation about the practice of leading – sub-titled *What is it like to be in charge but not in control?* – functioning as the first day of the regular 2.5-day Annual Leadership Conference, which was usually attended exclusively by the 60 or

so most senior managers of ROCKET (e.g. Corporate and country CEOs, COOs, and CFOs) in order to work on topics such as vision, business strategy, market trends, technology developments, competitors, and people development. This time, however, not only the Forum but also the Leadership Conference would be attended by all 130 senior managers.

The CPL steering team and I had designed the Forum taking into account the insights from the CPL country workshops and the entire process so far. To this end a few weeks earlier I had facilitated a phone conversation with a group consisting of one representative from each of the country management teams plus Garry and Matt about the process insights from the 22 CPL workshops. Their conclusions about the CPL process so far were:

- Conversing without the need to come to an agreement facilitates a more open and deeper exploration of different perspectives.
- Developing fresh thinking and discovering new insights requires different perspectives and takes time.
- ‘Just talking’ can be very powerful in facilitating increased alignment through its ability to implicitly influence personal action.

Garry and all of the other steering team members had been adamant that a genuine conversation involving 130 people would not be possible and that we shouldn’t even attempt such a thing. After all, they had argued, the tried and tested formula of the Annual Leadership Conferences of PowerPoint presentations, Q&A, breakout and report-back sessions had always worked well. Why risk failure trying something different, they had asked. I had persistently disagreed with that rationale, arguing that we had seen for ourselves and heard from countless country CEOs and their team members how surprisingly useful ‘just talking’ with time and no specific outcome pressures had proven to be for them in terms of developing personal insights and increasing intellectual and behavioural alignment and at the same time experimentation. I frequently reminded the steering team members that their rationale for the overall CPL process was supported by Shotter’s claim that

(...) to talk in new ways, is to ‘construct’ new forms of social relation, and, to construct new forms of social relation (of self-other relationships) is to construct new ways of being (person-world relations) for ourselves. (1993 p. 9)

It had taken me quite a while and numerous examples from other projects I had worked on to finally convince the steering team members to give a large group conversational process a try. But I sensed that most of them were still far from being convinced that the CPL Forum was a good idea; instead my constant arguing had probably worn them down and they had simply run out of arguments or energy. According to Garry, the main reason he finally decided to go ahead despite all of their misgivings was that he intuitively knew that something new had to happen to stimulate the further development of their repetitive and ritualized

conversational and interacting patterns. And equally important, as he told the steering team and me, he trusted my opinion. Subsequently, I felt quite a bit of pressure to justify his trust in me, but at the same time I was pretty certain that his people would have engaging and insightful conversations if we just let them.

So, there we finally were on our two green-carpeted tennis courts, having reluctantly abandoned the familiar format of the ROCKET Leadership Conferences with their seemingly endless, rather lifeless, but predictable PowerPoint presentations followed by mainly going-through-the-motions Q&A sessions, only interrupted by the occasional, lively small group breakout session and report-back. This time, however, the participants were in for a surprise. Sitting together with 130 people at 16 round tables in *maximum-mixture* groups on a huge in-door tennis court was already very unusual for them. But there were even more arrangements most of them had never seen in the context of a business meeting: When they came into the working space (and during the breaks) music was playing. The tables were set up in concentric circles so that they created no conventional front of the room dominated by a huge screen, but instead a round, empty forum-like⁵⁸ *community space* in their middle. The tables were covered with white paper tablecloths that people could scribble and draw on directly. Every table had several mobile stick microphones laying on them so that talking to and hearing each other would not be a problem. Furthermore, we had numerous big flat TV screens distributed throughout the room on which people could see the occasional slide that was shown, but more importantly they could easily see whoever was speaking or doing something due to the numerous camera teams who would broadcast the entire conversation. And finally, each table had on it a small digital video camera and – I almost forgot – a huge bowl filled with colourful wine gums.

People were already surprised by the unusual venue and space set-up, but what visibly unsettled a lot of them was the way in which we asked them to work together: informally; across hierarchies, functions and geographies; largely self-directed; without fixed endpoint in form of agreement, an action plan or some other device usually employed to ensure *implementation* after a meeting or workshop. They had never done anything like this.

My role during the Forum day was to (lightly) facilitate the various large group conversations to help us work with what was figural in the room at any moment and to provide some certainty by explaining the flow and key tasks of the Forum (see below agenda).

⁵⁸ From Latin *forum* "marketplace, open space, public place" (Retrieved [August 9, 2012] from (<http://www.etymonline.com/forum>))

The practice of leading @ ROCKET

The Forum – Conversations about the practice of leading: What is it like to be in charge and not in control?

Time	Theme	Objective	Method	Facilitation
08:00	The case for talking in new ways	Understanding why talking together in new ways might lead to being with each other and the world in new ways	Plenary ⇒ PechaKucha-style introduction ⇒ Dialogue ⇒ Short video project instructions	Garry Hartmut
08:45	Generatively intended behaviours (incl. break)	Exploration of our views about and experiences with 'behaving with generative intent'	Table groups ⇒ Dialogue Plenary ⇒ Short table group feedback ⇒ Dialogue	Hartmut
11:30	The paradox of intentions and outcomes	Exploration of what we have noticed since our CPL workshop about the paradox of having intentions while having no control over outcomes	Pairs ⇒ 'Walk and Talk' at the lake	Hartmut
12:30	LUNCH			
14:30	Collective behavioural patterns (incl. break)	Understanding of the behavioural patterns emerging from our daily practice of leading	Table groups ⇒ Dialogue Plenary ⇒ Short table group feedback ⇒ Identification of common themes and differences	Hartmut
17:30	The 'In charge – not in control' video project	Creation of a 5 min. video clip about our experience as senior managers of being in charge and at the same time not in control	Table groups ⇒ Planning, review of the days video footage, cutting etc.	Hartmut
19:30	DINNER			

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Despite the initial uncertainty many participants experienced the slightly uneasy mood quickly gave way to what looked and felt like whole-hearted engagement with the various conversations at hand. Personally I experienced several micro now-moments during the Forum and one challenging *macro* now-moment that occurred towards the end of the Forum that I want to describe now.

We were two hours or so away from launching into the last segment of the Forum, an activity we had called the *In charge – not in control video project*. Each table group was supposed to create a 5-minute video clip based on the happenings of the Forum and the subsequent Leadership Conference showing what it is like to be in charge and at the same time have no control over outcomes. These clips were then meant to become part of a company-wide CPL blog whose purpose was to start facilitating the involvement of the other roughly half of ROCKET's 300 line managers and the wider organisation in the CPL process. I had explained all of this at the beginning of the Forum to what I felt was a mainly silent you-must-be-kidding reaction. At that time I had put this reaction mainly down to the uncertainty and worry about the unfamiliar format we were just getting into. But during the course of the day several people had asked me about the video project with the same incredulous undertone of 'You want us to do WHAT?' It seemed that Garry had had similar conversations because in the late afternoon while the table groups were working on their collective patterns he came up to me and said:

⁵⁹ Regarding the term *PechaKucha* at the 8 a.m. slot: 'PechaKucha 20x20 is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and you talk along to the images' (Retrieved [July 10, 2012] from <http://www.pecha-kucha.org/what>).

"I think we need to push the video project a bit harder when you give them the instructions later. A lot of them are complaining about it and don't want to do it." Garry seems bullish. Hearing him mention *pushing harder* causes an instant sense of resistance within me; it feels as if a heavy weight has been placed on my chest. I don't quite know how to react. To buy some reflection time I suggest that we go outside and take a walk by the lake. He likes the idea and we leave the tennis center walking through a nearby park down to the lake.

Outside I say, "Before we get into the question of the video, how do you think it's been going so far?" Like a shot he says, "Outstanding! From what I have experienced myself and from what people have told me so far everyone seems to be extremely positive about this way of working together and about the genuine personal insights and collective understanding that are starting to emerge. And the palpable sense of community. Great stuff, indeed. I am very happy! But... why do you ask?" "Well," I say, "remember, the reason we originally thought the videos would be a good idea was two-fold. It would require people to work together slightly more creatively and cooperatively, and it would be an innovative, light-hearted way of starting to involve people who so far haven't been involved in the CPL process." "I do I remember. That's exactly why I think we need to push this harder to overcome people's resistance."

"Let's sit on this bench for a moment", I suggest. Once we have settled down I ask Garry, "What do you think this resistance as you call it is about?" Garry looks at me, then glances across the lake for a short moment. Finally he says, "I don't know... I guess it might have to do with them thinking this video stuff is not real work like we have done so far today, but just some sort of wired exercise. I'm not sure. What do you think?" I reflect for a moment, then say, "I have a sense you are right. And I feel the same. When we planned this it felt like a good idea, but now I don't think anymore this is the right step following on from the discussion about collective patterns we will have in a short while. The video work now feels too contrived; not appropriate anymore to where the group is right now in terms of their thinking and being together. I just wonder what a better next step might be to close the Forum well. Do you have a view on that, Garry?" He smiles at me and says jokingly, "Apart from action planning, which I know you don't like, not really. You?"

I briefly wonder how seriously he means his comment about action planning, but due to our short remaining time until we need to be back I decide not to get into this question right now. Instead I muse, "Actually, I have two thoughts. Firstly... I do think we need to discuss this in the big group, and secondly, I would suggest that finishing the day with a reflective paired walk & talk about 'What has become clearer to me today and what questions/thoughts do I have now?' might be useful to them." Without hesitation Garry nods while saying, "Good idea. I like it; let's do that." With that we get up from our bench and start walking back to the tennis center.

When I later explained Garry's and my thinking about the video task and our alternative proposal as to how to finish the Forum more appropriately and usefully, we only had a very short discussion until it became clear that the senior managers much preferred this alternative.

Sitting in my bedroom in the evening after having left the celebratory group dinner at the moment when lots of people were getting up to move to the hotel bar I wrote in my journal...

I am very tired!!! But also very satisfied with the day. Substituting the video task with a walk & talk about insights and further questions seems to have been a good move – lots of people came up to me during the pre-dinner drinks and commented positively on the fact that they had been able to conclude this intense, interactive day with a quite reflection on what had happened to them, what insights they had gained and what was figural for them now.

Reflecting on the Forum makes me think of Shotter's comment that I just looked up in my notes:

For individual members of a people can have a sense of 'belonging' in that people's 'reality', only if the others around them are prepared to respond to what they do and say seriously, that is if they are treated as a proper participant in that people's 'authoring' of their reality, and not excluded from it in some way. For only then will they feel that the reality in which they live is as much theirs as anyone else's. (1993 p. 59)

I very much feel that this is exactly what has happened in today's Forum conversations. People seemed to have been able and willing to express their views freely and listen to others' perspectives with interest and respect. As in the CPL workshops I think that the absence of the conventional compulsion in business contexts to come to any common conclusion, decision or agreed action plan has helped greatly in this. I think Bohm is expressing the same insight when he writes that in 'the dialogue group we are not going to decide what to do about anything. This is crucial. Otherwise we are not free' (1996 p. 17) and 'we have to (...) be able to think together, in order to do intelligently whatever is necessary' (ibid. p. 15).

Overall I am positively surprised HOW well people got into the spirit of *just talking* and at the same time they seemed to have already gained quite a bit of personal insights about how to work with the continuous cycling between intention and current state. Watching them work in such a different way makes me feel optimistic that the Forum will have a positive impact in terms of more coherent thinking and behaving patterns of the senior managers. One other quote from Bohm comes to my mind in this context, that is,

...if people were to think together in a coherent way, it would have tremendous power (...) then we might have (...) a coherent movement of thought (...) It would be coherent not only on the level we recognize, but at the tacit level, at the level for which we have only a vague feeling. (ibid. p. 14)

However, I do think it is important to not forget that coherence is neither a fixed thing we can hold in our minds nor a possible end result we can achieve through talking long enough, but a paradoxical,

continuous process that at best leads to *'transitional understandings (...)* and a set of *action guiding anticipations* as to 'where' we might go next' (Shotter, 2011 p. 25).

I think it is important to sit down with Garry and the other steering team members as soon as we can to reflect on the Forum and the entire CPL process and to think about what if anything we want to contribute to make happen next.

My Forum afterglow: A self-organizing process

For quite a few days after the end of the Forum I still felt a sense of excitement about the changes in the conversational patterns I had experienced in the interactions of the senior managers compared to the Annual Leadership Conferences I had facilitated in the two previous years. This time there seemed to be a much more personal connection between the participants, a more serious engagement with what they previously might have dismissed as *philosophical questions*, and an increased willingness to experiment with slightly different, for some people possibly even scary ways of interacting. But above anything else, I had noticed a much greater willingness to explore different perspectives without the need to dismiss them, disappear them, ignore them, or align them.

Already during the months leading up to the Forum I had begun to witness a slowly growing sense of aliveness amongst the senior managers, other managers and employees within the organisation. Wherever I went in ROCKET during that time there was one topic that most people eventually mentioned usually with obvious positive excitement in their voices: *THE CONVERSATION – Have you heard about it? Have you had yours yet? We had a great one! You wouldn't believe what we talked about! I have begun to see things from a completely new perspective!* Whenever people spoke about *the conversation* I noticed in them a palpable sense of new possibilities. My hunch is that the more than usually open and informal way in which people had been invited to and involved in the CPL process and the way they interacted together during it facilitated the emergence of a new sense of openness and feeling of vitality.

It seemed to me that the reaction to the unusually open (for ROCKET's context) process Garry had initiated had increasingly *gone viral*, that is, one person had spoken positively about *the conversation* to several people who in turn had spoken to several more people each and so forth. Eventually a large number of people – managers and non-managers alike – seemed to be interested in *the conversation* and positive about it, apparently regardless of whether they had already taken part in it or not.

In most of the informal chats and in many of the more formal conversations (I will come back to both of these conversational forms later) I have had with senior managers throughout the CPL process the one specific issue in relation to the CPL process that seemed to capture their attention and puzzled them more than anything else was the question about the dynamic relationship between intent and outcomes – *What do I do when I am in charge, but apparently not in control?* Or to use Shotter's terminology, how does one iterate

between one's situational 'action guiding anticipations' (Shotter, 2011 p. 25) and one's temporary 'transitional understandings' (Ibid.)?

The CPL process itself, I believe, is a good example of the emergence of a conversational pattern over time. A process that had very initially been envisaged by Garry as focusing on the agreement of common leadership principles had over a six-months period increasingly turned into a conversation mainly about what is it like to have intent and at the same time neither predictive agency nor control over outcomes. I was very curious as to how the pattern would continue to develop.

Surprise: The abrupt end of the formal CPL process

At lunchtime about a week after the Forum I received a private call from a very upset Garry. After having hung up the phone and having made myself a cup of extra strong coffee I wrote in my journal...

I am shocked!!! I can hardly believe that ROCKET has been sold by its parent company to a group of private investors without Garry or any of the other senior managers knowing about it. The new owners have immediately brought in their own CEO and a few other key senior managers. Large muscled men escorted Garry and most of his global management team out of their offices with no prior notice or time to pack their personal belongings. Neither Garry nor any of the others are presently allowed to make any comments whatsoever about ROCKET, their work there, or the new owners.

Apart from being shocked I feel lots of different emotions: There is a keen sense of sadness about Garry and his colleagues not only being out of their jobs but also out of the opportunity to continue contributing to the CPL process that had developed so well. There is anger about the investors who seem to treat people as if they were mechanical spare parts to be replaced at will. And finally, there is concern about me most probably losing a very interesting project and also a significant stream of income⁶⁰

I find myself wondering about the senior managers and the CPL process. What will happen to them now? What difference, if any, will the various CPL conversations that have taken place over the last six months within ROCKET continue to make? How will the apparently positive experience of *just talking* help or hinder the remaining senior managers to handle the new situation well? Although I know that these questions are unanswerable I still find it difficult to let them go.

Then I remember the old Taoist parable about the futility of wondering if a given situation is good or bad: (L.) an old Chinese farmer lost his best stallion one day and his neighbor came around to express his regrets, but the farmer just said, 'Who knows what is good and what is bad.' The next day the stallion returned bringing with him 3 wild mares. The neighbor rushed back to celebrate with the farmer, but the old farmer simply said, 'Who knows what is good and what is bad.' The following day, the farmer's son fell from one of the wild mares while trying to break her in and broke his arm and injured his leg. The neighbor came by to check on the son and give his

⁶⁰ Based on what I had heard and read about ROCKET's new owners since Garry's call, I was not overly surprised when a few weeks later I received an email from the new Director of Human Resources saying that my consulting services were no longer required because the CPL process had been 'stopped'. My response email to him offering to meet him to explain the rationale and details of the CPL process remained unanswered.

condolences, but the old farmer just said, "Who knows what is good and what is bad." The next day the army came to the farm to conscript the farmer's son for the war, but found him invalid and left him with his father. The neighbor thought to himself, "Who knows what is good and what is bad." (Retrieved [August 11, 2012] from http://vision-nary.com/weblogs/index.php/taoist_parable).

I feel a little better after reading this.

With this final journal entry I am concluding my presentational expression (Heron and Reason cited Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p. 183) of my ROCKET story. I had of course hoped that the project would continue for some time yet, but on the other hand working with Garry, Matt and their colleagues during these six months has given me ample opportunity to gain valuable experiences about when and how I am actually working live. Based on these and other consulting experiences I will now develop a number of key propositions about my practice.

Propositions about my practice

As I have said before I conceptualize the notion of *working live well* as *engaging in consulting activities for and with my clients to help them address issues that are real and important to them and that they feel they cannot address alone while at the same time being aware of my subjective experiencing at a particular moment and expressing it congruently and generatively*. What then do I think I do when I work live well?"

Proposition 1: Working live well requires proficiency and stability as enabler of flexibility and agility

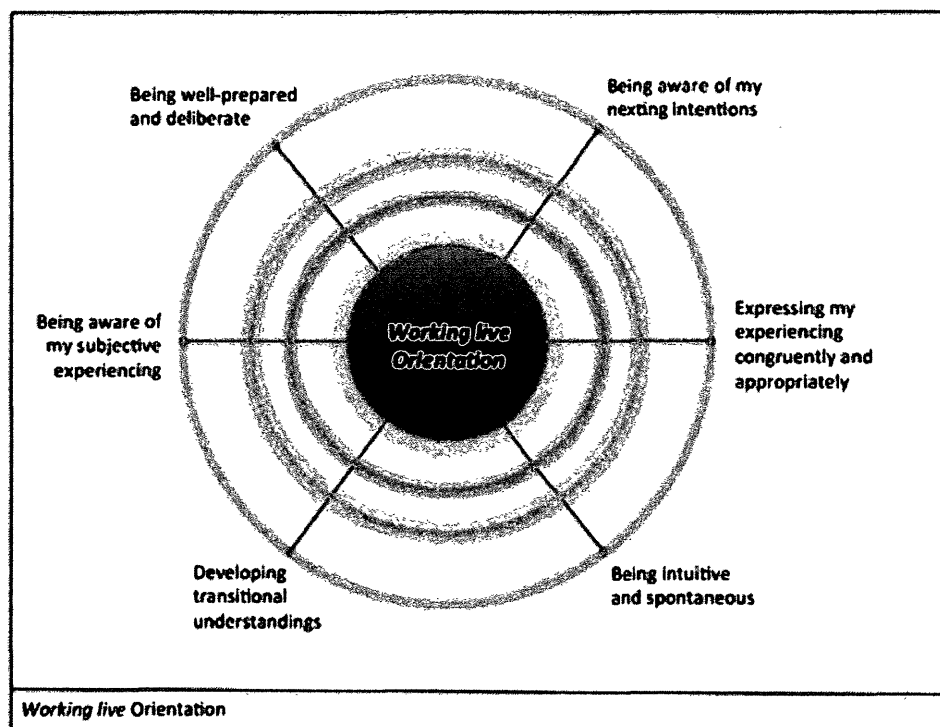
When I was practicing martial arts in my 20s my teachers would always point out that the real enjoyment of and grace in our practice would only start after I no longer had to think about which particular move I needed to make when and how in responding to my partners, but I would be so proficient that my moves would intuitively reflect the others' moves like a mirror. In other words, my proficiency in the various moves and techniques would give me a solid basis – a 'state of consciousness where there are no distractions (...) [an] intuitive state of being' (Hill, 2002 p. 270) – from which to improvise and work with what my partner/s threw at me at any moment. (Unfortunately I neither trained long enough nor hard enough to ever reach this state of grace.)

Coming back to my consulting practice, as soon as I begin to think about the question of what it takes for me to work live well a number of occasions come to my mind in which I did not do this well. Examples of these instances include being aware of my own impatience while blaming a client for it in front of his management team members; pushing an issue that was mine, not the client's; or improvising in the moment (*winging it* might be a more appropriate description) while not being properly prepared about my clients' context. I could go on, but the point I am trying to make with these examples is that most situations in which I did not work live well were situations in which I had to some degree lost sight of what I call my *working live*

orientation. In short, working live well also requires solid proficiency – the working live orientation – from which to intuitively and flexibly work well in the constant turmoil of what is emerging in the moment.

