An insider Action Research study focusing on synergy realizations during post-merger integration phase between competing organizations

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ABSTRACT

Mergers and acquisitions are gaining a lot of prominence in global corporate dynamics as a strategic way for organizations to grow and diversify rapidly. The significance of post-merger integration cannot be overstated (Shrivastava, 1986). Although the main purpose behind organizational mergers and acquisitions is "One plus one makes three", most post-merger integration studies focus upon failures (Dutta, Dutta, and Das, 2011). This research study is based in the context of post-merger integration between two competing firms and presents an empirical Action Research study focusing on "synergy realization".
This research study builds upon Clayton's (2010) work on Complex Adaptive System (CAS) (Stacey, 2011) for realizing synergies amidst post-merger integration. CAS has been complemented by Complexity Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey, 2007) which provides some control over the otherwise unpredictable nature of CAS. This study also attempts to utilize proven methodologies and methods oriented around organizational behavior, change management, emergence, co-evolution, and other leadership concepts that are anchored in Mode 2 research.

The research methods, as well as the issues related to the research context, have continuously evolved while conducting this research study due to reflections offered by the double loop learning process. Although the primary focus of this study was to identify synergy realizations during the merger integration phase, the research study also explored the underpinning issues, problems, and challenges faced by organizational members while adjusting to or reconciling the different ways of functioning and behaving that were affecting synergy realizations. This study therefore also includes findings associated with organizational merger associated concerns such as interpersonal issues, human resource, knowledge management, communication, organizational management, leadership, and organizational ethos.

This study makes 3 main contributions. First, this research study presents innovative insights towards resolving some of the mysteries attached with organizational mergers, by focusing upon positive merger objectives through synergy realizations by heeding to Clayton's (2010) appeal for scholars and practitioners to go beyond traditional M&A methodologies. Second, this study presents an empirical account of some of the Mode 2 knowledge creation concepts such as Action Research, CAS, CLT, SSM and LiC, which has the potential of inspiring similar experimentation in organizational learning and management research. And third, this study demonstrates how researching practitioners can make an impact on successful adaptations to organizational change management situations such as the ones presented by organizational mergers by bridging the gap between theory and practice, and building upon research-oriented knowledge through AR and professional doctorate programmes.

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this Thesis constitutes my own work, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

I declare that the Thesis describes original work that has not previously been presented for the award of any other degree of any institution.

Signed,

Ravi Tahilramani

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research study is based in the context of post-merger integration of a large merger between competing firms during a period that can be referred to as "operational combination phase" (Seo and Hill, 2005) or "integration phase" (Schweiger, 2002).

The research study presents an empirical Action Research (AR) focusing on "synergy realizations" during the post-merger integration phase, and makes use of the principles of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) as the primary theoretical framework. I have conducted the study as an insider Action Researcher i.e. while working as a full-time employee directly affected by the research context.

This document has been written as a first person narrative providing a high degree of personalization but at the same time maintaining an academic focus through use of relevant citations and references from respective textbooks and journals in adherence to the high standards set by the University of Liverpool towards partial fulfillment of a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) thesis project.

1.1 Why this research topic has been chosen?

Mergers and acquisitions have become one of the strategic means in global corporate dynamics for organizations to grow and diversify rapidly, and the significance of post-merger integration phase cannot be overstated (Shrivastava, 1986). A red-hot topic in my organization at the time of planning my thesis research project was a merger with one of our biggest competitor, which was in the post-merger integration phase. This seemed to me like a good area to research upon that would gain me the required support and resources to carry out AR at my workplace.

Upon conducting some preliminary literature review I learned that the probability of failure for mergers of global organizations is at least 50% (Clayton, 2010; Larsson and Finkelstein, 1999) with post-merger integration challenges being the primary root cause for failures. Due to such high rate of failures in merger integrations, there is vast extant of research literature available around understanding the underpinning failure factors but few researchers seem to have focused upon effective "synergy realizations", which in fact is one of the key reasons and a major driver behind mergers and acquisitions that is envisioned during the pre-merger phase. Despite all the research around merger failures, there has been no measurable impact on failure rates as discussed by Dutta Dutta and Das (2010), Larson and Finkelstein (1999), Marks and Mirvis (2011) and others, which

appears to be a significant gap and concern in research around organizational mergers. When two culturally diverse organizations merge they are likely to face significant challenges associated with merging their functioning and behavior, and "synergy realizations" play an important role in succeeding with the merger. I identified that focusing upon synergy realizations amidst post-merger integration was relevant to my research context, and makes my study interesting for both scholarly and practical stakeholders.

1.2 What is the scope of this research study?

I needed to narrow down on the scope of my research study in order to position my thesis in extant literature and produce actionable knowledge. I also needed to be cognizant of limitations of my sphere of influence within the organization, resources available for this research study, making use of relevant theoretical constructs, and meeting the expectations of scholarly and practical stakeholders. Synergy realization, therefore, had to be defined better for the scope of this research study. In the context of this research study 'synergy realization' should be envisioned as an organizational-level construct concerning all the underpinning issues, problems and challenges faced by organizational members while adjusting to or reconciling to the different ways of functioning and behaving that were affecting synergy realizations. Such problems and challenges are typical of post-merger integrations due to the associated fast-paced change management.

Organizational level synergy is interpreted by many as an abstract concept containing a range of issues. Therefore unless synergy realization is seen in relation to the underpinning disaggregated issues, it is difficult to achieve ambitious goals associated with organizational mergers. Synergy realization is therefore one of the intended outcomes of this study in addition to gaining better understanding of some of the issues and challenges associated with post-merger integrations. Reviewers of this thesis document may like to place emphasis on the research design, critical reflections, double loop learning process, interventions, and questioning insights, in addition to findings since these aspects collectively express the collaborative inquiries and joint actions that shaped up this research study.

Without revealing the identities of the organizations, it is important to highlight that the research has been carried out in the context of a merger between two large multinational organizations who have been long time competitors and are culturally diverse. The dominant organization is an independent foundation originally from Scandinavia while the

organization with about one thirds share in the merged organization belongs to a family owned business based out of Germany. Both organizations have grown in the past years organically as well as inorganically through acquisitions, and both organizations have had a long history and goodwill of over 150 years with global operations in diversified business areas. This study concentrates on real-life business challenges of a small section of the merged organization that focuses on developing, selling and supporting software for the energy, process and maritime industries. The AR participants belong to one of the offices of the researched organization amongst over 400 offices spanning across 100 countries. Synergy realization should therefore be considered as the guiding star for this AR study while the AR process concentrates on manageable and workable issues identified by the Core AR team belonging to one of the business units.

1.3 What Key Concepts are driving this Research Study?

As discussed by Microsoft and Poptech (2016), responsiveness is becoming the key to competitiveness in ever faster moving and interconnected global economy, which is very relevant to organizational mergers, which formed the context of my research study. They further discuss how organizations are shifting their focus from efficiency of process to effectiveness of outcomes in order to succeed, which makes AR an ideal approach due to its ability to generate actionable knowledge. Microsoft and Poptech (2016) also discuss how today's business contexts that are driven by knowledge workers places emphasis on traits and values such as empathy, compassion, trust, and cooperation. The approach to this research study is driven by the principles of Leaderful Practice which encourages working collectively, collaboratively, concurrently, and compassionately (Raelin, 2003).

While conducting literature review, I came across Clayton's (2010) paper titled "Understanding the Unpredictable: Beyond traditional research on mergers and acquisitions" which correlates unpredictable behavior of mergers to Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) and urges researchers and practitioners to go beyond traditional Merger and Acquisition' (M&A) research methodologies in order to bring much required fresh perspectives and contribute towards M&A theory. This paper sparked the idea of building up on CAS as the primary theoretical framework and visualizing post-merger integration characterized by fast-paced changes as the changing landscape or the environment wherein the agents in a sub system (think organizational groups or units) were interacting with each other in order to adapt and while doing so they co-evolved influencing other agents, systems, and the environment. CAS is a systems theory construct based on

relationships, emergence, patterns and iterations between systems that are complex and are constantly adapting to their environment. I built up on this idea and included Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey's (2007) Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) in order to provide the right kind of "bounded instability" for CAS to foster through managing administrative, adaptive and enabling leadership functions. Checkland's (1992) Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer's (2014) Learning in Crisis (LiC) were found to be related concepts and have been included in this study as complementing constructs. All these theories are hungry for empirical examples which potentially make this research study more appealing to scholarly stakeholders, and provide me with wider positioning within Mode 2 knowledge creation literature.

1.4 What is the approach to this Research Study?

This research is predominantly qualitative in nature and makes use of semi-structured interviews, review of documents and publications, Action Learning (AL) and AR for data collection purposes. AR has been used as the primary research methodology. Research data primarily comprised of qualitative data generated through the AR process which consisted of working with some of my colleagues through collaborative inquiry and joint actions. 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted prior to the AR process in order to identify themes and patterns to be focused upon through AR, which can be considered as pre-study interviews. The overall progression of the research context as well as regular discussions with my thesis supervisor shaped up the research progress. One of the expectations from practical stakeholders at my workplace was to demonstrate the development of my colleagues involved in the research project, and therefore there the AR process followed a routine emphasizing on AL and relevant management and organizational learning theories, which also shaped up the research process as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.5 What are the Aims and Objectives of this Research Study?

It is important to highlight the key differences between a DBA thesis and a conventional Ph.D. thesis as this thesis research project was undertaken during a DBA programme. A Ph.D. thesis typically attempts to fill up a gap in existing literature while a DBA thesis focuses on live business or management challenges experienced by individuals, groups, or organizations, wherein the researcher often ventures into an area "what we don't know we don't know" (Bouner, Ruggeri-Stevens, and Bareham, 2000). Ph.D. studies typically aim to

produce data that can be revalidated and replicated, while DBA studies are more contextual in nature with findings that usually cannot be generalized.

The key research question I am trying to answer through this study can be framed as "How synergy can be realized during the post-merger integration phase through Action Research?"

The specific aims and objectives of this thesis project can be grouped as follows:

1) **Personal and Professional Development:** One of the primary objectives of this thesis project was for me to present a thesis in a critical and thoughtful way that conforms to the academic practice, involves action research, and is considered worthy of fulfilling partial requirements towards earning a professional doctorate, which in turn would help me to earn professional recognition and credibility as an action researcher and scholar-practitioner. I aimed to contribute towards a real-life workplace problem situation through taking a "scholar-practitioner" approach, i.e. through the practical application of theoretical knowledge. I also aimed for this research project to help me hone the skills and understandings required to design and manage a research project within my chosen context, using appropriate methodology and techniques, and demonstrating the creation of actionable knowledge within the context of existing literature and practice while dealing with associated issues and challenges while carrying out the research in my organization, which in turn would help towards my development as a change agent and political entrepreneur.

2) **The impact to my organization:** According to some of the post-merger integration update newsletters and blogs published on my organization's intranet site by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members, the post-merger integration was characterized by fast-paced changes which placed a strong emphasis on "adaptivity" at all levels in the organization. All organizational members we were expected to have the functional ability but also wide area awareness of what was happening because what we did functionally was required to fit into the whole. Decision making was being decentralized and people were empowered with information to increase engagement, continuous learning, and collective decision making. The research methodology discussed in Chapter 3 aimed to facilitate some of these expectations

including increased engagement, continuous learning, and development for some of my colleagues into a resilient high empathy team that would drive desirable business outcome through collective decision making. Furthermore, this thesis project focused on the desirable positive outcome of the merger by working together on associated problems, issues, and challenges, as self-directed teams creating actionable knowledge, and contributing towards intended synergy realizations.

One of the expectations by SLT members who served as sponsors by providing the necessary time and resources for carrying out this research study at my workplace was to demonstrate personal development and learning for the organizational members involved in AR process, which would, in turn, benefit the organization as well as individual participants.

3) **Contribution to the broader community of professionals and academics:** This thesis project aimed to provide an account of how researching practitioners can impact real-life workplace issues such as organizational mergers through taking a scholar-practitioner approach and making use of AR, which is a hot topic in management journals, as discussed in Chapter 2. This research study, therefore, aimed to serve as an empirical reference for professionals and academics who are looking for examples of research generated actionable knowledge by bridging theory and practice to solve real-life workplace problems within the context of organizational mergers.

Since this thesis project has been carried out as a part of a DBA programme, it aimed to be of interest to practitioners and academics who are seeking empirical examples of solving real-life workplace problems as a part of professional doctorate programs. This study also aimed to discuss first-hand challenges of insider action research and provide an empirical account of how to deal with these challenges, which could be of value to practitioners and academics interested in insider action research.

Since this research study builds upon Clayton's (2010) appeal for looking at mergers as CAS, and makes use of related Mode 2 knowledge creation concepts such as CLT, SSM, LiC and AR, one of the objectives of this thesis project is to

serve as a reference for managers, leaders, researchers, and practitioners who would like to explore or critique these concepts for dealing with similar organizational challenges. These complexity science and systems thinking concepts are hungry for empirical studies, especially in merger contexts as further discussed in Chapters 2.4 and 2.5.

1.6 What are the key outcomes and achievements?

Action research and CAS had a positive impact on the overall ambition of this research study towards synergy realizations amidst post-merger integration phase of two competing organizations.

This research study makes three important contributions. First, this research study presents innovative insights towards resolving some of the mysteries attached to merger oriented situations by focusing on desirable positive objectives through synergy realizations by following Clayton's (2010) appeal for looking at M&A as CAS.

Second, this study presents an empirical account of some of the Mode 2 knowledge creation concepts together such as AR, CAS, CLT, SSM and LiC, which has the potential of inspiring similar experimentation in organizational study and management research.

And third, this study demonstrates how researching practitioners can make an impact on real-life organizational challenges by generating research-oriented knowledge.

1.7 How is this thesis document structured?

The structure of this document is highly inspired by Bob Dick's paper titled "Action Research Theses" (Dick, 1993) which highlights the difficulties involved with writing qualitative AR, and provides guidelines to researchers who are undertaking AR for thesis purposes. Dick (1993) recommends making extensive use of dialectics which forms the fundamental building blocks of AR process. I have also used some of the concepts learned during the 'Action Research and Thesis' module of my DBA programme which provided me guidance on how to write doctoral thesis following AR approach. Some noteworthy literature includes Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) book titled "Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization", and Greenwood and Levin's (2007) book titled "Introduction to Action Research", in addition to several research papers and articles from renowned Organizational Research and Management Study journals referenced in Chapters 2 and 3.

Since this research study contains sensitive information about the organization where research has been carried out, every attempt has been made to anonymize the organization and people involved in the study. The language and tone used is predominantly narrative in nature but also provides the relevant references for academically oriented reviewers.

This thesis document begins with an introduction Chapter, followed by an account of my literature review process, which is followed by a description and justification of research methodology and design. I then organize my findings by reflecting upon some of the themes/patterns that emerged while conducting the literature review and pre-study interviews, which is followed by an account of the AR process, outcomes, and highlighting the limitations along with some suggestions for future research work.

1.8 Key Definitions and Abbreviations

AL: Action Learning

AR: Action Research

CAL: Critical Action Learning

CAS: Complex Adaptive Systems

CAQDAS: Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software

CLT: Complexity Leadership Theory

DBA: Doctor of Business Administration

M&A: Mergers and Acquisitions

PAR: Participatory Action Research

SSM: Soft Systems Methodology

SLT: Senior Leadership Team

LiC: Learning in Crisis

KPIs: Key Performance Indicators

Mode 2 Knowledge: Knowledge that is "context specific" with a strong emphasis on the applicability of knowledge produced in a specific context, which is different from traditional generalizable academic discipline-based knowledge.

1.9 Delimitations of Scope, Key Assumptions, and their Justifications

The scope of this research study predominantly focuses on one unit belonging to one business area in a complex multinational multi-dimensional organization. The scope has been kept limited to one unit due to constraints including access to resources, time

available for the research, and meeting my academic deadlines as the primary researcher. Although the scope is limited to few participants, this research study is aimed to influence several units and business areas within the researched organization owing to the research design and CAS theoretical framework.

This research study is prone to insider researcher bias and role-duality concerns which I have attempted to mitigate by following some of the recommendations made by Moore (2007), Roth et al. (2007), Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) and Coghlan and Brannick (2010) as discussed in subsequent Chapters. These measures do not guarantee that this research study is not at all affected by insider researcher bias or role-duality concerns, although the risk is sufficiently mitigated. Furthermore, since this study is based on Mode 2 knowledge creation with AR being the main driver of the research process, there are several contextual as well as subjective factors that have shaped and influenced this research study. It is, therefore, important to be mindful of these limitations since qualitative studies can have different outcomes in different contexts. Reviewers may therefore not like to focus on replicating this study, but rather focus on the research process, underpinning double loop learning, and the account of my experience as an insider action researcher within the specific context of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter describes the literature review conducted during initial phases of this research study wherein I was aiming to understand the extant literature available around my research topic and identify how I could position my research within existing literature, such that it is considered as worthwhile by academics and practitioners. I have also reviewed some of the relevant literature introduced to me during the nine instructor-led modules of the DBA programme, which involved over 450 publications including textbooks, articles, instructor notes, and papers published in reputed organizational study and management research journals. Strong emphasis was placed on the quality of sources by particularly focusing on textbooks and peer-reviewed articles in high-ranking journals.

The literature review process helped me to gain awareness of existing work around my research context i.e. post-merger integration and research content i.e. synergy realizations. I was able to reflect upon various worldviews, research styles, and challenges faced by researchers working in similar contexts. I also became mindful of some of the areas wherein my research study could contribute towards validation of relevant theoretical concepts as discussed in the subsequent sub-Chapters. For e.g. lack of correlation between mergers and complexity science is one the key gaps that was identified through literature review. The literature review process also equipped me with the relevant theoretical scaffolding, developed my vocabulary, and helped me to clear some of my blind spots, assumptions, and biases.

The literature review process involved review of the classic literature as well as recent publications. Some of the key themes included Organizational Change Management, M&A case studies focusing on merger evolution, benefits, idiosyncrasies & research gaps, significance of post-merger integrations, synergy realizations, and the significance of empowering middle management. Additionally, literature on relevant research methods and methodologies based on the findings during thesis planning and proposal phase were also reviewed, which included AR, CAS, SSM, CLT, and LiC. Themes and findings that emerged during the problematizing process further guided the literature review process, and I made use of some techniques such as citation pearl growing and backward search for finding relevant literature as recommended by Levy and Ellis (2006) and Rowley and Slack (2004).

2.2 Philosophical & Paradigmatic Position and Research Quality

Most of the reviewed literature is based on the postmodernist research paradigm and take interpretivist, constructivist, realist, or pluralistic approaches that go beyond the limitations of positivist research and have the potential of appealing to academics as well as practitioners (Holt and Thorpe, 2008; Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Donaldson, 2008; Hassard, 1991).

One should be mindful of the subjective nature of this research study due to its unique context. Unlike physical sciences, organizational dynamics studies have peculiar characteristics rooted in their contexts as highlighted by scholars such as Tranfield and Starkey (1998), Huff (2000) and Huff and Huff (2001). Most of the reviewed literature follows personalized and non-generalizing postmodernist approach towards research and knowledge creation that are anchored in Marxist and neo-Marxist philosophies which proffer positivist thesis and postmodernist antithesis while being positioned between ontological realism and epistemological subjectivism that is typically critical of generalization and places strong emphasis on the research context, which in turn can cause researchers and participants to be biased (Johnson and Duberley, 2003; Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.125-126). Following is an account of how I was able to identify patterns, critically reflect upon strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed literature, compare and contrast various methods, and relate extant literature to my thesis project.

2.3 Reflections from Literature Review

2.3.1. The significance of research on organizational mergers

Dutta Dutta and Das (2011) define mergers and acquisitions as buying, selling and merging of different companies, and point out that although mergers and acquisitions are different terms, they have often been used by practitioners and researchers as synonyms (p.169). They define merger as "combining of two or more companies, generally by offering the stockholders of one company securities in the acquiring company in exchange for the surrender of their stock" (p.169) and consider merger activity as a mutual agreement between two or more organizations of about the same size to give up their individualities and continue as a single company with a new identity. Acquisitions, on the other hand, have a clear owner or acquirer of the new company wherein the acquiring company takes control and the acquired company typically ceases to exist. Mergers, therefore, require more mutual cooperation during the process of realizing the intended benefits, while in the

case of acquisitions the acquired organization follows the lead and directives of the acquiring organization.

According to Dutta, Dutta and Das (2011, p.171-172) organizational mergers have been classified into three main categories: 1) Horizontal Merger which is a merger between competing organizations sharing similar product lines and markets, 2) Vertical Merger which is a merger between organizations engaged in complementary functions of the supply chain such as a merger with a supplier or distributor, and 3) Conglomeration Merger which is a merger between organizations that have no related products or markets but merge with an objective of expanding product range and entering new business sectors. Additionally, there are Market-Extension mergers which involve mergers of organizations selling same products in different markets, and Product-Extension Mergers which are mergers between organizations selling different but related products in common markets. My research study is based on the context of a "large" horizontal merger between two competing multinational organizations of equal sizes aiming for a significant advantage over their competitors, which are relatively uncommon as compared to smaller horizontal mergers (p.171), thereby giving this empirical research study a noteworthy positioning within organizational merger literature. Smeets, Ierulli and Gibbs (2012) highlight that mergers between equally sized firms are more difficult due to potential ethnic conflicts and assimilation that compound integration challenges (p.10-11), which is relevant to my research context and further strengthens the significance and relevance of my research study within organizational merger literature.

Mergers have become one of the strategic means in global corporate dynamics for organizations to grow and diversify rapidly and have gained a lot of importance amongst top executives and organizational management researchers (Shrivastava, 1986). Organizational mergers can be reviewed through several theoretical lenses (Larsson and Finkelstein, 1999), which makes it a much-diversified research topic. Furthermore, every empirical study focusing on the organizational merger is highly influenced by its respective unique context with further increases the diversity. Despite such diversities almost every researcher who's studied organizational mergers has pointed out the high rate of failure of organizational mergers i.e. the dominant organization or the organization who owns the larger number of shares fails to achieve the objectives envisioned during the pre-merger phase. Clayton (2010, p.1) states that approximately 70-80% of mergers do not create their intended value and highlights that even the most conservative failure rate for

organizational mergers is as high as 50%. Other researchers echo similar conclusions regarding high rate of failure for organizational mergers such as Shrivastava (1986), Dutta Dutta and Das (2011), Marks and Mirvis (2011), Larsen and Finkelstein (1999), Lubatkin (1983) and Weber and Tarba (2011) to name a few. There is a lot of disparity in the rate of failures and underpinning reasons for failures studied by various researchers. Although some researchers like Bohlin, Daley and Thomson (1998) claim that the rate of success is less than 20%, I think it is safe to conclude that at least 50% of organizational mergers fail to achieve their objectives. Cartwright (2005 cited in Clayton 2010, p.1) highlights that over 50 years of research around organizational mergers has had no measurable impact on failure rates, while on the other hand, the number of organizational mergers has been continuing to grow as a strategic choice for leaders to grow their businesses. Lubatkin (1983) refers to the growing popularity of organizational mergers phenomenon as "merger mania" (p.218). Such high rate of failure and growing trend of organizational mergers is a huge risk and an area of high concern due to enormous stakes involved with this significant organizational activity and therefore makes the study of organizational mergers a very hot topic for practitioners as well as academics. It is imperative to find out ways for managing organizational mergers more efficiently and minimizing if not completely eliminating the risk of failure.

2.3.2. The importance of post-merger integration

Researchers have discussed various modes, progressions, and taxonomies of merger stages such as premerger, initial planning &formal coordination, and operational combination & stabilization as discussed by Seo and Hill (2005), or pre-combination, combination, and post-combination as discussed by Marks and Mirvis (2011). Although there are numerous ways of describing merger progressions or phases, I think they can be broadly classified as "pre-merger phase" which is the phase wherein organizations perform the necessary due-diligence before signing or formalizing the merger, and "post-merger phase" which is the phase after formalizing the merger. The "merger" itself is a distinct phase between pre-merger and post-merger phases but this is typically transactional involving negotiations and establishment of necessary governance and architecture. The pre-merger and post-merger phases are relatively more complex and unpredictable in nature (Bohlin, Daley and Thomson, 1998, p.2-3). The most important stage during the post-merger phase is "integration" which has been termed as "post-merger integration phase" by many researchers.

The post-merger integration stage involves various activities including Procedural Tasks such as combining accounts, management systems, rationalization of rules, systems and procedures, Physical Tasks such as combining offices, resources and redeployment of assets, and Managerial & Sociocultural tasks such as changing organizational structure, redesigning compensation systems, and stabilization of power sharing (Shrivastava, 1986, p.67). It is the post-merger integration phase wherein most of the intended synergy realizations happen (or fail to happen), although the intended synergies are envisioned during the pre-merger phase. Post-merger integration phase has been unanimously concluded by practitioners and academics as the most important phase deciding the fate of organizational mergers. Post-merger integration phase has therefore been the key emphasis of almost every empirical research study discussing success or failure of organizational mergers. This is very relevant to the context of my thesis project since my research has been conducted during the post-merger integration phase, which positions my study within post-merger integration literature, and also makes it significant for my organization as well as for professional and academic reviewers.

2.3.3. The significance of synergy realization in organizational mergers

Researchers have focused on various aspects contributing towards failure of mergers such as "inability to realize economies of scale" wherein organizations fail to realize the intended cost advantages (Dutta Dutta and Das, 2011; Henningsson and Carlsson, 2011; Larsson, 199; Weber and Tarba, 2011), "incompatibility between cultures of the merging organizations" (Vaara, 2003; Schein, 2004; Shrivastava, 1986; Stahl and Voigt, 2008), "change management challenges" (Gerds and Strottmann, 2010; Hilsen, 2006; Luscher and Lewis, 2008; Rafferty and Restubog, 2010) and "incompatible strategies" such as in Telia and Telenor case study discussed by Meyer and Altenborg (2008). Although there are varying reasons which have been central to merger failures, the "lack of synergy realization" has been the common underlying cause. In one of their recent research study, renowned organizational strategy consultants RolandBerger (2011) have highlighted that organizational mergers have been on a rise since 2010 and the number of unsuccessful mergers has also been ever increasing. They claim the lack of synergy realization due to lack of synergy management as the main cause for failure, which further validates the focus of my research study.

"Synergy realization" is an abstract term which has been used in various contexts depending on the focus of respective researchers. Oxford dictionary defines "Synergy" as

"the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects" (Oxford University Press, 2016). Larsson (1999) defines synergy realization as "a function of the similarity and complementarity of the two merging businesses, the extent of interaction and coordination during organizational integration process and the lack of employee resistance to the combined entity" (p.1), and he concludes that the success of mergers is directly proportional to the degree of synergy realization. In contrast Dutta Dutta and Das (2011) provide a relatively rudimentary definition for synergy as "one plus one makes three" (p.168) and they claim that this equation is the fundamental theory behind all organizational mergers. While discussing how synergy realization can be quantified or measured, Ficery and Pursche (2007) emphasize that synergies in an organizational merger context should not only be related to monetary benefits but should also consider intangible benefits such as new markets, skills, and culture, which are difficult to identify, locate, and define in monetary terms (p.29). Synergy realization should, therefore, be seen as an organizational-level construct and should be seen in relation to all the underpinning issues, problems and challenges faced by organizational members while adjusting to or reconciling the different ways of functioning and behaving that affect them. Referring to my research study, I tend to agree with Ficery and Pursche's (2007) notion regarding difficulties in quantifying synergies during mergers, and I lean more towards Larsson's (1999) definition of synergy realization which should take into consideration increasing the interactions, coordination, engagement, and learning during the integration processes, while decreasing employee resistance across various business functions in the merged organization. Reflecting upon Clougherty and Duso's (2011) and Dutta, Dutta and Das' (2011) discussion of synergies considering merger schematics, taxonomy, typologies, and classifications, I was able to relate my research context to a large horizontal merger aiming towards efficiency based synergy, wherein two large competing organizations sharing their product lines and markets had merged with an understanding of sharing their operations, management, finance, and resources, in order to increase their market share.

Due to high rate of organizational merger failures there is vast extant literature around analysis of failed synergies such as Ficery and Pursche's (2007) discussion of common synergy problems, Shrivastava's (1986) discussion of failed mergers between Coca-Cola & Wine Spectrum and between Fluor Cooperation & St. Joe Minerals Corporation, and Meyer and Altenborg's (2008) analysis of the failed merger between Telia and Telenor.

Some researchers have focused more on theoretical aspects from a purely academic point of view such as the categorization of organizational merger synergies by Clougherty and Duso (2011) who conclude that there are two basic types of synergies in organizational mergers, namely, 1) Collusive Synergies due to reduced competition and increases profits and market-share, and 2) Efficiency-based Synergies due to management and resource sharing opportunities presented by the merger (p.311). Henningsson and Carlsson (2011) on the other hand suggest three basic types of synergies which is different from Clougherty and Duso's (2011) version, namely, 1) Synergy of Technical Economies wherein merging organizations try to identify higher output through minimal input and resources, 2) Synergy of Pecuniary Economies wherein merging organizations aim to gain larger market share and 3) Synergy of Diversification Economies wherein the organizations aim to develop higher risk appetite and diversify their markets and portfolio (p.445). Some researchers have focused upon theorizing the intricacies of merger-related challenges such as Seo and Hill (2005) who present a detailed categorization of merger integration challenges as distinct theories, namely, 1) anxiety theory, 2) social identity theory, 3) acculturation theory, 4) role conflict theory, 5) job characteristics theory and 5) organizational justice theory. They have mapped these theories to the progressive merger stages as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Effects of Different Sources of Problems in Different Integration Stages of Merger and Acquisitions (M&As)

Stressor	Underlying Theory	Impact of Stressors in Each Phase of M&A Integration			
		Premerger	Initial Planning and Formal Combination	Operational Combination	Stabilization
Uncertainty	Anxiety theory	Medium-large	Large-medium	Small	Small
Loss of identity	Social identity theory	Small	Large-medium	Medium-small	Small
Intergroup conflict	Social identity theory	Small	Medium-large	Large-medium	Small
Perceived unfairness	Organizational justice theory	Small	Medium-large	Medium	Medium-small
Acculturation stress	Acculturation theory	Small	Medium	Large	Medium-small
Job environment changes	Job characteristics theory	Small	Small	Medium-large	Medium-small
Role conflict and ambiguity	Role conflict theory	Small	Small	Large-medium	Small
Prolonged uncertainty	Anxiety theory	Small	Small	Small-medium	Small or high

Figure 1: Effects of different sources of problems in different merger integration stages (Seo and Hill, 2005)

In spite of the categorical theoretical foundations provided by these research studies and in-depth study of merged failures, the probability of failure for mergers of global organizations is not declining, while integration challenges continue to remain the primary cause for failures as is evident from organizational merger-related literature reviewed spanning over the past four decades (Lubatkin, 1983; Shrivastava, 1986; Smeets, Ierulli, and Gibbs, 2012; Dutta, Dutta, and Das, 2011; Bohlin, Daley and Thomson, 1998). Very few researchers seem to have focused upon how to realize effective synergy realizations

during the integration process, which in fact is one of the key reasons and a major driver behind mergers as envisioned during the pre-merger phase (Larsson and Finkelstein, 1999). Furthermore, despite all the research around M&A failures, there has been no measurable impact on failure rates as critiqued by Cartwright (2005 cited in Clayton 2010, p.1), which appears to be a significant gap and concern in research around organizational mergers.

After reflecting on the existing literature around organizational mergers, it was evident that synergy realizations during post-merger integration phase is fundamental towards deciding the fate of a merger, and is a research area that will be of high interest to practitioners as well as academics. With this focus and vision, I started to probe further into the extant literature trying to identify ways for generating actionable knowledge through AR, since AR was a pre-requirement for my thesis project towards partial fulfillment of DBA degree. The AR approach intended towards solving a real-life problem at my workplace by engaging in a reflective process of progressive problem solving through collaborative inquiry and joint actions along with some of the colleagues at my workplace as discussed in Chapter 4.3.

2.4 Relevance to research context and conceptual framework

As discussed in the preceding sections, I could correlate the context of my research study with some of the existing literature, which provided me a better understanding of some relevant theories, but did not provide me with guidance on how I could add value to the ongoing merger within my organization through generating actionable knowledge. From a practitioner point of view, this made me challenge the benefits behind purely theoretical research around organizational mergers, and made me consider taking a more pragmatic approach towards identifying and realizing synergies through my research study; wherein I could make a difference as a scholar-practitioner, i.e. through the practical application of scholarly knowledge. The theoretical research studies are nonetheless beneficial for academics to build upon the M&A literature, but in my opinion, have less merit for practitioners who want to utilize existing knowledge to succeed with real-life challenges.

Review of Monin et al's (2013) study highlighted the significance of sociopolitical concerns during merger-related communication, which made me realize that I was dealing with a "symbiotic merger" that typically surfaces concerns related to perceived equality and fairness, justice, and heightened sensitivity, especially in cases where there is an imbalance in the share of ownership between the merging parties. Such sociopolitical

concerns were relevant to my research since one of the organizations owned two-thirds of the merged organization.

Most empirical studies focusing on synergy realizations during post-merger integrations have attributed success to stakeholders beyond senior leadership teams or top level management. For e.g. Larsen and Finkelstein (1999) presented a process-oriented post-merger integration model by proposing an integrative theory that takes a multifaceted view by combining theoretical perspectives from organizational strategy, finance, and HR. They highlight the significance of synergy realization not only towards financial gain for the merged organization but also towards employee resistance, cultural gaps, management styles, company size, and cross-border challenges. Bohlin, Daley and Thomson (1998) emphasize how synergy realizations require engagement and commitment from not only those who strategize synergies but from people at all levels in the organization. They further argue that synergy realizations should be managed more holistically such that the post-merger integration phase becomes an opportunity for people to learn, grow, and have their opinions heard (p.2-3). Along similar lines, Shrivastava (1986) opines that integrations and synergy realizations must occur at several levels of the organization including accounts, product lines, production systems, technologies, sales, IT, and so on. Such shared understanding and co-ownership of synergy realization are very relevant to the context of this study wherein I have conducted an insider action research study as a middle-level manager working for one of the several business units in one of the several hundred offices of the merged organization. My research study would, therefore, be relevant for being positioned within organizational merger literature even if I lack taking a holistic approach, but rather focus on specific functions, workgroups, and levels within the merged organization depending on my sphere of influence, resources available for the research study. The following sub-sections highlight how some of the relevant theoretical concepts were considered for producing actionable knowledge through this AR study aiming towards realizing synergies during post-merger integration context.

2.4.1. Organizational Mergers and Complexity Science

Owing to my restricted positioning within a large organizational change, I found potential in espousing organizational merger and complexity science concepts together for working upon synergy realizations by building on Clayton's (2010) study that urges researchers and practitioners to correlate the unpredictable behavior of M&A to CAS. Clayton's (2010) research interests focus on the realization of synergies during organizational mergers

through working along the principles of complexity science for unraveling non-linear behavior during merger situation, which he claims to be an untraditional and innovative approach towards M&A oriented studies. CAS can, therefore, be seen as a theoretical lens for looking into the emergence of synergy realizations during post-merger integrations, which takes a paradigm shift from the basic "cause and effect" principles that considers everything as a sum of its parts and assumes that everything can be predicted and controlled.

CAS is a systems theory construct based on relationships, emergence, patterns and iterations between systems that are complex and constantly adapting to their environment, with co-evolution, iteration, and self-organization as its key characteristics. Stacey (1995) defines CAS as a series of scenarios wherein groups of agents react based on some stimulus and as a result, create feedback loops that eventually affect their actions as well as the system as a whole. Relating this definition of CAS to organizational mergers as suggested by Clayton (2010), the post-merger integration processes characterized by fast-paced changes can be visualized as the changing landscape or the environment wherein the agents (read organizational members) interact with each other to adapt. While adapting to the changes the agents co-evolve influencing other agents, their networks, and eventually the entire system following systems thinking and complexity science principles. This characteristic of CAS which is rooted in complexity science appeared to be very relevant to my positioning as a middle-level manager conducting AR in a small section of a large organization. Figure 2 below illustrates how organizational mergers are visualized as CAS.
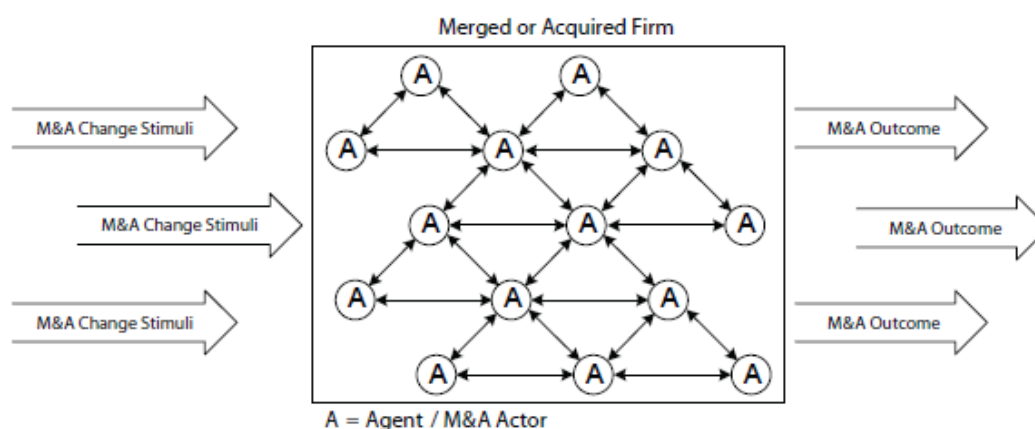
Figure 2: Mergers as a complex adaptive system (Clayton, 2010, p.5).

Clayton's (2010) discussion of organizational mergers as systems that are complex and constantly adapting appeared to be an excellent idea for conceptualizing CAS as the theoretical framework for reviewing mergers, but he does not provide any control to the unpredictable evolutionary emergence and underpinning adaptations. He however discusses how increasing the interactions between agents driven by adaptability to change, openness, and sense of shared vision can drive favorable synergy realizations (p.6-8). He further states that the "bounded instability" offered by merger-related accelerated changes is the most adaptive and creative state that can be achieved by CAS, but does not provide any means for fostering or managing the desired "bounded instability". This gap appears to be filled by McKelvey's (2002) and Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey's (2007) discussion of CLT which implies that bounded instability and coevolution can be managed through controlling some of the conditions that can foster adaptations through management of three entangled leadership functions: 1) Adaptive Leadership, 2) Administrative Leadership and 3) Enabling Leadership.

CLT takes a paradigm shift from bureaucracy and roots itself in complexity believing that leadership should not only be seen as a position of authority but also as an emergent interactive dynamic. Leadership can emerge at all levels in an organization through a complex interaction of feedback loops between agents (read organizational members) and their networks, thereby producing new behavior patterns. Congruent to Clayton's (2010) belief of increasing the interactions between agents or providing a state of bounded instability, CLT thrives upon Adaptive Leadership which refers to adaptations, creativity, and learning to occur through interactions amongst agents while they respond to stimulus or tensions. Administrative Leadership refers to the controls that are provided through hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational functions aimed towards increasing interaction between the agents. Enabling Leadership serves as a conduit and catalyst for Adaptive Leadership to thrive based on the stimulus provided through Administrative Leadership functions and facilitates the flow of knowledge from adaptive structures to administrative structures. This entanglement between formal top-bottom administrative forces and informal bottom-up adaptive forces that bring out emergent change is illustrated in figure 3 below.
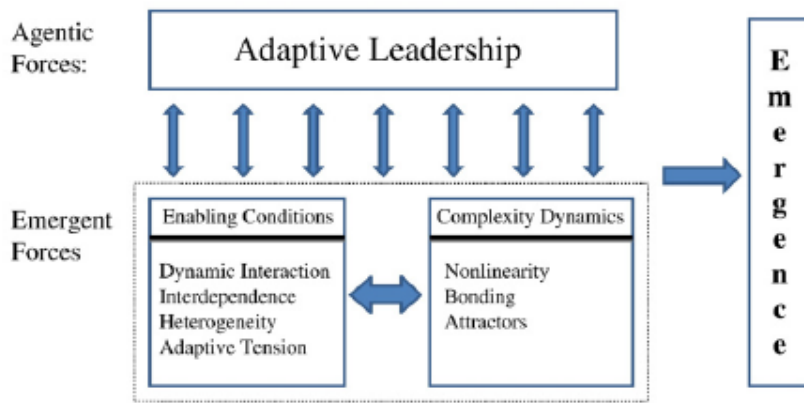
Figure 3: Adaptive Leadership emerging from CLT (Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2009, p.643)

According to Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008), complexity theory provides unique perspectives on organizational behavior especially in the era of knowledge workers wherein employees at all levels dynamically shape the organization through generating dynamic adaptability, thereby challenging the notions of a reductionist theory of predictability that can be managed through bureaucratic planning and coordination. In their book titled "Complexity Leadership – Part 1" Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) have reflected upon the nine major complexity fields and research traditions including Systems Thinking, Theoretical Biology, Graph Theory, and Complex Adaptive Systems, all of which were carefully considered while developing CLT (p.19-27). CLT aims to provide a structured approach towards making sense out of complex organizational behavior and is effective in providing the environment for burgeoning CAS while enabling some degree of control. Furthermore, CLT effectively helps in developing interpersonal skills and organizational performance (p.177-179), which was a desirable outcome of my research study, which in turn would help in gaining the required support and access for conducting an AR study in my organization. The post-merger integration context of my research study presented ideal conditions for realizing dynamic capabilities to bring out synergies. Relating with CLT, I was able to envision influencing CAS behavior for synergy realizations through my AR study wherein I could focus on providing the required "bounded instability" for CAS to permeate for synergy realizations to take place through managing administrative, adaptive, and enabling leadership functions as illustrated in figure 4 below.
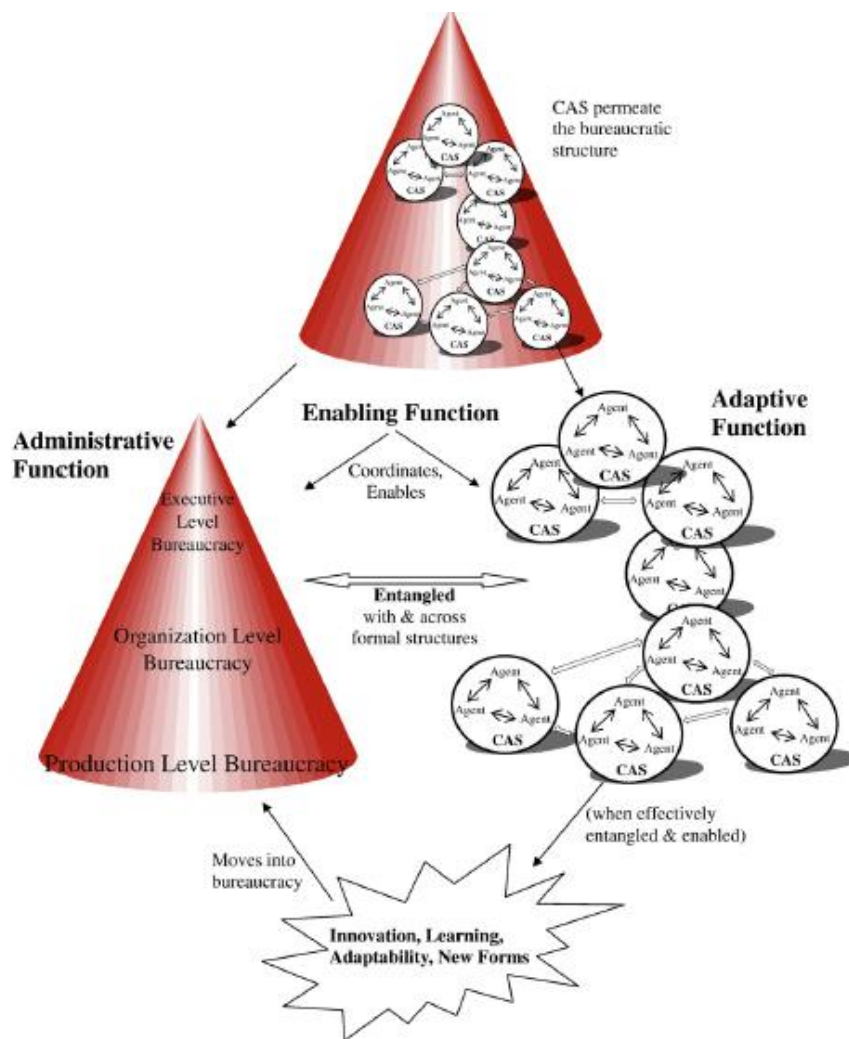
The nature of CAS would still be emergent, co-evolutionary, iterative, and self-organizing, but CLT would increase agent interactions through the provision of the required bounded instability.

Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey (2007) and Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) provide sufficient information on characteristics of CLT but do not detail how CLT could function in a multi-level, multi-national and multi-dimensional organization. Such complexities are relevant to large international merger integrations wherein there is a need for channeling informal discussions especially at lower levels in the organization. My research study had the potential to address this concern by demonstrating how informal CAS leadership behaviors can work within bureaucratic contexts through the implementation of CLT by taking an insider AR approach.

I realized that there was not much empirical research carried out around effectiveness of complexity science & systems thinking constructs such as CAS and CLT for realizing synergies in merger contexts, although some researchers such as Henningsson and Carlsson (2011), Meyer and Altenborg (2008) and Clayton (2010) have touched upon the possibilities. This lack of correlation between mergers and complexity science appeared to be a gap in organizational merger literature as specifically highlighted by Clayton (2010). I have attempted to address this gap as further discussed in chapter 2.5. Furthermore, these constructs rooted in complexity sciences claim to foster collaboration and cultivate synergies, which according to Larsson and Finkelstein (1999) is crucial for mergers to succeed, and was a desirable outcome of my thesis project as discussed in Chapter 1.5.

2.4.2. Organizational Mergers and Change & Crisis Management

Further review of literature around "synergy realizations" during post-merger integrations surfaced challenges rooted in change management concerns rooted in boundary management, lack of common understanding, integration challenges, employee resistance, and so on (Larsson and Finkelstein, 1999). It is imperative for merging organizations to overcome these change management issues during post-merger integrations for the merged organization to sustain, which is a situation that could be related to the Darwinian question of being able to adapt or perish. Some of the change management topics that have been focused upon by researchers studying organizational mergers include: 1) turnover issues (Iverson and Pullman, 2000; Karitzki and Brink, 2003; Krug and Hegarty, 2001), 2) correlation between employees' vulnerability or performance and their attributes such as age, tenure, education, gender and experience (Badaracco, 1998; Posner, 2010; Iverson and Pullman, 2000), 3) comprehending the worldviews of key players during merger of competing organizations (Checkland and Poulter, 2010), 4) taking a stakeholder strategy approach by gaining cooperation of various stakeholders such as customers, government agencies, regulatory bodies, NGOs, competitors, and suppliers (Porter and Kramer, 2006), 5) correlation between people, cultures and politics (Søderberg and Vaara, 2003), and 6) impact of national laws and regulations on global operations (Fox, 2012), to name a few, which made me cognizant of the potential issues, problems and challenges while dealing with my research context. All these empirical research studies highlight how merger-related change management concerns could spiral into crisis situations if not managed successfully. Failure of mergers or even the fast-paced change management associated with post-merger integration qualifies as legitimate crisis situations due to the

high stakes involved, which in turn made me reflect upon Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer's (2013) LiC reviewed during the Change and Crisis management module of my DBA programme.

The founders of LiC claim that LiC promotes learning amidst tensed situations, which was very relevant to dealing with the increased learning needs during the tensed post-merger integration context. Moreover, LiC claims to help with the intervention of cognitive, emotional, social, psychological, and political forces (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2013; p.9), which was relevant to me as an insider action researcher anchored in Mode 2 knowledge creation wherein I was directly affected by the research context. The emergent learning characteristic of LiC is linked to complexity science (p.6), which blends very well with CAS and CLT. LiC seemed relevant to my research study since "learning" was one of the primary goals for me while taking a scholar-practitioner approach to this research study. Furthermore, demonstrating learning for some of my colleagues who participated in the AR process was a key expectation of stakeholders sponsoring my thesis project. LiC has not been explored for realizing synergies amidst post-merger integrations, which appears to be an area in LiC and merger literature where my research study can add value.

2.4.3. Post-Merger Integration and Action Research

Since my thesis project required me to carry out the research using an AR approach, I reviewed relevant literature that would help me to carry out AR within my organization. Coglan and Brannick's (2010) book titled 'Doing Action Research in your own organization' and Greenwood and Levin's (2007) book titled 'Introduction to Action Research' were the key references for developing understanding of AR, while Bob Dick's (1993) article titled 'Action Research Theses' provided guidelines on documenting AR particularly for a thesis project. I also reviewed several empirical post-merger integration research studies that take AR approach (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2005; Williander and Styhre, 2006; Marks and Mirvis, 2011; Seo and Hill, 2005; Kernstock and Brexendorf, 2012), which helped me to reflect upon some of the practicalities and firsthand challenges encountered by researchers while carrying out AR within post-merger integration contexts, and also helped me in understanding how to document AR projects.

In simple terms, AR is a methodology which typically entails carrying out research on a real-life problem situation through a reflective process of progressive problem solving leading to improving the way for approaching issues and solving problems by engaging in

collaborative inquiry and joint action. There are however several AR approaches, modalities, trends, and associated challenges, as discussed by various practitioners and academics that have made use of AR while working on real-life organizational merger-related challenges. The AR approach taken for this thesis project is described in Chapters 3 and 4.3. Following subsections highlight some of the complementary concepts used to enhance the AR process.

2.4.3.1. Leaderful Practice

Raelin (2009) highlights the importance of the role played by AR team members and not just the primary researcher, and he recommends making use of "Leaderful Practice" which emphasizes on working concurrently, collectively, collaboratively and compassionately. These four tenants of Leaderful Practice are elaborated in Raelin's (2003) book titled 'Creating Leaderful Organization: How to bring about leadership in everyone', and Raelin's (2010) book titled 'The leaderful fieldbook: Strategies and activities for developing leadership in everyone'. I found that the Leaderful Practice principles were very relevant to my research study and complemented the AR approach, and also CLT. Leaderful Practice implies that motivated change agents working in a leaderful manner can make a positive impact during a state of flux and uncertainty that's typical of fast-paced change management associated with post-merger integration. Leaderful Practice, however, appeared to be prescriptive and fairly ontological in nature in contrast to the unpredictable nature of complexity theory that forms the basis of CLT, but Leaderful Practice seemed effective for cultivating a healthy environment for agents to work together constructively with a positive mindset. Raelin (2003, 2010) discusses several tools, approaches and strategies that could enhance the AR experience such as the Hang Time Exercise Using Nine Shapes which provides a structured way for reflecting upon problem situations as a group, The Continuum of Leaderful Teams which helps in measuring the conduciveness of organizational culture for Leaderful Practice, and Network Citizenship Behavior which helps in developing the required facilitation skills and behaviors for establishing bonds and commitment that are beyond formal rewards wherein desirable behaviors are portrayed due to a sense of social belonging. Some of these tools and approaches were utilized during the AR process of my research study and are discussed in Chapter 4.3.

2.4.3.2. Schein's ORJI Framework

Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) and Pablo et al. (2007) provided some reflection on potential challenges due to resistance from organizational members while establishing new routines

and carrying out AR interventions, especially during volatile situations such as post-merger integrations, which in turn could impede synergy realizations. For dealing with such undesirable situations, Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) discussion of Schein's ORJI Framework appeared as an efficient and structured process for journaling and reflecting upon unpredictable outcomes. Schein's ORJI Framework helps in sense-making of AR interventions by following the ladder of inference as illustrated in figure 5 below, which enables action researchers to be more observant and critically reflective while taking into account emotional reactions

.
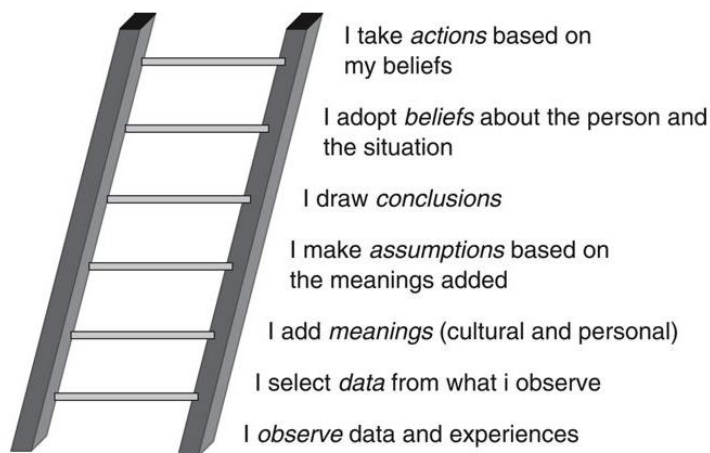
Figure 5: Ladder of Inference (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.26)

ORJI also takes into account spontaneous reactions to incidents and encourages questioning the conceptualization which adds rigor to qualitative research. ORJI stands for Observation, Reaction, Judgment and Intervention, and is carried out by reflecting upon the following questions:

1) What was **O**bserved? Describe it
2) What was our **R**eaction and what feelings were experienced?
3) What **J**udgments and thoughts emerged?
4) What **I**ntervention was done? No action can also be recorded as an intervention.

(Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.33-34)

I realized that ORJI framework would serve as a valuable resource in my toolbox while carrying out AR interventions. Chapter 4.3 and 5 discusses how ORJI was utilized while taking a scholar-practitioner approach to this research study.

2.4.3.3. Soft Systems Methodology

While discussing AR themes and trends, Dick (2004) highlights how Checkland's SSM complements AR as an efficient methodology. Dick (2004) claims that SSM is congruent to AR and can be efficiently used in AR projects, which has also been validated by the founder of SSM himself (Checkland, 1992), and is recommended by some prominent AR scholars such as Dick (1993) and Lester (2008). As discussed by its founder Checkland (1983 cited in Stacey, 2011, p.205-208), SSM is a second order systems thinking approach which adopts a phenomenological and interpretivist philosophy towards working upon "wicked problems" (Churchman, 1967) in real-life organizational challenges, as opposed to a positivist functionalist philosophy that would typically look for an ideal solution. SSM methodology suggests taking iterative constructivist approach towards interpreting and defining the problem in a systemic sense and developing models through a collaborative approach for reaching towards a consensus taking into consideration various alternate worldviews of the stakeholders involved. I found the discussion of worldviews very relevant to my research context since the accelerated change management stimuli presented by my research context was perceived differently by various individuals and groups affected. For e.g. changes such as a new manager or moving to a new office location was perceived as an undesirable event by some while others would perceive it as an opportunity. SSM is a pragmatic methodology for taking actions to improve real-world problem situations and takes a cyclical approach. Figures 6 and 7 below illustrate the systematic approach and guidelines proffered by SSM.

(1) The PQR formula
Do P
By Q
In order to contribute to achieving R

provides a shape for

(2) Root Definition

enriches

(3) Mnemonic

C A T W O E

'Customers' (victims, beneficiares)   Actors   Owners   Environmental constraints

Transformation Process and Worldview

monitored by criteria for

Efficacy (E_1)
Efficiency (E_2)
Effectiveness (E_3)

may be (4)
Primary Task
Issue-based

leads to

Purposeful Activity Model

(5)

operations

monitoring and control

Figure 6: Guidelines for building models of purposeful activity (Checkland and Poulter, 2010, p.220)

Figure 6 above illustrates the set of guidelines defined by SSM methodology consisting of the following 5 elements:

1) PQR formula: which stands for "do P by Q to achieve R", which discusses the Whats?, Hows? and Whys? associated with a problem situation, and enables to derive the root definition.

2) The Root Definition: This is a statement clearly describing the "purposeful activity" that's going to be carried out for the required transformation to take place for

improving the problem situation.

3) CATWOE Analysis: CATWOE is a mnemonic which helps to explicitly define the considerations for carrying out a purposeful transformation wherein CATWOE stands for: (C) Customers or people affected by the transformation, (A) Actors or people that will carry out the activities that make up the transformation, (T) Transformation which is the purposeful activity carried out by the actors, (W) Worldview that is derived using a Rich Picture which is a diagram or pictorial representation for creating a primary mental model of the problem situation helping to enrich discussions, (O) Owners representing the individuals or groups who can control the purposeful activity, and (E) Environment including constraints, regulations, resources, and so on. SSM places emphasis on measuring the performance of purposeful activity through monitoring: 1) Efficacy i.e. measuring whether the transformation is working, 2) Efficiency i.e. measuring whether the transformation is achieved using minimum resources, and 3) Effectiveness i.e. whether the transformation is helping to achieve significant and sustainable goals.

4) Primary Tasks vs. Issue based Tasks: Primary tasks deal with institutionalized activities that have clear definitions and boundaries while issue based tasks deal with activities that cut across organizational boundaries often including broader considerations. Most investigations include both primary and issue based tasks.

5) Conceptual Models: Conceptual models involve logically thinking along the guidelines offered by preceding steps, followed by modeling purposeful activities to improve the problem situation, and then eventually reflecting upon the improved problem situation, and carrying out the cycle again, if required.

Figure 7 illustrates an outline of how SSM methodology is carried out through a streamlined process consisting of the following seven steps: 1) identifying a problem situation, 2) expressing the problem situation, 3) coming up with root definitions of relevant systems, 4) developing conceptual models, 5) comparing the models with real world situation, 6) defining the feasible changes to be made, and 7) taking action to improve the problem situation.
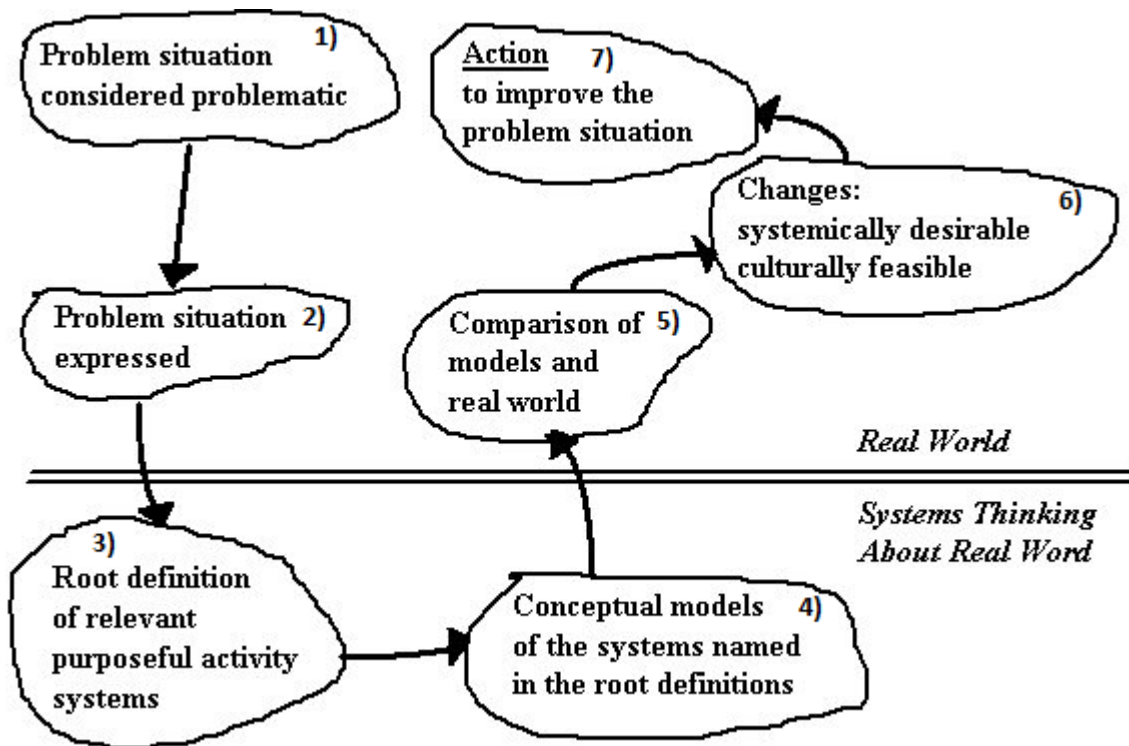
Figure 7: Outline of SSM (Gasson, 2013)

Steps 3 and 4 follow systems thinking approach while the remaining steps are carried out in the real world. Since SSM follows the systems thinking approach and claims to be used in hundreds of research projects in real-life workplace situations for over 30 years, I decided to explore SSM as a potential methodology for my research project, which I thought would provide more structure to CAS and AR, as further elaborated in Chapters 3.2 and 4.3.

2.4.4. Binding the relevant theoretical concepts together

Reflecting upon the literature and various relevant theoretical concepts mentioned in the preceding sections, I realized that I had sufficient literature for identifying where my study could be positioned within the existing literature, and for carrying out a purposeful AR project to generate actionable knowledge that would benefit the problem situation being researched upon i.e. identifying synergies during post-merger integration in my organization. The literature review process also provided some insights on how I could contribute to the existing body of knowledge around my research area that would be of interest to practical and scholarly stakeholders.

Building upon Dutta, Dutta, and Das' (2011) observation that synergy realization is the main purpose behind organizational mergers, 'synergy realization amidst post-merger

integration' has been the primary focus of my research study, although related integration problems and the underpinning challenges are also discussed.

Clayton's (2010) idea of relating the unpredictable behavior of M&A to CAS is used as the primary theoretical framework. CAS has been catalyzed by Uhl-Bien and Marion's (2008) CLT for facilitating informal CAS leadership behaviors to work within bureaucratic organizational contexts by taking an AR approach. Checkland and Poulter's (2010) SSM is used as a methodology that is congruent to AR while Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer's (2013) LiC is considered as an important construct for highlighting the learning and development for the AR participants. My thesis project, therefore, attempts to serve as empirical references towards validation of SSM and LiC as well.

Literature review was carried out throughout my insider action researcher journey as recommended by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.11), wherein I strived for continuous action, research, and participation (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p.5), aiming to add value to this research study, to my organization, to me, to the AR team members, and to the wider research and practitioner community. The literature review is, therefore, reflected in the entire thesis document.

2.5 Theories requiring empirical validation

While maintaining the focus on synergy realization during post-merger integration, I identified how my research study could serve as a useful reference for some of the relevant theories that are hungry for empirical examples and would be of interest to practitioners and scholars working in similar contexts as discussed in the following sub-sections of this chapter.

Although the following theoretical concepts are highlighted individually, they are used in juxtaposition during the research study as encouraged by Clayton (2010). The interrelation and effectiveness of these concepts in relation to the aims and objectives of this research study is discussed in Chapter 5.3.2.

2.5.1. Effectiveness of CAS for Synergy Realizations during Post-Merger Integration

CAS is used as the primary theoretical framework for this research study by heeding to Clayton's (2010) appeal. Relating with CAS, the merger situation was envisioned as the environment wherein employees from the merging organizations (agents) were co-evolving in a CAS like manner in order to adapt to the changing landscape characterized by new

teams, new policies, new routines, new practices, and new roles for many of the actors (read organizational members) involved. The agents would then adapt to the changes, and while doing so, they would influence other agents, networks, and eventually the entire system such that they bring out desirable synergy realizations. Since CAS has not been studied extensively in post-merger integration contexts and is considered as an innovative approach to organizational merger theory by Clayton (2010), my research study has attempted to explore the effectiveness of CAS for synergy realizations during post-merger integration.

2.5.2. Effectiveness of AR for Synergy Realizations during Post-merger Integration

AR approach has been critiqued by several researchers, most of who are grounded in positivist research paradigms due to concerns associated with AR such as preunderstanding, role duality, and strong contextual influences, which make it challenging to replicate the findings of AR (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010 p.114-124). My research study discusses the effectiveness of AR for synergy realizations during post-merger integration. I have also discussed some of the unique challenges faced by me as an insider action researcher in the context of this thesis project and how I managed to overcome these challenges. Chapters 4.3 and 5 describe how AR approach was effective in meeting the specific goals of this research study.

2.5.3. Effectiveness of SSM for Synergy Realizations during Post-Merger Integration

Several researchers and scholars have criticized and challenged the effectiveness of SSM for solving real-life organizational problems. According to these critiques, SSM could make the process too constrained, have little impact on the situation, and inhibit investigation and judgment (Lester, 2008). Furthermore, practitioners using SSM often face role duality challenges similar to AR as highlighted by critics anchored in functionalist paradigm who argue against SSM's seemingly prescriptive linear approach for working on macro-level problems (Dick, 2004). I think that such criticisms and limitations of SSM are valid from a theoretical point of view but are less relevant in Mode 2 knowledge creation that is contextual in nature and characterized by subjectivity.

SSM has been successfully demonstrated as a pragmatic approach towards "problem improvement" by the founders of SSM who have successfully implemented SSM for solving over 300 real-life organizational issues over 30 years (LancasterManagement, 2012). Houghton and Ledington (2004) present a framework based on SSM methodology

for solving real-world problems by making use of constructivist engagement process instead of the prescriptive model suggested by SSM, which according to the authors makes the process of consolidating worldviews emergent and truly co-evolutionary (McKelvey, 2002). I tend to concur with Houghton and Ledington (2004) who take a pragmatic approach towards dealing with their disagreement of philosophical paradoxes. One may argue that most of the SSM projects being critiqued by these researchers were carried out by experienced external SSM consultants thereby limiting role-duality challenges, which presents an opportunity for my research study for providing empirical evidence of implementing SSM as an insider action researcher engaged in Mode 2 research while working on a DBA thesis.