The key aspect of the working live orientation is the ability to hold three tightly intertwined paradoxical tensions at the same time:

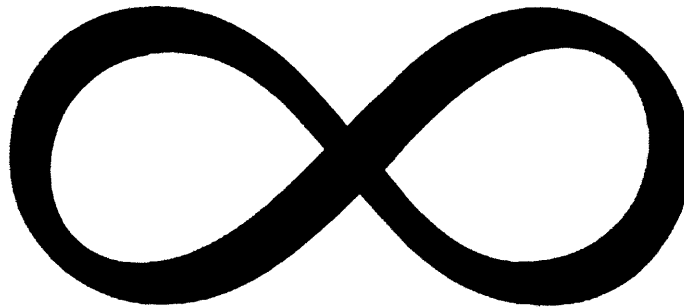
- Being aware of my experiencing at a particular subjective now-moment while expressing it congruently and nexting with generative intent at the same time.
- Being well prepared and deliberate while being intuitive and spontaneous at the same time.
- Being aware of my evolving nexting intentions or ‘action guiding anticipations’ (Shotter 2011 p.25) while developing my ‘transitional understandings’ (Ibid.) of a particular situation at the same time.



To work live well requires me to neither become too pre-occupied with one aspect of the three paradoxical tensions nor to only concentrate on one or two of the tension poles. In other words, I am constantly attempting to be aware of all six *at-the-same-time-aspects* constituting a working live orientation while at the very same time remaining open to my on-going experiencing of myself, others and the ‘more-than-human world’ (Heron and Reason cited Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p. 184) I am participating in.

Proposition 2: Working live well means working at different degrees of detail

I want to stress again that when I am talking about subjective micro now-moments I do not mean sharply delineated fix points in the constant flow of time and reality, but a continuous iterative subjective process taking place in each moment of constructing the present by reinterpreting the near and far past and anticipating and imagining the near and far future while judging both with ‘the logical and evidential characters which such data possess in the present’ (Mead, 1967 p. 57). In thinking about what I have come to call the *five-part movement of the presenting moment* I am always reminded of the infinity sign used mainly in physics and mathematics to indicate the characteristic of a phenomenon being limitless or unbounded.



The Post-Present-Future construction in the present

I have realized that this iterative process does not just happen in the context of subjective micro-now moments that might last no longer than 20 seconds, but it equally takes place at larger degrees of detail in the context of *macro* now-moments that focus on say hours because, ‘the circular iterative process of gesture–response at all scales (...) [is] analogous to fractal patterning – the same patterning process being conceptualized at whatever degree of detail’ (Stacey cited in Shaw, 2002 p. 124). For instance, I see the discussion I had with Garry about whether or not it would make sense to try to make his senior managers do the video project at the end of the CPL Forum as an instance of working live, albeit at a lower degree of detail, that is, with an awareness of and focus on hours rather than seconds. Working live at that degree of detail for instance meant to have a clear understanding of the conceptually coherent flow of the Forum, a keen sense of the mood within the group and their needs, a sense of Garry’s and my degree of attachment to the originally intended flow of the Forum day, and finally, an explicit and congruent intention for what we wanted to contribute to have emerge next in the groups’ conversational and relational process.

Proposition 3: Working live well means focusing on local interactions and at the same time on global patterns

As I have pointed out numerous times before, working live well requires focusing on local, subjective *now-and-what-next-moments* while at the same time paying attention to global patterns emerging from these local interactions, an activity I have called micro-scoping while macro-scoping. Simply focusing on the move you are about to make in the next second without recognizing the pattern your previous moves have contributed to will get you lost in repetitive routines or short-sighted action-guiding anticipations. Equally,

exclusively focusing on global patterns (e.g. a management team's tendency to take decisions without involving key stakeholders) without paying sustained attention to the very *now-and-what-next-moment* in which your next move continues this same patterning process (or not) will keep you insulated from lived experiences in the moment and thus unable to alter your habitual thinking, feeling and acting habits in that moment appropriately. Working live well means taking the next step with generative intent towards an intended (albeit transitional) outcome while being aware of the overall patterning of the moves already made. To be clear, all of that of course happens in the present moment.

Proposition 4: Working live well means working in informal and formal conversational settings

As will have become obvious from reading about the CPL project I did spend a considerable amount of time on activities and conversations within what one might call *formal conversational settings*, such as scoping and design meetings, the web-based large group conversations, the CPL workshops, the Forum, and many individual coaching sessions with Garry and a few others. I use the term *formal* here to stress that these types of conversational settings like, say, management team meetings are well-known episodes to their participants and often consist of long-established and well-rehearsed speech acts, and very frequently involve a significant power differential, often due to organizational hierarchy.

We can begin to think of social reality at large as a turbulent flow of continuous activity, containing within it two basic kinds of activity: (i) a set of relatively stable centres of well-ordered, self-producing activity, sustained by those within them being accountable (...); (ii) with these (...) moments of institutionalized order being separated from each other by zones of much more disorderly, unaccountable, chaotic activity. (Shotter, 1993 p. 17 - 18)

In addition to working in these formal settings, I have spent almost an equal amount of my time in *informal* conversational settings such as ad-hoc face-to-face, phone and email conversations with Garry, Matt and many others of the senior managers involved in the CPL process who wanted to talk about issues ranging from, say, *nothing in particular* to the mechanics of the process or my perception of them and their management teams. Informal conversational settings in this context for me are characterized by the absence or least by a noticeable reduction of pre-set episodes, routine speech acts and power differentials. Often these *unaccountable* conversations took place during breaks, in evenings of the formal events of the CPL process, or when I simply dropped in at the ROCKET offices and facilities. At other times a senior manager would call or send me an email or text saying, "I am in town on Wednesday, could we meet for a coffee?" or "The next time you're in the office, could you stop by for a quick chat?"

Working live with what is both in informal and formal settings is typical of how I attempt and prefer to work if at all possible given my clients' contexts. To take part in this dynamic interplay of conversations in both formal and informal settings gives me a good sense for what people talk about openly and what they feel they can only mention *in confidence* to me and a few select others. As Stacey writes, the

(...) distinction between formal and informal is very different to the distinction between legitimate and shadow [themes]. The former distinction relates to the degree of formality and the latter to the degree of legitimacy. (2003b p. 368)

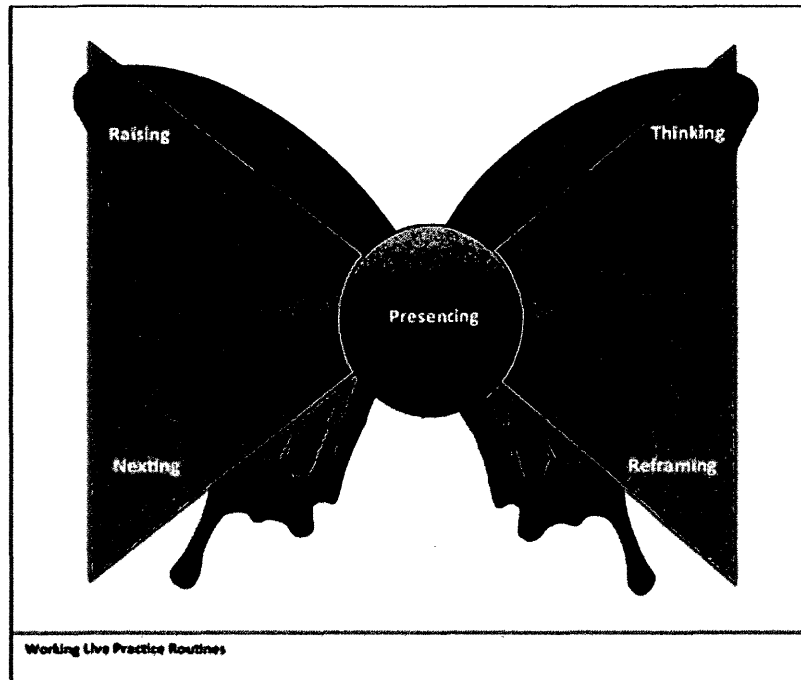
Getting a sense of both the degree of formality and legitimacy within ROCKET and any other organisation I work with is helpful to me in being able to support my clients well in contributing to more free-flowing conversations within the organisation so that fresh perspectives, diverse views and new ways of being with each other and their stakeholders can emerge.

My working live practice routines

During the last twelve months or so I have paid particular attention to what I do when I work live. The five *working live practice routines* shown in the graph below are my attempt at visualising the core activities I have realized I focus on in the course of working live with my clients. I have chosen a butterfly-shaped model out of two simple reasons:

- Firstly as a reminder to myself to hold these routines lightly just as a butterfly is flying through the air and landing on a flower or a leaf without causing much noticeable disturbance.
- Secondly, at the same time I want to keep the analogy of the 'butterfly effect' (Retrieved [May 12, 2012] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect) in mind that a tiny gesture I make at a certain point in time might be a small but important contributing factor to a communicative process evolving towards a novel pattern later.

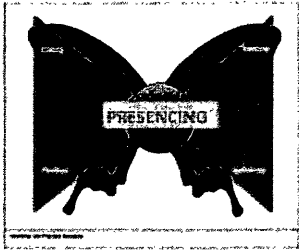
There is only a loose interrelation between the five practice routines, that is, presencing is an important prerequisite for all of them, but other than that there is neither a particular sequence in which I pay attention to these practices in a particular situation nor do I focus on all of them in each consulting situation.



I have found these practice routines to be extremely useful in aiding myself and my clients in working from a living process perspective, that is, focusing on the continuous iterative process of what is subjectively happening here now for us and at the same time on what we want to help make happen in the next moment, and on the patterns emerging from these interactions. In this way, these practice routines help to overcome the conventional divided and abstract thinking modes most of my clients tend to use in our work together.

Although I draw particularly on the ROCKET project to illustrate what I perceive to be salient points about my working live practice routines, these points are not exclusively based on my work with ROCKET, but are derived from the experiences I have gained from the numerous consulting situations I have been involved in especially during the last year.

Of course the model is just 'the map, not the territory' (Retrieved [August 22, 2012] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Korzybski); its sole purpose is to direct my general attention. To be sure, in my consulting I do not simply work with one of the practice routines at any one time. In my working *presencing, thinking, reframing* and so forth usually happen all in parallel and therefore I am using the model like a map rather than like a recipe, that is, helping me to focus my attention in a particular moment, not how to do it exactly. The *how* emerges in the particular moment between myself, others, and the circumstances we find ourselves in, which is a nonlinear communicative process of which Stacey says 'Such particularization is inevitably a conflictual process of interpretation as the meaning of the generalization is established in a specific situation' (2012 p. 34). With this let me move on to my first practice routine – presencing.



Practice 1: Presencing

At this immediate experiential level, we do not feel as if the self is *merely* the stream of experience. Indeed, even to call it a stream reveals our grasping after some sense of solidity, for this metaphor implies that experience flows continually. But when we subject this continuity to analysis, we seem able to find only discontinuous moments of feeling, perception, motivation, and awareness. (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 72)

Conventionally people often speak about *being in the moment*, *being in the present moment*, or *being present in the moment*. These phrases are perfectly adequate for use in everyday living, but for my purpose of working live they are unhelpful because they suggest the existence of a spacial entity (i.e. time) *out there* that is independent of and external to me here. In contrast, the term *presencing*⁶¹ is my attempt at finding an alternative for the static term *being present* and a simple way of linguistically expressing the dynamic and relational process nature of becoming aware of my subjective experiencing of what is happening in my mind and body, and around me as it is happening. And of course not just my own experiencing, but in my presencing practice I am also helping my clients to become more present by for instance asking them, “What is happening for you right now?” I think about presencing as a continuous process of becoming aware, albeit often only for a very short moment, of both the process of our thinking, feelings, bodily sensations, and their content. For instance I might notice my particular thinking pattern of often being slightly ahead in my mind of my embodied ‘momentariness’ (Ibid., p. 72) and/or I might be aware of the content⁶² of a particular thought at the same time.

Presencing constitutes the root or enabling practice of my working live practice routines because without ‘the ability to be present with one’s mind and body not only in formal meditation but in experiences of everyday life’ (Ibid., p. 60) I would not be able to work live at all because I would be too unaware, that is, too removed from my own experiencing. Presencing thus is a conscious and continuous mental and bodily process of becoming present to my subjective momentariness – coming back for instance from my day dreams, speculations, theories, abstractions, tonight’s movie, tomorrow’s concert, the thought that I don’t like beer, or want an ice cream now, back from all of these countless, discontinuous thoughts and emotions that are going on in our minds all of the time while being awake (and partly even while sleeping) often regardless of the actual situation we find ourselves in at a particular moment.

⁶¹ As you will see in chapter VII I am using the term *presencing* very differently than Senge et al. do who define it as ‘transforming self and will’ (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2004 p. 225) and as “pre-sensing’ and bringing into presence – and into the presence – your highest future potential’ (Ibid., p. 226).

⁶² In contrast, in traditional Buddhist mindfulness meditation the aim is to solely focus on the process of one’s experiencing and not on its content.

Based on my own living, working live and meditation experiences I have come to the conclusion that it is useful to differentiate between being *implicitly conscious* (i.e. not sleeping) and being *explicitly conscious of or aware of something*. Stern notes that 'Forming the present moment as it unfolds is an implicit process, yet for an experience to qualify as a present moment it must enter awareness or some kind of consciousness' (2004 p. 122). I would narrow down Stern's formulation slightly by saying that *for a happening to be experienced and remembered as a distinct subjective now-moment it must enter awareness*. In other words, although you are implicitly conscious (i.e. not sleeping) the entire time of driving to work in your car, you are unlikely to be aware of, and more importantly, be able to remember in detail most of the multitude of routine sensations of driving apart from *the few seconds in which you slow down to kindly let that other motorist in the red Porsche into the queue of cars in front of you and you get irritated when he does not wave 'thank you' back*. Earlier I have used the term *trigger event* to describe the phenomenon of the Porsche and its driver: A subjectively perceived occurrence that has special significance for me and thus pierces through my *threshold* degree of implicit consciousness (with which I go about most of my everyday living) into my awareness, which I define as my ability to become mindful of or present to the very process of my experiencing as it happens (and thus be able to remember and recall it afterwards). The phrase I have just used – *my ability to become mindful or present* – already indicates that I see awareness as the ability of mind and body of 'paying attention to attention itself' (Watson, 2008 p. 144). This ability is essential for the practice of working live because

(...) if you have a flickering light, like a candle in the wind, you'll only be able to observe while the light blasts. Now if you have somebody who has the stability of attention then it's like a light bulb that can be sustained for 20 minutes. So we are going to see different things. (Varela cited in Blackmore, 2005 p. 229)

It seems to me that although our living bodies are physically always *here*, we are often elsewhere. Presencing is nothing else than a disciplined practice to increase my sensitivity and stability of awareness, of being able to be embodied here now. I am developing this ability in my presencing routine by using two distinct practices – Aware Selfing and Focusing, which I will turn to now.

Aware Selfing

It seems clear from countless psychological studies that in order to function in the world we need to develop a psychological sense of ourselves that might include views about our past, our identity, or our aspirations for the future (Woods 1995; Pervin 2003; Aronson 2004). In this context we need to remember that this psychological sense of ourselves 'is [also] a construct (...) and to remain healthy it needs to be reconstructed from moment to moment' (Watson, 2008 p. 123). So, it seems to me that our legitimate need for continually developing a psychological sense of self and the illusion of a fixed 'ontological self' (Aaronsen cited in Safran, 2003 p. 52) creates a paradoxical tension: *Continually creating a psychological sense of self and at the same time not creating a sense of an ontological, independent self*. Is that possible? Based on my personal experiences I would argue it is possible, if difficult and of discontinuous and short duration – much like

awareness itself. But I do have no doubt that 'one can be aware without being presented to oneself as an ontologically unique subject with personalized boundaries that distinguishes a *me* from the rest of the world' (Albahari cited in Sideritis, Thompson and Zahavi, 2011 p. 63) – a practice I call aware selfing.

If the essence of the Non-Self teaching is simple, the personal implications for me personally of taking this theory seriously are anything but, because my ontological selfing habits seem very well developed, often implicit and therefore sticky. To become aware of these habits and to self more consciously the key question I attempt to ask myself while interacting with my clients and colleagues is this: *To what extent am I at this very moment creating and working from a sense of an ontological, separate self that needs to be important, right, loved, protected and so forth?* Let me illustrate how I try to work with this practice by describing an interaction between a client and myself largely acting from an ontological selfing perspective.

I lean back in my restaurant chair and relax. I have just concluded the second of four week-long leadership development workshops with a group of 30 senior managers. It is a warm June evening and my client Esteban*, the Chief Operating Officer of a global manufacturing company, and I are sitting in an open-air restaurant in one of Southern Europe's capital cities. I think I have worked very hard this week, and therefore feel Esteban and I, ... no... actually... I deserve a relaxing dinner tonight without talking about work. But as soon as we have ordered our food, Esteban starts talking about his thinking related to the business project segment of the third workshop, which will take place in about three months from now.

Already during the design phase of the first and second module the two of us had disagreed about what kind of business projects we wanted the workshop participants to work on as part of their learning process. Esteban felt that it was impossible for the managers of such a decentralised company to work on one common project and according to him his boss, the CEO of the company, did not want this to happen either. I had disagreed with this view from the very beginning of our work on the project and had argued that in order for the participants to learn to think together and work collaboratively cross-organizationally it would be much more beneficial for them to work on one common project. Esteban had always been adamant that he did not think that was feasible at the company.

I am very aware right now of repeating myself when I say forcefully and, I guess, rather impatiently, "I still think it makes a lot more sense for them to work on one common project throughout the rest of the programme instead of on thirty individual ones. If we want them to develop a company-wide perspective and the ability to think together then I feel to continue to focus on their individual business unit projects is incongruent with this goal, and as we've heard from them throughout this week, increasingly boring for them, too."

I notice I am becoming more and more frustrated with what I perceive to be Esteban's inability to see what I think is so obvious, and what I realize I am attached to pretty heavily, that is, the incongruence between the desired outcome of helping our participants to develop an enterprise-wide view and our way of going about it. By now our discussion must have gone on for about 45 minutes. I am angry and feel my heart beating strongly. I have to suppress an urge to get up from the table and just walk away. How do I get myself into these kinds of endless circular discussions? I feel trapped in our binary argumentation that goes from me to him and back to me like a pendulum without achieving anything. I do not know what else I can do to either convince Esteban or to change my own perspective.

After a short silent moment of eating our food listlessly Esteban replies visibly angry now, "I don't understand why you have to be so black and white. And anyway, who is the client here?" Without thinking I shoot back immediately, "Well, I am as black and white as you are. You see it one way and I simply see it another." "But", I add, "I'll shut up now. I have made the same point now several times and I have nothing more to add. I'll go along with whatever you decide. You're the client, after all."

I sulk while we finish our meal in what feels like an angry and frustrated silence. I feel unable to think, never mind say anything remotely constructive or conciliatory right now. I feel misunderstood, somehow blocked and strangely excluded, from what I am not sure. But mostly I am angry with myself for being so unskilful in handling this situation. I do think Esteban and I are working on an important project in the service of helping a select group of senior managers to learn something potentially important for them, that is, how to collaborate across organizational and cultural boundaries, think together and thus create a more free-flowing conversational culture with the company. I almost have to smile – it seems that the two of us do not even manage to work across our psychological and ideological boundaries to create a constructive conversation that leads somewhere.

Suddenly the quote 'to self or not to self (...) it's a choice to be made' (Olendzki, 2005 p. 27) pops into my mind and I have to immediately smile in recognition. I realize with a shock that I have forgotten to ask myself my ontological selfing mantra: To what extent am I at this very moment creating and working from a sense of an ontological, separate self? My answer for the interaction with Esteban was, "To a very high degree, indeed." Esteban looks at me quizzically and says, "Why are you smiling?" I reply, "I've just realized how stuck I've been in the last hour and that my perspective is not at all absolutely necessary. I am so sorry! Can we try our discussion again?"

As you have seen, I was very attached to my view of what should happen in the participants' development journey. They *should* work on one common business project and Esteban *should* simply go back to his CEO to explain to him why that was the right move to make if he wanted to help his participants to achieve their

learning objectives. As I think is obvious I was holding this position very tightly, in a way *becoming* that position rather than holding it lightly. At that moment the position was *me*. For me arguing against my position felt the same as arguing against me as a person. Being asked to change my position felt to me the same as being told to change myself. So you can see how easy it is to create and work from the misguided perspective of having an ontological self that needs to be protected without even realizing that that is what you are doing. Olendzki describes this process as starting with

(...) the cognizing of a sense object with a sense organ. ... When an object is known by means of an organ, a moment of contact is born. This is the elemental unit of experience upon which our world of experience is constructed, and it is an event that occurs rather than an entity that exists. Perception and feeling also arise in conjunction with this moment of contact, and the whole bundle is further conditioned by a particular intentional stance or attitude (2005 p. 27).