AR and SSM have a lot in common and are complementary as discussed by McKay and Marshall (2001), Eikeland (2007), and Starr-Glass' (2011) who suggest that SSM is very effective in bringing about the intended "collaborative inquiry and joint action" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2007, p.93). My thesis project attempts to explore the effectiveness of SSM within the context of post-merger integration.

2.5.4. Effectiveness of CLT for Synergy Realizations during Post-Merger Integration

The emergent and interactive process involved with CLT (Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2008, p.7) is very relevant to the context of my thesis project and aligns very well with AR and SSM. I decided to explore CLT in conjunction with CAS to provide the desired amount of bounded instability for CAS to thrive (Clayton, 2010), and for providing the required creativity and energy for synergy realizations to take place. Figure 8 illustrates how SSM, CLT, and CAS are envisioned working together wherein CLT provides the required bounded instability for CAS to foster, while SSM serves as a systematic methodology for controlling some of the CLT functions and provides a streamlined process for self-organizing local relationships to identify synergies and work collaboratively on changes towards improving a problem situation, as further elaborated in Chapters 3.2 and 4.3.
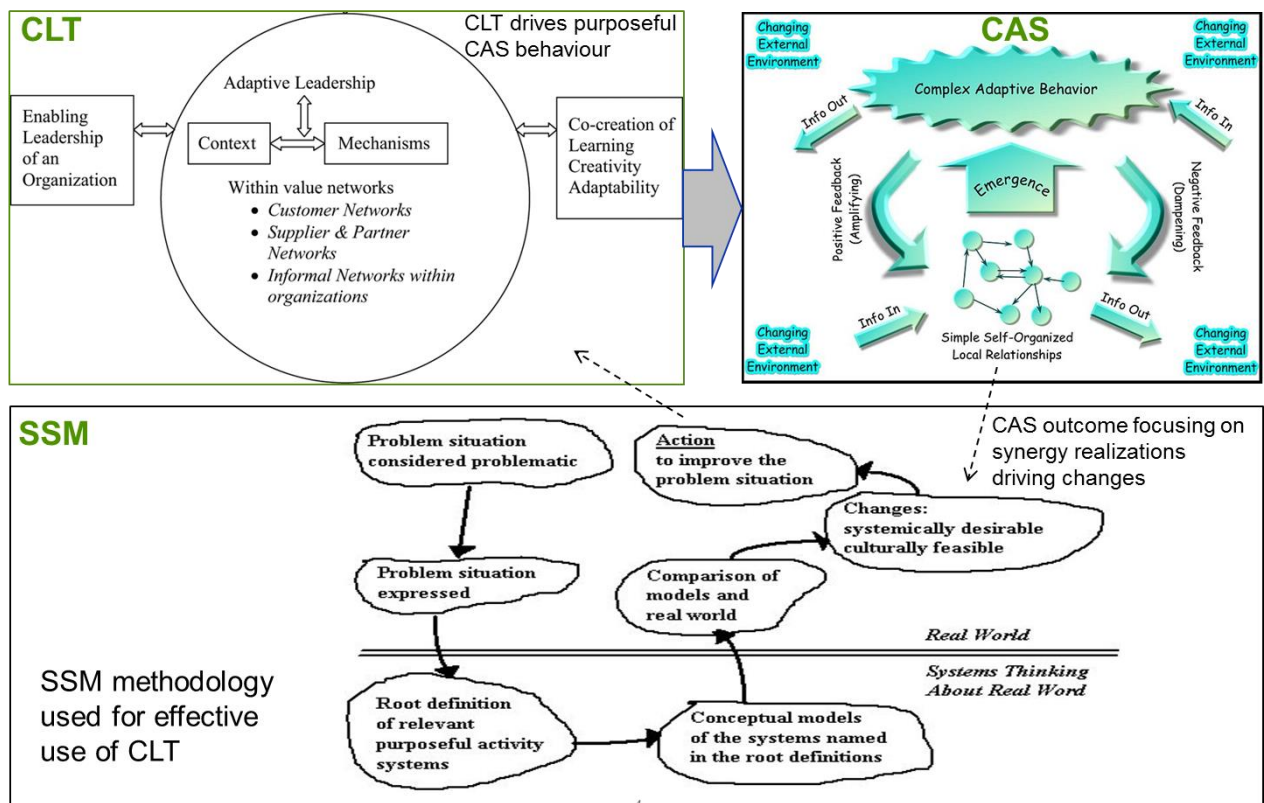
Figure 8: SSM and CLT driving purposeful CAS behavior (Desai, 2010; Checkland and Poulter, 2010; Gasson, 2013)

Such combination of complementary theories in an empirical context would potentially benefit practitioners who would like to explore similar experimentation for driving purposeful changes within their organizations, and would also be of potential interest to academics who would like to build upon or critique the effectiveness of these combined theories.

2.5.5. Effectiveness of LiC for Synergy Realizations during Post-Merger Integrations

Failure of mergers or even the fast-paced changes required for mergers to succeed qualifies as legitimate crisis situations. According to Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer (2013), LiC can help organizations to prepare for the worst, be innovative, and resilient, which I think can be very well epitomized by Intel's slogan "only the paranoid survive" (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000, p.1118). LiC aims to tackle the question "Why are mistakes that lead to crisis repeated again and again?" and "Why organizations are ill prepared when confronted by the unknown?" (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2013, p.5). Relating to the high rate of merger failures and the significance of synergy realizations during post-merger integrations, I thought that LiC could be explored for facilitating effective double loop learning amidst fast-paced change management situations during post-merger integration that could help

in intervention of the underpinning cognitive, emotional, social, psychological, and political forces (p.8) affecting the post-merger integration context. Since LiC has not been explored in the context of post-merger integrations, my research study could serve as an empirical account of how LiC can be used for synergy realizations during post-merger integrations.

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Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This thesis study predominantly follows an AR approach. One of the key challenges with AR thesis is that there are no standard recipes or methodologies for conducting the research, which makes it challenging for both researchers as well as reviewers when trying to justify that the research has followed a rigorous process (Dick, 1993). Furthermore, unlike positivist research the validation and replication of research findings is not straightforward with AR due to the strong contextual influence. Several AR experts have provided guidance on justifying research rigor and quality in AR projects (Dick, 1993; Easterby-Smith, Golden Biddle and Locke, 2008; Reason, 2006; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002), but there are no universal rules which make it challenging for action researchers especially while meeting academic requirements.

Dick's (1993) article titled 'Action Research Theses' has been one of the key references for organizing and documenting the AR aspects of this thesis project which includes describing the AR approach, methodology, contribution to knowledge, contribution towards my development as a researcher, and use of relevant references. In addition to guidelines provided by Dick (1993), I have implemented Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle and Locke's (2008) recommendations for qualitative research studies such as ensuring transparency of the research process by elaborating how the research has had an impact on individual and institutional levels by clearly specifying research access, rationale behind selection of research topic, participation and engagement with AR team, data collection, data analysis, development for the participants, and addressing ethical concerns.

My approach to the research methodology has been exploratory in nature based on interpretivist research philosophy taking a grounded theory approach wherein I have been continuously attempting to identify themes and images for generating theory as opposed to a deduction (Creswell, 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008, p.104). Kolb's learning cycle illustrated in figure 9 below summarizes the overall learning cycle during the AR process, which involved engaging in critical reflections and generating actionable knowledge.
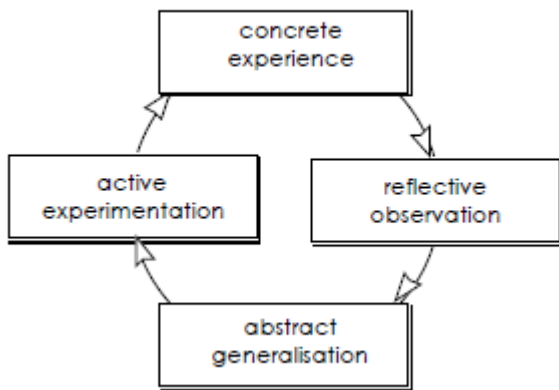
Figure 9: Kolb's learning cycle (Dick, 1993, p.30)

3.2 Justification for the paradigm and methodology

The subjectivities related to organization's ethnography, anthropology, leadership, psychology, geography, workforce composition, and so on that effect management knowledge creation and dissemination can be best divulged through qualitative methods. Furthermore, qualitative research methods are best suited for bringing about participation (Dick, 1993, p.20). This research study is, therefore, qualitative in nature.

While engaging in the AR process, I have worked along interpretivist, constructivist, realist and pluralistic research paradigms inspired by Hassard's (1991) multi-paradigm approach which highlights the emancipatory potential of taking a multi-perspective and pluralist approach towards organizational studies that help in comprehending subjective variables affecting Management Research contexts. Such multiperspective approach during AR is recommended by Peng, Sun, Pinkham, and Chen (2009), Morgan (1980), and Calàs and Smircich (1999).

3.2.1. Action Research

AR approach was a prerequisite for my thesis project as per the guidelines stipulated by my University towards partial fulfillment of DBA degree. I was very familiar with AR due to training and experience gained during nine instructor-led modules of my DBA programme over a period of about 2.5 years, which justified taking an AR approach for a crucial research project. Moreover, AR was best suited for meeting the dual purposes of increasing my understanding of chosen research subject, and taking actions to bring about change in my organization.

Greenwood and Levin (2007) define AR as a democratic research process that includes local stakeholders and co-researchers or AR team members, who work collaboratively to define the research problem, engage in a collaborative inquiry, cogenerate knowledge around the problem, and finally take actions and interpret results of the actions (p.3-4). Zuber-Skerritt (1993) takes a multi-perspective view of AR and describes it as **1) a philosophy** including theories, action, critical theory, and personal construct theory, **2) a theory of learning** encompassing adult learning or andragogy, experiential learning, and double-loop learning, **3) a methodology** based on dialectical epistemology and post-positivist paradigm, and **4) a technique** including techniques such as nominal group, repertory grid, and other tools enabling reflection and group discussions (p.45). The variations in defining AR further intensify due to the various AR modalities discussed by AR scholars based on their respective paradigmatic and methodical foundations. My preferences and experiences are based on qualitative and participative approaches, which is also recommended by Dick (1993, p.8) for carrying out AR oriented thesis projects.

Although there are several variations in defining AR owing to its development through the years since Kurt Lewin conceptualized it in the 1920s and formally defined it in the 1940s, everyone fundamentally agrees that AR is a spiral of AR cycles consisting of 4 distinct phases, namely, 1) Defining, Diagnosing, or Constructing the Problem Situation to be worked upon, 2) Planning Actions, 3) Taking Actions and 4) Reflecting or Evaluating, as illustrated in figure 10.
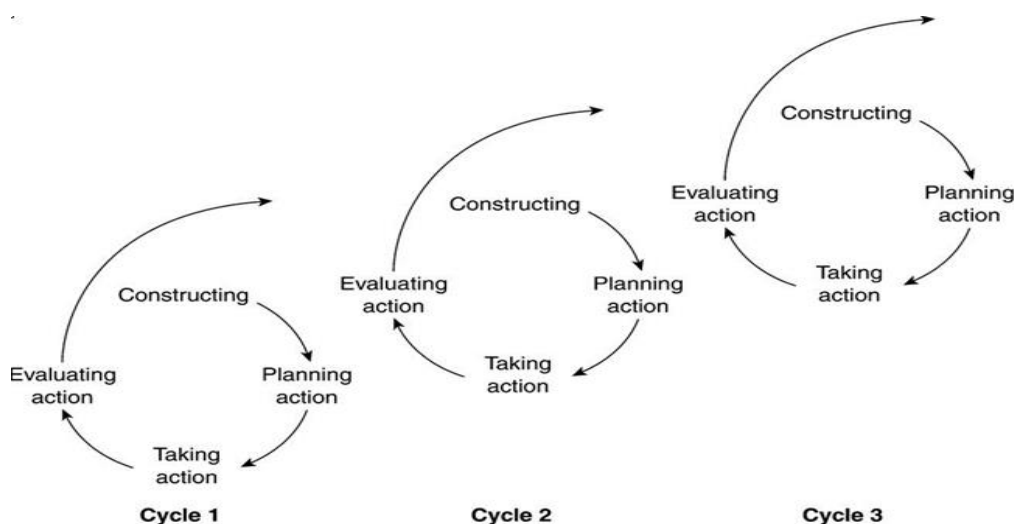
Figure 10: Action research progression (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.10)

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Relating to the key aims and objectives of my research study as described in section <u>1.5</u>, the above-mentioned attributes and features of AR provided an ideal approach, since my thesis project intended to influence my personal and professional development, add value to my organization through research generated knowledge & actions, contribute towards development and learning of AR team members, increase engagement amongst employees and teams, and promote continuous learning for collective decision-making.

3.2.2. Action Learning

AL is an approach for learning through experience by engaging in group discussions, taking actions, and critical reflections, wherein a group of people or AL Sets work on real issues directly affecting them such that the group owns the problems as well as solutions (Zuber-Skerritt, 1993, p.45). Reg Revans is considered as the founder of AL, and he defines AL using the formula L=P+Q where L stands for Learning, P stands for programmed knowledge, and Q stands for questioning insights. It is noteworthy that Revans intended AL to be an "organizational change management" approach, and his AL law states that an organization's rate of learning must at least be equal to its rate of change to survive (Pedler, 2008, p.10). Following steps are central to AL process:

1) Presenting a problem such that they are intractable problems of managing and organizing, and bring voluntary commitment from all participants such that they are a part of the problem and the problem is a part of them (p.11)
2) Working on solutions to improve the problem situation by learning about the problem through questioning insights
3) Carrying out the planned actions in light of the new insights
4) Sharing reflections, exploring the effects of actions and deciding on the next steps

(Pedler, 2008)

One of the key characteristics of AL is providing a balance between supportive and challenging behaviors amongst the AL set participants, which in turn enables effective learning and actions. The learning focuses on 1) learning about the problem being tackled, 2) learning about oneself, and 3) learning about the process of learning (Pedler, 2008, p.12). These attributes of AL were very relevant to the intended synergy realizations that was central to my research question, and also for dealing with underpinning disaggregated issues presented by my research context, due to the ability of AL for developing empathy,

compassion, trust, and cooperation, through increased engagement amongst the AL set members (p.50).

3.2.3. Action Research and Action Learning

Literature discussing AR makes frequent mention of AL (Dick, 1997; Dick, 2000; Zuber-Skerritt, 1993; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). According to Dick (1997), scholars have argued that AR is the umbrella term, and AL is an application of AR, while others have argued vice versa. He further discusses how scholars have highlighted the differences between AR and AL based on their fields of application suggesting that AL is more suitable in organizational settings while AR is more suitable in the community & educational settings, but this distinction is also being argued.

From my thesis project's point of view, I tend to agree more with Zuber-Skerritt's (1993) notion that AR encompasses AL wherein the former takes a deliberate, systematic, and rigorous approach that is always documented and available for review (p.46). Zuber-Skerritt (2001) emphasizes that both AL and AR are based in post-positivist social sciences, which believes that knowledge is socially constructed through a dialectical relationship between action and learning. Zuber-Skerritt (2001) opines that AL and AR are so interrelated that he decided to discuss these approaches together which he has referred to as ALAR. While discussing the praxis of ALAR, he states that *"There is no learning/research without action to follow and no action without a knowledge foundation based on prior learning/research."* (p.15-16). He further states that AL and AR are often used interchangeably and are based on the same philosophical assumptions, and explains that the fundamental difference between AL and AR is the same as the difference between learning and research, wherein AL primarily focuses on learning while AR is more systematic and rigorous 'research methodology' and is always documented for review (p.18-19). Zuber-Skerritt (2001) concludes that complementing the use of AL and AR supports symmetrical communication leading to mutual respect and synergy (p.23-24).

While discussing integrating AR and AL, Dick (2002) suggests that AR is nothing but AL + Critical Reflections, wherein Critical Reflections in each AL cycle drives the AR process. Relating this interrelation between AL and AR to my research project wherein I have worked as an insider action researcher carrying out AR within my organization while meeting the guidelines for documenting a thesis project, a conceptual model of working on

the core and thesis action research processes through AL and AR is illustrated in figure 11, which is a modified version of Coghlan and Brannick's (2010, p.143) illustration.
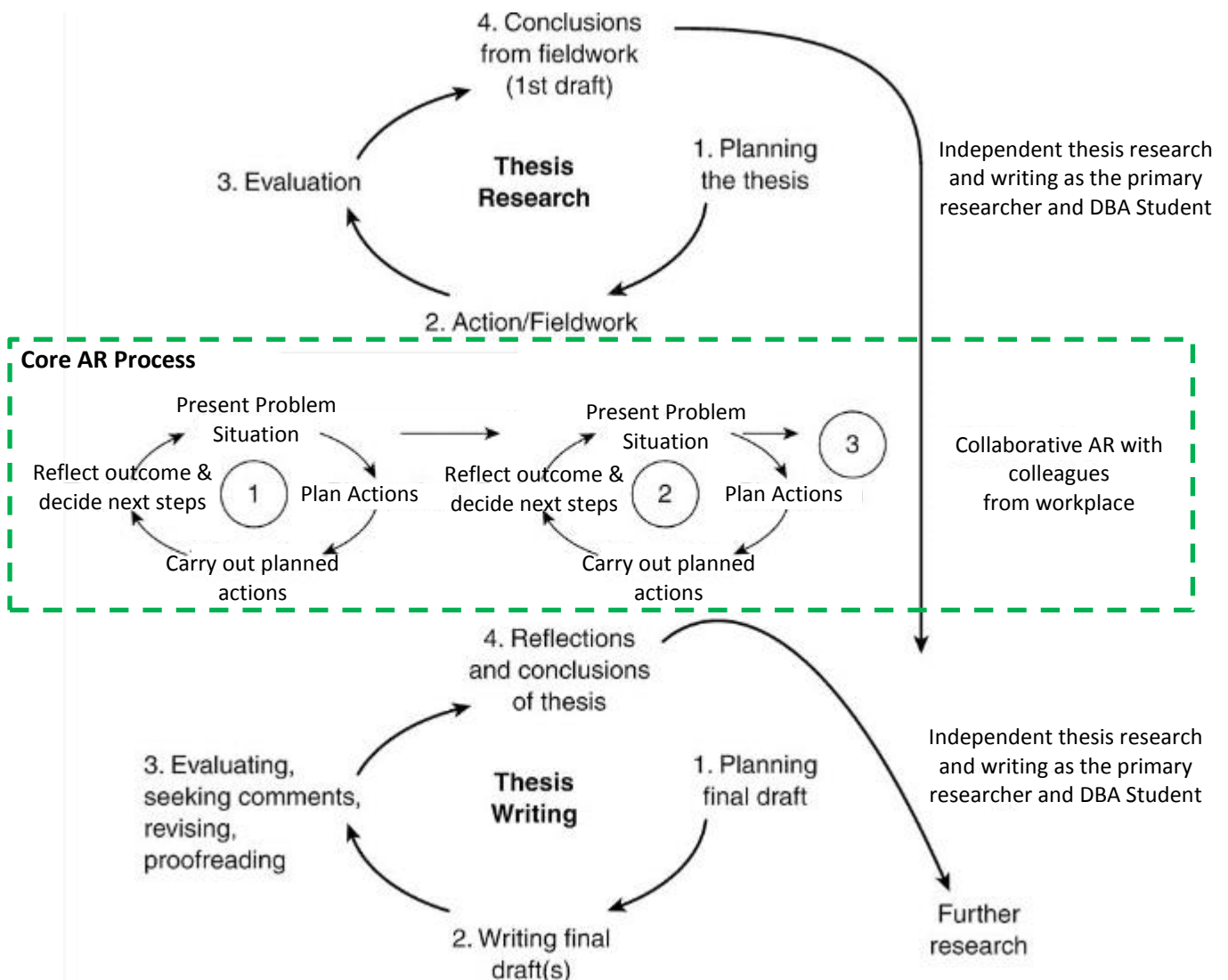
Figure 11 illustrates how action researchers working on thesis projects get involved in the "Core AR process" which can be defined as the collaborative process carried out with the AR team as a part of the fieldwork (highlighted in the green box in figure 11), while working independently on the thesis research. The Action/Fieldwork highlighted in the green box in figure 11 is the Core AR process and can be visualized as synonymous to AL cycles carried out with colleagues from workplace who are directly affected by the problem situation - let's call these colleagues who formed the Core AR team as the "AL Set". The AL steps discussed in Chapter 3.2.2 have been indicated in the AL cycles shown in figure 11. The AL set participants try to understand the real life problem situation which directly affects them by trying to change the problem situation through a collaborative process of

presenting the problem situation, planning actions to change the problem situation, carrying out the planned actions and reflecting on the outcome and deciding next steps, which qualifies as Participatory Action Research (PAR) according to the PAR characteristics discussed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.44-45). The Core AR carried out by the AL set can, therefore, also be related to PAR which followed a Core AR routine as discussed in Chapter 4.3.2.

Referring to Zuber-Skerritt's (2001, p.18) distinction between AL and AR, the Core AR (or the PAR process) need not be documented from the AL set's point of view but they were certainly interested in "learning" about the problem and taking "actions" to improve the problem situation, and not in a research project per se, which makes the collaborative Core AR a veritable AL process from AL set's point of view. I, on the other hand, was working independently on my thesis project conforming to academic standards, which required me to document the research process thereby making the collaborative AL process + Critical Reflections an AR process from my point of view as the primary researcher working on a thesis project. In summary, with reference to Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) discussion of ALAR, the Core AR process of my research project can be envisioned as identical to AL cycles wherein the latter focused primarily on collaborative inquiries and joint actions as demarcated by the green dotted lines in figure 11, while the thesis research process followed a formal AR approach that was carried out by me independently to meet academic requirements, as further elaborated in Chapter 4.3.

3.2.4 Soft Systems Methodology

SSM was identified as a research methodology that could add value to my research project due to its recognition for being an efficient methodology to carry out AR through a matured and structured process that is best suited for research carried out by practitioners (Dick, 2004; Stacey, 2011, p.205-208). Dick (1993) advocates SSM as an optimal choice for justifying rigor in academic thesis oriented AR, which was very relevant to my thesis project. The seven steps of SSM described in section 2.4.3.3 follow a series of dialectics as illustrated in figure 12 below.
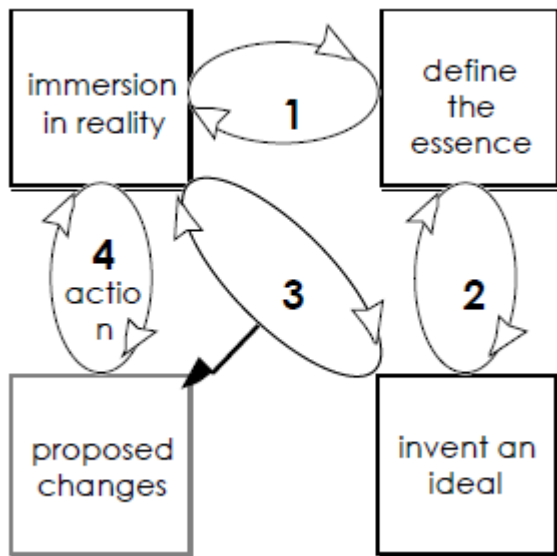
Figure 12: SSM represented as a series of dialectics (Dick, 1993, p.28).

While highlighting SSM's suitability for AR thesis studies, Dick (1993) emphasizes the use of dialectics for demonstrating rigor in AR since dialectics help to synthesize two or more sources of information that help in validating data, which has also been referred as "triangulation" (p.18). The dialectics transition in a systematic manner from defining the problem and its context according to the worldviews of various participants to a second dialectic deriving an ideal situation that's independent of the problem situation. A third dialectic then focuses on the gap between reality and ideal situation, which leads to the fourth round of dialectic focusing on actions and further reflections.

The streamlined approach proffered by SSM enables a structured debate amongst the AR team members. SSM takes a pragmatic approach that is not just theoretical but has had wide acceptance for "problem improvement" as demonstrated through over 300 empirical studies across over 30 years of consultancy work and development by the founders of SSM (LancasterManagement, 2012). My research methodology has therefore taken SSM into consideration as discussed in Chapter 4.3, and more specifically in Chapter 4.3.5.

3.3 Research Procedure

3.3.1 Setting

This research study is fundamentally grounded in qualitative research approach. The research participants were colleagues from my workplace working fulltime in a large complex organization, and the research study was restricted to one of the business areas

that focuses on developing, selling and maintaining software for maritime and oil and gas industry. I attempted to involve participants from other business units and also from different locations and regions around the world by making use of communication technologies including phone, instant messenger, video conferencing and emails. The involvement of remote participants was however limited to initial interviews, and they were not a part of the Core AR team.

3.3.2 Sampling

The data collection was carried out in 2 phases consisting of an initial round of interviews followed by an AR process. The initial phase consisted of semi-structured interviews aimed towards identifying prominent themes that could form the basis for problematizing during the AR process, as opposed to coming up with AR focus on my judgment that could be affected by assumptions and biases due to my role duality conflict (Moore, 2007). This initial phase of data collection can be perceived as pre-study interviews, which involved interviewing middle and senior level managers from diverse geographical locations spanning Europe, Asia, Middle East, and Americas. Transcripts of the interviews are available in Appendix C and analysis of interview data is discussed in Chapter 4.2. 18 interviews were possible due to participants' availability. The findings from the initial interviews were discussed with my project sponsor to validate them for organizational objectives to be achieved through the Core AR project. I have been mindful of AR problems to be framed such that the research:

a) is considered worthwhile for my organization

b) gains me access and resources for conducting the research

c) adds value to the existing body of knowledge as per the literature review conducted during the research

d) is deemed worthy of a doctoral thesis research validated through feedback from my thesis supervisor and other academic reviewers.

The second phase of data collection involved carrying out AR at my workplace. It was initially challenging to convince colleagues to get involved in a research project in addition to their day to day responsibilities especially considering ongoing post-merger integration related changes, uncertainties and increased responsibilities presented by the merger situation. I made use of suggestions from AR and AL scholars such as Zuber-Skerritt and

Perry (2002), Pedler (2010) and Kember (2000) who suggest emphasizing on "learning" and make use of "AL" when involving participants as opposed to using the term "AR" since not everyone would be interested or motivated to be involved in "research", I, therefore, emphasized on "learning" and "actions" through AL while communicating with colleagues from my workplace who formed a part of the Core AR process as elaborated in Chapters 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. The AL set that formed the Core AR team consisted of 6 colleagues from my workplace including me and 15 AL meetings were held. The transcript of AL meetings is available in Appendix E.

3.3.3 Recruitment & Selection of Research Participants

The research has been carried out within the context of a recent merger between two large global competing organizations resulting in a combined workforce of 16,500 full-time employees working in over 100 countries, distributed across 5 main business areas, namely, Maritime, Oil and Gas, Energy, Business Assurance, and Software. The sample population of this research is concentrated in one business area which primarily focuses on providing world-leading software for managing risk, and improving asset performance in the energy, process, and maritime industries, and employed about 700 employees around the world during the time of the research study.

I had gained consent and support from some of the SLT members at my workplace including my Line Manager who worked in the capacity of Regional Manager, the Managing Director who heads the Software Business Area, and some of the Product Managers who head respective software product lines and held responsibilities related to product development, sales, marketing, and customer support. In addition, I had also involved one of the SLT members who's an M&A specialist and worked as the Strategy Manager for guiding the Software business area through the merger process. No external consultants or participants were involved in the merger or this research study.

I sent an email invitation to all potential participants using corporate email. This recruitment email included a Participant Information Sheet (Refer Appendix A) seeking written consent to participate in my research study. The invitation clearly described the purpose of research and explained why the invitees were chosen. The invitation solicited voluntary involvement and provided clear instructions on exiting the study at any stage in case the participants no longer wished to participate. The invitation also mentioned what was expected of the participants, and also addressed risks and benefits of participating in this

research study. The invitation placed a strong emphasis on confidentiality and provided clear instructions for contacting the primary researcher (myself) or any of the SLT members supporting this study or the relevant University representatives in case the participants had any concerns before or during their participation. A reminder was sent 2 weeks after the initial invitation, and I received 23 signed consent forms.

Recruitment of the AL set that formed the Core AR team was feasibility-based and invitations were sent only to colleagues from my work location. Some of these colleagues had participated as AL set participants during the Critical Action Learning (CAL) projects as a part of my instructor led DBA modules. I was aiming for an AL set of 4-6 members consisting of employees holding at least middle management positions in business development, sales, administration, and people management. Since the AL set would be expected to conduct periodic meetings, the primary targeted recruits were employees working in the same or nearby offices from where I was based during the research project. I was mindful of recruiting the AL set participants such that I did not have any management responsibilities or strong personal bonds or coercive influence on any participant. It was my intention for the participants to be relevant to the problem being addressed by the research study, and I ensured that they were voluntarily willing to participate in this research study. No authoritative influence was used to recruit the participants.

The selection of AL set participants was influenced by limitations including proximity, time, access to resources, and funding available for the research. The number of participants, however, took into consideration need for diversity of participants expected for the research. One of the AL set participants happened to be my Line Manager and the remaining 5 (including me) worked in Regional Sales Management roles for different engineering software solutions offered by our organization. The AL set comprised of representatives from both legacy organizations and belonged to the age group 28-45, representing diverse cultural backgrounds including France, Scotland, Australia, Netherlands, Egypt, and India.

I carefully considered that no vulnerable participants were involved in this research study. I deliberately excluded groups such as HR and Finance for pre-study interviews or AR, since these departments hold sensitive information and could become a hurdle due to potential resistance for sharing information. I spoke to my Line Manager beforehand, who was the Regional Manager for Software business area in the Middle East, and gained his

support for the research study. I emphasized that the research process would not only enable me to progress with my academic thesis but also benefit the participants through the development of their skills, and help our unit towards meeting our business objectives amidst the fast-paced changes owing to ongoing post-merger integration. Facilitating synergies had already been on the agenda of SLT members in the ongoing post-merger integration phase, which aligned very well with the theme of my research, and therefore gaining access to the required participants was not very difficult.

During my discussion with my Line Manager, I made use of Roth et al's (2007, p.56-58) advice by framing my thesis project as an organizational development project, which helped me towards gaining the required senior management commitment and necessary access to required resources. Being a Ph.D. himself, my Line Manager valued research oriented work, and he was not only supportive but also convinced of benefitting from the research process. I, however, had to convince him of the AR approach for which I made use of Herr and Anderson's (2005) recommendations by highlighting organizational learning and knowledge creation elements rather than my personal academic goals. I had to assure my Line Manager that my thesis work would not affect normal job functions of any participant and that the research process will only add more value to the existing key performance indicators (KPIs) for individuals and teams.

3.3.4 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

The potential research participants were identified using a combination of both purposeful and convenience based sourcing. I worked closely with one of the Integration Managers, and the Managing Director, who have been supportive of my research study. The participation was voluntary as described in the preceding Chapter, and all participants had the right to withdraw from the research study anytime, as clearly mentioned in the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B). I made every attempt to ensure that the recruitment process was non-coercive and voluntary.

All advertisements and reminders were made using corporate email and formal presentations during internal gatherings/meetings. I had informed our Managing Director and Regional Managers of the relevant business units about my research study, and gained their prior support. All the ethical research guidelines imposed by the University of Liverpool were adequately followed and carefully validated by the University's Ethics Committee.

3.3.5 Data Collection & Retention

Data collected during the research was predominantly qualitative in nature. Since very few participants provided consent to record the interviews and discussions, most of the interviews and discussions were transcribed by me and validated by the interviewees. The transcripts were saved and archived on my personal laptop, and regular backups were carried out on an external storage device which was securely stored in a locker. Some of the data were also saved in the University's virtual classroom and was accessible only to me as the primary researcher and to my thesis supervisor. Other data such as notes, digital photographs, and flipcharts were stored securely at my workplace. I have personally served as the primary custodian for all the data generated by this research study. Only my thesis supervisor and I had access to the data generated by this study, and I intend to retain the data for about 5 years after this thesis is published.

3.3.6 Data Analysis

There were three main stages of data analysis conducted during this study. An initial data analysis was conducted while reviewing the pre-study interview transcripts, which helped in grouping the major concerns and topics that could be focused upon during the research study.