I appreciate the aptness of Olendzki's expression the *whole bundle* with which he refers to the mix of intentions, perceptions, attitude, contact, and reactions because all of these various, interrelated aspects can so easily be completely mixed up like clothes in a suitcase that has not been not properly packed after a long trip. The Buddhist teaching about dependent co-origination refers to just that phenomenon by saying that nothing arises out of thin air simply by itself, whatever arises does so dependently on a multitude of contributing factors (Harvey, 1990 p. 54 - 60). There is no escape from the fact that in relating to ourselves, other humans and the world one *thing* leads to other *things* in a non-linear dynamic fashion in which links between causes and effects cannot be attributed easily or at all and outcomes are never exactly as we had intended them (Stacey, 2003b p. 10) and are often outweighed by unintended consequences.

Therefore it is especially important to be aware of the first contact we make with what in Buddhist terminology is called a sense object, that is, anything that can be perceived by our mind or our five senses – hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, and tasting (Harvey, 1990 p. 54 - 60) – be it an idea, a thought, pain in your knee, a picture, or a dear person. Unless I am a highly trained contemplative practitioner, such as some very experienced Buddhists monks (Blackmore, 2005 p. 228), as soon as I for instance hear a sound I cannot stop my mind (or rather, my minding process) from immediately thinking “That was a lorry...why do lorries always have to stop below my window?...I should close the window...but it's too hot...why does it have to be so hot when I am trying to write?...what made me agree to write this article, anyway?...I'm just too afraid to say No...just like mum...I wonder how her heart is doing?...what will dad do if she has to go to hospital?...I am thirsty...I should get myself some water.” Of course, we do not just have an endless succession of more or less random thoughts; these thoughts also trigger bodily sensations (and/or vice versa) such as increased heart rate, sweating, quickened breathing, or thirst, and they trigger emotions (and/or vice versa) such as anger about the noisy lorry, sadness about my mother's poor health, and concern about my father. So indeed, we humans are a complex, often convoluted and discontinuous, process of sensations and thoughts that is going on at all times while we are conscious that gives rise to more sensations and thoughts, whether we are aware

of them or not. 'Such impulses are instinctual, automatic, pervasive, and powerful (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1993 p. 62).

To gain a little more awareness of and distance from the above process particularly in these instances when I am operating from a strong sense of ontological, that is, separate self I find the process called *Paticca-samuppada* in the Buddhist scriptures that is translated into English alternatively as 'dependent co-origination, interdependent co-origination, [or] conditioned co-arising' (Buddhadasa Bhikku, 1994 p. 136 – 137) to be very useful. In my aware selfing practice I use a simplified version of the dependent co-origination process, which applied to my interaction with Esteban looks like this:

1. My attitude: *I feel that throughout the week Esteban has shown little consideration for my need to have a few hours to myself after having worked with the group the entire day. The last five evenings we discussed the workshop until about 10 p.m. or so after which I still had to prepare myself for the next day's session. My attitude is: Even though you pay me quite a considerable amount of money, you do not own me for 24 hours.*

2. My intention: *I feel that after the very intense, and partly difficult, but ultimately successful workshop I deserve a relaxing "Thank You" evening meal with Esteban. During our drive to the restaurant I envision myself sitting around a table with him, eating a pasta dish, reviewing the week a little bit, but mainly talking about other things than work.*

3. Contact: *Right after sitting down at our table Esteban says, "Let's talk about the project work. I have been doing some more thinking..."*

4. My perception: *I notice my heartbeat increasing and my face getting hot.*

5. My feeling: *I am irritated with Esteban because he immediately starts to talk about the project work.*

6. My attachment: *I am holding on to three main thoughts: "Esteban is too afraid to push back at his CEO because he does not like to stand up to him", "Esteban's opinion is incongruent with what he says this development programme should be about", and, "I deserve an evening meal without work."*

7. My reaction: *I immediately, forcefully and increasingly frustrated argue for my position without acknowledging or exploring Esteban's situation, my assumptions, and reasons for and benefits of his perspective.*

8. Effect: *The attachment to my position, my assumptions and my need to be right contributes significantly to both of us feeling irritated, angry, and ultimately hurt.*

As you have seen from my interaction with Esteban even my intention of being aware of my ontological selfing did neither prevent it from happening nor did it help me to be aware that I was doing it. Only during the short reflection respite due to my sulking did I suddenly realize what had happened. Luckily it was not too late for Esteban and me to finally have an open conversation in which we explored my assumptions about him and his CEO, my attachment to one common project and to wanting a work-free dinner conversation. The many ontological and aware selfing episodes I have had during the last months have made me realize that it is extremely helpful for me to remember: Whatever I think at any moment in time is just a thought that arises and ceases based on a myriad of knowable and unknowable conditions and which has no inherent substance and are no more important or right than any other thought I might have about Esteban, the business projects, or Barack Obama, for that matter. None of them are *me* or *mine*, they are simply thoughts continuously arising in my *minding process* that will fade away again as quickly as they have emerged. There is no sensible need to be attached to or upset about any of them, really.

In moments of realizing my attachment I am trying to think of Bohm's comment that 'to realize (...) that there is an assumption of absolute necessity which you're getting into, and that's why everything is sticking' (1996 p. 24). In my attempts at aware selfing if and when I realize that I have *become* my opinion I do try to follow Bohm's suggestion that "if you can question it and say, "Is it absolutely necessary?" then at some point it may loosen up. People may say, "Well, maybe it's not absolutely necessary" (Ibid. p. 23). But of course, all of this is a lot easier said than done, but I have noticed that through my continual asking myself in moments of attachment, such as during my discussion with Esteban, "Is that point, move, perspective, reaction really absolutely necessary?" the answer is usually "No" and with that aware selfing does get a little easier. As Ajahn Amaro⁶³ said in a workshop a colleague and I were facilitating in April 2012, 'Of course you need to acknowledge your ego, but don't put him in the driver's seat.'

Focusing

Let us now move on to my second presencing practice. Because I view the body as 'intentional (...), primordially relational, and co-arising with its situation (...) not just fleshly perceptual but also full of implicit meanings and relational understanding' (Todres, 2007 p. 21) I use a body-centered method called *focusing*, which I have already described in my methodology section, to become present and to develop my presencing ability. Let me give you a concrete example of how my focusing process typically works (Gendlin, 2003 pp. 43; Cornell, 1996 pp. 44). I conducted and documented this particular focusing session early in the morning on the day of the ROCKET CPL Forum:

I am sitting on a straight chair in my hotel room and take some time to bring my awareness into my body. I can sense my scalp, my throat, and my neck. I move my attention to my shoulders and sense them being tense. I stay there for a moment and acknowledge this sensation without trying to change it. I move down to my chest, feel its tightness for a moment, onto my stomach that feels

⁶³ Abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, Nettleden, England

...empty. I sweep my attention down the rest of my body, my back, hips, pelvis, upper and lower legs, my thighs and my feet on the floor.

I am asking myself silently "What wants my attention right now?" After a very brief moment I start to become aware again of the tightness in my chest. I decide to stay there with my attention for a while.

I greet the tightness as kindly as I can, like I might say 'hello' to a friend, as a way of establishing contact with the sensation.

I try to describe the sensation of tightness in my mind. It feels...heavy...makes breathing in difficult...it feels like...a sheet of heavy metal laying across my chest...black, shiny metal...and cold...no, not a sheet, it feels more like a...tight, iron band around my chest that makes breathing difficult...a tight, black iron band...yes.

I continually check back with my felt sense if the words and images I am using resonate. When I think 'tight, black iron band' I feel a very clear sense of rightness, of 'Yes, that's exactly it' in my body.

Now I am asking this tight-black-iron-band felt sense about its emotional quality. Is it...sad...angry...scared...? After a while comes the word ...scared! ...Yes, that's it, it's scared!

I am asking the tight-black-iron-band felt sense what it is that makes it ...scared? After a while the answer comes as...making the Forum a success...not wanting to...disappoint ...and embarrass Garry.

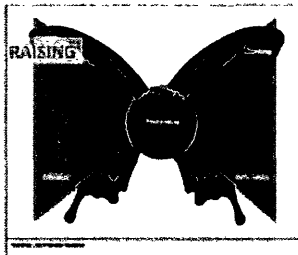
Now I am asking the tight-black-iron-band felt sense what it needs: ...Nothing actually, comes the hesitant answer after a moment...nothing apart from... me being...actually...just being present.

I stay a while longer with this now named need of my felt sense of 'just being present'. Then I decide to finish the focusing session because I have a bodily sense of release, of acknowledgement.

A short while later I left my room, walked down to our tennis-court-conversation space, looked around the still deserted space feeling calm and focused.

So, now that you have a vague sense of how the focusing process works, you probably wonder what purpose it serves in my presencing practice routine. I think Gendlin's quote from before has already provided us with an answer. Focusing puts me 'in touch with what the body already knows and lives' (2003 p. 165), but I have either not noticed yet and/or have not been able to express yet to myself in a way that has led to a keen

sensation of recognition – “Aha, that’s it!” – and a subsequent, noticeable release of bodily tension. In other words, focusing for me is a simple and effective way of developing my subjective sense of what is going on here now and thus is a powerful and important enabler to work live. In other words, focusing is a method of raising a sensation up to my awareness so that the sensation might be examined as fully as is possible and deemed appropriate. In a sense, my next practice routine – raising – aims at the same purpose but does it in a different way.



Practice 2: Raising

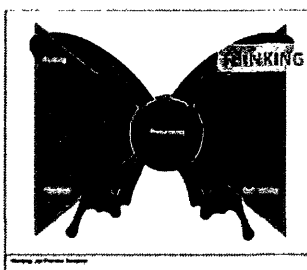
I have repeatedly stressed the importance of conversational life in an organisation to be free-flowing and flexible in order to allow the emergence of novelty, that is, the evolving of relational patterns through the introduction and utilization of deviance. One way to introduce difference into the conversational and relational flow is by encouraging shadow themes that organize people’s informal and private conversations (e.g. why this new strategy will never work) to become legitimate informal and formal themes that are talked about openly.

I refer to my practice of doing just that as *raising*, namely, helping my clients to talk more openly about issues, thoughts, or sensations that are alive for them and of relevance to the conversation they are involved in at a particular moment. I use the term *raising* to express the notion of helping to *bring something of possible importance into the light* so that it might be looked at, thought and talked about thus potentially making a difference in the emergent process of people’s relating. This might be an issue I am aware of but the participants of a given conversation are not, or something people perceive as a shadow theme, that is, something one only talks about in confidence with people one trusts.

Let me illustrate my raising practice with briefly recalling an interaction I have described earlier. You might remember that I facilitated a one-day retreat for Manfred, the Head of the Sustainability function, and his recently formed management team. At some point during the day Manfred had concluded the discussion of an important issue concerning all of his management team colleagues by saying, “Fine. I’ll discuss this with the Head of Sustainability Management, the Head of Strategic Initiatives and the Communications Manager and will then come back to you for a decision.” To have Manfred’s support staff managers think about and discuss an important strategic question and only then involve his management team to make the final decision was in my view incongruent with his espoused intention of having the management team members (including himself) practice thinking together. After Manfred had finished speaking I had a sense that several of his team

members seemed unhappy about his comment. I waited for a moment to see whether anyone of them would raise this issue. When no one of them did, I said, “Manfred, I am wondering about the perception that your management team colleagues here might have about you building up a parallel management team...” He seemed genuinely surprised about this possible perception, but readily acknowledged that he had neither intended nor realized that this might indeed be his colleagues’ impression. Subsequently they had a very constructive discussion about how for the last few months they had actually started to feel that Manfred was increasingly using the young staff managers he had recruited as a personal think tank and sounding board, something they felt was their role. At the end of their conversation, they had in my view developed an understanding about how the three staff managers could support them as management team in their thinking-together work, but stop doing it *for* them.

I feel that raising is one of the most delicate practice routines I use due to its potential for bringing up issues that are mine and have nothing to do with the people I am working with at that moment, or for raising an issue in an inappropriate way or at an inappropriate time so that it does not get heard, gets rejected, or hurts someone’s feelings. I have learned through many painful lessons (for me and my clients) that there is a very fine, but important line not to be crossed between for instance me saying to clients, “I am bored” versus saying, “I notice that the energy in the room seems to be very low. Does anyone else feel that as well?” In raising issues no one else perceives or does, the potential for making mistakes and causing harm is considerable.



Practice 3: Thinking

It might seem strange to you to discover that I am using *thinking* as the third of my working live practice routines. After all, aren’t we all thinking all of the time anyway? So, why mention it at all? What do I mean by thinking? And what is the connection between working live and thinking? I will attempt to answer these questions in this section.

When you look up the term *thinking* in the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology you find the following definition:

thinking *n.* The act of having ideas or thoughts, including reasoning, problem solving, decision making, the formation of mental models, and the contemplation of knowledge, beliefs, and opinions. (Colman, 2001 p. 765)

In the context of working live the aspect of thinking that I believe is of paramount importance in being able to be present to our experiencing is the fundamental difference between *thinking* on the one hand, and *using* thoughts on the other hand (Bohm, 1996). *Thinking* for me in this context means to consciously and deliberately develop new thoughts (at least new to the person/s in question) in the present moment. In contrast, by *using thoughts* I refer to the process of utilizing the outcomes of one's own or others' past thinking. Let me illustrate what I mean by this distinction using a case from my consulting practice.

I have been coaching my client Angus*, the Director of Strategy at a small, very successful producer of audio equipment, for almost a year now. He looks at me across our small table in a quiet café where we are conducting our coaching session and says reflectively, "I have just realized that I have told you things I have never told anyone else before. Not even my wife." "And how does that make you feel?", I ask as a way of response. He nods several times. "Good", he says without hesitating. "It feels good. And it helps me discover what I think and why."

We continue our coaching conversation discussing his growing unease with what he perceives as the negative influence Rob*, the company's CEO, has on the behaviour of the management team and the entire company that culminates in him saying, "If he doesn't change his introverted and off-hands leadership approach soon, the whole culture change process we are about to embark on is doomed to fail from the very start." "Why do you think that?" I ask after a moment's silence. Angus thinks for a brief moment before saying, "Well, we all know that change starts from the top. If we want the company to become faster and even more innovative, than it needs to start with Rob! No one will accept that they have to run if they don't see Rob running first."

He continues with what seems to me a very simplistic and mechanistic explanation of how change in organizations happens, namely, from the CEO to the management team members, than to their direct reports and so on. "Like these gigantic rows of dominos you see on TV, basically" he stresses. "Rob needs to be the first one that starts." "How do you know all of this?" I ask. "Well, I basically learned about change and different change models during my MBA and then later when I was a management consultant at one of the big consulting firms, they had this 9-phase change model. Simple, but it works really great! But there are many of these models around. You surely know some of them as well." I look at him for a short moment and smile, "Yes, of course I know some of these models and more importantly I think I understand the assumptions underlying them. Why don't we spent a bit of time now to investigate the assumptions you hold about change that lead you to say that change in the company needs to start with Rob." He looks at me as if he wants to say, "You want to do WHAT?" But he seems to trust me enough to accept my suggestion.

We go on to examine, that is, think about his view of change as a mechanical phenomenon. At one point I ask, "Where have you personally experienced changing in an organisation actually happening in this planned and controlled way?" He looks across the café and only after quite a

while responds haltingly, “Honestly..., I’ve just realized ... nowhere, actually.” He shakes his head in what feels to me almost like disbelief. After a brief moment I ask him, “What then have you observed in how change happens?” He thinks for what seems like a long time, finally he slowly says, “From what I have seen, change seems to start with someone somewhere doing something that is in some way different to the convention and attracts the positive interest of others.” I help Angus during the next hour of our conversation think through how change in his organisation might actually work based on his own experience and the principles of the complex responsive process perspective.

When we say our goodbyes he shakes my hand firmly and says, “Thank you. That was extremely helpful. We definitely need to include more people in this conversation!”

So, as you could see, Angus started out talking about change based on what he had picked up from others – he simply repeated the results of other people’s thinking. But slowly he started to think for himself, to discover what he had observed about changing, and to start drawing his own conclusions from that. Supporting my clients in this process by basically asking probing questions, is what my *thinking* practice routine is about.

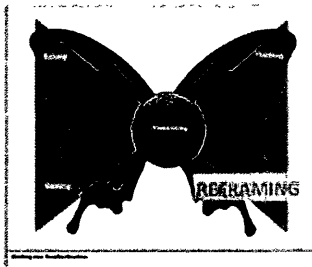
But why is the practice of thinking (individually and/or collectively) important in and for working life? There are two main reasons for this:

- Firstly, I conceptualize thinking as a silent, private conversation in people’s minds (or in writing, as I am doing right now) as well as a spoken conversation between people, and view the organisation as *being* the on-going conversation between people consisting of words, gestures, and symbols out of which patterns emerge over time. Novelty, flexibility and the sense of liveliness then emerge from the introduction of difference into the patterned conversational process. One key source of difference is the development and introduction of fresh thoughts as a result of new or different thinking.
- The process of being interested in and engaged with the question *What am I (are we) thinking about this particular issue here now and based on what?* is a very powerful way of being present to one’s live thinking process and thus one’s experiencing in the moment.

Finally, let me at least briefly mention the issue of time that often comes up when I am talking to my clients about the fact that the process of thinking for oneself takes time. “We don’t have time to involve all stakeholders.” “We don’t have time to take two days for talking about leadership, can’t we do it in a day?” “Can’t we do this reflection in 10 minutes instead of wasting half an hour on it?” I hear notions like these very often from existing or potential clients. It seems to me the two main reasons behind this view is the unchallenged, conventional assumption that *time is money* and the individual sense of managers of already

being overwhelmed by competing demands on their attention – “*And now you want me to spend time thinking? Oh, come on, get real.*”

In contrast, I believe that ‘slow knowing’ (Claxton, 1998 p. 4) – understanding, developing new insights, and changing takes time – it takes time for instance, to become aware of deeply held beliefs and unconscious behavioural patterns, it takes time to deeply reflect on one’s practice of being in the world and of leading. ‘Knowing emerges from, and is a response to, not-knowing. Learning – the process of coming to know – emerges from uncertainty’ (Ibid., p. 6). In my experience, the process of *coming to know* not only takes time, but it requires un-BlackBerry-interrupted time, and, most importantly, the willingness to try to investigate one’s assumptions, beliefs, and experiences honestly. It is this very process I try to encourage and support my clients with and at the same time engage in myself. A frequent input to and at the same time result of the thinking process is a reframe of one’s views, which is the practice routine I will turn to now.



Practice 4: Reframing

For me the practice of *reframing* is an integral and frequent part of my working live practice, in particular guided by the following question: To what extent do my clients and I use process-based language to reduce abstracting and distancing us from our lived experiencing? This question is derived from my claim that abstract *as-if* languaging of the phenomena of living makes it difficult for us to be present to our experiencing and thus hampers the emergence of new feeling, thinking and acting patterns. But before I go any further with theory, let me give you an example from my consulting practice of what I mean by *reframing*.

Nathan*, the CEO of an international music company, and I are walking through a beautiful sun-drenched forest engaged in our coaching conversation. He is talking animatedly about the *screwed up relationship* he has with Randolph* (whom he calls Randy), the chairman of his Board of Directors. “The guy is just not able to trust me. Well, actually he doesn’t trust anyone, I think. He almost seems paranoid at times.” He shakes his head and falls silent.

“Have you spoken to Randolph about this at all?” I finally ask. Nathan responds instantly. “Are you nuts? No way. Randy couldn’t deal with something like that. Too touchy feely for him.” He continues with an elaborate explanation as to why he can neither really discuss their relationship with Randolph openly (“Then he would totally distrust me and interfere even more in my business.”) nor why he thinks Randolph would not be willing and able to change his behaviour anyway (“He is just too old to change. You know, old dogs, new tricks and all that.”).

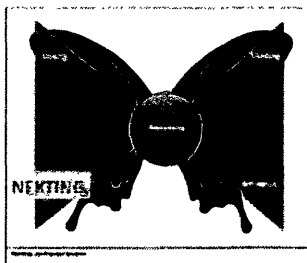
While I am listening to his seemingly well-rehearsed explanations I am beginning to have a strong sense that his abstract (i.e. *the* relationship is a thing that is too broken down to be repairable) and divided (i.e. it's him, not me; if anything could be done about this, it would be clearly up to Randolph to do it, because clearly it has nothing to do with me, Nathan) way of thinking prevents him from seeing any way forward. They seem more like excuses to me as to why Nathan cannot do anything to attempt to improve their relating rather than explanations of the actual situation.