The second step that formed the crux of this research study was the data generated through the Core AR process. Data was analyzed by engaging in collaborative inquiries and critical reflections. Some of the theoretical concepts utilized in relation to the expressed problem situation were also considered during the analysis as discussed in Chapter 4.3.

Finally, I worked independently as the principal researcher focusing on the thesis study by making notes of my reflections on the effectiveness of the Core AR process, and also reflecting upon the effectiveness of some of the theoretical concepts that emerged during the literature review process and were used during the AR. This data was coded and further analyzed by me to report the findings from this research study as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.3.7 Confidentiality & Anonymity of Research Participants

Every attempt has been made to anonymize the data collected, and I do not have any intention to publish the data collected beyond the needs of this thesis project. In cases where identification of individuals could be revealed if important to the research outcome,

prior voluntary consent has been received from the respective participants without employing any influence or coercion.

3.3.8 Risk Management

Every attempt was made to identify the potential risks before embarking on this research study. The risk assessment process was guided and validated through a stringent proposal approval process imposed by the University of Liverpool. Risk management has been an integral process during this research study, and the relevant mitigation and contingency plans were implemented as and when required.

I had received prior support from local management teams and also the Managing Director of the business unit that was involved in this research study to minimize risks related to sensitivity and any restrictions or objections that I could encounter during the data collection process. Since the key focus of this research study was to identify and solve a real-life workplace problem that involved the personal development of the participants, risks related to access and use of organizational resources were mitigated through development and progress of the individuals and groups involved in the research study.

I was aware that this research study would surface some disagreements between participants, which could cause stress and pose a potential risk to this research study. These effects, if any, were, however, minimal and not career limiting for any of the participants. All participants had the necessary information to raise and discuss any concerns with me or the relevant authorities within our organization, and even with the University Ethics Committee, and therefore were classified as "acceptable risks." Moreover, all participants had the right to exit the research study if they felt uncomfortable at any stage, without having to provide any explanation, with the only requirement that all data collected before their exit would be used for the research. These risks were addressed in the Thesis Proposal (Appendix D) and the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B).

Some of the positive risks were also considered such as AL set participants being able to identify and eventually work upon resolving real-life workplace problems that could provide them with opportunities for developing AL skills.

This research study was expected to reveal some of the real-life workplace problems and cause tensions between and across some of the employees affected by this study. However, since the purpose of this study was to focus on synergy realizations and

collective problem solving, such risks were seen in positive light and beneficial for various individuals and groups involved. I constantly reminded the participants that the primary focus of this research study was on synergy realizations amidst the ongoing post-merger integration, and reminded them of continued support from the SLT.

I made every attempt to avoid overly sensitive issues by not involving HR & Finance areas in my research study, and I placed strong emphasis on personal and organizational development throughout the study, which helped me to deal with some of the risks related to confidentiality and access. I also made every attempt to be politically astute and gain any necessary guidance or support from some of the SLT members or my thesis supervisor as and when required.

Since I was working on a thesis project and had role duality issues owing to the core and thesis AR projects, I made every attempt to adhere to the timeline committed to my University and liaised with my thesis supervisor regularly for guidance and validation at regular intervals, which was a great help owing to my supervisor's vast research experience.

3.4 Ethical considerations

A meticulous ethics approval process was followed adhering to the University of Liverpool's ethical guidelines. No potentially vulnerable groups were involved in this research study and all target research participants were fluent in English, which was the only language used throughout the research process. No covert research was conducted as a part of this study, and every attempt was made to refrain from topics or issues that could be overly sensitive, embarrassing, or upsetting for any of the participants. Sensitive, embarrassing, or upsetting sensitive issues, if any, were in no way career limiting for the participants, and all participants were encouraged to highlight problems or concerns in a positive light since the research study focused on synergy realizations. Confidentiality of research participants was closely guarded at all times and all participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Anonymity and other ethical research best practices were ensured, in addition to gaining support from some of the SLT members.

This research study refers to some established theoretical concepts and attempts to validate them through an empirical research. All efforts have been made to not criticize or propagate any of the concepts being mentioned and discussed, as this is not the purpose of this research study. Any critical comments or findings have been mentioned ethically,

with the sole intention of highlighting the limitations of the respective constructs within the specific context of this study.

3.5 My role as a researcher

This research study involved carrying out AR with colleagues from my workplace, and carrying out an independent thesis research study, as discussed in Chapter 3.2.3 and further elaborated in Chapter 4.3. I made use of my scholar-practitioner status, which enabled me to bridge the gap between theory and practice owing to the learning and training received through the DBA programme. I engaged into regular critical reflections trying to understand what worked and what didn't during the research process, and I constantly adapted by considering the literature around my research area.

One of my key roles was to serve as a mentor for developing participants' facilitation and leadership skills, which was also a key expectation from SLT members who had granted me with the required access and resources to conduct this research study at my workplace. A great deal of effort was spent in gaining the required access and cooperation to carry out a research project at my workplace as discussed in Chapter 3.3. Engaging into regular reflections and adaptations also helped me to deal with some of the challenges faced by insider action researchers, such as preunderstanding, role duality issues, access, and organizational politics as further discussed in Chapters 4.3 and 5.1.4.

I have worked independently on the thesis research project following academic guidelines. Since the thesis research required me to work along a predefined timeline meeting stringent academic requirements, one of the significant roles played by me also involved managing my expectations from the progress of Core AR project, such that the focus and momentum of the thesis research were not compromised. Dealing with the insider-outsider dichotomy has been a constant challenge while working on this research project, which is typical of insider AR projects. AR typically starts with a "problem situation" that is contextual in nature. The problem eventually unfolds, gets defined, and redefined, during the AR cycles through reflections, actions, and further reflections which are in contrast to the traditional research approach of developing and testing a hypothesis. Documenting the research process and findings in the form of this thesis document has also been one of the key roles I have fulfilled as a researcher during this thesis project.

The following sequence outlines the approach taken by me as a researcher in this study:

Planning Thesis → Literature Review → Qualitative Interviews → Identify Themes and Patterns → Action Research through AL cycles that consisted getting involved in meetings, interviews, observations, review of documentation/publications → Data Analysis → Findings and Discussions → Writing Thesis → Modifying Thesis based on feedback from reviewers

Since this thesis document is written in first person voice, my role, experience, and development as a researcher are chronicled throughout this document.

Chapter 4: Data Collection and Action Research Process

4.1 Introduction

The data collection process was carried out in two phases, 1) the initial pre-study interviews, followed by 2) AR.

The findings, reflections, and conceptualization during data collection process are discussed in the following sub-Chapters. The transcript of phase 1 pre-study interviews is available in Appendix C, and the phase 2 AR process has been described in Chapter 4.3. My reflections as the primary researcher carrying out AR for a thesis project are discussed in Chapters 4.3, 5 and 6.

4.2 Phase 1: Pre-Study Interviews

I initiated my data collection for pre-study interviews by asking 18 of the key stakeholders at middle and senior management positions the following questions through a semi-structured interview, which can be associated with narrative research that has the power to elicit emotional appeal and a sense of pathos (Rhodes, Pullen, and Clegg, 2010).

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger?

   This question was inspired from Monin et al's (2013, p.260) research study wherein the authors ask a similar open-ended question while conducting semi-structured interviews. The question prompts a narrative approach for discussing sense-giving and sense-making of justice during post-merger integrations, which according to the authors enables participants to express their experiences without the need for too much guidance.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?"

   This question was inspired by lecture notes of one of the modules undertaken as a part of my DBA programme (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012). The lecture notes suggested that the above question is certain to receive a response as there are no "don't knows" when such direct questions are posed to practitioners. Furthermore, this question focused on the business activity and enabled me as a scholar-practitioner to identify areas for bridging the gap between theory and practice.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after the merger?

Relating to my research focus on synergy realizations, shared or common vision was one of the most important areas that had to be considered. Perception of common vision has also been emphasized by Larsson and Finkelstein (1999) and Clayton (2010) in their research studies focusing on synergy realizations during organizational mergers. According to Clayton (2010), employees' perception of the shared vision of the merged organization is an important determinant in realizing synergies from the merger integration and determining the future of the newly constituted firm (p.2). The term "common vision" had gained a lot of significance within our organization through merger updates provided by the group CEO, which further justified asking this question.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

This question formed the crux of my research through which I intended to identify opportunities for any coexisting synergies to be researched upon through AR.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

My intention behind asking this question was twofold. Firstly I wanted to learn about some of the challenges that could be worked upon during the Core AR processes through AL cycles. As suggested by Pedler (2008, p.12), one cannot teach AL but can present situations for learning through taking actions. Secondly, as discussed by Pedler (2008, p.5), AL set participants must own an organizational task or problem that they wish to act upon. Therefore, by asking this question, I also intended to find potential AL set participants who were motivated to work on particular challenges during the Core AR process.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

Since there is no action without learning and no learning without action (Pedler, 2008, p.45), it was important for me to find out what actions can be considered to achieve an improved state in my research context. Response to this question also contributed towards helping me in identifying potential AL set participants, and learning whether potential participants were motivated in taking actions (p.5-6).

The questions took into consideration Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg's (2010) recommendation for encouraging the participants to narrate their stories by making meaningful connections during transitions, which has been termed as "threefold present" by Ricoeur (1984 cited in Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg, 2010, p.538), that has the potential to connect memory and prediction. The questions attempted to elicit participants' sense-making of the ongoing merger integration, make them reflect upon synergy realizations plot that forms the crux of this research study, and also predict the outcome of the merger integration.

The questions were a means to provide some structure around the respective narratives and establish some level of consistency for data collected from different participants, which in turn helped me as the primary researcher to analyze the data by focusing on similarities and differences in worldviews of various interviewees. The questions were framed as open-ended questions to bring out reflection and criticality, and at the same time identify new possibilities and explore assumptions (Marquardt, 2007).

Out of the 20 scheduled interviews 18 interviews could be conducted due to availability and willingness of participants to be interviewed on the scheduled dates. Most interviews were conducted face to face while 4 interviews were conducted using real-time web-based video conferencing facilities. Only two of the eighteen participants who were interviewed agreed that their interviews could be recorded for transcription purposes. Therefore all interviews were scribed by me while conducting the interviews and transcribed later, which were proofread by the respective participants and edited where required. Some of the participants commended the interview set-up, structure, and questions, and commented that they felt comfortable in sharing their narratives.

4.2.1. Summary of Findings, Reflection, and Conceptualization

The interview transcripts (Appendix C) were analyzed manually since the data collected was not sizable enough to justify the use of a Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The findings were grouped under the following themes that also took into account some of the themes highlighted in regular merger update publications issued by the group CEO, which was reviewed by me during the research process.

1: Accelerated Change Management Concerns

Most participants were positive about the merger and considered the merger phenomenon to be beneficial for both legacy organizations in the long run, but were skeptical about immediate gains. There were, however, concerns around the pace of ongoing changes

and organizational restructuring during the post-merger integration phase, due to professional and personal impact at individual levels. The following feedback from one of the Sales Manager interviewed from Middle East region summarized these mixed feelings and concerns which were expressed by majority of respondents *"I think that the merger will benefit all of us and our customers in the long run, but honestly, all the accelerated changes are making the situation very stressful as of now. We have been through some major structural changes and are now managed more centrally as opposed to before. Also merging the processes of the legacy organizations is a challenging task, not only while understanding and merging the processes but also while disseminating the new processes. Most of us now have new colleagues and new bosses to report to; that makes one feel like working in a new job altogether".* Progress, accelerated growth, and industry leadership, were noted as some of the top benefits of the merger, while the concerns expressed by respondents included accelerated change management characterized by organizational structure changes, steep learning curves, and building new relations both locally and as a part of a large global organization.

Many of the participants were also interested in learning about how the new corporate identity was to be convincingly communicated to customers, and the kind of impact the merger would have to ongoing business relations. One of the Regional Business Development Managers commented *"With an organization as diverse as ours, it often becomes difficult to gain a holistic view of the organization. I know about the merger in bits and pieces and would be interested to know of high-level stuff that's going on that's going to impact our brand and identity. On a similar note, I am not too sure about the new branding which has made us dump 150 years of branding efforts; I would like to know why did we have to rebrand ourselves and what implications this could have – both positive and negative".*

I could relate these concerns to Kernstock and Brexendorf's (2012) discussion of how brand integration strategies during mergers and acquisition integrations can have challenges around building brand equity, which are often characterized by time consuming and expensive affairs, especially in case of a non-synergistic or new brand strategies that was relevant to the merger integration in our organization, which according to the authors often results in loss of brand equity and can potentially pose challenges in communicating the new brand (p.171-172).

Some of the feedback received through the interviews appeared to be rooted in notions of change and pluralism as discussed by Kilduff and Dougherty (2000), that often indicate traces of crisis arising from undesirable reactions from certain groups and individuals whose self-interests are threatened by the changes, as discussed by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999, p.304), or due to incompatibility between merging team members, and unacceptance by customers as discussed by Turner (1976).

Although most participants expressed their faith and confidence in SLT for strategizing and driving the ongoing merger integration related change management, accelerated change management related concerns appeared to be one of the prominent themes that emerged from analysis of the pre-study interview data, especially concerning the speed of changes and high uncertainty during the post-merger integration.

2: Individual Concerns: "What's in for me?"

When queried about what participants wanted to know about the ongoing merger integration, the responses from interviewees were quite varied yet specific to their respective roles in the organization. However, there was a common feeling around their desire to know if there would be any significant restructuring regarding downsizing or restructuring of employees or restructuring and discontinuation of specific products and services. Most of these concerns were rooted in an anxiety of how these changes would affect their individual day to day work and careers. One participant who worked as a Regional Sales Manager in the Middle East commented: *"I do not understand as yet how the merger is going to benefit what I do in my day to day work."*

Most participants were also not certain about the imminent changes and were curious to know what would unfold in the coming days. The following response from a Project Manager summarizes such uncertainties and inquisitiveness *"There are a lot of mysteries attached with the ongoing merger integration process, both positive and negative. Personally, at an individual level, I would be interested to know about the job security plan, as this could be based not only on competence but also some strategies that emerge during the ongoing integration process."* The project manager's comment appeared to be in line with the concerns around voluntary and involuntary turnovers during mergers discussed by Iverson and Pullman (2000) wherein the authors have presented their research findings around trends and processes involved when determining layoffs and turnovers during post-merger integration phase, and one of the conclusions these

researchers have made is that age, position, nature of work, and amalgamation are some of the individual specific variables that could determine voluntary turnovers during mergers and acquisitions.

Most interviewees had some sort of clarity of high-level communication provided through a dedicated intranet site for merger-related news, publications, and email updates by respective section heads, but did not have much clarity on how to adapt to changes in their individual day to day roles, especially considering new colleagues and new challenges as a result of ongoing restructuring. The participants appeared to be concerned and were seeking for more clarity on how changes associated with the merger integration process would affect them at individual and unit levels, and have an impact on associated organizational routines, which according to Simon and Pauchant (2000) can be linked to sense-making and new learning during seemingly crisis situations.

3: Clarity of Vision

The merged organization's common vision was very well communicated both internally and externally. Most participants cited the public relations and marketing messages when asked about a common vision of the merged organization, while a couple of participants also highlighted that the common vision reinforced our ambitions to be the largest world leader in our business areas while growing our market share and trumping the competition. Reflecting upon common vision of the merged organization one of the Business Development Managers stated *"If you ask me my thoughts on what do we intend to become as a company after the merger, I think it's all about accelerated growth that could not have been achieved organically, and the key goals would be to gain more market share and reduce competition"*. One of the Project Managers commented *"We have 4 to 5 business areas, and my feedback will be based on a relatively smaller business area functioning as an independent business unit functioning as a commercial software house. The focus is often higher on larger business areas, and I think that we have similar goals and vision focusing on broadening our value offering to customers, gaining more market share, and being able to manage more and larger projects more effectively"*. This particular feedback from the Project Manager is quite relevant to the AR project carried out as a part of this research study, which focused on one of the smaller business areas as opposed to the entire organization.

While discussing the common vision of the merged organization, "cultural compatibility" appeared to be one of the major concerns expressed by most participants, and there were suggestions for taking a more holistic approach to ensure compatibility, cooperation, and ensure psychological, sociological, and emotional comfort of all involved as discussed by Guerrero (2008). Clayton's (2010) study suggests that the state of "bounded instability" is conducive for successful implementation of merger-related changes, and highlighted that employees have a more open minded approach, positive focus, and sense of common vision, during post-merger integrations if they work collectively within the bounded instability, which in turn promotes innovation, adaptability, and high performance required for coping with accelerated changes. This bounded instability is something that I desired to achieve through the AR process.

4: Moving from "Making it Work" to "Making it Good"

While discussing incidents and experiences from the ongoing merger integration process, the participants shared few examples of synergy realizations during the ongoing merger integration process, which formed the crux of my research study. For one Business Development Manager, his new role was a result of synergy realization between two units belonging to each of the legacy organizations, and he stated *"… as a matter of fact my new role would not exist without this synergy. The legacy companies are very complementary in nature although there is significant overlap, the merger will certainly help us to add more value for our customers as we are now able to offer more comprehensive services at optimized costs"*.

Underlining the importance of looking at the ongoing merger integration process as an opportunity for growth, an Integration Manager commented *"The merger is a great opportunity for us to meet our growth objectives. I think that the more stable we get with the ongoing integration, the more positive and beneficial it becomes for all of us. It is also important to note that the more you give during the ongoing integration phase, the more we will benefit from the merger. Therefore, it is important that we engage more at all levels"*. He also cautioned on the limitation of resources, and the fast-paced plan of the integration which was reflected in the following excerpt from his interview *"I think that one of the main challenges is to decide actively not to do things, which we intend and plan to do. This is due to the need for doing too many things with limited time and resources. Optimal utilization of time and resources is a challenge for everyone involved in the merger due to the amount of work that's required to succeed, which is over and above the normal*

business responsibilities. I think that there is a need for at least additional 25% efforts that needs to be achieved through better organization and execution of priorities. Furthermore, we have decided not to involve external support which makes it all the more challenging to find relevant key resources for taking up key merger-related tasks internally who also need to fulfill their normal job responsibilities".

Speaking of sense-giving of the common vision of the merger integration team, the Integration Manager commented *"I think it can be summed up with our "broader view" theme, which is really inspiring for employees of both legacy organizations as well as our customers. We have a well-planned process to develop our 2016-2020 strategy, and this will translate our vision into a more tangible strategy. Our vision is clear and well defined, and it will be an inspiring and interesting journey towards realizing this."*

Most respondents felt that the synergy realizations were beneficial for customers and also for employees looking for different roles within the organization as appropriately summarized by a comment made by a Regional Quality, Health, Safety and Environment (QHSE) manager *"A lot of employees are being shuffled to make the most out of this merger, and I consider this as a synergy. For e.g. I have been moved from a unit-level role to a regional role during the merger integration process"*. A Regional Manager commented *"The focus has now moved from "make it work" to "make it good." The joint organization is in place, where cross-selling takes place, joint delivery projects are performed, joint reporting is produced, and collaboration in software development has led to new product releases. Nevertheless, many of these processes are still "bumpy" – and making them better is our current focus."* Some participants cautioned against the associated challenges such as the following wicked problem noted by a Software Product Manager who commented *"I am not sure if this can be classified as a synergy or a wicked problem at hand, but we are now looking into combining the strengths of competing software products offered by the legacy organizations, and this is one of my most critical challenges as of now."*

The ongoing merger integration process was indeed witnessing some synergy realizations, and there was a certain degree of emphasis on how discursive processes could help to break barriers such as employee resistance and anxiety as discussed by Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg (2010), and Beech, McPhail and Coupland (2009). One of the areas that could potentially be worked upon during the AR process was how learning from actions could

help with synergy realizations during transitioning from "making it work" to "making it good", which was also one of the themes highlighted in one of the merger update newsletters.

5: Sense-making and Sense-giving

The pre-study interview respondents highlighted several challenges, most of which were related to restructuring and merging policies, establishing best practices and routines, consolidating systems, and cultural differences of the legacy organizations. While speaking of challenges, a Regional Sales Manager stated *"We are experiencing challenges with aligning processes that were followed by legacy organizations, which ones to retain, merge, and discard. This could cause issues such as resistance, ambivalent behavior, power play, cynicism, and even undesirable silence"*. Similar sentiments were shared by other participants and a Regional Project Manager commented *"I can see a lot of movement within the organization across roles and locations, which has kind of disturbed the harmony we had established by working together for many years. Although these changes are good in the long run, they are causing disruption for ongoing projects. I wish that the resource related transitions could be more gradual"*. Another Project Manager commented *"We need to get up to speed with getting to know our new colleagues and calibrating our skills to be able to deliver projects related to legacy products from both organizations. Furthermore, we have a Herculean task of aligning our systems, processes, and guiding principles. We also have challenges with some of the legacy contracts, especially with mega projects"*.

Such feedback and comments emphasized the challenges within the post-merger integration context and made me reflect upon the concept of "sense-making" and "sense-giving" as discussed by Weick and Quinn (1999) and Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg (2010), wherein the authors proffer constructivist approaches in social settings for collective and constructive negotiations and renegotiations of actions through practicing collective enactment. I reckoned that we could benefit from exploring sense-making and sense-giving oriented dialectics during AR for dealing with the lack of clarity, and for overcoming some of the challenges posed by the merger integration.

6: Complexity Theory and Systems Thinking

One of the prominent themes that emerged from the pre-study interviews was the provision of more autonomy at mid-level management employees who were front facing the customers, as discussed by a Product Manager who commented *"I think more management support and understanding at granular levels will certainly help. Also, the*

Product Managers need more resources to communicate the changes both internally and externally. I understand that we need to communicate at higher levels, but there are customer representatives whose relation with our organization is based on certain software products and that's all they are concerned about. I think giving more authority and resources to Product Managers would help my unit to succeed with our KPIs, as well as being aligned with the merger integration process".

Effective communication was also being mentioned by some respondents when discussing the measures that could help getting through the post-merger integration process, as summarized in the following excerpt from an interview with a Regional Project Manager who stated *"I think communication is the key for us to succeed, and our managers at all levels need to be involved in open transparent communication both internally and externally"*.

Finding out examples and suggestions for effective post-merger integration and realizing potential synergies during the integration process was supposed to form the core activity of AR, which was carried out during the next phase of this research study as discussed in Chapter 4.3. An Administrative Assistant who was interviewed made a comment which hinted the need for better synergy realizations and systemic thinking *"I think our pace of change is too fast and at times becomes challenging to keep up with the changes. It could help if we could spend more time in communicating the changes through periodic short meetings as opposed to memos and guiding/governing documents"*. The respondent also implied having more influence and autonomy at local levels.

An Integration Manager who participated in the pre-study interviews was a strong proponent of CAS and commented *"Adopting CAS mental model could help to understand the major driver for achieving our strategy and objectives – not only in the integration, communication among actors, but also our culture as a company, and we must believe in motivating each colleague/ actor and taking him or her on board. We could also incentivize different actors and encourage them to function in a CAS like manner…. We need to motivate all key actors to be more adaptive to the changing landscape."*

These suggestions for improvement prompted making use of CAS principles rooted in systemic thinking as discussed by Stacey (2011), wherein the merger could be visualized as the changing environment wherein different groups and individuals were co-evolving to adapt to the changing environment. This also surfaced sense-making of various

worldviews while functioning as a CAS, and was one of the objectives to be achieved through AR process driven by collaborative inquiry and joint action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2007, p.93), which could in turn help towards achieving desirable synergy realizations through actionable knowledge generated by my research study owing to its design and methodology. As discussed in Chapter 2, principles of CAS were very relevant to the context of my research study. The AR process involved identifying and working upon some of the red-hot organizational issues (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2005) while CLT served as a catalyst helping in synthesizing the process by providing appropriate conditions for promoting CAS. CLT is very well aligned with CAS and is effective towards enabling CAS to foster, and to some extent even manage the flow of CAS (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey, 2007). Complexity theory and systems thinking concepts were therefore considered for shaping up the AR process, as discussed in Chapter 4.3.

4.3 Phase 2: Action Research

4.3.1. Introduction

Phase 2 of the data collection was carried out through AR, which involved engaging with my colleagues from my workplace in AL cycles. Figure 13 below illustrates the methodology applied in this research study by building up on Coghlan and Brannick's (2010, p.143) discussion of thesis AR projects and Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) discussion of ALAR as discussed in Chapter 3.2. The methodology also considers CAS, CLT, and SSM, as envisioned during the literature review process described in Chapter 2.4 and reflections from pre-study interviews discussed in Chapter 4.2.1.
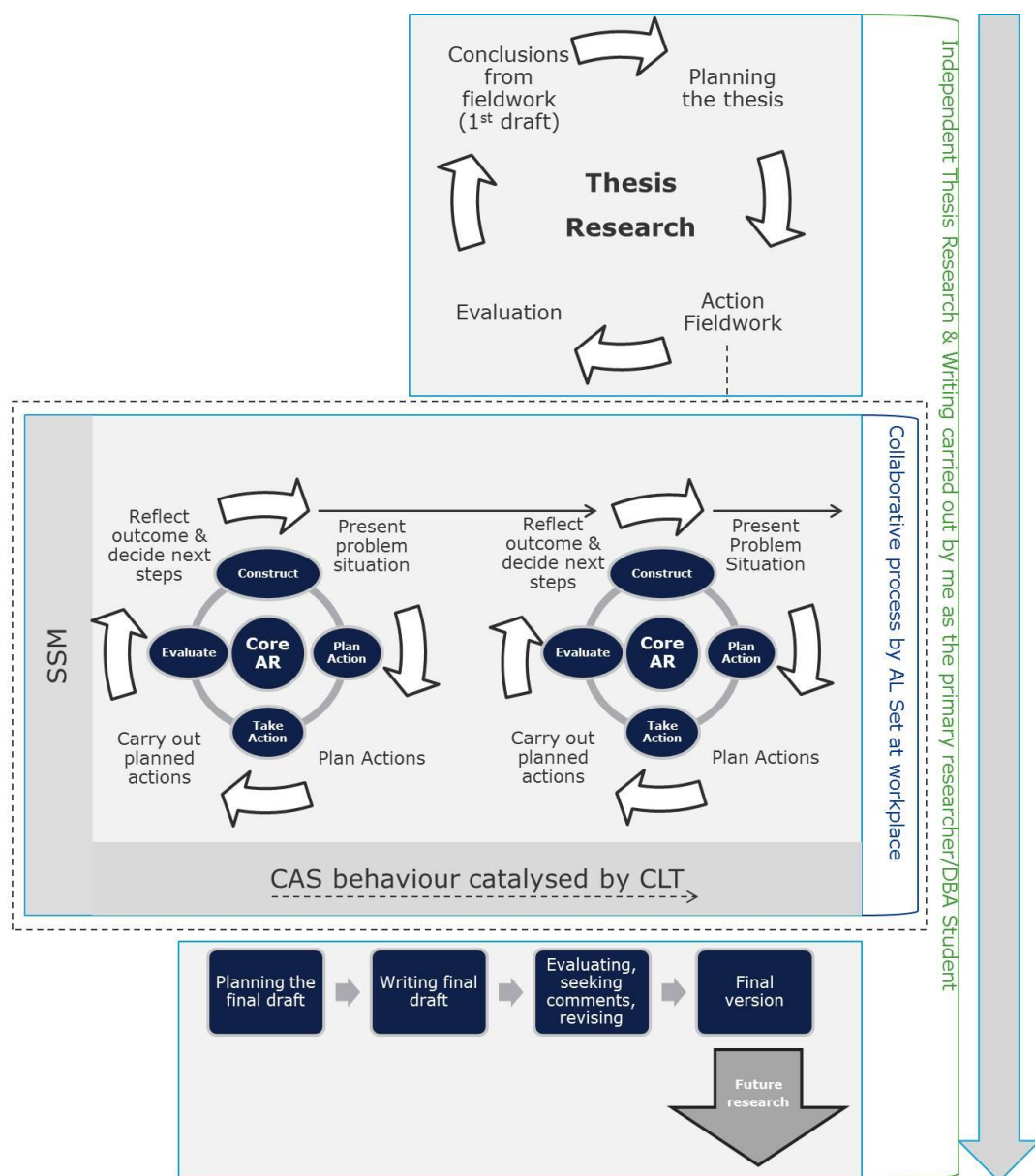
Figure 13: AR methodology used in this research study

I was solely responsible for the AR process that was documented in the form of a thesis project towards partial fulfillment of my DBA degree, and therefore my individual responsibilities as the primary researcher involved all the processes and activities represented in figure 13. The Core AR process which was central to the empirical foundation of this research study was carried out as a collaborative process with colleagues at my workplace, which has been marked as "collective process by AL set at workplace" in figure 13. A series of AL cycles were driving the Core AR process characterized by collaborative inquiry and joint actions, which formed the crux of Action Fieldwork process of my thesis project. AL cycles went through the process of 1) planning, 2) taking actions, 3) observations, and 4) reflections, all of which focused on synergy realizations and the underpinning problems, issues, and challenges faced by the AL set. The AL set comprised of colleagues from my workplace who were directly affected by the research context i.e. fast-paced changes amidst the ongoing post-merger integration. The critical reflections on the actions carried out during AL shaped the Core AR process comprising of 1) construction of the AR problem, 2) planning actions, 3) taking actions and 4) evaluating actions. Such harmony between AL and AR is in agreement with Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) and Dick's (1997, 2002, 2004) interrelation of AL and AR as discussed in Chapter 3.2.3.

SSM was conceptualized as a methodology for providing a structured approach for planning and taking actions on the change management issues presented by the post-merger integration context. The focus was on realizing synergies during the adaptations that employees were going through in a CAS like manner. These employees included not only the AL set but also other employees who were affected by the actions carried out by the AL set, as discussed in the subsequent sub-chapters. CLT was conceptualized for catalyzing CAS, and providing a sense of control to enable the conditions for desirable CAS outcomes i.e. realizing synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration.

Table 1 shows how AR, AL, and SSM align with each other.

AR Cycle	AL Cycle	AL Activities	How Activities relate to SSM Stages
Constructing	Problematization Observe & Reflect (from cycle 2 onwards)	Identifying and learning about the problem to be worked upon. The problem must be owned by the AL set such that they are a part of the problem and the problem is a part of them, and everyone is willing to act on the problem. It is important that the problem must be a wicked problem i.e. one that has no right or wrong solution due to often incomplete information about the problem or the constantly changing environment.	- Entering problem situation considered problematic - Problem Situation expressed, preferably as a Rich Picture
Planning	Plan	Diagnosing the problem, collecting relevant data, analyzing the data, and presenting possible interventions	- Root definition of relevant purposeful activity systems - Conceptual models of the systems named in the root definitions - Comparison of models and real world - Identifying changes that are systemically desirable and culturally feasible
Acting	Act	Carrying out the planned actions/interventions	- Actions to improve the problem situation
Evaluating	Observe & Reflect	Evaluating against original goals	- Reassessing problem situation
Document/Publish			

Table 1: Interrelation of AL, AR, and SSM

SSM, CAS, and CLT were however not introduced to the AL set until the third AL cycle, in order to not confuse the AL set participants with too many theories towards the beginning of AL process, which I thought could be detrimental to the Core AR process. A trimmed down version of the AR methodology was therefore used during the initial stages of the Core AR process as illustrated in figure 14 below, focusing on AL cycles, and excluding SSM, CAS, and CLT.
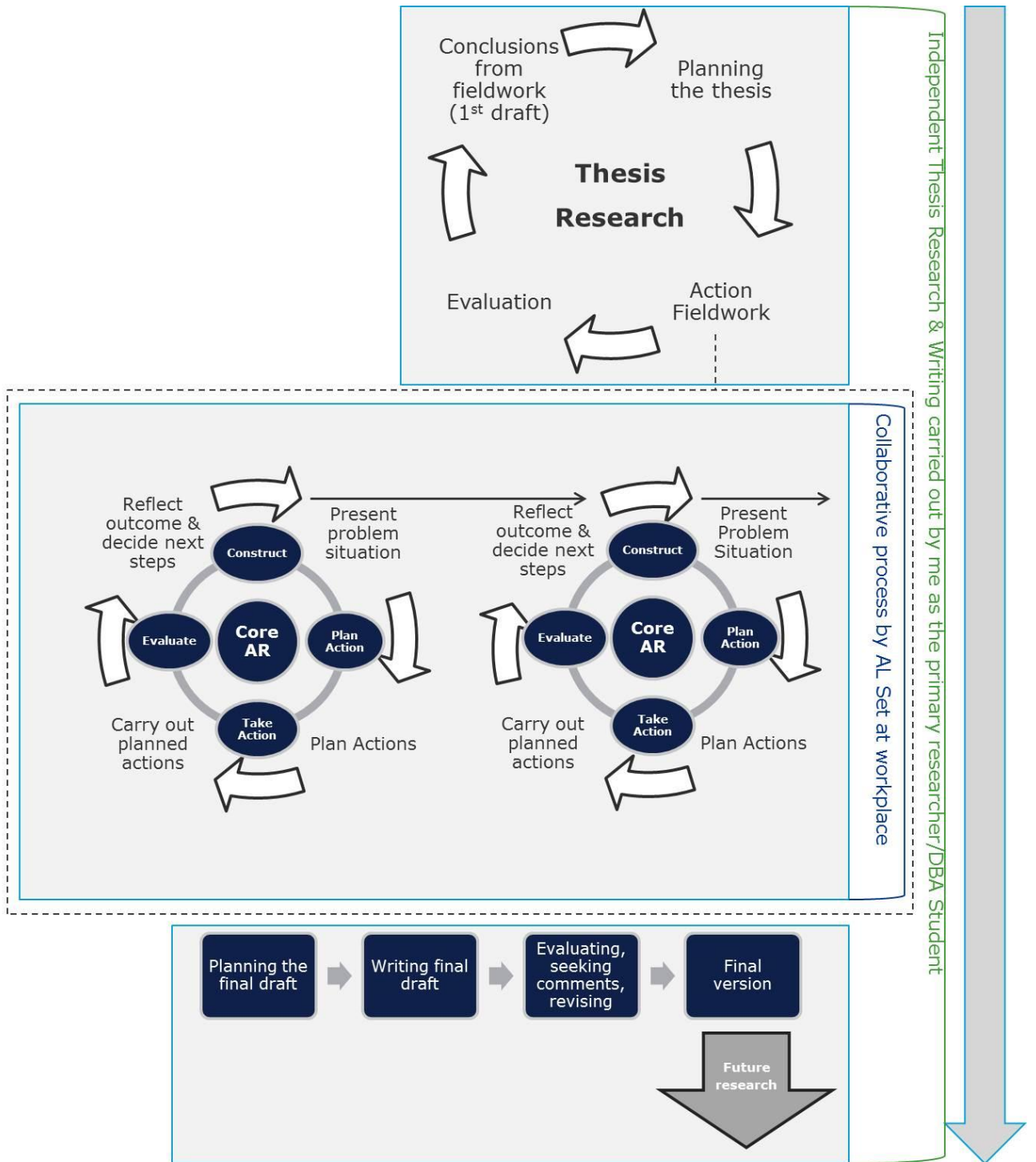
Figure 14: Trimmed down AR methodology used during initial phases of Core AR process

While designing this research study, I was mindful that the perception of my colleagues from workplace for being involved in a "research" project per se could be unfavorable for gaining their voluntary participation, and I therefore refrained from using the term AR when interacting with potential Core AR participants. I made use of the term "AL" instead, which focused on learning about the problems that were affecting us, taking actions on them, and also engaging in personal development, which in turn was relatively more interesting and motivating for the participants as against highlighting the "research" element. Therefore, one of the reasons for emphasizing on AL during the Core AR process was to gain the cooperation and participation of colleagues from my workplace who formed the Core AR team functioning as the AL set. Although colleagues from my workplace have been referred to as "AL set" in the following narrative of the Core AR process, they essentially formed the Core AR team. As highlighted by Dick (1997) and Zuber-Skerritt (1993, 2001), and discussed in Chapter 3.2, the distinction between AL and AR is blurring, and the terms are being used both interchangeably and interdependently. The focus of this thesis project is not theoretical debates on AL and AR, but rather how ALAR has been utilized in this empirical study for generating research driven actionable knowledge in order to realize the personal, organizational, and wider professional & academic, aims and objectives as envisioned in Chapter 1.5 and summarized in Chapters 5 and 6. In summary, AR is the key methodology used while AL has been used as a method and tool to facilitate meetings and collaboration between my colleagues from workplace that formed the Core AR process.

4.3.2. Establishing the Core AR Routine

I had invited 8 colleagues to be involved in the AL set. All invitees were located in the same business location where I was stationed. The invitees were requested to confirm their participation in an AL project for working on some of the problem situations presented by the ongoing post-merger integration. 5 of the invited colleagues confirmed their voluntary participation, and they eventually formed the AL set comprising of 6 members including me. One of the participants was my Line Manager who worked in the capacity of Regional Manager for Software Business Area operations in Middle East and India. Other five, including me, were Regional Sales and Administration managers responsible for Software Business Area operations in the Middle East region, all of who reported to my Line Manager. An initial meeting was scheduled to familiarize the participants with the AL process, set expectations, and establish ground rules. The participants were made aware of key findings from the pre-study interviews. 4 of these participants were involved in the

pre-study interviews and were already familiar with my thesis project. All participants had signed the consent form (refer Appendix B) and therefore had some preliminary information about my thesis research project. All participants were provided with a quick overview of the current status of my ongoing thesis research project and what was expected from them. I clarified to all participants that as far as my thesis work is concerned I would be solely responsible for the research design, conducting required interventions, and documenting the study, with dual aims of working on the identified workplace problem, and generating new actionable knowledge that could add value to the existing body of knowledge around my research area.

I also familiarized the AL set with some of my research work within the merger-related context that was carried out as a part of CAL projects during the DBA modules, which as per Herr and Anderson (2005) can be considered as pilot studies. Some of the AL set participants had participated in these CAL projects. After providing everyone with an overview of my thesis project, I clarified that the key purpose of the AL set was to help us as a unit to succeed at some of our work related challenges and KPIs amidst the ongoing post-merger integration phase, by engaging into AL.

Some ground rules were established by going around the table in a round-robin format and making notes on a flipchart. Some of the ground rules that were unanimously agreed by the group included confidentiality, respect for each other's opinion, commitment to action, and not getting personal while encountering any disagreements. We also included some basic courtesies as a part of the ground rules such as respect for everyone we would interact with during the project, making every attempt to participate in planned meetings, and informing the AL set well in advance of any anticipated absence or withdrawal. We agreed to meet on a weekly basis, and our meetings were referred as "Action Learning Meetings".

One of the key expectations from SLT, who served as sponsors for my research project, was to demonstrate learning and development of leadership skills for the participants. The AL meetings, therefore, followed a routine for taking turns to chair/facilitate and scribe the meetings, which would help everyone in the AL set to develop facilitation, leadership, listening, and scribing skills. I offered to provide any required support and guidance owing to learning and training received through the DBA programme. We brainstormed on a structure for our AL meetings, and the following routine was agreed:

1) Introduction of at least one concept (could be theoretical or based on experience) that would help the AL set.

2) Recapitulate actions agreed during the previous meeting(s)

3) Reflect upon status and learnings from these actions

4) Discuss existing challenges in a round robin fashion

5) Unanimously pick up a challenge discussed during the meeting and reflect upon it using the following questions illustrated in figure 15 as guidelines, as recommended by Raelin (2010, p.54):

1. Why is this challenge important to me?

2. Whose opinions must I consider in solving this problem?

3. Who has to be involved in the solution before it will succeed?

4. What assumptions am I making that may be unfounded?

5. What are the key success factors?

6. What lessons from the past can I bring to this problem?

7. What led to this problem in the first place?

8. How did I contribute to the problem?

9. How can I contribute to the solution?

10. How can I bring others who are resisting on board?

11. What agreements do I need before I can proceed with confidence?

12. What is already working well?

13. What is pulling me and others forward?

14. What barriers are holding me and others back?

15. What supports are already in place?

16. Which stakeholders need to be consulted outside the organization?

17. What skills are required to make particular solutions work?

18. What attitudes or self-beliefs do I need in order to be successful?

19. Do I need to invest in technologies to help me solve the problem?

20. What might happen if we did nothing?

Figure 15: Twenty great coaching questions (Raelin, 2010, p.54)

6) Brainstorm on actions

7) Summarize and outline agenda for the next meeting. Volunteer or nominate the chairperson/facilitator and scribe for the next meeting.

I placed emphasis on long-term commitment and teamwork from all AL set participants to improve a larger problem situation affecting all of us, as opposed to solving smaller pieces of disparate puzzles. I clarified to the AL set that our learning approach would follow Argyris' thought-model of taking a holistic approach towards sustainable continuous organization learning, as opposed to Lewinian principles of episodic stability (Herr and Anderson, 2005).

The description of 3 AR cycles in the subsequent sub-chapters refers to the Core AR participants as "AL set". The narrative of the 3 AR cycles carried out during this research study are presented following the 4 distinct AR stages, namely, Constructing, Planning, Acting and Evaluating. The activities described were however carried out during 15 AL meetings and the 4 AR stages correlate with the 4 AL processes as mapped in Table 1 and as illustrated in figure 14, as per the correlation between AR and AL discussed in Chapters 3.2.3 and 4.3.1. A transcript of the 15 AL meetings along with my reflections after each meeting is available in Appendix E. The following sub-chapters describe the meeting setting, discussions, and reflections carried out together by the AL set, and also my reflections as the primary researcher working on my thesis research. The data collected during the pre-study interviews, and also the learnings from the literature review process were taken into consideration during the Core AR process.

4.3.3. First AR Cycle

4.3.3.1 Constructing
The Constructing phase consisted of the problematization process carried out by the participants. Since most of the participants had sales related KPIs, it was unanimously decided to pursue cross-selling challenges as the AL problem, since this was one of the significant issues affecting the AL set during the ongoing post-merger integration phase. The SLT members had placed a lot of emphasis on taking advantage of the post-merger integration by engaging in cross-selling activities with other units and teams within and across the respective business areas. After some discussions on how we could define a problem to be worked upon during AL, our problem statement was framed as "How can we make use of synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process?" We discussed some of the key challenges along the lines of the

defined problem statement, and we collectively reflected upon uncovering the details around these challenges, as discussed in the following sub-sections.

Post-Merger Organizational Restructuring

One of the issues that were of common interest to all participants was related to introduction of new colleagues as a result of post-merger restructuring, and there was some natural resistance to this change, which according to Armenakis and Bedeian (1999, p.304) could be due to threatening of self-interests of certain individuals which in turn could lead to failed cooperation and eventually give rise to a crisis (Turner, 1976). One of the Sales Managers in the AL set raised a concern around large groups of colleagues from legacy organizations being non-cooperative in helping with cross-selling intentions. He expressed *"We had never worked with these colleagues before which made us feel that they were unwelcoming towards us."* This remark resonated with everyone in the AL set and we brainstormed upon the plausible causes. Some probable causes that were discussed included lack of awareness of SLT expectations, lack of relationship building, preoccupation, workload, inability to look at the benefits from cooperation on a holistic level, and misconceptions about our value addition to customers. It was evident that we had to gain cooperation from others beyond the AL set in order to succeed through our defined problem, which led to discussions on how we could influence the relevant individuals and groups within and outside the AL set to focus on realizing synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration in order to engage in cross-selling.

High Attrition Rate due to Voluntary and Involuntary Terminations

The fast-paced organizational restructuring during the ongoing post-merger integration process was giving rise to several voluntary and involuntary terminations due to people resigning or being made redundant. Such turnovers are expected during mergers for several reasons as discussed by various scholars who have researched on organizational mergers such as Marks and Mirvis (2011) who state management of culture as one of the reasons, Clayton (2010) who states individual interactions associated with alignment and commitment to change as one of the reasons, Krug (2003) who highlights mismanagement of expectations & misinterpretations as the key reason.

The sudden resignation of our Regional Manager who was a part of the AL set and also served as one of the key sponsors for my thesis project was a shocking and unexpected incident occurred between the first and second AL meeting. The Regional Manager,

however, confirmed his support to continue with the AL process during his notice period, but he was put on a gardening leave soon after his resignation which restricted his participation in future AL meetings. Gardening Leave is a practice in our organization wherein resigned or terminated employees are on the payroll but asked to stay away from work during their notice period. Everyone else in the AL set was committed to continuing with the planned AL meetings. We discussed concerns around the sudden resignation of our Regional Manager and a Sales Manager stated: *"We really enjoyed working under his (referring to the resigned manager) leadership, and it now feels like being headless chickens."* Another Sales Manager added *"It's more of a feeling like being seated as executives on a chartered plane scheduled to take off (referring to merger associated accelerated growth actions), and the pilot has resigned. What's worse is that a bus driver would most likely be nominated to fly this plane by someone sitting in an ivory tower (referring to our head office based in Europe), and the bus driver would then sit in the cockpit wondering what to do next, while the executives onboard are wondering why there is no movement or announcement!"* We were going through an emotional turmoil due to high attrition causing the dismissal of colleagues with whom we had been working together for years. Relating to our identified problem statement, we realized that similar post-merger reorganization situations could also be affecting colleagues working in other business units with whom we were aiming to realize synergies to enhance cross-selling.

Need for Driving a Culture of High Adaptivity and Collaboration

Some theoretical concepts focusing on collective thinking and collaboration were introduced and discussed, since the introduction of relevant theoretical concepts formed a part of the AL routine aimed towards development of the AL set participants and helping us with the AL problem. The theory of primary differences between Enacted and Espoused Values as illustrated in figure 16 which is an excerpt from Raelin's (2010, p.119) 'The Leaderful Fieldbook' was discussed as one of the relevant theories, which highlighted the characteristics of "adaptive self-directed teams," that was relevant to our AL problem.

Current Enacted Values	Future Espoused Values
Work is done as individuals	Teams outperform individuals
Someone else tells you what to do	Decisions should be made at the lowest competent level
External controls are needed	Employees can be trusted
No one owns the problem	Teams should "own" the solution
We react to the customer	Problems should be anticipated
Costs are someone else's problem	Everyone should work to reduce costs

Figure 16: Differences between Enacted and Espoused Values (Raelin, 2010)

"Network-Level Change" was discussed as another relevant theory highlighting the paradigm shift we were going through from working in silos to working as teams and eventually working as complex networks (Raelin, 2010, p.121-123). Network Level Change was described as a phenomenon which goes beyond normal job responsibilities and the typical "give and take" relationship between employees and employers. The behaviors enacted by employees in a Network Level Change go beyond the individual, interpersonal, team, and organizational level changes, and demonstrates bonds and commitment beyond the formal rewards provided to employees by employers. Behaviors such as empathy, sense of social belonging to a group, community, or network, become more prevalent and eventually enables organizational members to take a more holistic approach towards problem-solving that not only focuses on benefitting the respective individuals but also their groups and the entire network (Raelin, 2010). Emphasis was placed on the need for a sense of ownership, responsibility, and accountability for everyone, which forms the basis for Network Citizenship Behavior or Organizational Citizenship Behavior. It was highlighted that every Network needs Network Weavers or Change Agents, and our AL set could serve as these Agents by contributing our time and resources to the Network, especially considering that working on our identified problem would involve working across several stakeholders and stakeholder groups.

Raelin's (2010) 'Leaderful Practice' was discussed as another relevant theoretical concept in relation to our defined problem, which made use of findings from the literature review process as discussed in Chapter 2.4.3.1. Emphasis was placed on the 4 C's of Leaderful Practice, namely, Concurrent, Collective, Collaborative, and Compassionate, as opposed to the serial, individual, controlled, and dispassionate traditional leadership model. The illustration in figure 17 was used to highlight these characteristics of Leaderful Practice.
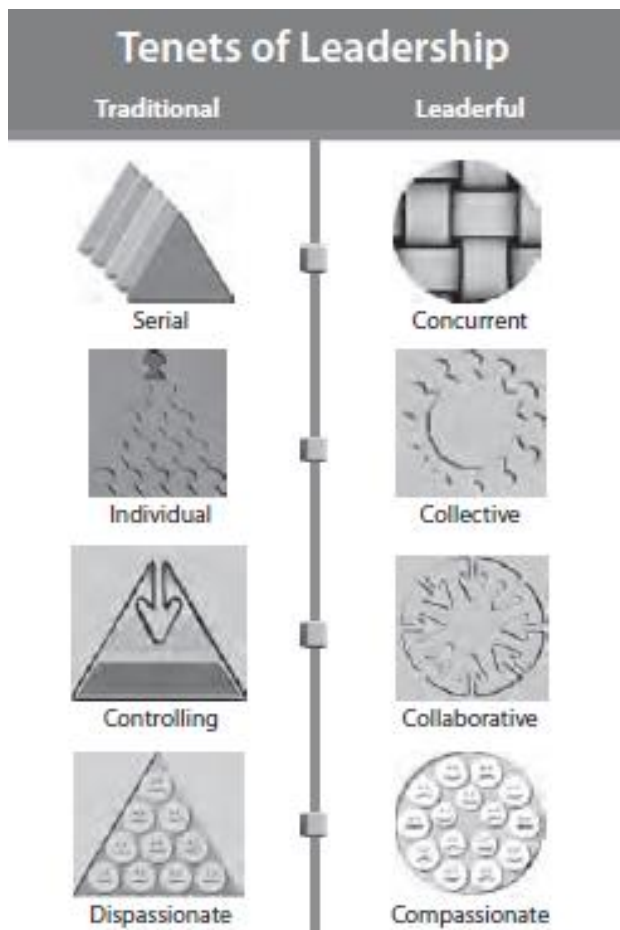
Figure 17: Four C's of Leaderful Practice (Raelin, 2010, p.16)

These theoretical concepts helped us with the problematization process and enabled us to view how we as AL set participants, most of who were not in designated leadership positions, could still be capable of exerting leadership through embracing Espoused Values, Network Level Change, and Leaderful Practice, thereby driving a culture of high adaptivity and collaboration.

Reflective Pause: Our manager's resignation seemed like an undesirable distraction to the Core AR project initially, but it eventually helped in shaping up the Core AR problem. There was an inevitable delay in scheduling the second meeting due to the availability of participants and the manager's resignation. However, after the second meeting started, I could feel the energy in the AL set and everyone seemed to be interested and engaged in the AL process.

I was able to relate the discourses and AL set behavior to some of the literature reviewed during the Change Management module of my DBA programme. Organizational change management behaviors such as ambivalence (Piderit, 2000) and cynicism (Fleming and Spicer, 2003) appeared to be the most prominent at individual levels, which have the potential of transitioning into defensive group behaviors (Vince and

Broussine, 1996). I realized I had to be mindful of potential challenges and be prepared with relevant case studies and tools that could be utilized for dealing with issues that could affect my research study.

Network Citizenship Behavior discussions paved the path for CAS, which was the theoretical framework for my research study, and it appeared like the AL set could function as effective CAS agents influencing other AL set participants and also individuals and groups from other business units during their pursuit of enabling cross-selling, which in turn could eventually drive Network Level Change following the principles of Espoused Values, and also help in meeting the organizational objectives of increased engagement and collaboration.

4.3.3.2 Planning

To identify synergies and engage in cross-selling activities, we identified as an action on all AL set participants to spread awareness of their sales-related goals, targets, and value propositions and gain cooperation from at least two colleagues from the merged organization with whom we have never worked before in cross-selling initiatives. Each one of us was expected to report our approach and outcomes and reflect upon what went well or what didn't, which would, in turn, enable us to measure our success and help us to gain a better understanding of the problem situation.

As a part of the planning process, the "Hang Time Exercise" also known as "The Nine Shapes Exercise" from Raelin's (2010) 'The Leaderful Fieldbook' was discussed as a tool for collectively reflecting upon our problems, or for discussing any unpredictable outcome from our actions. The exercise would also enable us to take a collaborative approach towards understanding the problem situation by viewing it from different perspectives, which in turn would help to enhance our actions. The primary idea behind Hang Time Exercise was to step back and take a more holistic view of a problem presented by a protagonist (an AL set participant who volunteers or is nominated to present a problem) before taking any actions, and engaging in reflecting upon the problem from different perspectives. Each participant was required to pick up one or more of the nine shapes illustrated in figure 18 and offer their thoughts relating to the problem such that their inputs corresponded to respective shapes. This process of reflecting upon the problem and offering inputs according to the shapes is termed as "Q-Storming," wherein the protagonist is not allowed to speak or interrupt, but instead carefully listen to the various perspectives offered by others.

Minus You tend to point out any omitted details or facts

Plus You like to ask about the benefits of any plan for change and what difference it would make if it succeeds

Stop Sign You point out the cautions, constraints, and contradictions and ask about the things that can prevent the plan from succeeding

Yellow Sign You point out the ways that any cautions, constraints, and contradictions can be overcome

Light Bulb You like to bring up new, even wild, ideas and alternatives

Question Mark You like to ask about the assumptions underlying the approach being taken

Connector You look for connections among disparate ideas and point out emerging patterns or principles

Heart You like to ask about any gut feelings toward the plan

Arrow You focus on next steps and ask if the planning can make way for implementation

Figure 18: Nine Shapes as Q-Storming cues during Hang Time Exercise (Raelin, 2010, p.20)

The Q-storming phase of the Hang Time exercise is followed by an "Assumption" phase wherein all team members offered their respective assumptions and suggestions to the problem presented by the protagonist.

Reflective Pause: *We were working together effectively towards a common organizational problem by building up on some of the concepts that complement AR such as Raelin's Leaderful Practice (Raelin, 2009) as discussed in literature review chapter* 2.4.3.1. *I was meeting the personal objective of being able to use appropriate methodology and techniques and demonstrating the creation of actionable knowledge, while*

my colleagues were demonstrating working collaboratively towards intended synergy realizations as discussed in the aims and objectives mentioned in Chapter [1.5](#).

4.3.3.3 Acting

A couple of AL set participants who worked as Sales Managers had approached colleagues working in other business units whom they either knew directly or through other known colleagues, but had never worked with before on cross-selling initiatives. They managed to secure some joint customer sales meetings through their discussions which were a clear demonstration of how synergies were being realized by focusing on cross-selling activities. The AL set participants highlighted how they placed a high emphasis on creating more value for customers by working with individuals and teams from other business units wherein both units could benefit in meeting their sales related KPIs rather than one obliging the other. One of the AL set participants emphasized how his discussions with colleagues from other business units highlighted creating long-term synergies as opposed to one-off transactional favors, for which he made use of Espoused Values, Network Level Change, and Leaderful Practice concepts that were discussed during the previous AL meetings. He added that these concepts were well received by relevant colleagues from other business units and were useful in reinforcing synergy realizations.

One of the AL set participant had an undesirable outcome while trying to organizing a "Lunch and Learn" session, which according to him was his action for spreading awareness of his value proposition with a wider group of colleagues from other business units. He described how he proposed the idea of Lunch and Learn sessions to the Section Heads of a couple of business units that he's never worked with before. His primary intention behind these Lunch and Learn sessions was to spread awareness of how the software product and services he's responsible for could benefit colleagues from other business units and their respective customers, thereby establishing synergies for cross-selling. The key predicament he faced was the availability of various team members and convincing the respective Unit Managers to support and facilitate these Lunch and Learn sessions. These Unit Managers were new in their roles due to the ongoing restructuring due to post-merger integration changes, which made the AL set participant think that these managers had other priorities then since none of them accepted his request for organizing the Lunch and Learn sessions. We decided to make use of the Hang Time Exercise to discuss the predicament faced by the AL set participant who worked as a Regional Sales

Manager, and he was asked to present his problem as the protagonist of the Hang Time Exercise. His problem was framed as *"How can I improve cooperation from various Section Heads for helping in Cross-Selling?"* The following questions emerged through the Q-Storming phase of Hang Time exercise wherein each one of us selected a couple of shapes out of the nine shapes as illustrated in figure 18, and the protagonist was asked to address these questions:

- Who else do you think would have a similar problem as yours?
- What are the consequences of you not addressing this problem?
- Who do you think could help you?
- How do you think you can win the time and confidence of these managers?
- Did you try asking one of our top managers to facilitate the required cooperation?
- Do you think that they are not able to trust you enough?
- How could you make your session more attractive for them to attend?
- Do you think other units have similar attrition and change management challenges which are bothering them at the moment?

After reflecting upon these questions, the protagonist offered his thoughts which were mostly related to his lack of thinking about how the ongoing merger-related challenges and restructuring may have affected colleagues from other units, which in turn could have affected their lack of response towards conducting the proposed Lunch and Learn sessions.

We then progressed to the "Assumption" phase of the Hang Time exercise wherein all team members offered their respective assumptions and suggestions to the protagonist's problem, and some of these assumptions and suggestions included:

- There may be some people in other units who empathize with you, or may be genuinely interested in learning how they could synergize with you
- You may like to try by-passing the unit heads and approaching the cross-unit team members directly
- You could be clearer while communicating your intent and purpose of these sessions
- You could correlate your intent with the values of our organization, as we strongly encourage learning and helping each other as an organization

- You seem too focused on arranging the Lunch and Learn sessions as opposed to being more creative on the underlying objective of establishing synergies and facilitating cross-selling

Upon further reflections on these assumptions, the protagonist remarked that he was perhaps not creative enough in making his proposal for these sessions, and we brainstormed the following options for reframing the problem:

- How can I attract colleagues from other units to collaborate in cross-selling amidst the ongoing post-merger integration?
- How can I create awareness about my aim to facilitate more cross-selling?

The protagonist took the learnings from the Hang Time Exercise and was successful in organizing a Lunch and Learn session that eventually led to joint customer meetings and also a joint proposal, thereby accomplishing our cross-selling intentions.

Reflective Pause: It was good to see some synergy realizations taking place as a direct result of the AL process. The AL approach helped us to channel our energies in the desired direction and enabled us to focus on areas that mattered most to the participants and the SLT members. Furthermore, the AL process provided us with a support system as well as healthy peer pressure while working on the planned actions, which seemed to be quite useful during a state a flux wherein the entire organization was going through fast-paced changes due to the ongoing post-merger integration. The AL routine was also helping us to focus on desirable positive outcome as opposed to getting dragged into the issues, problems, and challenges posed by the integration. The positive outcome from AL so far validated the effectiveness of research paradigm and methodology discussed in Chapters 3.2 and 4.3.2.

The hang-time exercise received very good response from all participants and induced a lot of energy amongst the participants, which was evident from their active participation and enthusiasm. I reckoned it would be useful to include more of such group activities from the toolbox I had developed from learnings and CAL projects during instructor-led modules of my DBA programme.

4.3.3.4 Evaluating

While evaluating our actions, we figured out that a couple of AL set participants had made good progress on realizing synergies with colleagues from other business units by accomplishing cross-selling activities such as joint meetings, successful Lunch and Learn sessions, and joint proposals.

While reflecting on the outcome of the Hang Time Exercise, the AL set participant who was the protagonist in the exercise commented *"I had to move the focus away from the primary intention of cross-selling, and rather emphasize on how the session could be made more attractive for the respective Unit Managers. In addition to emphasizing on the potential synergy, I highlighted how our unit could help in cross-selling and providing value addition to the services provided by these respective units, as opposed to merely educating them about our services and looking for means to boosting the sales of our respective products and services. The path we followed can be related to the Future Espoused Values and Network Level Change discussed during AL meetings, which makes a lot of sense now."* He further added *"It was my feeling that our colleagues at ground level more than welcomed the opportunity for a Lunch and Learn session. I am not sure whether the lunch part or learn part interests them more, but it's a good sign that they are at least taking out the time and are willing to listen to us, which could hopefully help towards establishing a strong synergetic relation. It may be interesting to reflect on why some of the Unit Managers were earlier resisting to such initiatives"*.

Upon further discussions on our actions aimed towards cross-selling activities, we realized that it was unfair for us to assume that everyone would be interested in our objectives around cross-selling, especially considering that each unit and individual had their respective priorities and set of KPIs. However, our strong organizational values, vision, and regular merger updates from the group CEO helped us to emphasize the need for such collaboration and synergies. The merger update publications also guided our communication with some of the key stakeholders who were then obliged to support our initiatives, as they were now being communicated in alignment with our key values as an organization, the most relevant organizational values being "We are committed to teamwork and innovation" and "We embrace change and deliver results."

Reflecting on some of the merger updates and our organizational values made us realize that our problem situation was more complex than we had initially imagined, as there were apparently more stakeholders associated with our problem than we had initially considered. We realized that there was a need to redefine our problem situation by taking a more holistic view. Afte some brainstorming we realized that we required better understanding of the complexities involved with our problem situation. We also realized the need for bringing in more support from various stakeholders for realizing synergies to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration.

Concepts and tools such as Espoused Values, Network Level Change, Leaderful Practice, and Hang Time Exercise, were found to be very useful, and all AL set participants expressed the desire to learn about more relevant theoretical concepts and tools that would support the AL process and individual development of the participants. Everyone appreciated the AL process and the theoretical concepts that were being used effectively while working on our defined problem situation. The established AL routine was also appreciated by all AL set participants and they were enjoying chairing and scribing the meetings, which was developing their facilitation and scribing skills.

A feedback form for the AL meeting chairmen/facilitators was agreed by everyone for serving as a feedback mechanism and also for demonstrating participation to the SLT members who were closely monitoring the development of AL set participants. We decided to provide a combined feedback after each AL meeting as opposed to completing the feedback forms individually. I proposed the feedback form from Raelin (2010, p.66-68) illustrated in figure 19 and all AL set participants agreed with this as the feedback mechanism.

1. The session improved in its effectiveness as a result of the facilitation (please circle one).

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. If the session improved, what specifically did the facilitator do to assist the team?

b. Do you recall any specific interventions by the facilitator that were helpful? Not helpful?

c. If the session did not improve, did the facilitator do anything to hold the team back? If so, what specifically would you point to?

2. The facilitator was helpful to me.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. How was the facilitator helpful to you?

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3. The facilitator was helpful to other group members.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. With whom and how was the facilitator helpful to others?

4. The facilitator helped the group learn.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

5. The facilitator helped me or other individual group members learn.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

6. The facilitator helped the team manage conflict.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

7. The facilitator helped the team face some deep emotions.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

8. The facilitator helped the team by encouraging all to express their ideas freely, even if outside the norm.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

9. The facilitator modeled for the team how to be a sensitive team member.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you point to what he or she did that revealed a degree of sensitivity?

10. Are there any other attributes of the facilitator that you would like to mention, either positive or negative?

Figure 19: Facilitator Feedback Sheet (Raelin, 2010, p.66-68)

Reflective Pause: The AL process appeared to be on track despite the distraction caused by our Regional Manager's departure. We had a long way to go for achieving the desired change in our defined problem, but we seemed to have some sense of direction and guidance due to the AL routine. Everyone seemed to get more and more involved, and there was strong acceptance to the established approach, which I think everyone understood quite well by now and seemed to enjoy.

I could relate the discussions during AL meetings to some of the findings from Phase 1 pre-study interviews. For e.g. the problem presented during the Hang Time Exercise was similar to sense-making and sense-giving findings from the pre-study interviews as discussed in Chapter 4.2, and also related to Rhodes, Pullen and

Clegg (2010), and Beech, McPhail and Coupland's (2009) discussions on overcoming barriers related to employee resistance and anxiety.

While reflecting on the initial AL meetings in relation to the Core AR of my individual thesis research project, I reckoned that we had successfully completed the first AR cycle, and were ready to progress with the second AR cycle wherein we would be reconstructing the problem situation based on the insights and reflections from the first cycle.

I prepared to discuss some of the relevant theories and tools with the chairpersons for the next meetings and to equip them with some relevant tools and resources, which also helped in keeping the process interesting for the participants. While discussing these theories and tools I was conscious of making use of the relevant theoretical concepts from the literature review and research methodology processes as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, which could be interpreted as insider researcher bias, but I had to be mindful of staying on track with regards to my thesis research, because there was a lot of room for Core AR process to digress due to losing focus, especially during the early phases. Such negotiations are essential as discussed by some insider action research scholars including Roth et al (2007, p.52) who have termed such (steering) behavior as "street-smartness" that is desirable during AR, Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) who call this being "politically astute", and Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.11) who consider such steering behavior by primary researchers essential for balancing Core and Thesis AR projects.

4.3.4. Second AR Cycle

4.3.4.1 Constructing

Reflecting on the Hang Time exercise, one of the AL set participants remarked *"We seem to have moved our focus from the key problem defined during our first meeting which was framed as "How can we make use of synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process?"* He further added, *"It might be useful for us to identify more ways of enhancing cross-selling by making the best out of ongoing post-merger integrations instead of merely focusing on Lunch and Learn sessions"*. Everyone agreed to this suggestion and another participant commented: *"The success of organizing Lunch and Learn sessions is without any doubt a good initiative in line with our identified problem, but it seems like we need to take a more holistic approach towards working on our problem."* Upon further discussions, the Leaderful Practice, and Espoused Values concepts discussed during the previous meetings were deemed as relevant constructs for taking a holistic approach to our identified problem. We felt that there was no need to

redefine the problem statement, but we all needed a better understanding of the complexities surrounding our problem situation, and we needed a holistic approach.