I wonder if I should say what I am feeling in a way that will deliberately disturb him and loosen the firmness with which he seems to hold his view about Randolph, hopefully in a helpful way. I can feel my heart beating stronger now, probably nerves, I think. When Nathan finishes speaking, I stop walking and look at him; then I say as gently as I can, "With all due respect, Nathan, but I have a sense that the explanations you just gave me are all unhelpful simplifications."

He looks at me with what feels like surprise, but also interest and says, "What do you mean by unhelpful simplifications?" I wonder for a brief moment how to help him to reframe his view of their relationship as a broken thing towards seeing it as a continuous interactive process that he does influence in some way and might be able to influence slightly differently in future. When we continue our walk I say, "The simplification that it's all his fault, nothing to do with you. Just imagine, if you were Randy and had just heard what Nathan said about you, what would you feel and think?" We walk on in silence for a moment until finally Nathan speaks again. "Well, first of all I'd be really pissed off. I'd think, who does that guy think he is to talk about me so disrespectfully?" Nathan walks more quickly now as if to get away from something. He repeatedly shakes his head and seems visibly upset.

After a while I say, "You have spoken about *the* relationship with Randolph as if it were a thing, say like a dilapidated house. If you imagined instead that the two of you do not *have* anything, but you are *doing* something together – you are relating with each other in a continuous process; a bit like tennis, really. What small move would you have to do, Nathan, to give that tennis game a slightly different direction or feel?" He stops walking again and looks up into the sun-lit treetops. Then he says slowly, "Well..., if you look at it that way then... I'd have to get closer to him, understand him a bit better. Maybe start by spending a bit more time with him rather than continue to avoid him. And... I'd probably have to stop telling everybody what a idiot he is." Nathan then goes on to tell me that he intensely dislikes confrontations with people, in particular in higher hierarchical positions than himself, and therefore tries to avoid them as much as possible, which in his view is a key reason why he has tried to have as little contact with Randolph as possible. We end the coaching session with his visible determination to call Randolph, invite him out for lunch and start getting to know him a little more as a person rather than seeing him simply as a position title.

The theory informing my *reframing* practice routine is based on the notion from Social Constructionism that there is no one exclusive, correct truth of the world, but that there are countless versions of truths that we humans construct over time between ourselves. As a society ‘we construct our own versions of reality between us’ (Burr, 2003 p. 6). That we isolate something in nature and designate it as an oak tree, what we think and feel about oak trees, and what we do with them is nothing but a socially constructed convention of a certain group of people. Therefore, what we perceive as real and good is always constructed, situational, relative and therefore much more fluid and malleable than we often assume. The practice of reframing then, in my experience, helps my clients and myself to loosen our grip on what we believe to be *the reality* and experiment with different explanatory frames that have the potential to bring us in closer contact with our lived experience, that is, our ability to work live.



Practice 5: Nexting

Nexting is one of my core practices of working live and in a way most of what I have reported in this paper about my consulting practice is in one way or another about nexting. ‘What are we doing together when we don’t know what we are doing yet?’ (Stacey, retrieved [September 1, 2012] from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTAV7-FZLRs>), What is it that my clients or I might do next in our continual conversational process that could potentially be a helpful move in what we are trying to do together?, and ‘What can I help to happen next?’ (Stewart, Zediker and Witteborn, 2005 p. 47) – these are the questions I focus on in my ‘nexting’ (Ibid., p. 46) practice, the fifth and final of my working live practice routines.

As participants in the conversational process that *is* our living and organizing we influence others and at the same time are influenced by them, and we neither have control over our intentions, over the meaning of our gestures or over the transitional outcomes because intentions, meaning and outcomes continually emerge from our interacting and lead to further interacting. However, although we do not know what exactly will emerge from our interacting, at the same time it is nevertheless important to act next in a way that in some form embodies our outcome intention (Mead, 1967 p. 383) or ‘action guiding anticipations’ (Shotter, 2011 p.25) for the next moment. In other words, nexting is fundamentally an improvisational technique where

With each spoken word or action in the scene, an improviser makes an *offer*, meaning that he or she defines some element of the reality of the scene. This might include giving another character a name, identifying a relationship, location, or using mime to define the physical environment. These activities are also known as

endowment. It is the responsibility of the other improvisers to accept the offers that their fellow performers make; to not do so is known as blocking, negation, or denial, which usually prevents the scene from developing. (...) Accepting an offer is usually accompanied by adding a new offer, often building on the earlier one; this is a process improvisers refer to as "Yes, And..." and is considered the cornerstone of improvisational technique. (Retrieved [January 1, 2010] from [#http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yes,_And](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yes,_And) #Improv_process)

Make no mistake about it, all of us *next* all of the time. There is now way not to *next* as long as we are alive; we always do, think, feel, or say something next. Nexting is fundamentally improvisational in the sense that most of the time in living and working we neither have a script nor do we plan what to do or say in the very next second, and the next, and the next after that, and so forth. To live a process of continuous conscious nexting would be impossible. During most of our daily living therefore nexting happens below our conscious awareness until, as we have discovered before, a subjectively perceived occurrence that has special significance for us pierces through our *threshold* degree of implicit consciousness – like the red Porsche we came across earlier.

For me personally the main challenge in what one might call *Yes, and...nexting*, that is, acting with generative intent in those moments of being suddenly and sometimes rudely woken up by life is to differentiate 'between feeling that one has to do something "because of" what has already happened (...) and what one has to do "in order to" bring something else about' (Pearce, 2007 p. 164) – the paradoxical tension I described earlier as *Being affected by the past while at the same time acting with generative intent for the future*.

Let us look at how nexting in this context can look in practice:

For the last few days I have worked on a simple model showing the interaction of the various aspects involved in creating movement amongst other people. Before my close colleague Gwen* and I will show it to our clients at a global FMCG company next week as part of the design for their senior managers' leadership workshop, I want to get her input so that we can make the model as robust, elegant and easy to understand as we can. Gwen and I sit in the quite café of one of my favourite museums. Next to our coffee cups we have a printed copy of the model on a white A4 paper lying on the small round table between us. I say, "So, as you can see, there are..." She interrupts me in mid-sentence, "You don't need to explain the model. It makes no sense. Frankly, Hartmut, it's bullshit." I have a sense that my heart stops and beats incredibly fast at the same time. I feel my throat closing up. I am too perplexed to be able to say anything else than to stammer, "But... but you haven't even looked at it." I can feel my heart beating strongly now; I notice feeling something like... shock, I think, and... anger, no, hurt. I have the strange sensation as if I am sitting beside myself. Gwen says coldly, "I don't need to look at it any longer. It's obvious

that it makes no sense.” I take a sip of my coffee without noticing its taste just to have a brief moment to think.

I am mostly aware of being angry now and feel an urge to say something hurtful like, “What do you know about leading, anyway?” At this very moment I know from experience that I could easily react driven by me feeling hurt and insulted by her casual dismissal of something I had put quite a bit of thought into. The model might indeed be in need of improvement, but I cannot believe that Gwen can ascertain that it is entirely without merit in the few seconds she looked at it without knowing my thinking behind it. Lots of conflicting thoughts and emotions run through me. I could easily go down the route of feeling that in dismissing my model, Gwen dismisses me.

Finally, through all the noise of my minding process Bohm’s earlier question emerges clearly – Is defending the model and reacting based on feeling insulted absolutely necessary? *No, not really! And definitely not right now.* What then do I want to help to happen next? *I want us to focus on completing the design of the workshop today.* Eventually (it feels as if the above thinking process has taken minutes, but it has probably only lasted 15–20 seconds) I manage to say, actually, it feels more like I hear myself saying, “O.K., so what do you suggest we do with the model?” “Forget it. Let’s just make a simple bullet point list instead” she answers immediately. I nod, “Fine. Let’s do that quickly then so that we can focus on the design of rest of the workshop.” Gwen nods in agreement.

This nexting episode with Gwen had most of the hallmarks of a subjective now-moment I have described earlier:

- There was a very red Porsche, namely, a distinct trigger event. Or maybe more accurate, I felt a strong embodied resonance when Gwen described the model as ‘bullshit’.
- I immediately had various strong tangible bodily sensations: Increased heartbeat, dry throat, anger, and hurt, yet also a sense of aliveness and a surge of energy.
- I experienced a significant increase in the degree of my attentiveness and a sharpening of the focus of my concentration and at the same time a very strange sense of standing next to myself watching me act.
- I had the feeling that the speed of my subjectively experienced time was significantly slowed down.
- I could feel the explicit intention to help make something generative or useful for our client work happen next and not react *because of* feeling angry and hurt.

- I did have a slight sense of bodily relaxation after having decided what to do next. However, I did also notice not being able to fully concentrate for quite a while on what we were working then. In my mind and body the event was still lingering.

The late Art Tatum, the American jazz pianist, famously said, 'There's no such thing as a wrong note' (Retrieved [September 1, 2012] from <http://musingsatmusespeak.blogspot.de/2008/12/theres-no-such-thing-as-wrong-note.htm>), a sentiment that is echoed widely in music and theatre improvisation circles. However, in my experience in nexting in a business and consulting context there can very well be wrong notes or moves. Here again I see a strong parallel between working live and walking across a high wire – because nexting is an improvisational move in the moment often just based on a hunch or a felt sense mistakes can seriously hurt people.

With this I conclude the short description of my consulting practice cycle and turn to an important, almost final piece in the investigation of my practice of working live – what do my clients and colleagues say about working with me in this way?

The voices of my clients and colleagues

(...) people mutually judge and correct both each other and themselves as to the 'fittingness' of their actions to what they take their reality to be. (Shotter, 1993 p. 40)

On the previous pages of this chapter I have made numerous claims as to how I work live and what I focus on while doing so. I have done so as honestly and precisely as I am able to, but as we know from Social Constructionist theory the way we describe the world through language is not a reflection or representation of what there is *out there*, but of what I subjectively choose to perceive and describe as *my reality*. In short, 'there is no privileged relationship between world and word. For any situation multiple descriptions are usually possible' (Gergen, 1999 p. 34) and it therefore makes no sense in my mind to believe that 'the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely' (Austin cited in Austin, Urmson and Sbisà, 1975 p. 1). What I turn to now, therefore, is not an attempt to measure or assess whether my various descriptions of how I consult are *factually correct*, but a resonance check, that is, in what way does or does not what I have written resonate with what my clients and colleagues perceive and say about me and my way of working with them in this way.

The below inputs from representatives of both groups (eight clients and six colleagues) are based on a number of questions (which you will see below) I emailed to each person and their subsequent written responses. I have then simply clustered the responses into groups of similar topics using my five practice

routines of *presencing*, raising, thinking, reframing, and nexting as the main framing. It was interesting for me to note that I could not see a difference in the responses of clients and colleagues. I take that to mean that no matter with whom I work – client or colleague – I do seem to behave in the same way, which resonates with my own experience. Apart from translating into English and shortening when necessary, I have not altered any of their statements. This then is what my clients and colleagues have to say about my consulting practice and me:

Question 1: What do you notice when working with me?

Presencing

I am claiming that... my practice of *presencing* helps my clients and myself become aware of our subjective experiencing of what is happening in our minds and bodies, and around us as it is happening and be able to work with it appropriately.

- ‘How **present** you are – right here, right now, really with the individual or group you are working with’ (C. Laursen, 2012, pers. comm., May 24). ‘You are attentive and awake. You exhibit great calmness and composure’ (M. Rasmus, 2012, pers. comm., May 25). ‘You’re very interested and attentive to whatever the issue is. How open you are to and able to work flexibly with the topics that emerge in the moment’ (I. Killer, 2012, pers. comm., June 3). ‘Present, engaged, attentive to what is happening, confident, figural but sometimes selfless’ (R. Dickson). ‘I notice your calmness, aplomb, mastery of the topics discussed, understanding of the situation and people, group dynamics, sharp observer’ (M. Ceccon, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- ‘Your **focus**’ (J. Mash, 2012, pers. comm., June 2). ‘You are rarely distracted’ (K. Pritchard, pers. comm., May 28). ‘An intensity to really get to the issue being addressed’ (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25). ‘You are kind at the same time intently focused’ (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., August 20).
- ‘I noticed your ability to **listen** actively and the precision with which you found the question that illuminated a situation’ (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5). ‘You listen actively and are always coming up with good thoughts’ (H. Crisp, 2012, pers. comm., August 22). ‘You are **genuinely curious** and ask questions that you actually want to know the other person’s perspective on’ (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14).
- ‘I notice your **clarity** and the fact that whatever session you run, that you sound clear and ‘precise’ in your thinking and explanations. You exude certainty and authority in your communication and provide participants and clients with a safe container to take big development steps’ (D. Mookherjee, 2012, pers. comm. August 22). ‘You seemed to work with enviable mental clarity and

sometimes quite **ruthless acuity**' (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5).

- 'You take **time**, never rush (how you manage that I don't know)' (K. Pritchard, pers. comm., May 28).
- 'You are using **intuition** to seek out the underlying cause of a problem rather than focus on the high level symptoms' (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- 'I have observed that your body appears to be relaxed and that you are often smiling when you are in front of the group. I have experienced this as you **being relaxed** (almost all of the time) and confident. I have also experienced that you are having fun (for the most part when you are at your best)' (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14).
- 'When a group engages in the dance with you, you become even more **energized**' (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14). 'I don't think I have ever seen you passive!' (H. Crisp, 2012, pers. comm., August 22).

Raising

I am claiming that... my practice of *raising* helps my clients and myself to talk more openly about issues, thoughts, or sensations that are alive for us and that we think/feel are of relevance to the conversation we are involved in at a particular moment.

- '[I]often [feel] uncomfortable in the early stages as you will be very **tenacious in pushing** for the matter being considered to be exposed in great detail and not allowing me to respond in a superficial way or avoid difficult or uncomfortable subjects' (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- 'I like being **challenged** in order to learn and advance personally. I like that you **disrupt superficial thinking** and drill to the bottom of it - asking, what's behind' (M. Ceccon, 2012, pers. comm., May 25)
- 'There is an authenticity about you that is so often lacking in other consultants. Whilst always firmly grounded you do not attempt to 'over theorise' with your clients but aim to **cut through to the core** of what needs to be addressed and avoid over complicating the matter in hand. You are the only consultant that I have heard my fellow Board members say they felt privileged to work with – praise indeed!' (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- 'The clients have found you engaging and **constructively challenging**' (H. Crisp, 2012, pers. comm., August 22).

- ‘Challenged and out of the whirlwind’ (J. Mash, 2012, pers. comm., June 2).

Thinking

I am claiming that... my practice of *thinking* helps my clients and myself to consciously and deliberately develop new thoughts (at least new to the person/s in question) in the present moment.

- ‘It’s rare for you to quote other organisations solutions, reinforcing an idea that my situations are unique and that my solutions are already credible. When you do give examples of other ways of dealing with situations it is never as direct comparison. It gives space to think’ (K. Pritchard, pers. comm., May 28).
- ‘(...) every interaction enables me to learn something about myself or the way I work – something rare and special’ (C. Laurenson, 2012, pers. comm., May 24). ‘You encourage new thinking. You represent new directions, letting go of old ways’ (M. Rasmus, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- ‘True moments of reflection and learning, when the light bulb goes on and you know yourself, or you see in others, that something has changed and won’t be the way it was before’ (C. Laurenson, 2012, pers. comm., May 24).
- ‘Disciplined relationship between the points made and your principles and various research sources (it is unashamedly rigorous)’ (J. Mash, 2012, pers. comm., June 2).
- ‘I think and I see others thinking as new insights emerge’ (R. Dickson, 2012, pers. comm., August 18).

Reframing

I am claiming that... my practice of *reframing* helps my clients and myself to loosen our grip on what we believe to be *the reality* and experiment with different explanatory frames that we feel/think have the potential to bring us into closer contact with our lived experience.

- ‘Dramatic revelations, especially when being more rather than less judgemental (which is a bit against the grain)’ (J. Mash, 2012, pers. comm., June 2).
- ‘With you I have been more conscious of space being created in which I can make discoveries. In the dedication to my AMOC dissertation I thanked you for ‘introducing me to several selves that I had not previously met’ (which is why I enter the ‘space’ with some apprehension, not knowing what I should discover). But in the space created you were able to provide positive input and guidance’ (T.

Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5).

- 'I did not get many concrete answers from you, but you did help me to calm down, you inspired and stabilized me. And you helped me to discover important questions and the beginnings of new answers' (M. Rasmus, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- 'You inspire out of the box thinking - questioning and understanding, why we do things as we do it and provide disruptive ideas, why not to it different (which difference makes the difference) - if you want to change, you have to DO things different' (M. Ceccon, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).

Nexting

I am claiming that... my practice of nexting helps my clients and myself to determine what it is that they/I might do next in our continual conversational process that could potentially be a helpful move in what we are trying to do together.

- 'What I notice is how you **encourage people in an affirming way** by regular acknowledgement, absolute interest in others (both their ideas and personal being) and you have an excellent way of finding connections and summarising multiple ideas' (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., August 20).

Question 2: How do you feel when working with me?

- '(...) you never positioned yourself on a pedestal, you were **another human being** on the same journey, so even if there was a 'storm at sea' on the journey we could be fellow travellers again by the time we parted' (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5).
- 'There is a **real sincerity** about you and a very evident desire to make a difference' (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- 'I always feel **supported** (...) Able to explore the issues and what lies beneath them. I have absolute confidence in your discretion and the confidentiality (...) You so rarely make anything other 100% positive comments about people that can feel a little hard to live up to' (K. Pritchard, pers. comm., May 28). 'Supported and encouraged' (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., August 20).
- '**Safe**' is a word that comes immediately to mind. I also feel trusted and supported to be able to deliver' (D. Mookherjee, 2012, pers. comm. August 22). 'I feel calm, inspired, respected, valued, complemented' (A. Thum, 2012, pers. comm., August 19). 'Appreciated and respected, implicitly

understood, comfortable (that the group is in good hands)' (R. Dickson, 2012, pers. comm., August 18).

- '**Energised** and stimulated to give my best performance' (H. Crisp, 2012, pers. comm., August 22).
- 'I feel that I am truly **part of a team** when working with you – I am at my best. I have the sense that "I CAN" and if I can't you will be there to disguise things so it appears that I CAN or to help me remember that I can. I trust you' (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14).

Question 3: What in your experience of working with me do I need to pay more attention to?

- '**Don't give up on people** – have some **more patience** at times – even though it might be exasperating! Be interested, and try not to jump to judgement' (R. Dickson, 2012, pers. comm., August 18). 'I notice (...) that you seem to be **stuck in a pattern of frustration** with clients who have what I suspect you might describe as 'lower level needs' (D. Mookherjee, 2012, pers. comm. August 22). 'If a group you are facilitating is being slow to engage with a task, your patience is sometimes stretched to a point where you step a bit too much into their task to get them going' (H. Crisp, 2012, pers. comm., August 22). '**When you become "fed up"** (...) it is very difficult to change your mind/perspective (...) or rather, I experience that you tend to listen much less than you usually do. (...) When it is past the tipping point, your patience is gone and in those moments you can be somewhat **intoxicated in your emotions**' (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14). '(...) you could be **tough and impatient** if you felt that people were not giving the same quality of attention to their own material' (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5). 'Sometimes I observe you **judging others** also by devaluing them' (A. Thum, 2012, pers. comm., August 19).
- 'The power of your **kindness**. I don't think you need to pay more attention to it for the purpose of doing anything more with it but rather pay attention to the importance of your kindness in the whole of what you bring' (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., August 20).
- 'You (...) demonstrate a **youthfulness** that I think you need to pay attention to as a strength' (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., August 20).

Question 4: What have the results of working with me been?

- 'Your signature presence has something to do with **connecting to a sense of shared purpose**, it's about making a palpable difference by bringing humanity to the workplace' (K. Pritchard, pers. comm., May 28).

- 'Effecting real **change to behaviours**, which have been resolutely difficult to change in the past. There has been a tangible difference to the team dynamics which has been maintained beyond the intervention that you have personally been involved in' (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25).
- '(...) It has caused me to work with them in a way that we all seem to feel is useful and **generative** and which is much more '**open**' than any of my previous work. With 2-3 shareholders and some of the managers we spend 2-3 days a month together in various sessions, and whilst I never arrive 'empty-handed' I have worked with them in a much more 'present' way than I have ever worked with any client before' (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5).
- 'You have a gift to create, harness, and redistribute **energy with a purpose**. I have seen this when you are with a group that is open to what is possible and open to listening and thinking; not always agreeing but agreeing to think (I guess in some ways willing to experiment with you)' (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14).
- 'Clients are able to make **huge leaps** in their thinking and practice' (D. Mookherjee, 2012, pers. comm. August 22). 'I see clients feeling **able to speak up**, developing their confidence to participate and to think aloud'(R. Dickson, 2012, pers. comm., August 18).
- '(...) I feel three things beginning to happen. Paradoxically I begin to feel **calm, alert and apprehensive** (...), I begin to feel **focused**; (...) I feel a **sense of 'energy-in-readiness'** as if I am preparing for some strenuous physical activity (...)' (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5).
- 'It's fun, it's real, it doesn't feel like work, it genuinely feels like a **shared exploration**, (...) it feels like it really matters. There's none of this going through the motions nonsense that I often seem entangled in!' (K. Pritchard, pers. comm., May 28).
- 'Working together gave me **confidence** in myself to experiment and inquire into my own experience as a valid way of knowing. This then resulted in me being in absolute presence with my clients and encouraging the same with them (...)' (M. Cannon, 2012, pers. comm., August 20).
- 'I have no doubt that (...) [the company] has undergone a significant change largely down to the fact that you were able to earn the trust and respect of the most senior people in the organisation and because you provided a safe container for managers to **do something different** and **shift their patterns**' (D. Mookherjee, 2012, pers. comm. August 22).