We brainstormed on what we could do for taking a collective and holistic approach and made use Raelin's (2010, p.54) twenty great coaching questions (refer figure 15 in Chapter 4.3.2) for reconstructing our AL problem. The following factors were identified for enabling us to gain better understanding of our problem situation: 1) identifying the key stakeholders involved with our problem, 2) identifying some of the success factors and metrics to track our performance, 3) identifying alliances and approaches that could help while working on our problem, and 4) identifying the consequences of not taking actions. These reflections made us consider the problem situation beyond the AL set, SLT, and a handful of Units with whom we had been engaging so far, and made us consider additional stakeholders within and outside the organization that was affected by the problem situation. We then thought of framing the desirable actions aimed towards cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration such that they would be in line with KPIs of the relevant stakeholders, which in turn could increase our success while gaining the commitment for working on our identified actions. We realized that there was a need for mapping the stakeholders relevant to our identified problem, reflect upon their respective interests, and identify what actions could we carry out to realize synergies for enhancing cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration.

A recent announcement made by our CEO published on our intranet site which provided a status update after one year from the merger announcement was discussed by the AL set. The announcement mentioned some of the key achievements including a uniform strategy, new visual and brand identity, establishment of new organizational structure, implementation of a common management system, establishment of some joint offices, common IT platform, and ongoing harmonization of common career models & HR processes. The announcement also highlighted that we have successfully achieved "make it work" phase and are now focusing on "make it better" phase, that would be eventually followed by a "make it excellent" phase, which related to one of the themes identified during the initial pre-study interviews as discussed in Chapter 4.2. The announcement placed a strong emphasis on how we have managed to achieve this success independently within the organization, without involving any external consultants, while maintaining our commitment and focus on quality, market, and customers. This was very relevant to our AL set as we too were contributing towards these achievements and some

of the SLT members were closely monitoring our progress. An excerpt from the CEO's announcement stated *"We still have a lot to gain from cross-selling and collaborative business development across both service lines and business areas. This is an area where I expect your customer focus and foresight to generate results."* We discussed how this timely announcement was relevant and conducive to our identified problem and discussions, and could help us gain the required support and commitment from some of the stakeholders.

Since CAS formed the theoretical framework of my thesis research, I introduced and discussed CAS with the AL set, which further helped in building upon Espoused Values and Network Level Change concepts, and accentuated how actions carried out by the AL set could make an impact on the larger organization. While discussing CAS, I made mention of Kantian philosophy (Stacey, 2011, p.52-54), and related to how CAS could help in thinking of our defined problem situation more holistically. We visualized our AL set as an autonomous sub-system within a large system that was self-organizing through the AL process such that we interacted with other sub-systems (business units) thereby self-emerging together without any prior design. Our actions were making an impact on the overall system (larger organization). I used the analogy of "fitness landscape" (Stacey, 2011, p.246-248) for emphasizing the significance of being able to adapt to the changing landscape and evolving during the process thereby emerging stronger individually, as teams, and as the larger organization. The changing landscape in our case was the fast-paced changes due to the ongoing post-merger integration, and our survival strategies involved meeting our KPIs while being able to adapt to the changes.

Referring to CAS, one of the participant commented: *"This all sounds good in theory but how do we get our acts together to work on our identified problem using this principle?".* To address this concern, I introduced Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey's (2007) CLT for enabling some degree of direction and control to CAS through adaptive, administrative, and enabling leadership functions as discussed in Chapters 2.4.1 and 4.3.1. Relating our actions to CLT, we discussed how our AL set participants and colleagues from other business units influenced by our actions would be demonstrating Adaptive Leadership functions. Some of the Unit Managers and SLT members would be demonstrating Administrative Leadership through the provision of enabling conditions by establishing alignment and control, for e.g. setting KPIs around cross-selling, establishing mandates for facilitation of joint meetings and learning, and so on. Enabling Leadership functions would

serve as a conduit between Adaptive and Administrative Leadership functions by providing the required guidelines and structure, and drive the culture for CAS to evolve and flourish. The illustration in Figure 20 was used to summarize how CLT driven Adaptive Leadership could take place in a CAS like manner.
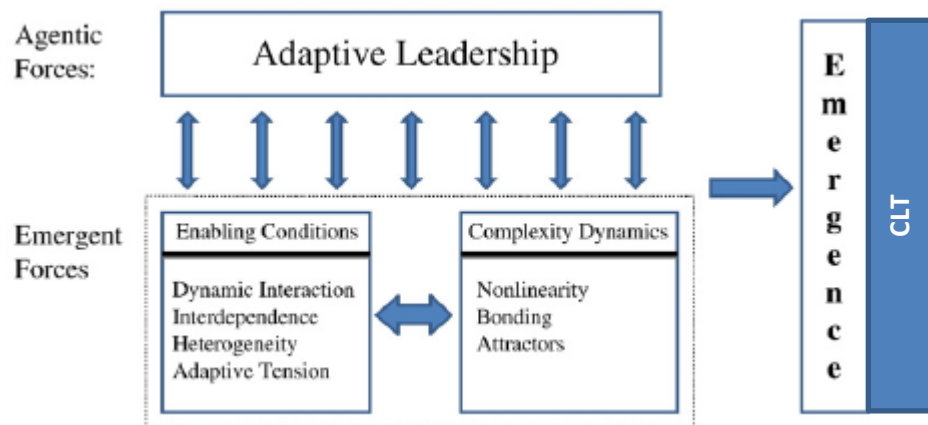
Figure 20: Adaptive Leadership Leading to Emergent CLT (Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2009, p.643)

There were some clarifications and questions on CAS and CLT, which I could address based on my knowledge gained during the instructor-led DBA modules and the literature review process. Everyone seemed to be convinced with the relationship and applicability of these systems thinking concepts to our identified AL problem, and we progressed to planning some actions based on these insights.

Reflective Pause: The CEO's announcement came in at a very appropriate time which not only motivated the AL set participants but also helped us with establishing some Administrative Leadership actions.

Upon viewing our problems and challenges through a theoretical lens, I realized that we were dealing with a "teleological change" process (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995) wherein some of the like-minded colleagues directly affected by an ongoing change were striving towards working as a group, constructing an envisioned goal and taking actions to reach the goal as well as devising metrics to measure progress.

Reflecting on the progress so far, I thought we had a good start to the second AR cycle, and I now had a sense of structure in the Core AR process outlined in Chapter 4.3.2. The participants were effectively reflecting upon problems, identifying actions, working on these actions, reflecting on learnings, and agreeing on new actions, thereby meeting some of the aims and objectives related to impact to my organization as discussed in Chapter 1.5.

4.3.4.2 Planning

Some of the actions that we identified to take a more holistic approach to working on our problem included:

- Mapping the key stakeholders, both internal and external
- Aligning our problem and actions with the larger vision, values, and merger-related objectives communicated by the SLT and CEO
- Framing our problem and proposals as an organizational development project in line with KPIs of most stakeholders and units we anticipated working with, to gain the required support from relevant individuals and groups
- Gaining commitment at all organizational levels we are aiming to influence

The Stakeholder Strategy Matrix from Raelin's (2010) 'The Leaderful Fieldbook' shown in figure 21 was proposed as a tool that could provide us with a structured approach for mapping internal and external stakeholders associated with our defined problem. Everyone seemed to be in agreement with this suggestion for taking a holistic view of our identified problem.

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What You Need from Them	What They Need from You	How You Plan to Meet Your Mutual Needs

Figure 21: Stakeholder Strategy Matrix (Raelin, 2010)

Some of the following actions and purposeful activities along the lines of CAS and CLT were identified, which in turn were grouped as administrative, enabling, and adaptive leadership actions.

Some of the Administrative Leadership actions were noted as follows:

1) Establishing KPIs for conducting joint customer meetings
2) Establishing KPIs for knowledge sharing through Lunch and Learn sessions, seminars, meetings, networking, etc.
3) Establishing KPIs for cross-referencing value addition that could be offered by other units and business areas in their proposals and tender responses to customers
4) Establishing KPIs for conducting joint industry seminars to highlight collective strengths
5) Establishing KPIs and incentives for cross-selling successes achieved through collaborating across units and business areas
6) Alignment and integration of systems and procedures used by various legacy organizational units

Some of the Adaptive Leadership actions were noted as follows:

1) Active engagement with colleagues from other units and business areas
2) Making it attractive for other colleagues and units to work together and help in cross-selling
3) Being open minded and embracing the actions laid out through administrative leadership functions
4) Taking a holistic view of our organization and the entire supply chain including customers, regulators, and even competitors; this was associated with Stakeholder Strategy Matrix (figure 21).

Some of the Enabling Leadership actions were noted as follows:

1) Engaging in joint meetings and discussions
2) Making use of corporate networking tools such as discussion blogs and buddy programs to realize synergies during ongoing post-merger integration
3) Regular sharing of opportunities and customer challenges in a collaborative manner

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We then discussed the pros and cons around these actions and engaged in a structured debate for the change. We realized that we should be taking a more piecemeal approach towards our actions, as some of the actions, especially when seen together, were seemingly daunting, overwhelming, and beyond our sphere of influence. It was therefore decided to concentrate on the following actions as immediately viable actions to be carried out.

1) Identify and invite one key member of the SLT in the next AL meeting to have their buy-in to the administrative leadership actions.
2) Organize at least one cross-unit meeting to discuss way forward on some of the actions noted in adaptive and enabling leadership actions

Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson's (2008) 'Situational Leadership Theory' was introduced as a part of our routine for introducing relevant theoretical concepts, which aimed towards equipping AL set participants with management and leadership skills while engaging with other colleagues and influencing their behaviors. The developers of Situational Leadership Theory claim it to be an effective practical approach for influencing leadership relationships that and can be used by managers, leaders, teachers, and salespeople (p.131). The illustration in figure 22 was used to explain Situational Leadership Theory, which indicated what level of task and relationship behavior (S1, S2, S3 and S4) should be adopted when dealing with individuals and teams with different levels of performance readiness (R1, R2, R3 and R4).
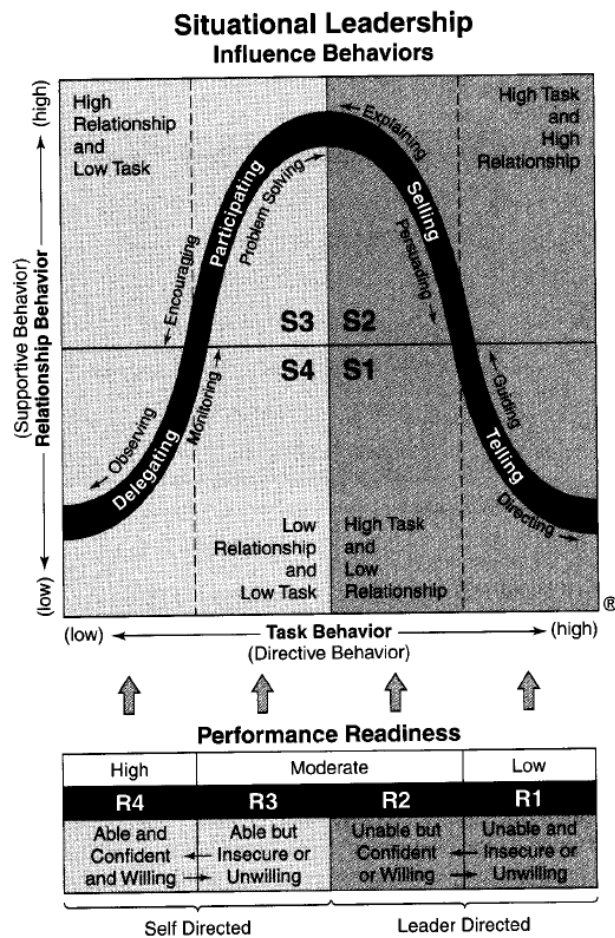
Situational Leadership Theory was aimed to enable the AL set participants with guidelines for influencing desirable cross-selling oriented behaviors through managing the appropriate level of relationship and task behaviors while dealing with individuals and teams with different levels of performance readiness based on their respective capabilities and willingness.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) Leadership Continuum was also discussed, which is a classic theory related to Network Level Change. Leadership Continuum helped in referring to common metrics and terminologies when discussing the performance readiness of various individuals and teams, and also gaining a better understanding of our organizational environment while working on our identified actions. The illustration in figure 23 was used to discuss Leadership Continuum, which is an excerpt from a Harvard Business Review article. Leadership Continuum correlates the degree of influence exercised by managers/leaders to the degree of freedom offered to people and groups being influenced.
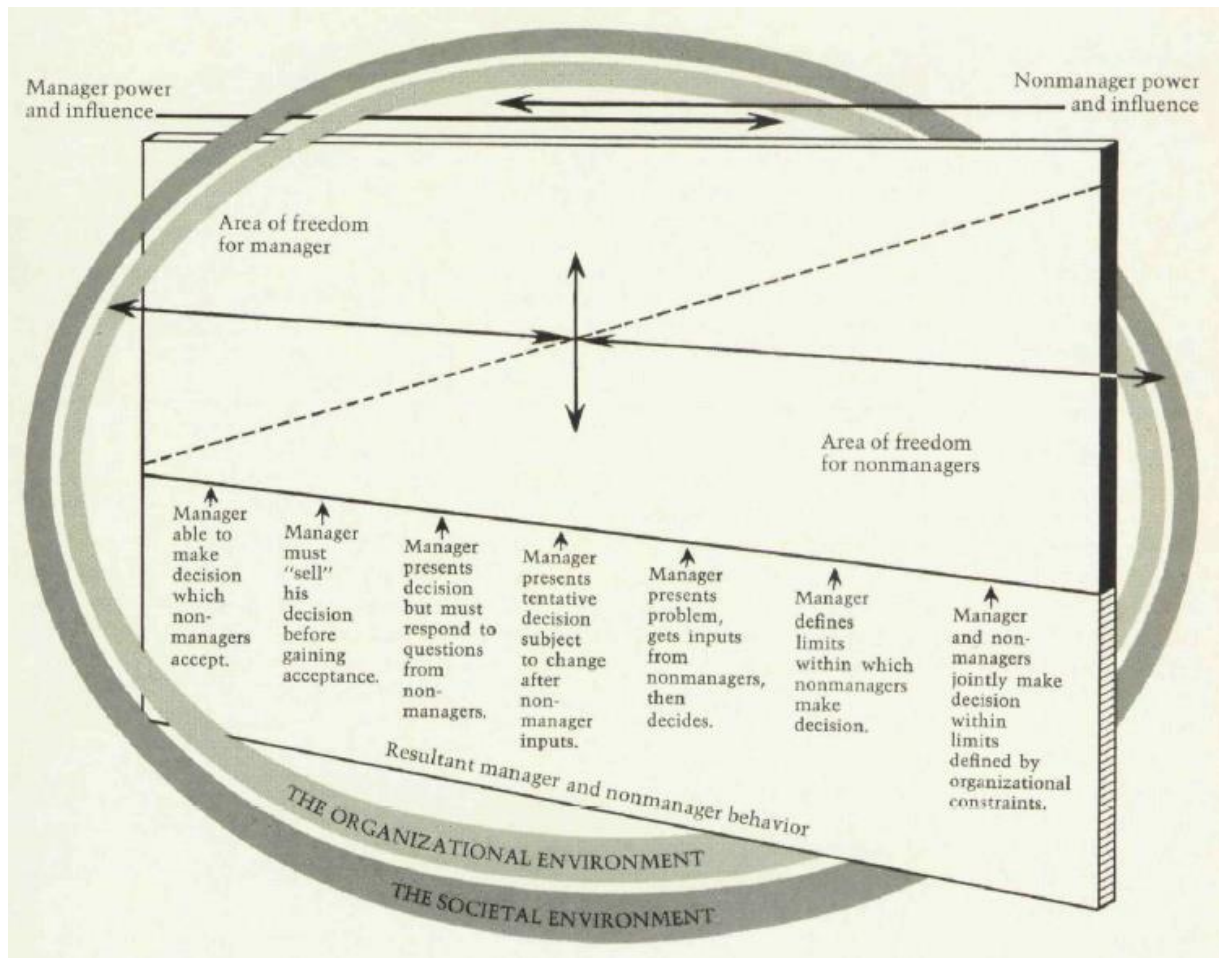
Figure 23: Continuum of Manager-nonmanager behavior (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973, p.167)

We concluded that we tended to lean more towards the right of the Leadership Continuum in our organization that provides more freedom for non-managers, which was conducive for our ongoing initiatives and also for CAS to thrive. Both Situational Leadership Theory and Leadership Continuum were found to be useful and relevant concepts by the participants. The Situational Leadership Theory, in particular, appeared to be an instant hit, and we were able to relate it to Enabling and Adaptive Leadership functions of CLT. Referring to Situational Leadership Theory, one of the participants said: *"This is an excellent model which I think will serve as a valuable tool in my leadership toolbox, not just for our ongoing AL but for everything I will do as a leader and a manager."* Another participant remarked *"I think we have self-directed performance readiness in our organization, which will require us to deploy S3 and S4 leadership behaviors with low to high relationship and low task behaviors, as most of our colleagues seem to be quite able and confident, but some could also be able and insecure or unwilling, especially considering the ongoing post-merger integration related changes and high turnover rates."*

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We agreed to work on the Stakeholder Strategy Matrix and CLT oriented actions while making use of CAS, Situational Leadership Theory, and Leadership Continuum.

Reflective Pause: The complexity science concepts that were envisioned to shape up this AR project such as CAS and CLT as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 were being implemented effectively. Concepts such as Stakeholder Strategy Matrix, Situational Leadership Theory and Leadership Continuum were valuable towards meeting the aims and objectives of continuous learning and collective decision making by some of the organizational members participating in this research study as discussed in Chapter 1.5. CLT in particular seemed to have catalyzed the CAS theoretical framework as discussed in Chapter 2.4.1 and the actions identified seemed effective towards the intended synergy realizations.

4.3.4.3 Acting

The Stakeholder Strategy Matrix was completed collectively by the AL set participants as shown in Table 2 below.

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	Successful post-merger integration through establishing strong synergies and success stories.	Strategy, guidance, and access to resources.	Support for succeeding with merger objectives in alignment with organizational vision and values, such that there is an impact to the overall value chain.	Gain support from SLT members for access to required resources and for channeling key communications. In return, we would foster a spirit of synergies and joint actions towards realizing merger objectives in alignment with organizational vision and values and as per the direction set by

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
				SLT's expectations.
Unit managers and section heads from various Business Areas/Units	Collaboration and synergies across units.	Motivation and access to resources that these respective managers can influence.	Support towards meeting their unit KPIs and making work more enjoyable for their team members.	Gain clarity on each other's KPIs and brainstorm on how we can achieve these through collaboration.
Sales Managers from other Business Areas and Divisions	Increased sales and customer satisfaction.	Cross-selling synergies, continued enthusiasm, and support.	Cross-selling synergies which will eventually help them to meet their KPIs and also make their work more enjoyable.	Brainstorm on how we can achieve our KPIs together. For e.g. joint events, meetings, and demonstrating a spirit of oneness.
Consultants who work with Customers on a daily basis	More value addition to customers, which will, in turn, have a positive impact on ongoing projects.	Make use of existing customer relations for cross-selling.	Meeting project delivery KPIs, better customer satisfaction, referrals, and upselling consultancy work.	Joint meetings with customers to demonstrate value addition. Knowledge sharing sessions to share capabilities and identify synergies.
Customers	Better value creation, smooth execution of projects, and long lasting relationship with their preferred	More business and positive references.	Meeting their business critical objectives in an efficient and professional manner.	Joint meetings with existing customers, arranging networking conferences that would also involve

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Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
	business partner.			regulatory bodies.
Regulatory bodies	Strong impact on safe and sustainable future.	Knowledge and cooperation. Nominate us as the preferred solution partner to our target customers	Help them to achieve the desired regulatory compliance by providing optimal solutions and services to target customers.	Sharing international best practices, conducting joint industry projects, participation in strategic conferences, sponsoring strategic events.

Table 2: Completed Stakeholder Strategy Matrix

The following actions were carried out as planned:

1) Identify and invite one member of the SLT in the next meeting to have their buy-in to the administrative leadership actions: We decided to seek the support of our Divisional Director since the Regional Manager's position was not yet filled up, and our Divisional Director was acting as the Regional Manager. I provided the Divisional Director a summary of my AR project and the ongoing AL process that focused on using synergy realizations for cross-selling, and was also provided a quick summary of CAS and CLT. The Divisional Director was then requested to establish some Administrative Leadership actions. The Administrative Leadership actions mentioned in the planning stage mentioned in Chapter 4.3.4.2 were discussed and some of the following actions were proposed for implementation: 1) issuing formal memos, 2) providing resources for conducting knowledge sharing sessions, 3) cross-referencing value addition from other business units in tenders and proposals going out to customers, 4) conducting joint meetings with customers and regulatory authorities, 5) joint participation in conferences & seminars, and 6) imposing coordinative facilitations. The Divisional Director agreed to establish Administrative Leadership actions as it aligned with the ongoing post-merger integration activities and SLT expectations. The Divisional Director communicated

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some of the feasible administrative actions during the monthly management meetings, and through a memo to relevant team members, Section Heads, as well as some SLT members.

2) Organize at least one cross team meeting to discuss way forward on some of the actions noted in adaptive and enabling leadership actions: We managed to engage with some of the key team members from other business areas and also other regions comprising of individuals from both legacy entities who we had not worked with before on cross-selling initiatives. We had some successful joint customer meetings, agreements for joint participation in conferences and seminars, and increased engagement focused on cross-selling.

Reflective Pause: I felt more confident of CLT after speaking to the Divisional Director who established some of the administrative actions that were instrumental for CAS to thrive within our organization. All participants were enthusiastic about the collaborative inquiries and joint actions being carried out through AL process; wherein we were collectively working on common challenges and co-generating actionable knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). I could see CAS behavior being used as a vehicle for forming goals, deciding on the implementation plans, evaluating our actions, and modifying goals as required which validated Clayton's (2010) suggestion of making use of CAS during post-merger integrations. AL proved to be an effective tool and method for the Core AR process by providing us with an established routine and structure to work in a problem situation that we truly owned while contributing towards individual development for the participants.

The Core AR process was demonstrating all tenants of Leaderful Practice. I could relate our discussions to "dispersalist and constructionist discourses" (Caldwell, 2005), wherein employees at all levels were contributing towards cultivating an autonomous learning organization while working towards the intended synergy realizations in line with some of the aims and objectives mentioned in Chapter 1.5. We were negotiating our change management interventions as self-managed teams eliminating the need for central hierarchical controls, which was also in line with CAS principles that formed the theoretical framework of this research study.

4.3.4.4 Evaluating

Referring to the completed Stakeholder Strategy Matrix (Table 2), we came to a realization that even a focused problem such as ours which was concerned with making use of synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process, involved a complex matrix of stakeholders at various levels that required a sense

of ownership, responsibility, and accountability in everyone. We realized that we had made significant progress as compared to our initial meetings wherein we were merely focusing on working on a problem situation concerned with arranging Lunch and Learn sessions. We were now cognizant of where respective actions were placed in the grand scheme of things and were able to see our redefined problem more holistically.

We realized that our next challenge was to prioritize the actions mapped in the Stakeholder Strategy Matrix and come up with a practical approach for carrying out these actions. We also realized that we required more support beyond the AL set for influencing the stakeholders at different levels. We identified that the AL set could serve as Change Agents or Network Weavers. One of the participants commented *"Taking a holistic approach is a great idea, but this could reap benefits in the long run. There are some actions we have identified in the stakeholder matrix that we could implement on our own, and I think we should continue working towards achieving some of the tangible results in parallel."* We agreed to continue with our ongoing efforts around organizing joint meetings with customers, organizing knowledge sharing sessions, identifying conferences and seminars requiring joint contributions and investments across different business units. Most of the participants were successful in accomplishing some of these actions, which enabled us to demonstrate reasonable success with establishing synergies and engaging in cross-selling activities.

One of the participants who worked as a Sales Manager shared his experience and challenge while trying to attend an industry exhibition together with a Unit Manager from another business area that had complementing customer interests. Despite no need for any additional funding from the Unit Manager from another business area, he did not show interest to participate. We brainstormed how factors such as lack of SLT involvement, prior commitments, lack of trust, and other post-merger integration related challenges could have influenced the Unit Manager's lack of cooperation. One participant suggested that the Sales Manager should have asked the Unit Manager to contribute towards the required funding as opposed to simply inviting him to join, which could have drawn more commitment. Another participant probed the Sales Manager on his choice of communication medium, which in this case was an email communication. After some further discussions we concluded that the chosen means of communication through a formal email exchange was not a good choice made by the Sales Manager, and he should have rather tried to meet up in person or tried to arrange a video conference, and should

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also have involved other stakeholders such as SLT members or even Customer Representatives. Such constructive discussions were a good indication of how we had gained a more holistic understanding of our problem situation taking stakeholders at various levels into consideration.

Referring to CLT, everyone was receptive to the proposed Administrative Leadership functions, which was communicated by the Divisional Director through an official memo. The following excerpt from the group CEO's recent announcement was highlighted in the memo, which catalyzed the acceptance and implementation of Administrative Leadership functions *"We still have a lot to gain from cross-selling and collaborative business development across both service lines and business areas. This is an area where I expect your customer focus and foresight to generate results."* Everyone reinforced their commitment to the communicated Administrative Leadership actions, and the Divisional Director assured necessary support from Unit Managers and SLT members. The benefits of CLT were yet to be realized, and we required a more streamlined approach for implementing the actions at various stakeholder levels, which in turn required a deeper understanding of our problem situation.

Schein's ORJI Framework discussed in Chapter 2.4.3.2 was introduced as a means to provide structured feedback and reflections for evaluating the effectiveness of our actions. Following is an account of applying ORJI Framework for evaluating CAS and CLT, which was also in line with the gaps and areas requiring empirical validation identified during the literature review process as discussed in Chapter 2.5.

Use of CAS for synergy realizations during post-merger integration

(O) What did we observe?

CAS helped in fostering synergy realizations. One of the participants discussed how reshuffling of team members helped us to connect various teams and capabilities from across business areas and geographical locations. Another participant commented that the continuity of our AL meetings and associated actions were good examples of how CAS was driving synergy realizations for cross-selling.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?

The initial emotional reaction was that of confusion and skepticism, but gradually our hope of solving bigger problems together took over, and emotions related to building trust and

new relations were emergent.

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?
Resistance to any change is human nature, but we had to get along with the ongoing changes that nurtured CAS. Once synergies were emergent, we realized higher potential not only towards adding more value for customers but also enriching our individual and collective work experiences.

(I) What was our intervention of what can be done?
We discussed that we could continue to benefit from the adaptations and new relations achieved through CAS and continue realizing synergies.

Use of CLT for synergy realizations during post-merger integration

(O) What did we observe?
CLT functions, especially the Administrative Leadership actions such as motivating individuals and teams to organize knowledge sharing sessions, participating in joint events and meetings, the inclusion of cross business area capabilities in proposals and tender responses, and so on, did make a notable difference for boosting synergy realizations.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?
The Administrative Leadership functions appeared as additional work initially, and there was some resistance to perform these additional tasks over and above our normal job expectations. However, once these actions were included in our routines, the results were encouraging, and we realized how small initiatives were providing favorable results contributing towards our individual and group KPIs. For example, one of the Sales Managers who had organized a Lunch and Learn session along with several colleagues who recently relocated into his office building from other offices as a result of the post-merger integration reorganization mentioned *"It was amazing that one of the Sales Managers from another business area and region asked me to share with him a few slides for an upcoming strategic meeting with C-Level executives of all significant Maritime companies in South Asia, as he considered what I shared today could add value to these VVIP customer representatives, and in turn make him and our organization look good during his presentation."* This example validated achieving some of our goals aiming towards synergy realizations for increasing cross-selling.

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?

The Administrative Leadership actions had a direct impact on our KPIs as these were measurable actions that influenced our individual as well as unit level performance assessments and appraisals. After realizing some initial successes of synergy realizations as a result of CLT functions, we were more enthusiastic of the newly established routines and relations.

(I) What was our intervention of what can be done?

CLT can be used not only for facilitating episodic gains but also for establishing long-term routines that would be driven by CAS behavior across and beyond the sphere of influence of our AL set.

The evaluations using ORJI Framework confirmed that both CAS and CLT were relevant and useful constructs for effective synergy realization during post-merger integration.

While discussing some of the key takeaways from the AL process so far, one of the AL set participants said *"I have never been involved in AL, at least not in a formal way…. This way of working on real-life problems is effective, and provides one with an opportunity to look at the problem from multiple perspectives while fostering team spirit".* Another participant commented *"Not only do we have a sense of accomplishment for some of the actions we agreed upon while addressing our problems but we have also gained new knowledge and skills during the process. I am glad that we came together as an AL set, and I look forward to continuing working on our problem and learning during the process. Furthermore, all this is adding a lot of value and enthusiasm to our day to day work".*

Reflective Pause: The comments from participants validated the effectiveness of my research project contributing towards some of the aims and objectives related to the personal and professional development of participants, and contribution to the organization, as discussed in Chapter 1.5. The AL process had gained good momentum, and we could see some of the actions demonstrating successful synergy realizations. All participants seemed to be convinced that the ongoing AL process was an effective approach towards working on real-life workplace challenges. The feedback from AL set participants helped me to demonstrate that the participants were indeed going through effective personal development while working constructively towards common organizational challenges, which was enhancing their efficiency and

increasing the chances of achieving their individual and group level KPIs. I shared the progress with some of the SLT members who served as research sponsors, which was my attempt to justify my research problem as an "organizational development project" while demonstrating contribution to some red-hot issues in our organization, that could provide me with ongoing support and resources to continue with the Core AR process as recommended by Bjorkman and Sundgren (2007).

I was able to relate CAS, CLT, and AL set discussions to one of the themes identified during the Phase 1 pre-study interviews associated with complexity theory and systems thinking as discussed in Chapter 4.2.1. CLT was effective as a catalyst for CAS and facilitated successful synergy realizations, at least within the area of influence of the Core AR team. It was evident that CLT can help CAS to thrive when used effectively. The true benefits of CLT were yet to be realized and there was a need for a more streamlined approach to implementing actions at various stakeholder levels. There was also need to gain a much deeper understanding of our problem situation, which justified entering into the Constructing phase again thereby initiating the third Core AR cycle. During the third Core AR cycle, I was hoping for a relatively more complex combination of AL, CAS, and CLT, and aimed to introduce SSM and LiC to the AL set for helping me with my independent thesis research in accordance with the research paradigm, methodology, and design discussed in Chapters 3.2 and 4.3.1.

I reviewed the classroom discussions and notes from the Knowledge Management module which was one of the nine instructor-led modules of my DBA programme, and I could relate the Core AR process to some of the subjective aspects of Management Research that are typically characterized by organizational culture, regional and ethnical idiosyncrasies, leadership, and employee behavior. The philosophical foundations of the ongoing Core AR process appeared to be based on a combination of post-positivist approaches that builds up on multiple perspectives of the world (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.155) and constructivism which is a result of negotiated views of realists and idealists who together argue that all human knowledge is warranted by social processes (p.56-57).

I was successfully fulfilling the internal action researcher criteria by demonstrating that good research is for me, for us, and them, through the synthesis of first, second, and third person research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.149). I was successfully able to highlight some of the red-hot issues in our organization (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2005) and was making efficient use of relevant management research and organizational learning theories. I had the necessary commitment from research participants and sponsors to continue with the Core AR process, which ensured the intended progress with my independent thesis research, which in turn helped me to avoid getting trapped into eating the forbidden fruit trap as discussed by Moore (2007) wherein I could have been pulled between core job responsibilities and pursuing my academic deadlines.

4.3.5. Third AR Cycle

4.3.5.1 Constructing

One of the AL set participants who worked as a Sales Manager raised a concern around his experience related to lack of cooperation from some of the colleagues based in another continent, who were in their new roles. The Sales Manager was working on a trans-continent sales opportunity for a multinational client and was not receiving the expected level of cooperation from some of the new colleagues in another geographical division. The Sales Manager remarked that things would have been different if there was no reshuffling in the management teams caused by the ongoing post-merger integration. We related this incident to the various announcements made by SLT and CEO for engaging more into cross-sales initiatives, and realized that the expectations and intentions were quite different from reality, at least in this example. Upon brainstorming on what we could do as an AL set for understanding and improving this situation in line with our defined problem, we realized that there was a need to connect the expectations of various stakeholders that we had outlined in the Stakeholder Strategy Matrix (Table 2). We were however not clear on what approach to take for relating the holistic view of our problem with our expectations from various stakeholders.

SSM was proposed by me as a systematic methodology to gain better understanding of the problem and providing a streamlined approach to working on improving the problem situation taking various stakeholders into consideration, which qualified for the third round of (re)constructing our problem, marking the onset of the third Core AR cycle.