What sense do I make of my clients' and colleagues' input?

First of all I want to acknowledge the feeling of gratitude I feel about my clients and colleagues not only taking the time to answer my questions in such a detailed way, but also about the promptness of their replies, and the kindness, thoughtfulness and candour of their answers. What you have just read is only about 60% of the input I received. So, what sense am I making of all of this? Based on all of people's comments I draw following three conclusions:

- It seems that apart from *nexting* (which I will come to shortly) my clients and colleagues recognize and appreciate my practice routines of presencing, raising, thinking, and reframing.
- I was initially very surprised and even slightly disappointed to realize that *nexting*, which I think of as my main practice in working live, did not get mentioned at all in people's comments. I am not even sure if the statement I did put into the *nexting* category does say much about *nexting* at all, apart maybe from implying the notion acting with generative intent.

So, why might this have happened and what might it point to? I have thought about both of these questions for a while and have come to following conclusions: Firstly, my own *nexting* practice is to a significant degree a mental activity (see the example with Gwen), namely, my weighing up what to do next is invisible to others. Only my next action can be experienced by them; but as I have pointed out before, we always do *something* next, anyway. However, it seems to me particularly from people's comments about the results of working with me that the outcomes of my *nexting* with generative intent can be seen (see for instance the comments under "How do you feel when working with me?"), but not my own *internal nexting* process itself. Secondly, I think that I can become more explicit in helping my clients to become more aware of their own *nexting* consciously with generative intent by asking them for instance, "What is it that you want to help make happen next?" or "What is the *in order to move* instead of the *because of move* that you might make next?"

- I was not surprised, albeit not happy either, about the majority of the comments relating to what I need to pay more attention to: Giving up on people, acting impatiently, feeling frustrated and fed up, being tough and judgmental, and at times playing the drama queen. I recognize all of these feelings and behaviours, and acknowledge them as being *normal* and acceptable for any human being in times of feeling tension or pressure. At the same time I notice a sense of embarrassment about behaving in this way mainly based on the observation that in aiming to help others develop more freely flowing and flexible conversational patterns these types of reactions are unhelpful. I see these behaviours as *because-of-reactions* or ontological selfing activities sparked by my negative perception of what someone has *done to me*.

How does my way of working compare to that of other organisation consulting practitioners?

The goal is to 'go down' inside the body, to shift the interior gravity center from the head to the body. (Petitmengin-Peugeot in Varela and Shear, 1999 p. 61)

To conclude this final inquiry cycle I want to explore in what way my particular way of working is similar and/or different to other ways of consulting. But which ones should I choose from the countless number of organisation consulting approaches? When I am thinking back over the last almost 28 years of my consulting practice four approaches stand out as having been particularly influential to how I have developed my understanding of organisation consulting and my own practice of working with my clients – *Process Consultation* by Schein (1988), *Future Search* by Weisbord and Janoff (1995), *Presence* by Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2004) and finally, *Changing Conversations in Organizations* by Shaw (2002). In the following I will look at how these practitioners describe their informing theories and/or assumptions and their ways of working and compare them to mine.

Process Consultation

Schein first published his influential book *Process Consultation – Its Role in Organization Development* in 1969, he revised it in 1988 in the second edition, and in 1999 he published *Process Consultation Revisited – Building the Helping Relationship* in which he predominantly explores the building and maintaining of a constructive and helpful relationship between client and consultant.

I remember coming across the 2nd edition of *Process Consultation* during a workshop about internal consulting skills I attended at the Management Centre Europe in Brussels in 1992. The workshop facilitators recommended Schein's approach as providing a solid philosophical and methodological approach for consultants wanting to help managers help themselves. Even now 21 years later I distinctly recall being inspired to further develop my own consulting practice after reading this thin but insightful and thought-provoking book. Let me highlight what I see as the key aspects of Schein's process consultation model.

Let us start with a number of definitions Schein offers. He defines the term *process* as 'how things are done rather than *what* is done' (Schein, 1987 p. 39, his emphasis) but he is not as explicit in defining what he means by an *organisation* despite writing that process consultation 'is a way of studying organizations' (Schein, 1988 p. 191). However, comments such as 'no organizational form is perfect' (1988 p. 10), 'the culture of the organization' (Ibid.), 'to improve the organization' (Ibid., p. 11), 'organizations are networks of people engaged in achieving some common goals' (Ibid., p. 12), 'human processes in organizations' (Ibid., p. 15), 'organizations are open systems that exist in uncertain and dynamic environments' (Ibid., p. 16), or an 'organization can be thought of as having the following components: (...) *Permanent Systems* (...) *Temporary*

Systems (...) Coordinating Systems (...) (Ibid., p. 198, his emphasis) lead me to conclude that he sees an organisation *both* as a formal system or structure *and* as human processes. Or to put it perhaps more accurately, Schein seems to argue that organizations are intentional, formal structures that *have* human processes operating *within* them. Based on this assumption he sees the task of the process consultant as helping to 'make (...) [the client's] organisation more effective' (Ibid., p. 20) by establishing a helping relationship with the client that then 'will enable the client to focus on the critical process events in his own environment, and (...) to diagnose and intervene in those processes' (Ibid.).

Schein's view of how change happens in individuals, groups and organizations is based on Lewin's well-known three stage model of '*Unfreezing: Creating motivation and readiness to change (...)[,] Changing through cognitive restructuring (...)[,] Refreezing: Helping the client to integrate the new point of view (...)*' (Schein, 1987 p. 93, his emphasis). He explains the necessity for this sequence by writing that

What the consultant or manager who is attempting to produce and manage change must realize is that whether or not he himself causes each stage to happen, the stages must be gone through by the client or the change target. (Ibid., p. 114)

Finally, Schein defines the practice of *process consultation* as

(...) a set of activities on the part of the consultant that help the client to perceive, understand, and act upon the process events occurring in the client's environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client. (Schein, 1988 p. 11)

With the process consultation model he articulated an alternative and addition to what he sees as the two conventional consulting models (Ibid., p. 5-9) described below that I, too, had tried to practice until reading the 1st volume of *Process Consultation*, but had started to increasingly question because of their inherently low degrees of client involvement and the resulting often weak commitment of the clients to actively address their own issue.

- *The expertise model:* The client defines a need that in her or his view cannot be met by the expertise available within the organisation and thus purchases this expertise, often in form of data or other factual information, externally. In this model, the client defines the need/problem and the solution on her/ his own, and the consultant delivers the specified input.
- *The doctor-patient model:* The client senses a problem, often related to the organisation's functioning or some unsatisfactory results generated by it (such as customer complaints, declining sales), and brings an external consultant into the organisation to "check them over", (Ibid., p. 7, his emphasis). In this model, the consultant analyses the problem and its causes (often by interviewing people affected by it and /or able to affect it), and then suggests appropriate solutions.

In contrast, in Schein's process consultation model the client perceives the need to fix or improve a particular aspect related to the organisation's functioning or its generated results, and due to a perceived lack of internal expertise in this regard brings an external consultant into the organisation to help her or him to identify 'what to improve and how to improve it' (Schein, 1988 p. 10). In this model, the client/s and the consultant/s diagnose the problem, its causes, identify the appropriate solutions, and implement the necessary changes jointly with people affected by the problem and able to affect it. Thus, in contrast to the two conventional models in which consultants are more 'concerned about passing on knowledge' (Ibid., p. 194) the main function of process consultation is to 'pass on the skills of how to diagnose and fix organizational problems so that the client is more able to continue on his own to improve the organisation' (Ibid.). Schein describes this as a process in which the consultant, that is,

(...) the helper takes on obligations that are associated with being in the helping professions, i.e. the interests and the welfare of the client must be protected at all times, and all of the helper's actions (...) are de facto interventions and must be evaluated as interventions before they are undertaken. (Schein, 1995, p. 3, retrieved [May 6, 2013] from <http://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/2583/SWP-3833-33296503.pdf?sequence=1>, his emphasis)

Schein makes it very clear that he is open for clients and consultants to use all three consultation models whenever appropriate but recommends to start with process consultation in particular in 'those situations where people are troubled but neither know what the problem is nor what kind of help they should be seeking' (Schein, 1987 p. 20).

Developing and maintaining a *helping relationship* is at the heart of process consultation and is therefore according to Schein the consultant's first task with the explicit intention of helping the client 'to remain "pro-active", in the sense of retaining both the diagnostic and remedial initiative' (Schein, 1988 p. 11, his emphasis) and thus not to become dependent on the consultant and her or his support. Schein is adamant that '*the decisive factor as to whether or not help will occur in human situations (...) is the relationship between the helper and the person, group, or organization that needs help*' (Retrieved [May 6, 2013] from <http://ddf.websolutionsofne.netdna-cdn.com/documents/Edgar%20Schein%20Article.pdf>, his emphasis). In his view 'help will not happen' (Ibid.) without the prior existence of this helping relationship with the various stakeholders of the problem. He argues that this relationship must be build *before* any significant work on the problem at hand can commence because the 'initial relationship-building (...) permit[s] clients to own their problems and make sensible decisions (...)' (Ibid.) regarding their resolution. In Schein's experience, building this specific type of relationship 'takes time and requires a certain kind of attitude from the helper' (Ibid.).

Schein outlines this attitude of the helper with his 'ten principles' (Ibid.) that are the 'essence of process consultation' (Ibid.). These principles firstly enable 'the process by which the consultant builds readiness for change' (Schein, 1988 p. 3) and subsequently 'helps the manager to define diagnostic steps that lead

ultimately to action programs and concrete changes that improve the situation' (Ibid., p. 4). For me these principles fall into two groups, that is, 1.) a set of general assumptions the consultant needs to operate from and 2.) a set of behavioural instructions for the consultant.

General assumptions about working with clients

1. **'Everything you do is an intervention'** (Retrieved [May 6, 2013] from <http://ddf.websolutionsofne.netdna-cdn.com/documents/Edgar%20Schein%20Article.pdf>): Everything the consultant does has consequences for the client and the consultant.
2. **'It is the client who owns the problem and the intervention'** (Ibid.): The organisation 'often does not know how to use its own resources effectively either in initial problem formulation or in implementation of solutions' (Schein, 1988 p. 193). However, the consultant should not take on the responsibility of the client; her/his only task is to 'create a relationship in which the client can get help' (Ibid.)
3. **'Timing is crucial'** (Retrieved [May 6, 2013] from <http://ddf.websolutionsofne.netdna-cdn.com/documents/Edgar%20Schein%20Article.pdf>): There are right moments when the client is open enough to accept the consultant's input and help.
4. **'Everything is a source of data; errors are inevitable (...)'** (Ibid.): There is no way to avoid that the consultant's actions will 'produce unexpected and undesirable reactions in the client' (Ibid.).

Behavioural instructions for the process consultant

1. **'Always try to be careful'** (Retrieved [May 6, 2013] from <http://ddf.websolutionsofne.netdna-cdn.com/documents/Edgar%20Schein%20Article.pdf>): A process consultant 'must be an expert at giving help' (Schein, 1988 p. 10) and must, at all times, have the intention to be helpful to the client/s.
2. **'Always stay in touch with current reality'** (Ibid.): At all times the consultant needs to be aware of 'what is going on in' (Ibid.) her-/himself, the client, and their environment.
3. **'Access your ignorance'** (Ibid.): The consultant should use her/his areas of not-knowing as pointers for further inquiry.
4. **'Go with the flow'** (Ibid.): The consultant should work with what is actually happening at any moment rather than be fixated on what she/he thinks should be happening.

5. **'Be constructively opportunistic with confrontative interventions'** (Ibid.): Whenever the consultant wants to raise something the client might find difficult to hear, seizing the appropriate moment in which the client 's 'attention to a new input appears to be available' (Ibid.) is crucial.

6. **'(...) learn from (...) [errors]'** (Ibid.): Because all of the consultants' actions will impact the client in unexpected and undesirable ways and because the consultant will make errors in her/his interacting with the client, learning from the client's reactions is important for both the client and the consultant.

7. **'When in doubt share the problem'** (Ibid.): In moments of, say, feeling confused, lost, frustrated, impatient or angry in which the consultant does not know what to do next, she/he should share his situation with the client and 'involve the client in (...) [the consultant's] effort to be helpful' (Ibid.).

Similarities with my practice of working live

There are a number of significant similarities between Schein's process consultation model and my practice of working live – all concerning the relational process between client and consultant – that I would like to highlight now.

Perhaps first and foremost amongst them is our shared view of the importance of the relationship between the consultant and the client/s in working together, that is, the conscious process of a meeting of embodied people in each emerging moment of now and next (Schein 1988).

Secondly, my practices of *aware selfing* and *generative nexting*, that is, holding an opinion rather than being that opinion and then acting *in order to* help contribute to a generative development of the relational process rather than acting *because of*, say, feeling not heard and wanting to protect my self seem to pick up on the importance Schein places on the consultant's general attitude of wanting to be helpful to the client (Ibid.).

Thirdly, Schein's argument that it is important to work from within an understanding of the *current reality* and then *go with the flow* (Retrieved [May 6, 2013] from [http://ddf.websolutionsofne.netdna-cdn.com/documents/Edgar% 20Schein %20Article.pdf](http://ddf.websolutionsofne.netdna-cdn.com/documents/Edgar%20Schein%20Article.pdf)) of what one subjectively believes that a particular transitory situation – this unique, first-time event – requires in relation to what one wants to contribute to help emerge next (rather than what one might habitually do in situations that appear to be similar) resonates with my view and experience that working live well happens from *within* an awareness of the five-part movement that *is* the presenting moment.

Fourthly Schein's point that everything one does as a consultant is an intervention (Ibid.) is similar to my view that we are always participating in the process of interacting with ourselves and others, and that there is no

away from that fact and therefore, as Watzlawick noted, it is impossible to not have an impact on (and be impacted by) oneself, others and the world at large.

Finally, Schein's espoused practices of *trying to be careful* when working with clients (in particular in confrontative situations), *being open about one's subjective experiencing*, and *accessing one's ignorance* (Ibid.) echo my own practices of *being intuitive and spontaneous while being deliberate and choiceful*, *raising the issues, thoughts, or sensations that are alive for me*, and finally, *of knowing while not knowing*.

Differences with my practice of working live

However, despite these similarities there are very significant differences indeed between Schein's practice of process consultation and my practice of working live. Again, let me draw out the three critical ones.

Most importantly, Schein seems to make a Kantian split by seeing organizations as a thing, that is, a system and structure that can be designed and changed at will by *its* managers and seeing the human aspects that these organizations *have* as intra- and interpersonal processes that can be observed, diagnosed, explained and improved by using psychological theories (Schein, 1988 p. 17 – 20). This view, of course, is very different from my perspective that individuals, groups, and organizations *are* complex and paradoxical social processes of gesturing and responding to oneself and each other, of influencing each other and being influenced by each other, of enabling and constraining each other that can be understood from within the interaction itself. In other words, I argue that individuals, groups, and organizations are not things that *have* human processes inside of them, as Schein suggests, but are complex relational processes of continuous micro-scoping and macro-scoping from within the five part movement of the presenting moment.

Secondly, Schein suggests that one needs to build the relationship with the client *before* one can start working jointly on the problem or issue that the client wants to address (Schein 1988). I have two disagreements with this point: 1.) Schein seems to construct *the relationship* as a thing, perhaps like a boat, that one can build and then to use as a supporting platform for the work. In contrast, I understand relating as a continuous, complex process within and between myself and my clients that *is* the work. Consequently I also disagree with Schein's claim that *the problem* must be diagnosed first for the remedy to be implemented thereafter (Ibid.).

The third difference between process consultation and my practice of working live derives directly from the previous point. In Schein's logic there seems to be a strong one-directional and linear aspect to the relationship of the consultant and the client, namely, the consultant (i.e. *the helper*) helps the client (i.e. *the helpee*) to fix his/her problems related to the functioning of the organisation (Schein 1988). This position stands in stark contrast to my view that both client and consultant participate in a continuous and complex process of gesturing and responding to themselves and each other of which none of them is in charge and which none of them can influence at will (in order to fix the problem) but both of them influence and are

influenced by at the same time. Contrary to Schein I argue that neither I nor my clients can *fix the problem*, as Schein suggest, all we can do at any micro moment is to contribute to the possibility of the self-organizing communicative processes we participate in developing *roughly* in congruence with our generalized notion of what we individually and collectively believe *better* constitutes. In short, I do not see myself as a *helper* but, as I have outlined before, as a *participant-observer-facilitator*.

Future Search

Weisbord and Janoff define their future search method as a 'large group planning meeting that brings a "whole system" into the room to work on a task-focused agenda' (1995 p. IX, their emphasis) and enables its participants to 'make choices previously unavailable' (Ibid., p. X) to them in order 'to make things happen' (Ibid.) during and after the 2.5-day meeting.

The future search format has four main methodological influences (Ibid., p. 11-13): 1.) Trist's and Emery's *search conference*, a workshop method that creates conditions enabling heterogeneous groups of people to explore common issues diversely and cooperatively. 2.) Bohm's *dialogue group*, a conversational method for groups to explore their process of thinking together without defined agenda or desired outcome. 3.) Owen's *open space technology*, a method for individuals to explore issues with others that are of interest to them without facilitation, formal agenda, or specified outcomes. 4.) Dannemiller's and Jacob's *participatory strategic planning conference*, a workshop method enabling a critical mass of an organisation to 'create a new culture *in the moment*' (Holman and Devane, 1999 p. 206, their emphasis).

Since the future search meeting participants (approx. 60 - 80) represent a cross-section of all stakeholder groups (from across the organisation's functions and hierarchies, customers, suppliers, competitors, external experts, and representatives from society at large) of the issue in focus, Weisbord and Janoff speak about bringing 'a "whole system" into the room' (Ibid., p. IX, their emphasis). They believe having representatives of all stakeholders of an issue and thus diverse views in the room 'makes feasible a shared encounter with aspects of reality (...) people normally avoid (...) ' (Ibid., p. 3) or do not encounter.

The future search meeting has three specific purposes: It helps its participants to...

1. '(...) create a shared future vision for their organization or community' (Ibid.).
2. '(...) discover shared intentions and take responsibility for their own plans' (Ibid.).
3. '(...) implement a shared vision that already exists' (Ibid.).

Because future search meetings are largely self-managed (apart from the facilitators specifying tasks and

logistics) they put 'people in a position of having to choose, as a temporary planning community, which way to go now' (Ibid., p. 21) in designing their common future and agreeing the necessary steps towards it. They summarize their future search meeting philosophy by writing that 'Instead of trying to change the world or each other, we change the conditions under which people interact' (Ibid., p. 6).

Let us now look at the three main assumptions Weisbord and Janoff make in their work. Firstly, from their numerous references to the *whole system* and from other comments in Weisbord's book *Productive Workplaces* (1987) such as 'My systems perspective is the most useful thing I have.' (Ibid., p. 233) or 'workers work *'inside a system'*, [and] the leaders *'must stay outside, working on it, not in it'* (Ibid., p. 165) I conclude that he and Janoff understand an organisation as a *'sociotechnical system'* (Ibid., p. 143, his emphasis), that is, an interrelated 'interaction of people (a social system) with tools and techniques (a technical system)' (Ibid.) within and across organizational structures and boundaries. In essence, for them 'systems models are (...) tools for coalescing people to do something together, helping them to undertake a systems-improvement task' (Ibid., p. 233).

Secondly, it seems clear that for Weisbord and Janoff organizational change is a planned and coordinated set of activities whereby "'everybody" improves whole systems' (1995 p. 2, their emphasis) through a deliberate, linear sequence of firstly, agreeing a collective future intent (i.e. a vision), secondly, identifying the necessary steps towards it, and finally, implementing these steps and activities.