LiC was introduced as a means to perceive learning amidst the fast-paced changes due to the ongoing post-merger integration that was seen as a crisis by some organizational members. The introduction of SSM and LiC was also in line with my research methodology as discussed in Chapter 3.2.4 and AR design as discussed in Chapter 4.3.1.

Building upon SSM and using Rich Picture to gain deeper insights & reconstructing the problem
Building upon the description of SSM discussed in Chapters 2.4.3.3 and 3.2.4, SSM was introduced to the participants as a pragmatic methodology and systematic approach for dealing with problems through consolidation of individual worldviews aimed towards achieving a better state of being. SSM's founder Professor Checkland's video describing SSM (LancasterManagement, 2012) was played during one of the AL meetings, and the

link was shared with all participants, along with links to some SSM literature for further exploration in case anyone would like to learn more about SSM. After gaining some understanding of SSM methodology, we brainstormed on how we could provide a root definition to our defined problem statement "How can we make use of synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process?" We then collectively developed a Rich Picture of our problem situation, which according to Monk and Howard (1998) is a method to view real-life organizational problems in a holistic perspective illustrating various stakeholders, their biases, and concerns. The Rich Picture in figure 24 is a reconstruction of the Rich Picture that was produced during one of the AL meetings.
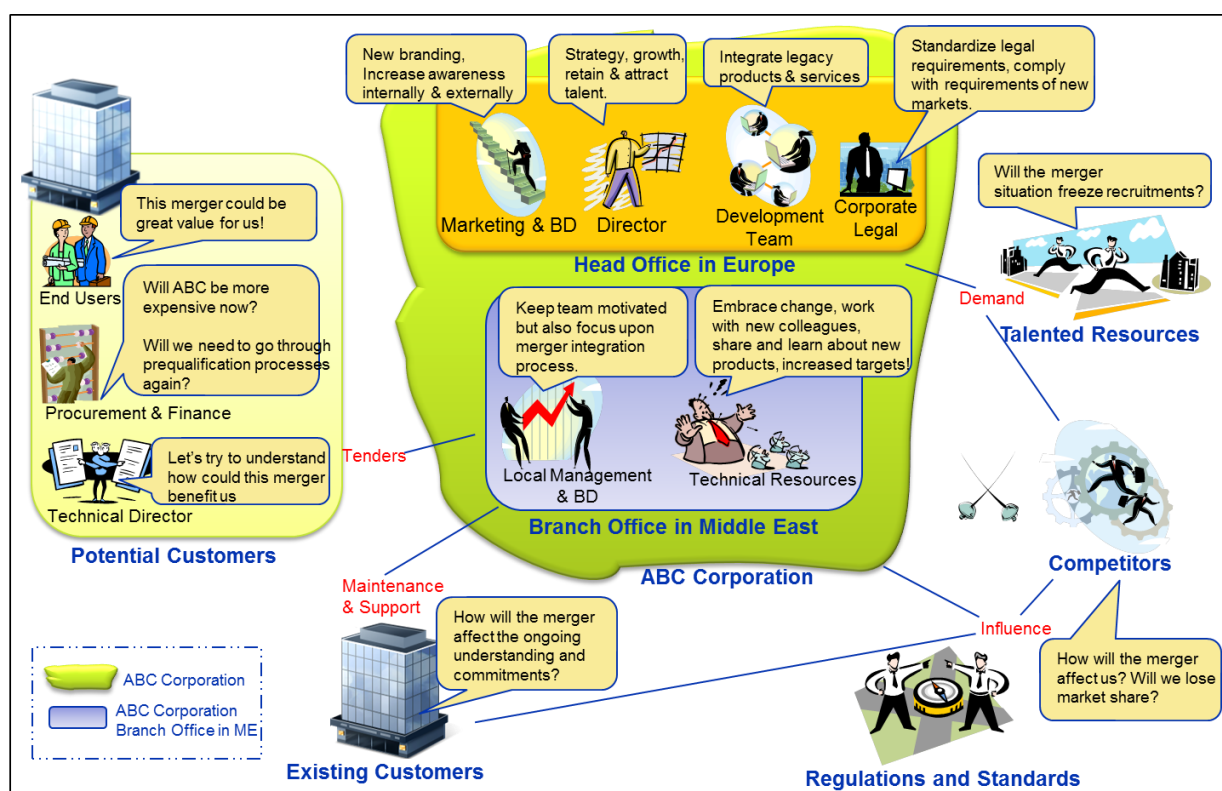
Figure 24: Rich Picture of the Action Learning Problem

The Rich Picture initiated a lot of interesting discussions and raised the overall enthusiasm amongst participants, which reminded me of the impact that use of imagery can bring out for eliciting emotional responses as discussed by Vince and Broussine (1996), and also recommended by Pedler (2008, p.48) as an efficient research technique for reflecting upon shared understanding. According to Pedler (2008, p.76), Rich Pictures help to get away from the words and create clarity, honesty, and openness. Developing the Rich Picture enriched interpersonal communication between the AL set. We correlated the Rich Picture to the Stakeholder Strategy Matrix, and discussed how the Rich Picture provided us

additional insights on the interrelation between various stakeholders, and also helped us to identify additional stakeholders that could influence our identified problem situation.

Validation of ongoing AL initiatives and identifying areas to improve upon

A merger update announcement highlighting how the Software Business Area (all AL set members belonged to Software Business Area) was performing in the merger context was discussed. The announcement read *"We are more and more entering the operational phase as one company and "business as usual". The temperature check status for Software is overall very positive, and we are performing very well compared to the other Business Areas. We have the highest score on commitment, readiness to take on challenges, management support, level of trust in the company, and positive feelings overall. We have acceptable scores on the belief that "we work in a customer focused way," but we also realize that we can improve on certain aspects of this, like customer communication."* We could link some of this success to the ongoing AL process, but we critiqued the announcement's lack of specific expectations by SLT from various business areas, lack of measurement metrics, and lack of mention of specific actions or examples that led to this success. We also realized that the ongoing AL process was relatively more adaptive and showed relatively more willingness to learn new ways of working, as compared to other colleagues who were not involved in AL, for e.g. the trans-continental sales opportunity discussed by one of the participants.

Making use of LiC to enhance the AL process

LiC was discussed and proposed during one of the AL meetings as a theoretical concept for providing fresh perspectives to learning amidst difficult and turbulent situations, which in our case was fast-paced changes due to the ongoing post-merger integration that could be perceived as "crisis", especially considering rapid organizational restructuring and high attrition rates. In addition to some of the LiC traits discussed in Chapter 2.4.2.1, the fresh perspectives and new modes of learning proffered by LiC at individual, group, and organization-wide levels were emphasized. Strong emphasis was also placed on LiC's perception of "crisis", which according to founders of LiC should not be necessarily seen as a negative situation because effective learning can take place amidst a crisis. We discussed how LiC encourages embracing tension and critique as key criteria for learning. LiC was defined as an approach to learning amidst crisis through dynamic engagement with the unknowns, wherein individuals and groups develop new understanding through experimentation with existing knowledge and let go their biases to come up with improved

actions that shape learning, and eventually the crisis itself. This was very relevant to our AL process due to some of the setbacks faced by us such as the Regional Manager's resignation and some failed attempts on agreed actions such as the Lunch and Learn incident discussed during the Hang Time exercise, or the lack of cooperation in the trans-continental sales opportunity. We reflected on how learning practices in LiC transcend across individual, group, and organization-wide levels, and brings about learning practices that involve cognition, emotions, social and psychological engagement, and political dynamics, all of which were relevant to the learning that we were going through during the AL process. We could also relate to how individuals and groups involved in LiC take actions to change the status quo and are committed to learning by relying heavily on the practical judgment or "Phronesis" with a strong emphasis on shunning any biases or narcissist views.

<div align="right">Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer (2013)</div>

One of the AL participants commented that *"the concept of LiC sounds very similar to the AL routine we have established during the past weeks"* to which I partly agreed. I highlighted that it was important for us not to be complacent or blinded by the assumption that we had developed all the knowledge for dealing with our defined problems. I emphasized that we should rather aim to stay at the edge of chaos and continue learning and improving. I clarified that the uncertain situations presented by the ongoing post-merger integration provided us with the crisis like environment that could bring out effective learning according to principles of LiC. I also clarified that LiC does not focus upon being adaptive, such as in CAS which is often unpredictable, but LiC rather requires one to be reflexive and reflective by engaging in double loop learning i.e. learning about our underlying values and assumptions amidst the changing and evolving problem situation.

Reflective Pause: I sensed that some of the terminologies and jargons introduced through SSM were overwhelming for the AL set participants, but all AL set participants seemed to be open to the idea of gaining deeper insights into our problem situation. Creating the Rich Picture was an excellent group exercise that gained all AL set participants' interest and made them more open to the idea of exploring SSM in relation to our problem situation, which was a remarkable milestone from my thesis research point of view. As conceived during the literature review phase, my research study aimed to explore SSM and LiC's effectiveness for synergy realizations during post-merger integration as discussed in Chapter 2.5. The

problem reconstruction phase during the third Core AR cycle presented me with an opportunity to introduce SSM and LiC.

During this point in the research study I was mindful of the fact that we had limited time left for the planned AL set meetings due to the upcoming year-end holiday season and due to the time and resources negotiated with the SLT members who served as sponsors for my thesis research study. My role-duality was posing a dilemma for me being pulled into the Core AR process and at the same time focusing on fulfilling my academic deadlines. I, therefore, planned that the third Core AR cycle would be the final AR cycle as far as my thesis research is concerned, and I was conscious of trying to make the most out of the limited remaining AL set meetings. Insider action researcher challenges such as role duality and issues related to access were beginning to affect me in addition to some of the deadline challenges faced by researchers carrying out AR for thesis purposes as discussed by Dick (1993) and Coghlan and Brannick (2010). I had an honest and transparent discussion with the AL set participants that I would require their support and cooperation to meet some of my academic goals. These discussions with my colleagues made me relate to the role-duality challenges discussed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), and how being street-smart (Roth et al, 2007, p.52) could help insider researchers to balance the Core and Thesis AR projects while serving as a political entrepreneur (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.11). These challenges also contributed towards some of the personal and professional development aims and objectives of this thesis project as discussed in Chapter 1.5.

4.3.5.2 Planning

Building upon SSM and the Rich Picture, we brainstormed on redefining our problem situation by collectively working on the PQR formula, Root Definitions, and CATWOE Analysis (refer Chapter 2.4.3.3), and following was the outcome:

PQR formula was defined as "We had to **establish synergies (P)** by taking advantage of the ongoing post- merger integration **through taking advantage of principles of CAS and CLT (Q)** to **achieve higher cross-selling (R)**.

Our CATWOE analysis revealed the following attributes associated with our problem:

Customers – Unit Managers and SLT members

Agents – Our AL set and various colleagues from other units who would be involved while working on our identified actions

Transformation – outcome of actions that were focusing on establishing synergies for achieving cross-selling

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Worldview – refer Rich Picture in figure 24

Owners – Various Unit Managers and SLT members; and potentially some Customers, and representatives from Regulatory Bodies

Environment – Post merger integration, high turnover rate, increased expectations from management and customers

Our performance criteria were defined as follows:

Efficacy – increased engagement and activities focusing on synergy realizations with various colleagues and units

Efficiency – increased cross-selling initiatives eventually leading to higher sales figures and customer satisfaction scores

Effectiveness –establishing long-term synergetic behavior

Referring to the constructive discussions that were leading to collaborative and collective reconstruction of our problem situation through socially negotiated realities, and considering how our thinking was being affected by these discussions, the theory related to classical, and new organizational discourses were shared with the AL set. The following table from Marshak and Grant (2008) illustrated in figure 25 was used to highlight the differences between classical and new organizational discourses trends pre and post-1980s. The purpose of this discussion was to have a sense of shared meaning of the discursive practices being experienced through the AL process and to help us recognize between classical and new organizational discourses as we experienced them while working on our actions that involved engaging with various stakeholders.

Classical OD (1950s onward)	New OD (1980s onward)
Based in classical science and modern thought and philosophy	Influenced by the new sciences and postmodern thought and philosophy
Truth is transcendent and discoverable; there is a single, objective reality	Truth is immanent and emerges from the situation; there are multiple, socially constructed realities
Reality can be discovered using rational and analytic processes	Reality is socially negotiated and may involve power and political processes
Collecting and applying valid data using objective problem-solving methods leads to change	Creating new mindsets or social agreements, sometimes through explicit or implicit negotiation, leads to change
Change is episodic and can be created, planned and managed	Change is continuous and can be self-organizing
Emphasis on changing behaviour and what one does	Emphasis on changing mindsets and how one thinks

Figure 25: Trends in Organizational Discourse (Marshak and Grant, 2008, p.8)

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I could relate these discussions to one of the findings from the pre-study interview regarding sense-making and sense-giving in social settings for collective and constructive negotiations and renegotiations of actions through practicing collective enactment, as discussed in Chapter 4.2. We discussed how individuals and groups could be affected by ambiguity and uncertainty during organizational changes, which in turn could impact merger related change management initiatives such as ours. I highlighted some learning from literature review process related to how organizational discourses highly influences sense-making and sense-giving in merger-related change contexts that are often characterized by simultaneous emotional, cognitive, social, psychological, and political forces (Monin et al., 2013). These discussions helped us to appreciate the significance of understanding the underpinning emotional responses in ongoing discourses for us to reach a state of workable certainty while working with our colleagues from other units, SLT members, and also with Customers and Regulatory Bodies.

Proceeding with SSM, our ideal model was conceptualized as one where a lot of synergies were being established across various business units amidst the ongoing post-merger integration, and wherein employees working across various units were adapting to the changes in a CAS like manner to achieve higher-cross selling. We also envisioned that the administrative and enabling leadership functions of CLT that were facilitated through AL process would spread beyond the sphere of influence of our AL set, thereby providing the necessary adaptive functions for CAS to thrive and give rise to more cross-selling in the larger organization. We visualized how all the stakeholders identified in the Rich Picture, and CATWOE analysis would influence and benefit from these synergy realizations leading to increased sales figures and customer satisfaction scores.

Upon comparing the ideal model to our real world situation, we identified the following workable and purposeful actions:

- Continuing with the actions identified around engaging with relevant stakeholders, but now considering a wider group of stakeholders identified in the Rich Picture
- Continuing establishing synergies with colleagues from other units and business areas by placing emphasis on administrative and enabling leadership functions established through CLT
- Making use of LiC and new organizational discourses while working on our problem

- Making use of the theoretical concepts learned during the AL process, and discussing how these theories are helping or not helping while working on our identified actions.

Reflective Pause: Following the SSM approach, especially the PQR definition, provided a fresh collective perspective of the problem situation, which validated SSM's capability as a streamlined pragmatic approach for carrying out AR on real-life organizational challenges. The Rich Picture and CATWOE analysis helped in identifying additional complexities associated with the research problem, in addition to providing further insights on stakeholders and their interrelations, going beyond what had been identified through Stakeholder Strategy Matrix in the 2nd Core AR cycle.

The actions planned by the AL set demonstrated how various theoretical concepts introduced during the AL were helping to generate actionable knowledge for solving real-life organizational problems. The actions were aligned to some of the research aims and objectives described in Chapter 1.5, and the path ahead now appeared much clearer to me considering the objectives of my thesis project. I felt grateful towards the participants for understanding my academic goals and for considering evaluation of the theoretical concepts as an action, but this would also contribute towards their personal learning and understanding of these concepts which in turn would benefit the organization as well as the participants.

4.3.5.3 Acting

We continued with the agreed actions related to engaging with key colleagues from other business units, and there were some good synergies being established leading towards effective cross-selling initiatives. The administrative leadership functions established through a formal memo shared with the Unit Managers catalyzed some of the actions such as organizing knowledge sharing sessions, organizing strategic joint customer meetings, joint marketing events, and seminars, and working together on joint proposals focusing on cross-selling initiatives.

One of the participants who worked as a Regional Sales Manager discussed a dilemma of a Sales Representative in his region getting demotivated due to the post-merger integration related restructuring, wherein the Sales Representative was asked to give up responsibility for certain portfolio of products he was previously handling and was asked to take responsibility for other product portfolios instead, which he was not too keen on. Reflecting on this problem, one of the participants recalled Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson's (2008) Situational Leadership Theory which was discussed during one of the previous AL meetings. We positioned the Sales Representative in the performance

readiness area of R3 (refer figure 22) i.e. 'able but Insecure or unwilling' which required 'participatory leadership style' requiring the Regional Sales Manager to get engaged in supportive behavior through high degree of two-way communication, collaboration, encouragement, facilitation, and showing commitment, all of which can be summarized as 'High Relation and Low Task' behavior. The Regional Sales Manager responded saying *"This is exactly what I needed to be reminded of, and I think I have been enacting 'high task - low relationship' behavior instead of the desirable 'low task - high relationship' behavior"*. The Regional Sales Manager later reported how he made use of learning from Situational Leadership Theory, New Organizational Discourses, and LiC for influencing the mindset of his Sales Representative. The Sales Representative later got engaged in some cross-unit and cross-business area synergies which led to successful cross-selling.

Another participant who also worked as a Regional Sales Manager for another software product shared his experience related to failed collaboration with a Customer Service Manager from a different unit during a cross-selling initiative. The Customer Service Manager from another unit had recently submitted his resignation and was due to join a competitor, which was also an outcome of the fast-paced changes due to the ongoing post-merger integration, and in accordance to one of the findings from pre-merger interviews associated with accelerated change management concerns as discussed in Chapter 4.2. The Customer Service Manager from another unit had good relations with the customer representatives and could now potentially influence them to consider his future organization instead, especially considering that the typical sales cycle was 6-9 months. The Regional Sales Manager's initial efforts were now jeopardized, and there was a lack of support from the Customer Service Manager for obvious reasons. The Customer Service Manager tried to excuse himself out by stating prioritization of a smooth handover to his successor as opposed to engaging in cross-sales initiatives. The Regional Sales Manager commented *"I am relatively new in this region, and a lot seems to depend on strong relations with key customer representatives. I am afraid all the leg work I have done so far could be wasted as it is very likely that the Customer Service Manager will influence his contacts to consider the software product and services of the competitor organization he is now joining. Furthermore, he will have a sales-oriented profile in his new job."* After brainstorming on the predicament faced by the Regional Sales Manager, we decided to make use of Schein's ORJI Framework, which had served as an effective framework for

collective reflections and bringing out emotional responses that could help with effective interventions by taking a structured approach. We recorded the following:

1) Observations: The Regional Sales Manager had started to feel insecure about his sales opportunity. The Customer Service Manager's cooperation in the cross-selling initiative seemed to have ceased in light of his recent resignation.

2) Reactions and Feelings experienced: Insecurity, lack of cooperation, and lack of commitment to make cross-selling work, were some of the initial feelings experienced by the Regional Sales Manager. He wanted to react by notifying this behavior to the Customer Service Manager's Line Manager.

3) Judgments and thoughts that emerged: Initially the judgments were based on the reactions and feelings noted above, but upon further reflection we discussed that this behavior is only natural for the Customer Service Manager to safeguard his personal interests considering his imminent transition. We concluded that the Regional Sales Manager should not think negative about the opportunity as he would probably not have had established contact and rapport with the customer representatives without the Customer Service Manager's support.

4) Intervention: It was proposed that the Regional Sales Manager should consider this opportunity a result of inter-unit collaboration, and continue to build relation with the customers' representatives. Building upon LiC, it was also proposed that the Regional Sales Manager should try and engage the customer in a pilot project as soon as possible to set his foot inside the door, and to build trust and confidence with the customer representatives.

The Regional Sales Manager later pursued this opportunity independently without support from the Customer Service Manager, and he made good progress, which also enabled him to establish and nurture his relationship with the customer contacts including additional key stakeholders working in the customer's organization.

Both of the above-mentioned examples were a manifestation of how some of the theoretical concepts learned during the AL process were helping towards effective synergy realizations during the ongoing post-merger integration related changes.

Reflective Pause: I realized that we were working on an issue based model which concerns informal actions as opposed to institutionalized processes. Some of the actions seemed repetitive from the previous AR cycles, but SSM provided us with a structured process and systemic approach that provided deeper insights on our problem situation.

The enthusiasm in AL set was very high which was demonstrated by everyone willingly overstaying the scheduled meeting time, which as a matter of fact ran into our weekend hours. I could relate this to the coercive control due to network/organization citizenship behavior, wherein our bonds and commitment towards each other were beyond the formal rewards provided to employees by employers, and we were motivated by empathy and sense of social belonging to the AL set. I could also relate this with the organizational aims and objectives of working as self-directed teams working upon the merger related problems, issues and challenges as discussed in Chapter 1.5.

4.3.5.4 Evaluating

We made good progress during the third AR cycle; wherein we were making a difference through actions and learning more about our problem situation through a disciplined approach offered by SSM. The AL set participants demonstrated a remarkable development of leadership and management skills which was validated through the effective application of some of the concepts such as CAS, CLT, SSM, Situational Leadership Theory, and Schein's ORJI Framework, about the problem situation. There was a fair degree of involvement and commitment from various key stakeholders, and we had managed to maintain a good balance between learning, knowledge creation, and solving workplace problems, which is the characteristic of an efficient AR process according to Cassell and Johnson (2006). The reconstructed understanding of our problem through the use of Rich Picture and SSM definitions enabled us to visualize actions from various stakeholders' point of view, for e.g. we were able to realize how much customers appreciated value addition provided by cross-selling and how this impacted competitors. While carrying out the actions with colleagues across various business units, these colleagues could realize the benefits from the newly established synergies, which in turn caused these colleagues to interact more with other business units, thereby giving rise to

desirable CAS behavior leading to more synergy realizations beyond the direct sphere of influence of our AL set.

Schein's ORJI Framework helped in effective journalizing of some of the events and engaging in streamlined the reflection process, which helped us in not randomly jumping into conclusions. The ORJI Framework also served as a means for capturing emotional responses by following the ladder of inference as discussed in Chapter 2.4.3.2 wherein we were moving from data to reasoning to conclusions and actions. We were building upon the problem situation through reflection and learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.26) and engaging in 'double loop learning' focused on solving complex problems by taking into consideration the underlying values and assumptions (Argyris, 1994). Similar to the second AR cycle, Schein's ORJI Framework was used to evaluate the effectiveness of theoretical concepts. The following sub-sections describe the evaluation of 'SSM and LiC for synergy realization during post-merger integration' using Schein's ORJI Framework, which is in line with the gaps and areas requiring empirical validation identified during the literature review process as discussed in Chapter 2.5.

Use of SSM for synergy realization during post-merger integration

(O) What did we observe?

We observed that SSM is indeed an effective methodology for helping to solve complex organizational problems where one is not sure of the "Whats, Whys, Hows, and Whens" about the problem. SSM helped us to uncover that there were several stakeholders involved, and all of them had different perspectives or worldviews of the same problem situation. For e.g. the leadership team was concerned about making the merger succeed, the HR team was concerned of harmonizing the policies and processes of the legacy organizations and their various business units, IT team members were concerned about optimizing the IT platform and infrastructure, middle-level managers were concerned about losing their jobs due to abundance of similar competencies after the merger, and customers were concerned about how the merger would affect their ongoing and future business relations. SSM provided us with an organized way of thinking and combining various worldviews, and the Rich Picture, in particular, was an effective tool for visualizing the various factors affecting our problem situation.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?

One of the participants commented "*SSM was quite overwhelming for me to begin with due to the unfamiliar jargons such as worldviews, PQR, CATWOE, 3E's and so on. However, the methodology itself provides an effective structure to work around messy problems that are hard to define especially amidst a dynamic post-merger integration situation such as ours wherein we are exposed to constant changes.*" Another participant echoed this feedback and added "*I think we were following the SSM process through the AL process, and in my opinion, SSM is only an extension of these methods. Although the methodology may sound theoretical with all the jargons, it is very effective for solving complex real-life problems with a pragmatic approach.*" The initial emotional reactions indicated that SSM was perceived as a sophisticated methodology which requires adequate training and experience, but was considered as an efficient methodology.

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?

SSM provided with an organized way of understanding the problem situation from multiple perspectives. The people-oriented nature of SSM helped to strengthen relations and consolidate various worldviews, which in turn increased our acceptance of each other's' perspectives and priorities. We realized that worldviews of various stakeholders were interrelated, and it's important to take a people-centered view considering various worldviews. We also judged that we required more experience and a better understanding of SSM to realize its full potential.

(I) What was our intervention of what can be done?

We realized that SSM could be used effectively for providing a reliable structure for working on complex problems enabling us to understand and work on the problem situation in an organized manner. SSM could also help to bridge the gap between people and systems thereby facilitating resolution of complex problems, conflicts, and issues. We decided to work on gaining further understanding of SSM processes or seek external expertise if required in future.

Use of LiC for synergy realization during post-merger integration

(O) What did we observe?

The post-merger integration period was perceived as a veritable crisis by most participants, particularly because of high attrition rate due to internal transfers or resignations, which is

an expected outcome in most merger situations. The reflective approach recommended by LiC was effective in stimulating learning, and perceiving crisis situations conducive for learning.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?
With the high level of uncertainty and fast pace of changes, the emotional reaction was that of "one must change or perish", and LiC provided us with the required guidance for the required change and adaptation, by not giving into external pressure but rather focusing on our reasoning as individuals and group. LiC also provided the much-required support system amidst what was being perceived as a crisis. We were more open to learning when they engaged in collaborative inquiry and joint actions on problems that they collectively owned as a group.

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?
LiC helped us to learn from our actions, come up with better action plans, and then reflect and learn again from our actions, thus helping us to engage into double loop learning. The LiC process also enhanced our interactions thereby helping in synergy realizations during the post-merger integration phase.

(I) What was our intervention of what can be done?
We realized that the LiC process encouraged us to experiment and improvise. We identified that there was room for us to get better at prioritizing between multiple tasks while being in a state of flux that's typical to post-merger integration contexts. We decided to continue making use of LiC as a guiding concept for embracing learning and dealing with biases amidst crisis situations.

I realized that the overall ALAR process helped with effective synergy realizations during post-merger integration, which was very well reflected by the following comment shared by one of the AL set participants: *"I have observed that besides the obvious benefits of the AL process, the routine we have established has united us as a group and most definitely helped us to identify synergies within our group, in addition to identifying the intended cross unit and cross business area synergies"*. The Core AR process helped us to develop as a resilient high empathy team that was driving desirable business outcome through collective decision making, which was validated by the following comments made by one of

the AL participants: *"I felt like we have a good support system during uncertain and stressful times amidst post-merger integration related changes."* Along similar lines, another AL set participant commented, *"We could indeed talk about our problems and worries without hesitation, and the AL set provided us with not only the required sounding board but also helped us to find some pragmatic solutions to our problems"*.

Reflective Pause: SSM proved to be an effective methodology for streamlining the process of working on complex issues and was quite effective during the post-merger integration work carried out in the context of this research study. SSM, however, requires an understanding of the various terminologies and would benefit from seasoned facilitators, who have solid experience with SSM, which I think was a limitation of this research study. Although I agree with Houghton and Ledington (2004) who instead of debating on philosophical grounds, proffer using SSM for solving real-world problems, this research study made me realize that SSM is best suited for practitioners who have in-depth experience with not only the particulars of SSM as a methodology, but are also highly experienced in disseminating and facilitating SSM oriented research projects.

I was mindful of the timeline for my thesis research project as well as the limited access granted to me by the sponsors for carrying out a research study within my organization. I believed that I now had sufficient data for proceeding with the analysis, discussions and findings phase.

One of the AL set participants had resigned during the final rounds of AL meetings, and he was serving a two month notice period. He, however, confirmed his willingness and availability to participate in the following AL meetings as he was benefitting from the process as an individual and professional, which further validated the fact that the AL process was adding value to all participants at individual levels.

I felt more confident of the benefits of insider AR as a means for solving real-life workplace problems and learning from the experience. I also felt more confident and experienced in dealing with challenges related to internal AR. It was obvious that the insider AR process had been very effective in influencing all three audiences i.e. my personal growth as a researcher and practitioner, learning and growth for my colleagues who participated in the research process, and finally contribution to my organization by solving real-life organizational challenges. I as well as my colleagues who had been involved in the Core AR process developed strong vocabulary, knowledge, and skills on some of the organizational learning and management concepts, which we were able to apply effectively in the post-merger integration context.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Analysis, and Outcome

The pre-study interviews, as well as Core AR data, were manually coded since there were only 18 short interview transcripts (Appendix C) and 60 pages of the transcript from the AL meetings (Appendix E) which did not justify the use of CAQDAS. As the sole primary researcher for this study, there was no need for me to combine data collected from various sources. My thesis supervisor who's a very experienced researcher also supported a manual coding approach considering that the reflections were noted down immediately after each meeting. The transcripts of AL meetings that formed the Core AR process and my immediate reflections after each meeting as an independent researcher working on my thesis study are available in Appendix E.

Following sections of this Chapter discusses the outcomes and achievements of this thesis research project towards personal, organizational, and wider body of knowledge, oriented aims & objectives as mentioned in Chapter 1.5.

5.1. Impact on Personal and Professional Development

This research project helped me to hone the skills and understanding required to design and manage a research project within my chosen context, using appropriate methodology and techniques, and demonstrating the creation of actionable knowledge within the context of existing literature. I also developed my knowledge on some of the theoretical concepts that were relevant to my research, and I am now more confident of taking a scholar-practitioner approach for carrying out research for working on real-life workplace problem situations. The following sub-sections discuss the contribution of this research project towards my development as a Scholar-Practitioner, Action Researcher, Change Agent, and Political Entrepreneur.

5.1.1. Development as a Scholar-Practitioner

This research project helped in developing my understanding and experience for carrying out research in an empirical setting by applying the theories, tools, and methodologies that were relevant to the research context. These included AR, AL, SSM, CAS, CLT, LiC, Schein's ORJI Framework, Hangtime Exercise, and Stakeholder Strategy Matrix.

The literature review process provided me with the opportunity to learn from and reflect upon several books, journals, and articles, which not only helped towards developing my knowledge around my research area but also improved my writing skills for documenting and publishing doctoral level thesis that would be appealing to practitioners as well as

academics. I was able to document the entire research process including an account of how actionable knowledge can be generated in an empirical setting through applied research while serving the threefold purposes of 1) adding value to my organization and involved colleagues, 2) contributing towards the existing body of knowledge around my research area, and 3) for meeting partial requirements towards a DBA degree.

I was able to develop the research design independently, conduct the required interventions, lead the Core AR process, and document the research process. This thesis project has provided me with confidence for conducting and leading insider AR taking into account the existing literature, sophisticated analytical tools, methodologies, methods, and approaches. I have also been able to understand and implement few AR and CAS related theoretical concepts which enabled me to validate these theories in the context of this empirical research study. Furthermore, I have also been able to present a unique combination of theoretical concepts that can be reused, validated, or critiqued by other practitioners and academics as discussed in Chapter 5.3.

I now feel better equipped and experienced in dealing with organizational and management issues associated with personal attitudes, power dynamics, and organizational politics. I have learned to deal with bias and assumptions through the development of critical thinking skills, which I think has helped in my development as a Scholar-Practitioner who can successfully conduct interventions and facilitate implementation of changes that are worthy of producing actionable knowledge.

Working on this thesis project enabled me to develop my writing and presentation skills as a result of which I have actively engaged in writing and presenting papers at relevant industry seminars and conferences. For example one of my papers presented at India Oil, Gas and Renewable Energy Summit (Tahilramani, 2015) was featured in Oil Asia Journal, Jan 2016 edition (Tahilramani, 2016). My paper was chosen to be featured amongst 90 papers presented by international industry experts, which was a remarkable achievement and gained me recognition amongst industry peers.

This research project has enabled me to identify my philosophical position as a researching practitioner who prefers taking Multiple Paradigm approach, which can be best described as a combination of post-positivism that believes in multiple empirical ways of understanding the world (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.155) and constructivism which takes a middle way between realism and idealism arguing that all human knowledge is warranted

by social processes (p.56-57). Being anchored in post-positivist ideology, I do not consider researcher and researched as independent entities, and therefore believe in taking into account contextual influences such as choice of theories, methodologies, methods, researcher bias, and other subjective elements that could influence the research outcome. Research traditions such as postmodernism (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997; Chia, 1995) and past-postmodernist variants including feminism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism (Calas and Smircich, 1999) have influenced my thinking. While working as the primary researcher during this thesis research study, I have engaged in Mode 2 knowledge creation, which is knowledge created by practitioners and involves a continuous loop between theory and practice through applied research that is considered instrumental towards the development of management research (Huff, 2000; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998).