Thirdly, personal learning is seen by Weisbord and Janoff as being influenced and facilitated by several factors and conditions:

- '(...) *working as peers on tasks of mutual concern'* (Ibid., p. 6, their emphasis) helps 'participants bridge barriers of culture, class, age, gender, ethnicity, power, status, and hierarchy' (Ibid.)
- '(...) *stay in the moment and describe your experience, don't explain it'* (Ibid., p. 67). When 'participants experience what already exists – as fully, deeply, and humanly as possible in the time available (...) [they] are more likely to make rational choices about what they want to do' (Ibid., p. 8)
- '(...) *involve ourselves fully in our world and work – head and heart, mind and body, feelings and dreams'* (Ibid., p. 66)
- '(...) *keeping aware and moving around (literally) helps us contact our own buried wishes, hopes, fears, and experiences'* (Ibid., p. 67)
- Each person 'learn best from his or her own experience' (Ibid., p. 69)
- Listening to other people's perspectives without having to agree with them, and articulating their own without having to defend or justify them.

Weisbord and Janoff describe the work of the (usually two) facilitators of the future search meetings as specifying the meeting tasks and timings, supporting participants' in their autonomy and in taking

responsibility for their own actions, and holding 'uncertainty in (...) [themselves] and in the group until people decide what they will and will not do together' (Ibid., p. 143). They are very clear that they are 'not "process consultants" on interpersonal dynamics' (Ibid., their emphasis) but aim to be what one might call *non-judgmental task facilitators*. That means they do not discuss or work on why people feel what they feel, say what they say, or do what they do, they do not offer conclusions, interpretations, suggestions, or disclose how they feel or what they think, they do not try to resolve different perspectives or disagreements, and they neither comment on nor 'take negative or positive comments personally' (Ibid., p. 147). Instead they aim to 'accept everything we hear as something this community needs to deal with' (Ibid., p. 155) and try to minimize their authority as facilitators 'by shifting attention from us onto the task' (Ibid., p. 155) in order to make it as easy and acceptable as possible for individuals and the group to 'keep working on the task even when they feel anxious' (Ibid., p. 144). Weisbord and Janoff summarize their work as future search facilitators like this:

We are there to be shot at and will be. It's no fun, but it's no big deal either. If we don't fall dead and we don't shoot back, we will have a quick truce, followed by a peace treaty.' (Ibid., p. 155)

Similarities with my practice of working live

I vividly remember sitting in a large circle of chairs of about fifty people including Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff on the morning of September 12, 2001 in a conference room somewhere in Germany. It was the second day of a workshop about their philosophy of 'how-we-do-us' (Ibid., p. 159) as facilitators of future search meetings. The mood in the room was very subdued due to us being shocked by the terrible events in New York City we had watched on the TV unfold the previous evening. We were discussing whether we should stop the workshop in light of this tragedy or continue working with each other. Finally we concluded that one of Weisbord's and Janoff's central recommendations to facilitators that to 'accept polarities in groups, we start by accepting them in ourselves' (Ibid.) and that therefore we need to 'accept every statement as part of the shared reality. Like it or not, this comment is how some one of us feels, sees, hears, believes, or thinks' (Ibid., p. 149) was good advice for us at this very moment of shock, anger, and sadness. Like it or not, what had happened in New York the previous day was caused by how some of *us* felt and it therefore was inevitably part of our common reality. We therefore decided to continue our exploration of the future search facilitator's attitude of acting non-judgmentally in the service of helping groups and communities to achieve their common objectives with renewed vigour.

The reason for recounting the above episode here is that I think it highlights well one of the key assumptions that both I and Weisbord and Janoff hold about our work, that is, the importance of paying attention to and working with what is subjectively happening for people (including ourselves) in each given present moment and to 'deal with what is happening, not what our theory says *should* happen, and to treat what actually goes on as the only reality that matters' (Ibid., p. 144, their emphasis). In trying to do this we both 'encourage people to give concrete examples of what they mean. That helps all of us ground ourselves

in each other's reality' (Ibid., 147) and avoids talking in generalities and abstractions and thus makes consciously experiencing now and knowing what to do next a little easier.

The second area of similarity I would highlight is the assumption that in working live well and helping others (and ourselves) to individually and collectively make generative *nexting* moves that in some way embody their intent for the future it is necessary to *describe* what we see, feel, think, and do at a particular moment and *recognize* the patterns emerging from these sensations and actions, but it is not necessary for going forward intuitively and choicefully to *explain* them using theoretical frameworks or methods, say, from psychology, sociology or neuroscience.

The third major similarity in my view is the intention to work with what I have called earlier *passionate-non-attachment*, that is, an attitude where 'we do not judge (out loud) what anybody says' (Ibid., p. 147). The rationale for this is a mutual belief that for the conversational process in groups and organizations to include and appreciate divergence, and to flow freely and flexibly it is important for people to be able, willing, and allowed to express their particular (and possible divergent) views as openly as possible without having to defend them, at least not to us as facilitators and consultants.

Differences with my practice of working live

I see three fundamental differences between my way of working and that of Weisbord and Janoff. Firstly, I do think that not splitting *planning the future* from *implementing steps towards it*, as Weisbord and Janoff do, and thus participating with my clients in their *ordinary* every-day conversational life and at the same time whenever appropriate to engage with them in sporadic, time-bound *extraordinary* interventions (such as the large group workshop I facilitated for Garry and his colleagues at ROCKET) resonates more with my view that the phenomena of human living and organizing such as individuals, groups, organizations, relationships, and intentions are on-going complex social processes that do not evolve into new patterns simply because of select few people have participated in a 2.5-day workshop planning the steps to take to implement an agreed upon future.

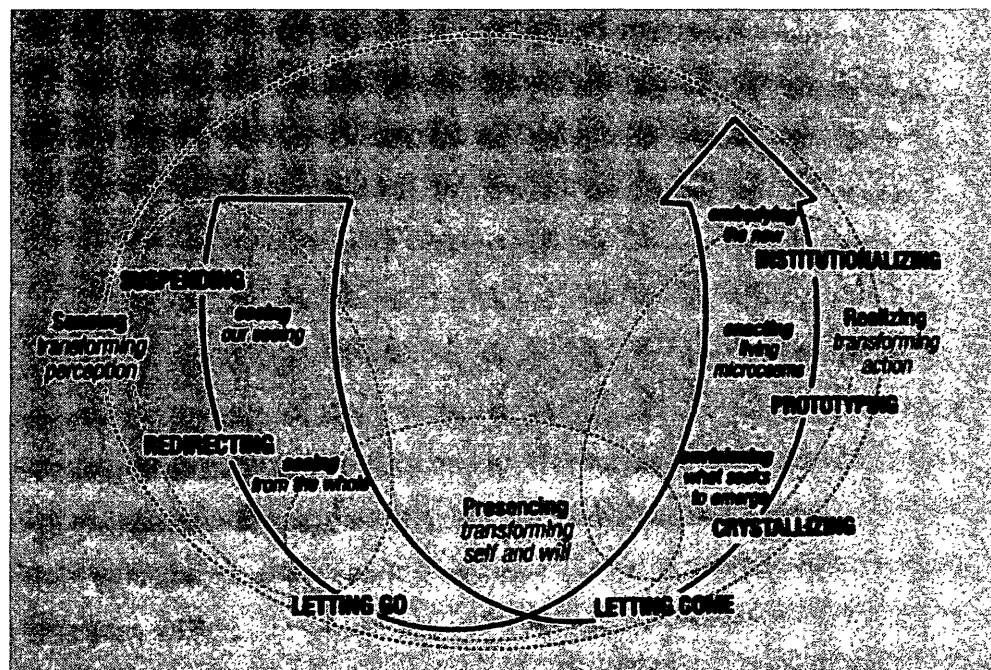
Secondly, my way of working differs in relation to our views about handling disagreement and conflict. Where Weisbord and Janoff allow space in their future searches for participants to raise areas of difference and disagreement, but do not explore them, I am very interested in and think it is useful to deliberately explore divergent views for the potential emergence of new micro *nexting* possibilities in people's process of gesturing and responding and through their amplification over time to the emergence of recognizable novelty of the patterning of these interactions.

Thirdly, Weisbord and Janoff understand themselves as 'facilitators in the narrowest sense' (Ibid., p. 144) in order to help 'keep people moving toward action on a common future' (Ibid., p. 144). In contrast, as I have explained several times before, I see myself as *participant-observer-facilitator*, namely, I do not and cannot

stand outside of the process of interacting with and between my clients because I do not see people or groups as a system of which one can stand, at least partly, outside of and work *on*, as they assume, but as complex responsive processes of interaction in which I am participating. In this respect I work with my clients very differently than Weisbord and Janoff. As outlined in my *working live practice routines model*, whenever I think it is appropriate and might be helpful I do try to say what I think, see, and feel, make recommendations, challenge my clients reason or thinking, summarize, raise unspoken issues, offer observations about process and content – albeit with the intention to act from a position of *aware selfing*, that is, with the intention of holding my views lightly and of being helpful to my clients.

Presence

Presence (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2004) is an inquiry into ‘the deeper dimensions of transformational change’ (Ibid., p. 15) and into ‘who we are and the inner place or source from which we operate, both individually and collectively’ (Ibid.). For this research Scharmer and Jaworski asked 150 leading scientists, social and business entrepreneurs “What question lies at the heart of your work?” (Ibid., p. 269). They then combined the insights from these interviews with their own theories and practices about the relationship between parts and wholes, in particular with elements from Senge’s hugely popular book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) such as systems thinking and personal mastery, elements from Jaworski’s book *Synchronicity* (1996) such as generative leadership, and insights from Scharmer’s research on social change and innovation, and collective learning, as well as views from thinkers such as Goethe, Buber, and Bortoft, and spiritual traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism to develop their *Theory of the U*.



Seven Capacities of the U Movement (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 2004 p. 225)

The theory U is based on the following main assumptions:

1. Organizations are living systems that have like any 'life form (...) the potential to grow, learn and evolve' (Senge et al., 2004., p. 6).
2. Living systems 'create themselves' (Ibid., p. 3) like trees in that 'the seed is the gateway through which the future possibility (...) emerges' (Ibid., p. 2).
3. Living systems have a 'natural "prejudice" against otherness' (Ibid., p. 35, their emphasis).
4. When the future needs to be significantly different than the past, that is, when a 'shift from re-creating the past to manifesting or realizing the emerging future' (Ibid., p. 12) is needed 'a different process is required' (Ibid., p. 87) in order for people to individually and collectively 'act in the service of what is emerging' (Ibid., p. 10).
5. This *different process* begins when people 'begin to see from within the source of what is emerging, letting it come into being through (...) [them]' (Ibid., p. 83) and when they 'connect to the source, perception arises "from the whole field"' (Ibid., p. 99, their emphasis). In other words, 'the self (...) like the seed of a tree (...) becomes the gateway for the coming into being of a new world' (Ibid., 92).
6. For people 'knowing that their choices and actions really matter (...) and feeling guided by forces beyond their making' (Ibid., p. 11) to become possible they have to develop deep levels of listening and awareness.

Consequently, the specific purpose of the U theory is to enable people to generate '(...)[d]eeper levels of learning [that] create increasing awareness of the larger whole (...) that lead(...) to actions that increasingly serve the emerging whole' (Ibid., p. 9) by distinguishing between 'different depths of perceiving reality and different levels of action that follow from that' (Ibid., p. 87). The U theory or 'U Movement' (Ibid.) has three phases: 'Sensing: *transforming perception*, Presencing: *transforming self and will*, Realizing: *Transforming action*' (Ibid., p. 225, their emphasis).

In order for this process of moving from deep thinking to generative action in the service of the whole to happen Senge and his colleagues designed it as a sequence of seven steps (or capacities) that each are 'a gateway to the next' (Ibid.) and that all need to be taken (or developed) to make one's movement through the entire U process possible. As you can see on the above illustration of the U movement the seven step sequence flows as follows: 'The capacity for *suspending* enables *seeing our seeing*, the capacity for *redirecting* enables *seeing the whole*, the capacities for *letting go* and *letting come* enable *transforming self and will*, the capacity for *crystallizing* enables *envisioning what seeks to emerge*, the capacity for *prototyping* enables

enacting living microcosms, the capacity for *institutionalizing* enables *embodying the new*' (Ibid., their emphasis).

Because I want to specifically concentrate on describing the practice Senge et al. call *presencing* as a basis for identifying similarities and differences between their way of working live and mine I will neither explore the three phases nor the seven-step process any further.

Similarities with my practice of working live

When first reading *Presence* in 2005 I was resonating strongly with one of the central arguments of the book, namely, that many of the problems in organizations and societies are caused by the flawed assumption that 'understanding lay in studying isolated things [that] has largely persisted in the social sciences and still dominates everyday affairs' (Ibid., p. 197). Although I still agree with this notion today the only significant parallel I see between how I and Senge et al. think about and work with organizational change relates to the practice of presencing and lies in the fact that both Senge and his colleagues and I are interested in and think it is possible and necessary for working well *now and next* to develop a personal awareness practice that helps generate a keener sense of being *explicitly conscious of one's subjective experiencing* in each emerging moment and of the overall patterning these micro-moves create than our every-day way of being mostly *implicitly conscious* does. However, as we will see next, our views about what exactly this presencing practice is and what purpose it serves as well as what organizations are and how change happens differ fundamentally.

Differences with my practice of working live

The main difference between the perspectives articulated in *Presence* and the premises informing my way of working live stems from two fundamentally divergent assumptions Senge et al. and I make. Firstly, we differ greatly in our view about stability and change. Where they argue from a 'Formative Teleology [where] (...) [m]ovement toward a future (...) [i]mplies a final state that can be known in advance' (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 52) and where the purpose of the movement is to 'reveal, realize or sustain a mature or final form of identity, of self' (Ibid.), or in their words, living systems are like trees in that 'the seed is the gateway through which the future possibility (...) emerges' (Senge et al., 2004 p. 2), I argue from a 'Transformative Teleology [where] (...) [m]ovement toward a future (...) [is] under perpetual construction by the movement itself' (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 52) and simply creates further movement in the future.

Secondly, we hold very different views about what an organisation is. As we have seen, Senge and his colleagues argue that an organisation is a living system, a noun, that creates itself, can be aware of itself, and can grow and learn. In stark contrast, I see organizations as a verb, as on-going complex responsive processes of interaction out of which overall patterns emerge over time. In my view, Senge et al., despite decrying the

'industrial, "machine age" metaphors' (Ibid., p. 7) that is conventionally used to think about organizations, they make the same mistake of *nouning*, albeit using mostly *nature* as a metaphor, by conceptualizing organizations as living systems or entities that can become self-conscious and act with the intent to realize a better future for *the whole* that with through presencing practice can be sensed as being already implicitly *out there*.

This of course then raises the question what do Senge et al. mean by *the whole*? I am not really sure despite many references in *Presence* to *the whole*. Despite this lack of clarity it is very obvious that Senge and his colleagues believe it is indeed possible to sense a *future whole*, that an organisation 'can (...) become a place for presencing of the whole as it might be, not just as it has been' (Ibid., p. 7). In other words, once one has sensed or *let come* the possible future whole (or end state) into one's awareness one can then individually and/or collective become a vehicle through which this end state realizes itself. Since I see the phenomena of human living such as self, intention, relationship, change, groups, and organisation as self-organizing social processes out of which overall patterns emerge over time without an overall blueprint, independent, external agent (such as *the whole*, *the future*, or *the source*) and final end state I strongly disagree with the claim that there is a whole these micro interactions and transitory micro outcomes are manifestations of or add up to. In my view, our interactions in the present simply create more interactions in the future.

For Senge and his colleagues *presencing* represents 'the essence of the whole [U] theory' (Ibid., p. 225). They see it as allowing one's 'inner knowing to emerge (ibid., p. 88) and to become 'totally present (...) to the larger space or field around us' (Ibid., p. 91) in order to see 'from the deepest source and becom[e](...) a vehicle for that source' (Ibid.). Presencing thus is a state of 'deep listening' (Ibid. p. 11) and 'turning our attention toward the source' (Ibid. p. 45) in a 'state of "letting come", of consciously participating in a larger field for change' (Ibid., their emphasis). The purpose of presencing for Senge et al. is to move 'from seeing the details to accessing the imaginative capacity to see the living whole' (Ibid., p. 89). They thus understand *presencing* as a practice of suspending and redirecting one's ordinary every-day ways of seeing and being attentive so that a deeper perception can arise 'from within the living process of the whole' (Ibid.) and 'from the highest future possibility that connects self and whole' (Ibid.). In short, for them

(...) presencing constitutes a third type of seeing, beyond seeing external reality and beyond seeing from within the living whole. It is seeing from within the source from which the future whole is emerging, peering back at the present from the future. (Ibid., p. 90)

In my view presencing is neither an accessing of some inner source or future field nor a binary shift from perceiving the minute detail of a given moment to sensing a possible future for the living whole. Instead I view presencing as an paradoxical interactive process in each emerging presenting moment in which I become consciously aware of my experiencing not only of the echo of my subjective *near past* and my intention for and anticipation of the *near future* but also the echo of my subjective *far past* and my intentions for and anticipations of the *far future*. All of this impacts on and influences my experiencing of each emerging

presenting moment that at the same time impacts on and influences my perception and construction of my near and far pasts and futures. In short, in contrast to seeing presencing as a *state of letting the highest future possibility emerge from my inner knowing and become a vehicle for its realization* I conceptualize presencing as a *personal practice of becoming consciously aware of both the process of my thinking, feeling, bodily sensations, and their content from within the five-part movement that is my subjectively experienced presenting moment* in order to create the possibility for me to contribute to the communicative micro and macro processes (i.e. patterns) within and between myself and others to become alive.

Changing conversations in organizations

In her book *Changing Conversations in Organizations* (2002) Shaw is very explicit that she is not 'writing about conversations that take place 'in' an organization' (Ibid., p. 11, her emphasis) but about the process of 'Conversing as organizing (...) [and] organizing as conversing' (Ibid.) that *is* the organisation.

As we have seen in chapter IV Shaw is one of the originators of suggesting the above move away from the conventional view that 'human action and interaction is a system or can usefully be thought of a system' (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000 p. 186) by instead describing human organizations as 'complex responsive processes of relating' (Ibid.).⁶⁴ Consequently, for her "'the organization" is not the tool of joint action. It is joint action, that is, a pattern of cooperative interaction continually recreated and potentially transformed at the same time' (Ibid., p. 187, their emphasis) in each emerging present moment. The consequence of this temporal process perspective is that at every moment

(...) in our everyday lives we must *always* be improvising together (...) because we can never completely predict or control even our own response to what is happening, let alone the responses of others.' (Shaw and Stacey, 2006, p. 2)

In other words, 'our *experience* of everyday communication and thus human organizing (...) [is] a form of ensemble improvisation' (Ibid., her emphasis) that is characterised by being more or less spontaneous and pre-meditated, and can thus be experienced by its participants as more or less *alive*. This experience of "'working live"' (Ibid., her emphasis), of participating at every emerging moment

(...) in the everyday improvisation of human organizing, often as are literally present together, but (...) also as we are metaphorically 'present' to immediate circumstances in which distance, absence, histories and anticipated futures are all in play (Ibid., p. 2-3)

is what Shaw explores in *Changing Conversations in Organizations*. She therefore asks 'What happens if we take these aspects of our working lives seriously and inquire into what is going on and what the implications may be for appreciating organizational change?' (Ibid.). This question is of course of particular relevance to

⁶⁴ Since I have already described this perspective in some detail in chapter IV I will therefore not repeat myself here.

me both for my research in general and specifically as a basis for the comparison with my own practice of working life because it is very similar to the question I have been exploring in my research, albeit with a particular emphasis on the implications for me as an organizational consultant. Shaw identifies a number of implications of viewing our human organizing process as ensemble improvisations of which I would like to highlight the ones I consider particularly relevant for the comparison of her way of consulting and mine.

The first implication for understanding organizational change is that *changing* happens continually and naturally and therefore the notion that stability, that is, things staying unchanged over time, is possible is an illusion because 'our exchanges are never exact repetitions, but rather iterations; there are always tiny differences which may amplify in further iterations, creating significant novelty' (Ibid.) over time.

The second implication of this perspective relates to the notions of intention, planning and control that are highly valued and sought after by many managers in organizations. Because Shaw sees the communicative process between people as 'an inescapably self-organizing process of participating in the spontaneous emergence of continuity and change' (2002 p. 11) out of which overall patterns emerge over time, no one person or group has control over the process and its transitory outcomes, but everyone influences this complex responsive process and at the same time is influenced by it. Intention thus is seen as a process phenomenon emerging in this communicative interaction *within* and between people, rather than as a fixed object one owns and carries around like, say, a watch or a mobile phone. This means that any attempt to develop explicit, stable intentions (or visions) for the future state of the organisation, and elaborate strategies and plans how to achieve this state with the intention to implement them will fail due to the self-organizing nature of the complex responsive process of relating that *is* the organisation. This of course can cause a sense of anxiety in managers who believe they are in charge and in control and must make sure specific pre-determined outcomes are achieved, when from the complex responsive process perspective they are seen as being participants of the continuous process of relating and thus as being in the paradoxical position of being in control and not in control at the same time, and of knowing and not knowing at the same time.

The third implication of this temporal process perspective of human organizing is that power, like intention, is seen not as a fixed possession a person or a group can have, but again as emerging between people in their interacting in the present moment. The reason for this is the fact that as human beings 'we live (...) within patterns of interdependencies' (Ibid., p. 72), namely, within a 'jointly-created process of mutual constraint that affords each of us opportunities while at the same time limiting us' (Ibid., p. 73). Thus the sense of how powerful or powerless we feel emerges in the paradoxical process of our (mostly implicit) negotiating who we are in relation to each other and what value we have for each other in any given moment as we each 'offer, withhold and change' (Ibid.) our responses to each other – a continuous process out of which overall patterns, called 'power figurations' (Ibid., p. 72), emerge over time.

The fourth and final implication of seeing organisations as on-going conversations that I would like to highlight is that it draws attention to the degree of perceived liveliness of our communicative process as we

converse with each other in the hallways, offices or meeting rooms of the organizations we work at. As we have seen before, Shaw argues that we are always improvising when we are together with others (and alone) feeling our way forward as to what sense to make of what *just happened* and what to do *next* individually and collectively. As most people working in and with organizations will have witnessed, these ensemble improvisations in the present can feel more or less spontaneous or rehearsed, flexible and free-flowing, or stale and repetitive.

It seems to be a consequence of the conventional assumption that it is indeed possible to deliver pre-determined outcomes in, say, a formal management team meeting that whoever calls and/or facilitates this meeting frequently spends a considerable amount of time and effort preparing an elaborate agenda prior to the meeting. Once people then are together in the meeting, often days or weeks later, the pre-prepared agenda is faithfully *worked through* despite it not necessarily (anymore) reflecting what the participants sense or think they would have to discuss at *this* very moment of actually being together. However, often this emerging sense of what really matters at a particular moment remains unarticulated and the meeting is simply *endured* – sometimes interrupted or followed by lively informal conversations over coffee or drinks at the bar. Consequently, very often these formal, pre-designed meetings or encounters not only feel stale and repetitive to its participants but also don't help address what they feel they would need to address at that particular moment. Shaw is making the point that the 'value of 'just talking'' (Ibid., p. 12, her emphasis) – of being together more spontaneously and informally, and exploring in 'the free-flow of open-ended conversation' (Ibid., p. 18) what matters most now – is under-valued or even disregarded by countless managers and organizational consultants due to it being seen as unprofessional in a business context and, more importantly, ineffective in producing specific, pre-determined outcomes.

To be sure, Shaw is very clear that conversations are neither necessarily experienced as stale and repetitive only because they have pre-meditated agendas, pre-designed contributions, and/or facilitators, nor are they automatically experienced as lively and free-flowing simply because they are spontaneous and have no agenda or fixed outcomes. The qualities that makes an exchange feel either more stale and repetitive or more new and alive relate to the 'difference between more studied and more spontaneous contributions to communication' (Shaw and Stacey, 2006 p. 5) – the difference between a moment in which 'we literally 'act' and lose our spontaneity' (Ibid, her emphasis) and simply repeat pre-rehearsed arguments, and of consciously being 'in the process of negotiating our way 'live'' (Ibid., her emphasis) through what we are subjectively experiencing at a given moment. Shaw summarizes the 'transformative activity of conversing' (Ibid., p. 70) by pointing out that rather than understanding our work as managers and organisation consultants as 'to operate on any kind of whole system or sub-system' (Ibid., p. 70)

(...) we may understand ourselves as engaged in the co-created, open-ended, never complete activity of jointly constructing our future, not as a realization of a shared vision, but as emerging courses of action that make sense of going on together' (Ibid.),

albeit 'without clear outcomes in mind (...) [but not by] acting randomly without intent' (Ibid.).

Similarities with my practice of working live

The general similarity between Shaw's and my way of working is of course that we both work from the perspective of understanding organizations as complex responsive processes of relating. In the following I will use my *working live practice routines* to highlight some of the specific similarities between our ways of working life.

1. Presencing – becoming aware of our subjective experiencing of what is happening in our minds and bodies, and around us as it is happening and be able to work with it appropriately

The first similarity between our ways of working with clients relates to the importance we both attach to being present to oneself, others and the situation around us. In order to work live well, that is, to negotiate our way forward individually and collectively in each emerging moment based on our transitory understandings of the past and our action guiding anticipations of the future – or in using Shaw's question, 'How are we making sense of ourselves and how do we go on from here?' (Ibid., p. 156) – we must become aware of and inquire into our 'ongoing local situated communicative activity between experiencing bodies that give rise to intentions, decisions and actions, toll-making and tool-using' (Ibid., p. 171).

2. Raising & Thinking – talking openly about issues, thoughts, or sensations that are alive for us and that we think/feel are of relevance to the conversation we are involved in, and consciously and deliberately developing new thoughts

I agree with Shaw that as organisation consultants we can support the process of ourselves and our clients becoming present to the 'process of prospective sense-making rather than only attempt to piece together a picture of our situation that we may then seek to change' (Ibid., p. 70) by helping to raise issues, emotions, and thoughts that we experience as being present in the communicative process, but are unspoken due to whatever reasons. But not raising the potentially different, difficult or anxiety-provoking aspects of our subjective experiencing can mute the possibility of novelty emerging in our being together and increase the 'likelihood of people constructing the familiar' (Ibid., p. 32) instead of people's thinking and 'acting into the unknown (...) [being] enhanced' (Ibid.). As I have described before like Shaw I see my role in this process of helping novelty emerge by 'participating in the conversation in a way that helps to hold open the interplay of sense-making rather longer than would occur in my absence' (Ibid., p. 33).

3. Reframing & Nexting – experimenting with different explanatory frames that might have the potential to bring us into closer contact with our lived experience, and making *next moves* in our continual conversational process that could potentially be helpful in what we are trying to do together

Two other ways in which both Shaw and I attempt to *hold the interplay of sense-making open longer* is by helping our clients to reframe their familiar ways of thinking, feeling and acting by making unconventional *nexting* moves and by suggesting alternative perspectives. For instance, in a first conversation with a potential client Shaw notices that

(...) all my attention from the beginning of the call was to respond to John in a way that did not continue the familiar, 'professional' patterning of our responses so that we could voice our experience differently. (Ibid., p. 30)

In another conversation with clients Shaw suggests to them 'that maybe the solution [to the fact that the coffee breaks are very useful, but the rest of the time is a poor return on the time invested] is a meeting designed as a prolonged coffee break' (Ibid., p. 15) in which the experienced effectiveness and liveliness of the conversations might emerge because

(...) no-one has overall control over who speaks to whom about what, and yet patterns of response to the issues being addressed (or not!) in the formal meeting seem to emerge speedily. (Ibid., p. 15)

Differences with my practice of working live

Beyond what I can derive from her writing I do not know how Shaw actually works live because I have only met her once as a fellow participant of an improvisation workshop. However, as we have just seen, even though the above similarities are only based on her writing, they are quite significant. In short, it seems that we work in very similar ways based on the same or at least on very similar assumptions. Does that therefore mean there are no differences in our ways of working? I am not sure I can answer that question in relation to *ways of working* beyond pure speculation. However, I do think there are four aspects in my *theorizing* that inform my way of working live that are different to Shaw's or at least are not mentioned by her.

- **How we think about the notion of practice:** Shaw argues that 'the more professionalized an activity becomes, the more codified' (Ibid., p. 96) it gets and thus a 'systematic practice discourse of word and deed develops which increasingly comes to police the very terms in which the ongoing contesting of the practice is conducted' (Ibid.). In contrast to this view of practice as 'a knowingful doing' (Ibid.) that feels too binary to me I see the constant development of one's practice, in this case the practice of working live, as an iterative and paradoxical process of knowing and not knowing at the same time, of developing existing and new ways of practice while holding them lightly.

Therefore I do not share Shaw's view that deliberately developing one's practice causes a 'sense of being constrained in a prison one is helping to sustain' (Ibid., p. 97) but rather as creating a lively iterative process of being grounded (based on what has worked well in the past) and free (to experiment) at the same time.

- **That I explicitly speak about aware selfing:** In contrast to Shaw I explicitly draw attention to the importance of how we think about *our* self for the practice of working live, and therefore investigate and describe the negative impacts that the illusion of having a fixed, separate 'ontological self' (Aaronson cited in Safran, 2003 p. 52) that needs protecting can have on working live. I conclude this investigation with highlighting the need to hold the paradoxical tension of *continually creating a psychological sense of self and at the same time not creating a sense of an ontological, independent self*.
- **That I differentiate between being *implicitly conscious* and *explicitly conscious or aware of something specific*:** In contrast to Shaw I differentiate between being *implicitly conscious* and being *explicitly conscious of or aware of something*. I go on to say that in order for something to be experienced and remembered as a distinct subjective now-moment it must enter one's awareness. Subjectively perceived distinctive now-moments can in some way and out of some reason special significance for us and thus pierce through our *threshold* degree of implicit consciousness into our awareness, which I define as the ability to become mindful of or present to the very process of our experiencing as it happens and thus be able to remember and recall it afterwards, and work with it in our attempts to next well.
- **How I describe the phenomena of the presenting micro moment and the 5-part movement that *is* the presenting moment:** In contrast to Shaw I have identified and described in detail the phenomenal aspects of the presenting moment, that is, a trigger event, a very tangible bodily sensation, a sense of time slowing, a sense of connection to myself and at the same time to the other people who are part of this particular subjective now-moment, a noticeable and conscious intention to help make something generative happen next, and finally, a palpable sense of bodily relaxation after having decided what to do (and/or not to do) next. This in turn has enabled me to further expended the conventional three-part notion of the '*living present*' (Ibid., p. 46, her emphasis) in which 'the past (...) helps us recognize the future and give[s] it meaning, yet the future is also changing the meaning of the very past with which we recognize the future' (Ibid.) into the five-part movement that *is* the presenting moment as I have shown above. In my view this is a useful expansion because it provides us with a finer way of differentiating the micro-happenings in the presenting moment while attempting to work live well.

Reflection

What is there, beyond the mountain, if not the man? (Bonatti cited in House, 2010 p. iii)⁶⁵

Question: At the end of these last few months of being engaged in the third inquiry cycle into your practice of working live, what would you say is most figural for you right now?

Answer: That is a very difficult question, indeed. I have discovered so much about how I work live and how I can further develop that way of working, that it is difficult to pick out one aspect. But when I now think about your question, I would say that the first important factor for me is that working live is not simply a solipsistic fantasy of mine, but my clients and colleagues seem to notice and appreciate this way of working and the results it helps to create, however transitory they might be. And secondly, I have learned that working live well is not just a particular way of consulting, but also a way of engaging with oneself, others, and the world.

Q: In our last conversation you said you were interested in understanding more about *shifting from awareness to concentration*. Do you think you have made any progress on that question?

A: Yes, I think so, although I have changed my terminology somewhat to hopefully express more precisely what I mean by this shift. As I have just pointed out I now think it makes more intuitive sense to speak about the significant difference (in terms of the intensity of one's presence to an experience) between being *implicitly conscious in general* and being *explicitly conscious or aware of something in particular*. What I mean with this is that it feels markedly different to me to be *implicitly conscious* (that is, not sleeping) while going through my routine everyday activities, like driving a car, walking down a street or sitting in a meeting for instance, and those moments in which something special (according to my subjective perception) happens that pierces through the threshold degree of my implicit consciousness and suddenly *wakes me up*, that is, causes me to become present to this particular subjective now-moment, much like shifting from white light to a laser beam.

Q: You write that these subjective aware now-moments are very short and that you and most people are not able to sustain such a focussed laser-sharp awareness of something for longer than a few seconds. Why do you think that is?

A: I don't really know why that is, I am neither a psychologist nor a neuroscientist. However, through my own daily meditation practice of observing my minding process operating, I know that at least my mind has a tendency to jump from one random thought to the next, from one random bodily sensation to the next, only

⁶⁵ The late Walter Bonatti is widely regarded as one of the best mountaineers of all times.

ever being able to fully concentrate on one thing for very brief moments. There are many descriptions and explanations of this phenomenon in the literature, but one that makes most intuitive sense to me comes from Kahneman, who writes that 'For most of us, most of the time, the maintenance of a coherent train of thought and the occasional engagement in effortful thinking also requires self-control' (2011 p. 40). He goes on to say that 'It is now a well established proposition that both self-control and cognitive effort are forms of mental work' (2001 p. 41), both of which 'require (...) attention and effort' (Ibid.) He concludes his argument by writing that 'It is the mark of effortful activities that they interfere with each other, which is why it is difficult or impossible to conduct several at once' (Ibid. p. 23), or any one of them for extended periods of time, I would add. If you have ever tried to fully concentrate on your left thumb and on right knee at the very same time, you will know that that is impossible to do.

Q: Hearing you mention thumb and knee, you write that you have realized that working live can happen at different degree of detail. Was that surprising to you to discover that?

A: Actually, very much so, although in hindsight it seems obvious. I initially thought that working live and nexting as well happen at the microscopic degree of seconds only. However, in the meantime I have realized that the question of what is going on right now and what do we therefore want to contribute to have happen next can be looked at any degree of detail – seconds, hours, days, and so forth. For instance, working live and nexting well in a meeting, say, about customer service might mean to realize during the conversation in the morning that the topic requires a few other people to be involved necessitating a postponement of the conversation. In my view today working live and nexting well on any degree of detail require an explicit basis formed by one's informing theories and an understanding of the global patterns emerging from people's multitude of minute gestures. Without that as frame, if you allow me this spacial metaphor, knowing the appropriate next moves is impossible.

Q: Let me stay with nexting as topic for my last question. I know that you are an admirer of Gerhard Richter, one of the most well known contemporary painters. Richter's Cage paintings, these six large (almost 3x3 metre), abstract paintings consist of up to 30 layers of oil paint each covered over or modifying by the next. Storr describes Richter's process of producing these paintings as 'every destruction, painting over, exclusion or suppression of an image brings another one to the surface, (...) a positive manifestation of a negative reflex (...), an affirmation of the destructive force' (2008 p. 86)⁶⁶. Doesn't the same notion of creation and destruction apply to nexting as well?

A: I think nexting and abstract painting are very similar in that both activities are enabled and constrained at the same time by the specific context of the moment and are embodied processes very much influenced by

⁶⁶ Translated by me from the original German text: '(...) jede Ablösung, Übermalung, Ausschliessung oder Unterdrückung eines Bildes bring ein anderes an die Oberfläche, (...) die positive Manifestation eines negative Reflexes (...), eine Affirmation der Zerstörungskraft (...).'

the person doing it. However, there are main differences between these two improvisational activities. In painting over a part of a painting it is inevitable to destroy the previous layer at the very same time. However, I don't think that's a helpful analogy for nexting. Of course in nexting one might *create* something, say, more clarity about what to do next, or one might *destroy* something, say, anxiety of unknown outcomes. But I don't think in nexting creation and destruction necessarily frequently happen at the same time. For me a more enabling way of conceptualizing nexting is to think in terms of including and excluding options in the sense that nexting is a continuous process of evaluating various potential moves and in choosing one of them excluding others.

VIII. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

- The essence of my research findings
- My contribution and its generalizability
- A question for the future
- Beginner's mind

The essence of my research findings

When people focus their attention differently, they are highly likely to take different kinds of actions. (Stacey, 2003b, p. 415)

I recently saw a TV interview with two of Germany's best young extreme climbers, Benedikt Böhm and Sebastian Haag (Retrieved [August 26, 2012] from <http://www.benediktboehm.de/freundschaft-auf-zeit/#freundschaft-auf-zeit/1>), about their movie titled 'Freundschaft auf Zeit'⁶⁷ that examines both their climbing practice and their friendship. In the interview they talk about the challenge of living extremely closely together for weeks on end during their expeditions, sometimes spending endless days in their small two-person tent waiting for the weather to improve. On being asked by the interviewer whether they ever speak about their relationship during these downtimes they said; "No, never; that would be too scary." I think it is telling for how many people I come across in my work go about living that Böhm and Haag have been very close friends and climbing partners for decades, have risked their lives and trusted each other with their lives countless times during these years of speed-climbing 8000+ meter mountains and skiing them back down while at the same time finding it too scary to talk about their deteriorating relationship with each other. Something they today in hindsight admit would have been important to do for their friendship to not get into serious trouble.

For me talking about difficulties in our relating to others reminds me of a one of my favorite quotes from Martin Buber that 'Each of us is encased in armour whose task it is to ward off signs' (cited in Gordon, 2001 p. 141). I think the story of the Böhm and Haag is a good example of the *signs* I think Buber refers to we consciously or unconsciously try to ward off. It seems to me we often get anxious or afraid whenever living becomes too real, too close, and too personal for us. I find it particularly intriguing that we are frequently willing to risk our health, relationships or even lives in the pursuit of activities or goals we consider important, but as soon as a boss, colleague, friend, partner or family member stops us in our tracks and says, "We need to talk", many of us would rather be elsewhere. Indeed, it would be an interesting and legitimate question to ask why is this so?

However, in my research I have not asked this perhaps obvious question that in my view would have very likely led me down the route of a psychodynamic investigation that holds no interest for me because I

⁶⁷ Literally meaning 'Temporary friendship'

disagree with its 'basic assumption of a mind inside a person as an internal world and the social outside of the persons as a system' (Stacey, 2003a p. 329), i.e. the Kantian *both-and* split I have referred to earlier. In contrast, I resonate much more with the notion of Watzlawick and his colleagues that

(...) we can take the situation as it exists here and now, without ever understanding why it got to be that way, and in spite of our ignorance of its origin and evolution we can do something with (or about) it. (Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch, 1974 p. 83)

Therefore, in this research I have been interested in investigating the practice of *working live* from *within* my experience of participating in the continuous emergence of transitory moment after transitory moment in order to understand how to get into aware contact with what I subjectively experience in each moment of nowness, a phenomenon Shotter calls *transitory understandings*, and with what I want to contribute to emerge in the next moment, a phenomenon Shotter calls *action guiding anticipations*. In other words, I have investigated my 'spontaneously responsive, living bodily activity' (Shotter 2011 p. 4) from within its situation by asking the question in what way a *living process perspective* of the 'moving but invisible' (Shotter citing Anderson, *Ibid.*, p. 75) phenomena of human living (as supposed to, say, PowerPoint slides) can facilitate the emergence of more free-flowing and flexible patterned interactions *within* and *between* ourselves and others so that 'new possibilities of relation are engendered, new interconnections are made, [and] new 'shapes' of experience can emerge' (Shotter, 2011 p. 214).

I make the point that in contrast to the above temporal emergent and self-organizing process perspective the conventional scientific, engineering- and systems-based cause-effect approaches to *managing* change in organizations are largely grounded in and focused on firstly, what I have called *as-if abstractions*, that is, implicitly seeing and treating the phenomena of organizational life as if they were things that can be steered and controlled, and secondly, on splitting the experiencer and the experience. I regard this unconscious 'thing-think'-ing (Hayward, 1987 p. 236) or 'Aboutness (monologic)-thinking (...) [that] is unresponsive to another's expressions (...) [and] works simply in terms of a thinker's 'theoretical pictures'' (Shotter, 2011 p. 214, his emphasis) as a significant hindrance to getting into aware contact with our experiencing from within the moment of experiencing itself, an attitude and practice Shotter calls 'Witness (dialogic)-thinking (...) a form of reflective interaction that involves coming into living contact with an other's living being, with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their 'works' (*Ibid.*, his emphasis). In fact I have experienced in my research process that in order to be able to be in dialogue with another, one must also be in contact with one's own living being, one's silent utterances, one's bodily expressions, one's words, and one's works because in fact the 'Individual and social are simply two aspects of one process – they are the singular and plural of relating between human bodies' (Stacey, 2003a p. 2).

An important implication of this temporal process view is that these continuous and self-organizing social processes have neither pre-determined, inevitable steps nor final or ideal end-states, but *are* simply constantly arising and disappearing transitory manifestations. That means the changing from emerging

moment to emerging moment is only partly conditioned by what has gone on before and by what is anticipated in the future. That in turn implies for change of individuals and organizations that although both *are* constantly changing interactive social processes from emerging moment to emerging moment for these processes of constructing and relating to ourselves and each other to not develop into or get stuck in repetitive or *going-through-the-motions* patterns, but become alive and real, 'free-flowing and flexible' (Stacey, 2003b p. 364), it is essential for us 'to train ourselves in a new "attitude" (...) toward our surroundings (...) [and] to relate or orient ourselves in a new way' (Shotter, 2011 p. 218, his emphasis). I am calling this way of being and working *working live* and describe it as a conscious embodied improvisational moment-to-moment activity of choicefulness and at the same time spontaneity and intuition because the transitory outcomes of our individual and collective moves can neither be controlled nor predicted, but can significantly impact people and the world at large.

I define the term *working live well* as *helping my clients to address issues that are real and important to them and that they feel they cannot address alone while at the same time being aware of my subjective experiencing at a particular moment and expressing it congruently and with generative intent*. The elements constituting the essence of the experience of working live well I subsequently discovered through my research are the following:

- A **trigger event** (lasting 1 – 2 seconds) that seems to have some special significance for me *pierces* through my personal *routine* or *default* degree of consciousness into awareness. This discovery made me realize and appreciate the significant difference between what I call *implicit consciousness*, that is, the default degree of *white-light-like* attention with which we go about a large part of our waking day, and *awareness*, that is, the *laser-sharp-like* concentration on one particular, special occurrence at a moment in time, which we can recall afterwards. The necessity for shifting between white-light-like consciousness and laser-sharp-like awareness seems to be caused by the fact that at best we can perform many simultaneous activities at this superficial level of consciousness, but we can only be really aware of one of them because apparently our brain can only ever fully concentrate on one 'effortful' (Kahneman, 2011 p. 23) task at any one time.
- A very **tangible bodily sensation** such as increased heartbeat, a sense of aliveness, an energy surge, or anxiety that seems to accompany or follow this trigger event and the same time a strong sense of being **calm, competent, and grounded**.
- A keen sensation of the subjectively experienced **time slowing** down markedly. Most of the subjective now-moments I have investigated had an objective duration of between 2-30 seconds, but the subjectively experienced time felt significantly longer than that.

- A strong **sense of connection** to myself and at the same time to the other people who are part of this particular subjective now-moment.
- A noticeable and **conscious intention** to help make something generative happen next.
- A palpable sense of **bodily relaxation** after having decided what to do (and/or not to do) next.

Working live well is an explicit and thought-through embodied activity and at the same time it requires careful, yet courageous moment-to-moment improvisation because the transitory outcomes of one's moves can neither be controlled nor predicted, and mistakes can significantly impact people. It is important to note that by improvisation I do not mean *just showing up and winging it*, but being highly flexible, intuitive and spontaneous enabled by a thorough understanding of and proficiency in the theoretical and technical aspects of one's craft.

So, what then is it like for me to work live? In a nutshell, the essence of working live well for me is the delicate balancing act of living with the various paradoxical tensions I have identified and described. To not unconsciously give in to these tensions and thus collapse the paradoxes by only concentrating on one aspect of them, for instance to be either spontaneous or thoughtful, takes a lot of awareness as well as cognitive and emotional energy (that I do not always have – in particular in moments when my fear of disapproval and my need for approval get in the way of holding my views lightly and working with my clients with empathy and what I have earlier called *passionate non-attachment*). However, in situations when that is not the case and my clients and I are working live well and we can 'create, harness, and redistribute energy with a purpose' (S. Millstam, 2012, pers. comm., August 14), it feels effortless.

In paying very close attention to getting into aware contact with what is emerging at this very moment right here and with what I want to contribute to emerge next I have realized that we have much more latitude in each moment as to which move to make next than we conventionally realize. I believe this is so precisely because the social processes of human living are continuous and self-organizing in the present moment and have neither fixed, pre-determined *steps* nor final *end-states*, but are constantly changing from emerging moment to emerging moment, even if these changes are often too subtle to be noticeable.

In addition to the aspects of *working live well* I have just highlighted, becoming aware of and working with the following three *focus areas* is of paramount importance. That is, firstly, to understand the moment-to-moment complex responsive process of your interacting with yourself and others here now, secondly, to notice the global patterns emerging from these myriads of local interactions, and thirdly, to be aware of your 'action guiding anticipations' (Shotter, 2011 p. 25) or nexting intentions in terms of understanding how your very next move can 'embody the end in the steps that you are immediately taking' (Mead, 1967 p. 383) in the context of the global pattern.

I have identified five *working live practice routines* that in my experience facilitate my own and my clients' 'witness' (Shotter, 2011 p. 2) way of working:

- **Presencing** – Becoming aware of our subjective experiencing of what we perceive as happening in our minds and bodies, and around us as it is taking place as a basis for nexting well, that is, for new possibilities to emerge.
- **Raising** – Talking more openly about issues, thoughts, or sensations that are alive for us and we think/feel have relevance to the conversation we are involved in at a particular moment.
- **Thinking** – Consciously and deliberately developing new thoughts in the present moment.
- **Reframing** – Loosening our grip on what we believe to be *the reality* and experiment with different explanatory frames we feel/think have the potential to bring us into closer contact with our lived experience.
- **Nexting** – Determine what it is that I/they can do next in our continual conversational process that could potentially be a helpful move in what we are trying to do together. In my writing I have referred to *nexting well* as a shift from a past-oriented *re-acting because of* towards a future-focused *acting in order to*.

Based on my clients' feedback I have shown before I am very confident that working in this way greatly facilitates change towards liveliness and fluidity in conversational patterns that *are* the organisation or in the words of one client of mine 'effecting real change to behaviours, which have been resolutely difficult to change in the past' (M. Day, 2012, pers. comm., May 25). However, I do want to stress one last time that in working from a living process perspective I neither believe in nor claim that it is possible to set desired change objectives and then achieve them with *the working live method*. My only claim as a result of my research is that working live well makes it more likely that the complex responsive process of local interactions that *are* us and thus the resulting overall patterns become or remain fresh, flexible, fluid, and thus more accountable.

My contribution and its generalizability

(...) to grasp the not-as-yet said utterances, or the not-as-yet performed act, the as-yet-nonexistent activities involved in approaching vents in our surroundings differently (...) cannot be done simply by applying an already existing theory (...).
(Shotter, 2011 p. 75)

As I have said in the Abstract of this thesis I do regard my findings as a distinctive contribution to the existing academic writings related to the practice of working live (Mead, 1967, 2002; Blumer, 1969; Varela, Thompson

and Rosch, 1993; Weick, 1998; Barrett, 1998; Varela and Shear, 1999; Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Shaw, 2002; Kaplan, 2002; Kamoche, Cunha and Cunha, 2002; Stacey, 2001, 2003a, 2005a+b, 2009, 2011; Stern, 2004; Griffin and Stacey, 2005; Shaw and Stacey, 2006; Shotter, 1993, 2005, 2010, 2011). My reason for saying this is twofold:

1. Generally speaking, the majority of the existing works related to working live consist mainly of theoretical reasonings about various aspects of the living process perspective (e.g. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present*, 2002) and/or of analytical how-is-it-now dissections and descriptions of such relational aspects as everyday conversations (e.g. Shotter, *Conversational Realities*, 1993). In contrast, I see my contribution as working and writing *from within* my own experiencing of working live. In other words, this thesis supports the shift in emphasis – started mainly by Streatfield (2001), Shaw (2002) and Stacey (2003b) – from *theorizing about* complex relational situations to *reporting from within* the experiencing of such messy relational situations in which we have ‘to think ‘in the moment’, while ‘in motion’ (Shotter, 2011 p. 1, his emphasis).
2. Specifically speaking, I think that my combination of the six temporal process theories – process philosophy, social constructionism, present moment, complex responsive process perspective, non-self teaching, and improvisation – into the living process perspective focusing on *knowing from within the processual nature of our individual and collective thinking and doing* helps myself and others to ‘notice what has not been noticed before, and in so doing, to understand how it can be transformed’ (Shotter, 2011 p. 218). In my view, the inclusion of the relatively unfamiliar notions of *aware selfing* and *focusing* are particularly useful lenses for working live well. Furthermore, I believe that my distinction between *being situated in the present* and *working live*, between being *implicitly conscious in general*, that is, not sleeping, and being *explicitly aware of and engaged with something specific*, my description of the essential aspects of *what it is like* to work live, my model and description of the five-part movement of the presenting moment, the identification of the various paradoxical tensions potentially arising in working live, and finally and potentially most interestingly, the identification and description of the *five working live practice routines* represent the distinctive details of my research.

Let me move on now to the question of generalizability, that is, in what way my findings can be useful to others. In the chapter on research methodology I have said that in this research I want to produce practical insights for myself and my fellow practitioners. In addition, I have claimed that good qualitative research ‘can evoke *Vicarious Experience* which leads to *Improved Practice*’ (Stake and Turnbull, 1982, their emphasis). I think the below conversation with my client Tony⁶⁸ about these two points might be a useful entry into the discussion if my research findings can indeed be generalized in some way and therefore may potentially be of use to other organisation consulting practitioners.

⁶⁸ (T. Hunt, 2012, pers. comm., June 5)

Hartmut: *How do you feel when working with me?*

Tony: *When I am working well with you, I feel three things beginning to happen. Paradoxically I begin to feel calm, alert and apprehensive (...), I begin to feel focused (I experience this focusing as a physical experience rather than as some abstract concept; it's rather like adjusting binoculars to match my personal eyesight, what I am looking at in my mind's eye seems to become clearer and peripheral things are no longer in my eye-line to distract me); I feel a sense of 'energy-in-readiness' as if I am preparing for some strenuous physical activity like climbing a ladder.*

I feel that I am being invited to enter a dimly lit space like a cave. (...) this space feels safe and prepared for me (so I enter calmly, but I need to be alert and keep my wits about me). I do not know what awaits me and it may be less safe than it appears. As we begin to bring light into this space, unknown and unexpected things can appear, strange shadows can emerge, precarious paths lead away from the entrance. Some familiar loops of thought and ideas may not survive in this space, some uncomfortable new opportunities may unfold (so there is my sense of apprehension). I have a strong visual sense of this. Maybe your custom of wearing black contributes!

Hartmut: *When I am at my best working with you, what have been the results for you and or your clients?*

Tony: *[Reading about your principles of working live](...) has caused me to work with (...) [the food company we discussed a few weeks ago] in a way that we all seem to feel is useful and generative and which is much more 'open' than any of my previous work. With 2-3 shareholders and some of the managers we spend 2-3 days a month together in various sessions, and whilst I never arrive 'empty-handed' I have worked with them in a much more 'present' way than I have ever worked with any client before. We are exploring the opportunity that we have for developing the business and the team in very fluid discussions.*

(...) primarily we sit and discuss what has been happening in the business since my last visit, what we can learn from this and what we might try in the next month. We also working anthropologically looking at things like the language in the business (we have decided that we no longer produce our products in 'the factory' or 'the production facility' but in 'the kitchen'), the stories that are told amongst the staff, the pictures that hang on the walls.

Now I am not suggesting any linear process of cause-and-effect here. But since we began this process the management away-day has resulted in a great acceleration in the activity in the business, the rate of new brand development has been transformed, relations with customers have improved to the extent that accounts threatening to de-list us are taking new lines from us, we are winning awards for our products, sales have gone from a dire situation (production staff were made redundant) to being ahead of budget and the shareholders have agreed some valuable new policies for their own behaviour which will make more money available for re-investment.

Hartmut: *If you compare working with me to working with other consultants, what if any is the difference for you?*

Tony: *With you I have been more conscious of space being created in which I can make discoveries. In the dedication to my AMOC dissertation I thanked you for 'introducing me to several selves that I had not previously met' (which is why I enter the 'space' with some apprehension, not knowing what I should discover). But in the space created you were able to provide positive input and guidance.*

Hartmut: *If you had to describe my consulting style in one word what would that word be?*

Tony: *Illuminating.*

Based on the above conversation with Tony and with various other clients and colleagues who, like Tony, have read and with whom I have discussed the practice-related parts of this thesis I am convinced that in particular my work on describing the essential aspects of the phenomenon of working live and the resulting practice routines *from within* my experiencing of working in that way offer myself and my readers 'plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact' (van Manen, 1990 p. 9) with ourselves and our own practice of working well in the continuous and iterative process of developing transitory understandings and action guiding anticipations in each emerging moment.

As I have already explained in the methodology section, my findings cannot be used as scientific generalizations, but in my view they can indeed be used as *naturalistic generalizations* (Stake and Turnbull, 1982) that facilitate the arising of 'self-generated knowings (...) for each reader, each practitioner, [when] new [vicarious] experience (...) interacts with her existing naturalistic generalizations, formed previously from her particular experience' (Ibid.). In order to have an indication of the degree to which my findings are appropriate to serve as naturalistic generalisations I have offered these four criteria – (1) quality of being present, (2) degree of vicarious experiencing, (3) coherence of writing and conclusions, and (4) resonance with conclusions. Let's assess my thesis on these criteria:

1. **Quality of being present** – To the degree do I show up in my working and writing and am reflective about my perspectives, emotions, actions, claims, and conclusions?

It seems to me that Marshall's and Reason's notion of the researcher's 'quality of being (...) *there* (...) as an awake, choiceful, reflective human person, rather than as a researcher working strictly in role and with techniques to follow' (2007, their emphasis) is a useful indication of the quality of my being present in my working and writing. Have I been *strictly in the role of researcher working with techniques to follow*? Definitely not, and I think my writing shows this very clearly. But does that automatically mean that I have been an *awake, choiceful, reflective human person*? I do not think so, at least not all of the time. However, I do believe in all of the described encounters with my clients and myself I have been a human person connected to other human persons rather than a holder of the role of researcher of people. *Being a human person who is there* in this context means to me that I have consciously tried to be aware,

choiceful, and reflective, and in those instances in which I wasn't I either noticed it during or after the event, and, more importantly for the question of generalization, reflected on it afterwards in writing, as for instance the encounter with my client Ivan* (see page 86) exemplifies.

2. **Degree of vicarious experiencing** – To what degree do I provide enough, sufficiently detailed descriptions of encounters with my clients so that my readers are able to get a vivid, bodily sense of these situations without having been there?

I do believe that my thesis is full of *thick descriptions* of encounters between myself and my clients that offer the reader a wealth of 'in-depth particulars' (Melrose, 2009) about my experience of attempting to work live that detail 'not just (...) [my and my clients'] behavior, but its context as well, such that the behavior becomes meaningful to an outsider' (Retrieved [March 18, 2013] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thick_description). In my view, these numerous and detailed descriptions of real life consulting situations enable the readers of the thesis, despite not having experienced the situations themselves, to have felt, vicarious experiences that in combination with their own previous experiences and insights can lead to new ways of seeing and being in the world as exemplified by the comments of my client Tony above.

3. **Coherence of writing and conclusions** – To what degree are my writing and my findings internally coherent and transparent?

Another way of thinking about the coherence of my writing and my conclusions is to ask if I account well for my positions and my readers are thus able to easily follow the logic of the conclusions I draw? In other words, do I make assertions without explaining them, do I draw conclusions that are not justified by the *data* I have captured, or do I maybe even invent *deus ex machina* moves in which 'a seemingly unsolvable problem is suddenly and abruptly resolved, with the contrived and unexpected intervention of some new event, character, ability, or object' (Retrieved [March 18, 2013] from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deus_ex_machina)? I would answer all of these questions with an empathic *No*. I do indeed feel that my thesis has a strong internal logic leading to clear and comprehensible conclusions that are in line with and supported by the available data. However, in hindsight I also feel that the thesis could have been written more elegantly without so many diverse, and potentially confusing factors (such as the four paradoxical tensions, the six aspects of the working live orientation, the five working live routines). But be that as it may, in the final analysis I do believe that that there is significant coherence in my arguments and in my conclusions.

4. **Resonance with conclusions** – To what degree do my readers resonate with the conclusions I draw from my research?

In order to address the question of the readers' resonance with my conclusions I want to come back to two points I have mentioned earlier, namely, that 'if someone experiences something as self-evident, then someone else is not likely to experience it as absurd' (Langdrige, 2007 p. 155) and if 'the insight is self-validating and if done well, others will see the text as a statement of the experience itself' (Lavery, 2003 p. 23). Although I do not think that Langdrige's point is valid universally, I do believe it is valid *within* domains or groups of common practice. For instance, the bodily experience of excitement due to increased levels of testosterone when dealing with enormous sums of money is likely self-evident within the group of male investment bankers (Retrieved [March 18, 2013] from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/testosterone-to-blame-for-banking-crash-say-tory-mps-2348912.html>), but possibly not to other common practice groups, such as quantum physicists looking for the Higgs boson at the CERN institute or *train-spotters* trying to spot all of a certain type of locomotive or carriage. In other words, the question is, are my conclusions self-evident within the community of organizational consultants who work from or at least can adopt a temporal process perspective while reading my thesis? Tony's comments above that are typical for the sort of reactions I have received from colleagues and clients who have read (the practice-related parts of) my thesis and with whom I have discussed my findings lead me to believe that the readers' resonance with my conclusions is high.

A question for the future

Finally, I want to briefly raise a question that I am interested in going forward: How I can further develop my ability to work live well in addition to and outside of working with my clients? Mountain climbers, for instance, can and do deliberately experiment with and practise all kinds of capabilities and skills before they climb in earnest: difficult moves, endurance, speed, bodily flexibility, knots, abseiling, two-finger pull-ups, to name just a few. But what, if anything, can I as an organisation consultant practise outside of working with clients to further develop my ability to work live well?

First of all, I do think that it is absolutely feasible to improve the proficiency of one's practice, be that collecting stamps, riding horses, waling on a high wire, or as in my case, consulting in the moment. Based not only on my own very limited observations but mainly on the extensive research into the development of expertise (Ericsson 2004 and 2006) that has been conducted over the last 30 years or so it seems clear that

'talent is overrated' (Colvin, 2008) and that the 'factor that seems to explain the most about great performance is something the researchers call deliberate practice' (Ibid., p. 7).

During the last year I paid very close attention not only to working live and nexting well in my subjective now-moments, but equally to what I can do outside of my consulting work to improve my proficiency in these practices. Not surprisingly, I have discovered that concentrating on my five practice routines, that is, the critical aspects of my working live is vital. Furthermore, I have realised that preparing well before I actually work with my clients and reviewing my work afterwards is extremely helpful, as I have outlined in my methodology chapter.

In music or theatre people rehearse songs or scenes, but what can I train or rehearse when not working with clients that is directly related to my practice of working live and my five practice routines? I find this a very difficult question for organisation consultants. If I had to answer it right now, I would say that developing my awareness (through meditation and focusing), my spontaneity (through improvisation classes), and my grounding in theory (through reading and discussion with colleagues and other experts) is very important. However, these activities are to a large extent *only* enabling activities for my practice routines. The question what other practices more directly related to my client work I can train or rehearse outside of working with them is something to investigate in the future.

Beginner's mind

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few. (Suzuki 1970 p. 21)

There is a lot more I could say about what I have learned about myself, or rather the continuous process of *making me*, through this intense inquiry into the practice of working live well that goes far beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I want to conclude with only two brief comments.

Firstly, I want to reiterate the essential point I have stressed many times in my thesis. Through my research I have shown that in those instances of acute presencing and delicate balancing, that is, when I stop separating *myself* from my experiencing, when I transcend my thing-thinking habits, favorite mental categories, behavioral routines and pre-meditated moves, when I let go of my desire to control outcomes, when I am *here now* despite my prior experiences and knowing *while at the same time* consciously realizing the patterning of the communicative process within myself, and between myself, my clients and our contexts, then I am working live well with my clients. In those moments I did indeed 'become wire', as the high-wire artist Philippe Petit (1985 p. 22) so aptly put it. In short, in my experience becoming consciously aware of my subjective experiencing within each emerging presenting moment and at the same time of the overall patterning out of which this particular transitory moment of now-ness has emerged while *nexting* consciously, that is, trying to make sense of this very

(...) first-time, unique event(...), and what can usefully be expressed in relation to (...) [it], without “loosing the phenomenon”, that is, without losing the novelty expressed in first-time occurrence by assimilating it to already existing rules, principles, or conventions’ (Shotter, 2011 p. 219, his emphasis)

is essential in order to work live well and thus create the possibility to contribute to the conversational micro and macro processes within and between ourselves to become alive, free-flowing, and flexible.

Finally, I would like to thank you for reading my account of working live. I do hope this reading experience has been meaningful to you as a vicarious experience. If some of my thoughts and conclusions prove to be useful to you in the future ‘when [being] disoriented within the middle of a bewildering situation – to pause for a moment to engage (...) [yourself] in some imaginative work’ (Shotter, 2011 p. 3) and a conscious, generative *nexting* move then I have achieved my objective of wanting this research be useful to myself and others in understanding how to participate in and facilitate the process of changing within organizations in a way that resonates more with our lived experience than the conventional, positivist change methods.

IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Doctorate research about *Working Live*

Your involvement in the above study, should you agree, would consist of taking part in a virtual conversation with me via email and/or telephone that will take about 60-90 minutes of your time.

If you are willing to participate, please sign that you agree to the following:

- I, the undersigned, voluntarily agree to take part in the Doctorate study conducted by Hartmut Stuelten on "Working live – What implications does a process view of human living have for an organization consultant in supporting change in organizations?"
- I have been given a full explanation by Hartmut Stuelten of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been advised about any discomfort and possible ill-effects on my well-being which may result. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.
- I agree to co-operate with the research. I shall inform Hartmut Stuelten immediately if I suffer any deterioration of any kind in my health or well-being, or experience any unexpected or unusual reactions to the study.
- I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of volunteer
(BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signed

Date

Name of researcher HARTMUT STUELTEN

Signed

Date