I have learned not to confine myself to particular philosophical positions as a scholar-practitioner, but rather engage in double loop learning and practice reflective skills to explore multiple paradigm approaches that would provide alternative images of the organizational phenomenon being studied (Hassard, 1991).

5.1.2. Development as an Action Researcher

This research project provided me with an opportunity to learn about and implement various AR tips, tools, and techniques. Although the CAL projects during the instructor-led DBA modules provided me the experience to conduct AR, there were some unique challenges faced during this thesis research project which helped me to develop as a seasoned action researcher. While conducting AR during this thesis project, I learned how to deal with access-related challenges, keep the interest alive for a longer duration, and maintain the balance between core and thesis AR projects. The literature review process helped me to gain a deeper understanding of AR concepts, modalities, and also complementary concepts such as SSM, CAS, CLT, and LiC. I developed my AR skills while dealing with challenges including resources, funding, defining actionable problems, collecting and transcribing data, facilitating AR, validations, documenting the research process, and so on.

I found the Cogenerative AR Model (Greenwood and Levin, 2007) particularly useful for dealing with balancing the core and thesis research projects, which provided an efficient framework for reflecting upon the problem as an insider as well as an outsider as illustrated

in figure 27, and as discussed in Reflective Pause sections after every AR step in Chapter 4.3.
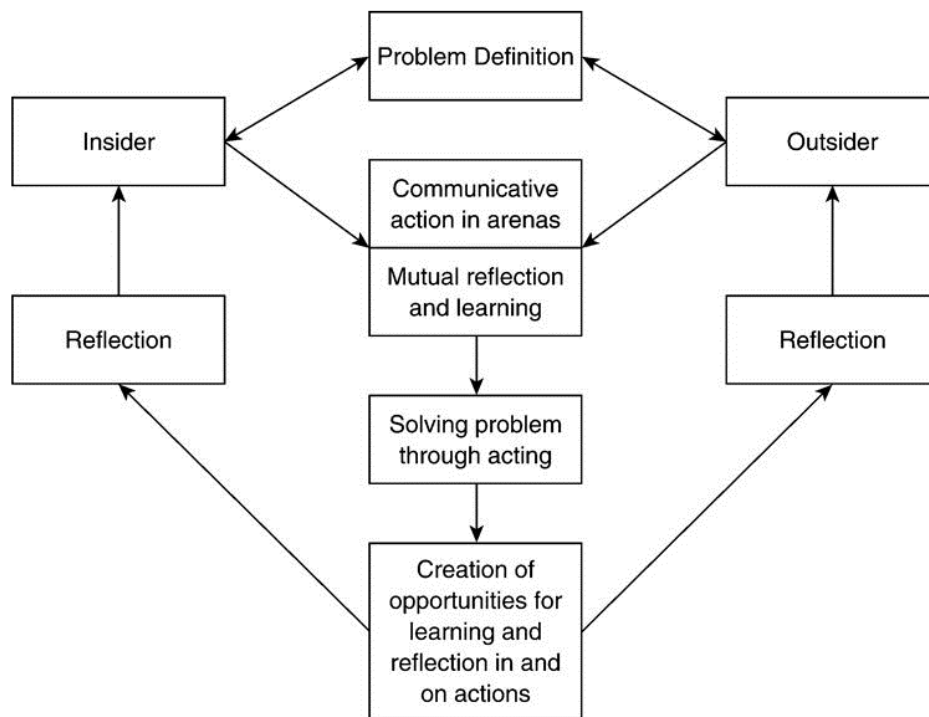
Figure 26: Cogenerative Action Research Model (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p.94)

I now have better appreciation for Greenwood and Levin's (2007) extension of Dewey's (1976 cited in Greenwood and Levin, 2007) General Systems Theory (GST), which is based on their study of several social research projects wherein they contend that science should not be detached with action. I also have a better understanding of the complexities and dynamics involved with AR, which gets further complicated due to its iterative nature and subjectivities involved due to dynamic content, process, and premises as illustrated in figure 28.
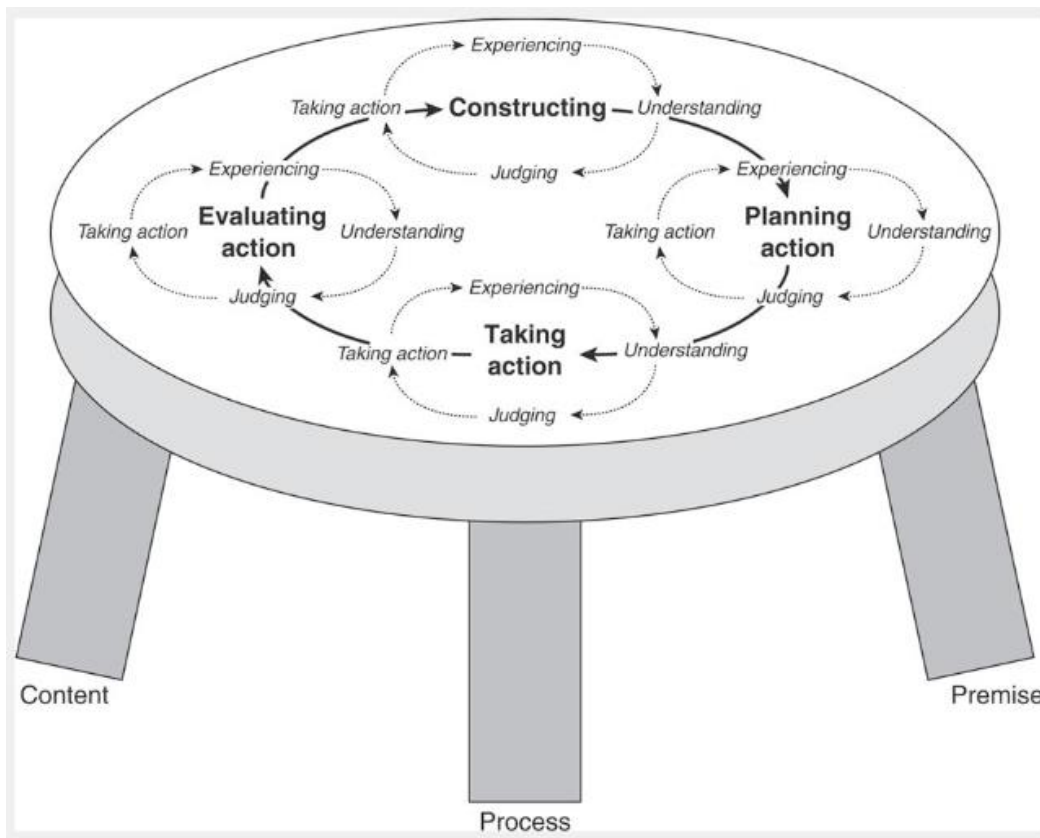
Figure 27: Complex dynamics of Action Research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.31).

The modality of AR used during this thesis project is close to Participatory Action Research which is best known for its emancipatory effect and typically involves participants and researchers who are directly affected by the problem. I, however, did not adhere to any specific AR modality, since I wanted to engage in double loop learning and keep an open mind due to which I was able to make use of complementary concepts such as SSM, CAS, CLT, and LiC, which is an approach strongly supported by Raelin (2009) who recommends utilization of allied AR modalities by complementing their strengths as opposed to strictly following specific modalities that could possibly be rooted in eccentric nature of the respective founders. I cannot emphasize enough how much I have started to appreciate the impact of collaborative inquiry and joint actions in AR.

5.1.3. Development as a Change Agent

While beginning this research study I was positioned in quadrant 3 of Researcher and System focus as illustrated in figure 29, wherein I was functioning as a self-motivated researcher working on my DBA thesis while the organization where research was being carried out was not completely motivated or engaged.
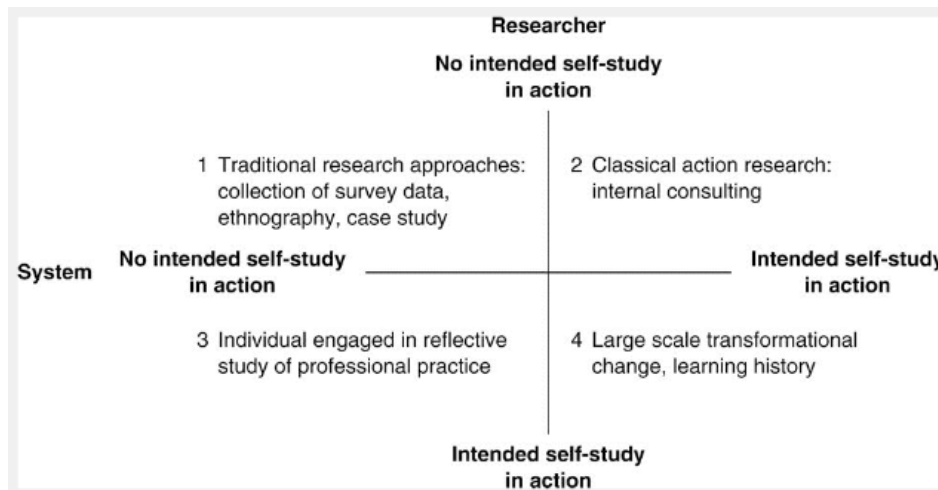
Figure 28: Researcher and System Focus (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.103)

As we progressed with the Core AR process as described in Chapter 4.3, we had successfully transitioned into the fourth quadrant wherein we were experiencing a large-scale transformational change while indulging in double loop learning, at least within the influence sphere of the Core AR team or the AL set. All participants were motivated towards learning and bringing up a transformational change, which in turn enabed me to realize the fundamental AR criteria of the research being beneficial to me, to my colleagues, and to my organization, through the synthesis of first, second, and third person research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.149).

Managing this research project has contributed towards my development as an efficient Change Agent within my organization. Along with the Core AR team, I managed to successfully drive positive desirable change within a post-merger integration context which involved in dealing with issues not only concerning various individuals and teams, but also concerning various departments, geographical units, cross-cultural issues, competitors, customers (both internal and external), and regulatory authorities, some of who served as "tempered radicals" i.e. entities who wanted to fit in without jeopardizing their respective individual identities (Meyerson, 2003 cited in Attwood, 2007, p.193).

The routine established during this research study as discussed in Chapter 4.3.2, enabled me to facilitate the development of leadership skills for some of my colleagues who formed the Core AR team. The established routine also helped in achieving high level of involvement and commitment from the paticipants while maintaining the right balance between solving the workplace problem and knowledge creation, which is a challenging task for insider action researchers (Cassell and Johnson, 2006; Greenwood, Whyte, and

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Harkavy, 1993; Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002). The participants were engaged in continuous learning and development that contributed towards developing their skills and knowledge required for identifying blind spots, debunking assumptions and prejudices, and working together collectively, concurrently, collaboratively and compassionately in a "leaderful" manner, as opposed to the conventional serial, individualistic, controlled and dispassionate manner (Raelin, 2003). One of the participants commented *"I am quite impressed with how much management research theory we have learned…while working on a real-life workplace problem"*, which validated the impact I could make on the participants.

5.1.4. Development as a Political Entrepreneur

Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) describe 'political entrepreneurship' as insider action researcher's capabilities for dealing with challenges such as access, role-duality, resource and funding, and preunderstanding. Engaging in this thesis research project presented me with opportunities for developing skills for dealing with some of the political, ethical, and social concerns that affected me as an insider action researcher, thereby contributing towards my development as a Political Entrepreneur. I was able to deal with ethical concerns of being pulled between personal academic interests owing to the thesis project and my obligations towards my employer. My obligation towards my colleagues and important stakeholders at my workplace further added to the complexity; wherein I had to balance the expectations of various individuals and groups. For e.g. there was a concern about some of the participants feeling as if they were being dragged into a research project wherein the returns for them would be very limited. I, therefore, placed high emphasis on learning, development, and problem-solving for the participants by highlighting AL and focusing upon some of the red-hot issues affecting my organization and the participants, as discussed in Chapter 4.3.1.

The research methodology described in Chapters 3 and 4 was designed such that the research interest remains alive for both research participants and me. The Core AR process was presented to the internal stakeholders as an organizational development program that would focus on some red hot organizational issues, to ensure the necessary access and resources for carrying out research within my organization. The participants, on the other hand, were made to focus on learning and collaborative problem solving through AL. There were times when I had to slow down to maintain interest and meet expectations of the research participants and sponsors. For e.g. SSM was not introduced

until the third AR cycle. Every AL meeting brought to light some new challenges, and I had to be prepared during these "defining moments" as the primary researcher. The entire research project, however, maintained focus on realizing synergies amidst the fast-paced changes during post-merger integration, which in turn contributed towards realizing some of the merger objectives as discussed in Chapter 5.2.

There were challenges associated with authenticity when reporting my findings. I had role-duality issues that posed dilemmas while handling the data collected during the research and at the same time balancing confidentiality concerns during third person dissemination of data, which is similar to "sending role and receiving role conflicts" as discussed by White and Wooten (1986 cited in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.136). For e.g. I successfully managed to relate the research challenges with some of the red-hot issues within my organization as recommended by Bjorkman and Sundgren (2007), which helped me to gain involvement of some influential colleagues, such as involving the Divisional Director for establishing CLT's Administrative Leadership functions as discussed in Chapter 4.3.4. There was, however, no coercive influence or covert research carried out as a part of this study.

I learned how to deal with the challenge of getting pulled between core responsibilities as an employee and meeting academic requirements and deadlines as a DBA candidate, which according to Moore (2007) could sometimes have dire consequences for researching professionals. Regular meetings with my thesis supervisor from the University helped me to stay on track and also helped me in not getting trapped into role-duality issues. I was aware of the potential threats and was prepared to deal with them by being street-smart (Roth et al., 2007, p.52) when required, being politically astute (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2005) where necessary, and by being mindful of proven approaches for justifying academic rigor as recommended by Dick (1993). For e.g. the empirical core of this research project was framed as a competency development program for colleagues involved from my workplace as discussed in Chapter 4.3 wherein, we followed a routine focusing on long-term objectives around synergy realizations amidst the post-merger integration phase that would benefit our organization and was also in line with expectations of some key stakeholders.

Dealing with these challenges not only contributed to the research progress but also provided me with the opportunity to develop my negotiation and persuasion skills. This

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research study has taught me how to stay morally educated while engaging in dialogues with various participants and stakeholders. I am now more cognizant of potential dangers and dilemmas involved with power and politics while working on insider action research projects. In summary, my political entrepreneurship skills have developed significantly during this research project, which has earned me recognition and admiration within the organization.

5.2. Impact to my Organization and Participants

This research study was conducted at my workplace within the context of a post-merger integration between two competing organizations, a situation that was characterized by fast-paced changes that required adaptivity at all levels in the organization. The research process, especially the AR process described in Chapter 4.3, enabled some of the organizational members to engage in collective learning and problem-solving which was driving desirable synergy realizations through collective decision making.

Using CAS as the primary theoretical framework for this research study enabled influencing individuals and groups beyond the Core AR team. For e.g. some of the CLT Administrative Leadership functions that were communicated through formal memo reached out to organizational members beyond the research participants. An update on the merger progress by the group company's CEO read *"We still have a lot to gain from cross-selling and collaborative business development across both service lines and business areas. This is an area where I expect your customer focus and foresight to generate results."* This research study positively contributed towards the CEO's expectations around "cross-selling and collaborative business development", which was highlighted by some SLT members who closely followed the progress of this research.

5.2.1. Impact of the Research Project on my Organization

This research study was carried out during the post-merger integration of a large horizontal merger between two competing organizations, which has a high risk of failure as highlighted in Chapter 2.3. Furthermore, this research study focused on "synergy realizations" which is fundamental towards deciding the fate of a merger as highlighted in Chapter 2.3.3. The AR process that formed the empirical core of this research project facilitated working upon some of the issues, problems, and challenges that were crucial towards the success of my organization during the critical post-merger integration phase. The AR process not only helped us in staying positive but also helped in dealing with some

of the organizational behavior and change management challenges associated with the post-merger integration such as uncertainty, lack of trust, high turnover, losing sense of direction, disconnect between senior leadership team expectations and middle level managers, communication related challenges, lack of control, ambition with no structure, losing sight of the key responsibilities, anxiety, organizational justice, and cynicism.

Some real-life organizational issues were addressed by making use of relevant organizational behavior and management theories thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice as further discussed in Chapter 5.3.2. For e.g. the AL routine helped the participants to remain focused during the sudden resignation of the Regional Manager, a situation which can be perceived as a crisis. This example also validated that no coercive influence was impacting the research participants and they were genuinely benefitting, which was further validated by the following comment made by one of the participants, *"AL has provided us with the much-required reflections in a structured and organized manner that helped us to take actions on our problems and then learn from these actions"*. The research process helped the participants to be more reflexive at the individual and group levels and enabled dealing with the post-merger integration related changes that were characterized by uncertainty. Relevant theoretical concepts were effective in solving real-life challenges faced by the orgnization such as Stakeholder Strategy Matrix and SSM for thinking about the problem situation more holistically, Hang-Time Exercise and Schein's ORJI Framework for engaging in collective reflections, CAS and CLT for understanding the dynamics associated with the ongoing change management, and AL, AR & LiC for engaging in effective double loop learning and actions.

The research process demonstrated individual, group, and (to some extent) organization-wide leadership and community development. We were able to demonstrate Leaderful Practice (Raelin, 2010) based on AL routines and catalyzed by CLT. Discussions and implementation of concepts such as Situational Leadership Theory, Network Level Change, and Continuum of Manager-Non-Manager Behavior, helped towards better cognition of the problem situations and helped us to engage in appreciative inquiry for solving organizational challenges.

Since the primary aim of this thesis project was to advance professional practice while working on real-life workplace problems, issues that were of particular interest to organizational members steered the research progress. The research was also aligned

with the relevant merger updates and SLT expectations. The Core AR problem was framed as "How can we make use of synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process?", which was in alignment with the key expectations of the Group CEO and SLT members. While commenting on the research process, one of the participants mentioned: *"This has been a great learning and development experience for me, which has been a great blend of theoretical knowledge and practical action…"*. Another participant commented, *"It's been a great opportunity to be a part of this project and at the same time create great bonds and synergies with colleagues at work, both old and new."* Such feedback and comments validated how this research study contributed towards the development of high empathy resilient teams working autonomously towards desirable business outcome benefitting the organization and organizational members.

5.2.1.1 Impact following the completion of the Core AR project

Although the Core AR process ended after 15 planned AL meetings, the momentum built due to the actions carried out during the Core AR process continued in accordance with CAS principles which validated Clayton's (2010) appeal for building up on CAS during post-merger integrations. Some of the CLT Administrative Leadership functions were reemphasized, updated, and followed up by SLT members, which fuelled continued synergy realizations and cross-selling initiatives. Some of the actions such as organizing knowledge sharing sessions, lunch and learns, cross business area meetings and events, were eventually established as routines and were being supported by Regional Management teams. Some of these actions also formed a part of individual and unit level KPIs.

The initiatives carried out during this research process were made known far and wide within our large organization through SLT discussions, which provided some recognition and admiration for the participants. I am not aware of similar AL/AR initiatives being carried out elsewhere in the organization, but my colleagues who formed a part of the Core AR team continued using AL while working on future organizational problems. Some of the established AL routines were followed during monthly team meetings, and more recently for working on a Culture enhancement initiative by the SLT that focused upon Customer centricity, Collaboration, Competent People and Sales orientation, all of which can be related to some of the topics we had touched upon during the Core AR process discussed

in Chapter 4.3. I also learned about instances after concluding this research study wherein tools such as Situational Leadership Theory and Hangtime Exercise were used for dealing with some organizational and management challenges.

At the time of this writing, it is early to predict whether the merger has been successful or not, and how much impact has this research study made to the larger organizational merger. It is, however, safe to claim that this research project has effectively contributed towards realizing some desired synergies during post-merger integration. If we go by some of the examples and studies that state lack of synergy realization as one of the biggest contributors to merger failures as discussed in the literature review Chapter 2.3, it is fair to conclude that this research project has contributed towards mitigating the risk of failure and has contributed towards realizing one of the key merger objectives (synergy realizations), in addition to meeting some of the SLT expectations during the crucial post-merger integration phase.

5.2.2. Impact of the Research Project on Participants

One of the ambitions of this research project was to demonstrate personal development and learning for some of the organizational members through developing their understanding of relevant management and organizational learning concepts that would, in turn, benefit the individual participants as well as the organization. Some of my colleagues from workplace who formed the Core AR team benefitted from the Scholar-Practitioner approach as reflected in the following comment made by one of the participant *"…it is quite amazing to see how much of management research knowledge we could actually put to effective use while working on our identified problems. We should continue referring to the vast ocean of Management Research theory…"*

This research study was not perceived as a distraction from routine work for any of the participants either who were directly or indirectly involved since we were working on a collectively defined real-life workplace problem. Furthermore, I had the required permission, support and access to resources granted by some of the SLT members, and there was no need for any of the participants to work beyond normal work hours, although there were some instances wherein the participants voluntarily stayed on for the AL meetings beyond work hours. All participants felt that participating in this research study helped towards their personal development, and helped them to succeed with their responsibilities at work amidst the ongoing post-merger integration changes, which reflects in the following

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comment made by one of the participants *"The entire journey so far has been very rewarding for me not only at work but also personally. I think I have discovered a very effective process for working on real-life problems as a team, and I have learned to be more reflective as an individual."*

The Core AR routine as discussed in Chapter 4.3.2 placed a strong emphasis on introducing relevant theoretical concepts and taking turns to lead and scribe the meetings, which contributed towards developing leadership skills for the participants. One of the participants commented *"The opportunity to chair and scribe during the meetings helped me to develop my leadership and listening skills respectively. There was a sense of healthy peer pressure, which helped me to get out of my comfort zone and learn new concepts, and I am very glad that I made that effort."* All participants had similar feedback related to personal development, which validated and confirmed effective learning and development of the participants. All participants who were involved in the Core AR process were able to familiarize themselves with and apply relevant theoretical concepts such as AL, SSM, CAS, CLT, LiC, and Schein's ORJI Framework, amongst others. Some concepts such as Situational Leadership Model and Hang-time exercise were highly appreciated and cherished by the participants as useful tools in their management toolbox. All participants were able to develop their metacognitive, double loop learning, and dialogic inquiry skills.

We had developed mutual respect while building up our individual, relative and collective conscience, which relates to the ethical elements of leadership and community theories such as those discussed by Brenkert (1992), Reynolds (1999), Sosik, Jung and Dinger (2009) and Trevino (1986). We were able to develop a constructivist view of our problems (Landry, 1995, p.328-330), that can be related to the critical realist approach or "withness thinking" as discussed by Shotter (2006), which does not detach researchers from the problem as in typical positivist approach or ignores historical learning as in a typical social constructivist approach. All participants who were directly involved in the Core AR process had the opportunity to engage with "changes in motion" which according to Shotter (2006) is effective for personal and organizational development.

Although this thesis report follows an academically oriented structure, the Core AR process focused on producing actionable knowledge underpinning learning and professional development for the participants. All participants gained recognition for being thought leaders and change agents during the crucial post-merger integration, and their

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contributions were appreciated by some of the SLT members and colleagues who were influenced by this research study.

5.3. Contribution to Broader Community of Practitioners and Academics

This research study has enabled me to demonstrate how researching practitioners can make an impact on real-life organizational challenges by making use of relevant theories, and building upon actionable knowledge generated through research. Some of the following outcomes of this research study may be of interest to the broader community of practitioners and academics:

1) Providing fresh perspectives on organizational merger theory by building upon Clayton's (2010) appeal for relating mergers and CAS.
2) Discussing how researching practitioners can carry out AR for bridging the gap between theory and practice.
3) The research design and approach discussed in this research study encourages experimentation of various theories, tools, methods, and methodologies by engaging in research-oriented knowledge creation for solving real-life workplace problems. Combination of various concepts such as AR, AL, SSM, CAS, CLT, and LiC could be further explored or critiqued by other practitioners and academics.
4) The narrative nature of this thesis document discusses first-hand challenges of insider action research, which could be useful for other practitioners and academics working in similar contexts.

The following sub-sections provide some thoughts on how the broader community of practitioners and academics can benefit from the outcome of this research study, specifically while dealing with synergy realizations in post-merger integration contexts, and by bridging the gap between theory and practice.

5.3.1. Impact on realizing synergies during post-merger integration

The literature review in Chapter 2 has highlighted the growing significance of empirical research around organizational mergers, and why synergy realizations during post-merger integration are important for mergers to succeed. The research methodology and process discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively discuss some of the contributions made through this research project to the existing body of knowledge around the key issue of post-merger synergies. This research study provides reflections on the significance of "Adaptivity" during post-merger integration by building on Clayton's (2010) appeal for

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relating organizational mergers to CAS. AR, AL, CLT, and LiC have been used as effective complementing concepts for learning, decentralizing decision making, and providing autonomy at all levels in order to realize synergies during post-merger integration, which has potential for further exploration, especially in the context of knowledge workers such as software engineers, medical professionals, engineers, academics, scientists, lawyers, and so on, who are professionals that make use of knowledge as their primary capital.

The enthusiasm demonstrated by the research participants validated Barker's (1993) discussion of how self-managed teams can generate coercive control or sense of responsibility towards a community, and bring out favorable results that are often better and more powerful than that of hierarchical and serial control. Such realization of synergies addresses the call for collaborative alliances and mutual obligations amidst organizational issues related to interrelating power and other uncertainties during post-merger integration contexts as discussed by Cohen and Bradford (1989), Gouldner (1960) and Wood and Gray (1991). Practitioners and academics working around synergy realization and post-merger integration themes could further explore or critique my research design and methodology while dealing with issues related to conflict management, interrelating power issues, and inter-level dynamics (Cohen and Bradford, 1989; Gouldner, 1960; Thomas, 1977; Wood and Gray, 1991).

This research study successfully met one of the key objectives of the Core AR process for the participants to work collectively towards a common change management problem through combining advocacy and inquiry (Coghlan and Brannik, 2010, p.30), and by following the principles of CAS and Leaderful Practice. The following comment made by one of the participants during one of the final AL meetings validates meeting this objective: *"The (AL meetings) routine has indeed made us closer as a group, and most definitely helped us to identify synergies within our group in addition to identifying the intended cross unit and cross business area synergies"*. Other comments and feedback such as *"I felt like we have a good support system during uncertain and stressful times amidst post-merger integration related changes",* and *"We could indeed talk about our problems and worries without hesitation, and the AL routine provided us with not only the required sounding board but also helped us to find some pragmatic solutions to our problems"* further validated how the research process helped participants to stay positive and resilient during the vital post-merger integration phase. When working with new synergies and routines that were established as an outcome of the research process, I observed that we were

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evolving and adapting to the newly found synergies independently in CAS like manner, that can be associated with self-directed teams (Fisher, 2000), empowered teams (Kirkman and Rosen, 2000), and super-leadership (Manz and Sims, 1991), which according to Barker (1993) has the potential for generating stronger control as compared to conventional hierarchical and serial control, and challenges the concept of charismatic leaders as discussed by Bell (1997). Practitioners and academics working around synergy realizations might find my research study useful for reflecting upon the effectiveness of AR and other complementary concepts used in this research study during similar post-merger integration contexts.

CLT, in particular, proved to be instrumental in establishing joint actions and routines for realizing synergies, while the AL routine and SSM provided with structured and streamlined approach for reflecting upon how synergies were working and what could be done to deal with the challenges, although the use of SSM was limited. The entire research process benefitted from following Clayton's (2010) suggestion of making use of complexity science principles in organizational merger integration contexts. The AR approach used in this research study enabled reflexivity and double loop learning, which is proven to be effective components of research studies based on the postmodernist research paradigm (Antonacopoulou, 2004; Argyris, 1994; Isaacs, 1993; Marshak and Grant, 2008). Tools and methods that are complementary to AR such as Schein's ORJI model, Hangtime exercise, and Stakeholder Strategy Matrix proved to be effective in keeping the discussions lively. The dialogic inquiries amongst participants helped to understand that organizational changes are based on relational discovery and are most effective when practiced in a "leaderful" manner (Raelin, 2003) wherein we worked concurrently, collectively, collaboratively and compassionately as opposed to the traditional serial, individualistic, controlling and dispassionate approach. As economies are becoming more dependent on human capacity, the Leaderful approach along with various tools, tips, and techniques presented in this research study are areas that can be explored further by both professionals and academics. Moreover, humans are autonomous, self-directed, and curious by nature, which further justifies the applicability of collaborative approaches used in this research study for synergy realizations amidst post-merger integrations, which is an area that can be further explored by practitioners and academics working in similar change management contexts that involve high interpersonal interactions, uncertainties, and high risks for failure.

5.3.2. Bridging the gap between theory and practice

This thesis study can serve as an empirical reference for professionals and academics looking for examples of how actionable knowledge can be generated through research to solve real-life workplace problems, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice, which is a hot topic in management journals. Since this research study has been carried out as a part of a DBA programme following AR methodology, professionals and academics who are seeking examples of adding value to real-life workplace problems through AR and professional doctorate programs might also find my research study interesting. This thesis document also discusses first-hand challenges of insider action research and provides an empirical account of how I have dealt with these challenges, which could serve as a reference for practitioners and academics who engage in insider AR.

This thesis project built upon Clayton's (2010) appeal for scholars and practitioners to go beyond traditional merger methodologies by looking at mergers as CAS, and made use of relevant Mode 2 knowledge creation concepts such as CLT, SSM, LiC, and AR. This thesis project aims to serve as an empirical reference for these concepts and also for encouraging experimentation of combining relevant tools, methods, and methodologies while engaging in research-oriented knowledge creation for solving real-life workplace problems. This study also aims to serve as a reference for managers, leaders, researchers, and practitioners, who would like to explore or critique the use of some of the Mode 2 knowledge creation concepts to foster adaptations and collaboration at the workplace.

Following are examples of how some of the relevant theoretical concepts were put to use in practical scenarios during this research study, which professional and academic reviewers may like to seek inspiration from or critique.

The characteristic of our legacy organization (pre-merger) was that of a "risk avoiding organization" (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1998), and therefore most of the ongoing changes were perceived as potential crisis characterized by strong resistance from certain individuals whose self-interest were threatened due to the proposed changes (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999, p.304), or due to failed cooperation between the merging team members that had the potential to spiral into crisis situations (Turner, 1976), such as some of the resignations that were witnessed during the course of this research study. LiC was used as an effective theory for perceiving crisis as an ideal opportunity for learning and

dealing with change. LiC helped us to be resilient, and open to learning from our actions, while having a positive impact on our interpersonal interactions. LiC helped to change the perception during a state of flux and had an overall positive impact on fostering synergy realization, while the routines established through AL, CLT, and SSM enabled us to remain focused on the desirable positive outcomes.

Some of the change coping strategies discussed by Ager (2011) such as exiting (voluntary and involuntary resignations), avoiding change, and transcending organization boundaries, were evident during this research study. CAS and CLT helped in coping with some of these issues and helped in remaining focused on constructive outcome amidst turbulent times as discussed in Chapter 4.3.4. Also, CAS and CLT helped in dealing with individuals and groups who had contrasting reactions, conflicts, and cultural differences, while we were adapting, emerging, and learning at the same time in a streamlined manner. Complementary tools and methods such as Schein's ORJI model, Hangtime exercise, and Stakeholder Strategy Matrix were effective in keeping the discussions lively, on track, and helped in making the most out of limited time and resources available for this study. These tools and methods also helped in dealing with some of the issues such as stress and related psychological effects that are often associated with organizational transformations as highlighted by Ashford (1998). I think there is merit for practitioners and academics in experimenting with various theoretical concepts used in this research study.

This research study could be of particular interest to:

- Practitioners looking for making use of research generated actionable knowledge by bridging theory and practice to solve real-life workplace problems
- Researchers and academics looking for empirical examples of putting AR and DBA to good use
- Academics who want to build upon or critique Mode 2 research concepts such as AR, CAS, CAL, SSM, LiC, Leaderful Practice, ORJI, and so on.
- Practitioners looking for tools tips and techniques to foster adaptations and collaboration at workplace in order to cope up with the "ever faster moving and interconnected global economy wherein risk taking is more appreciated than ever before, and wherein empathy, compassion, trust, cooperation matter more, because innovation has become a team sport, because the demands of the creative economy have accelerated" (Microsoft and Poptech, 2016).

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Chapter 6: Conclusive Thoughts

This research study makes three important contributions. First, this research study presents innovative insights towards resolving some of the mysteries attached with organizational mergers, by focusing upon positive merger objectives through synergy realizations by heeding to Clayton's (2010) appeal for scholars and practitioners to go beyond traditional M&A methodologies. Second, this study presents an empirical account of some of the Mode 2 knowledge creation concepts used together such as AL, AR, CAS, CLT, SSM and LiC, which has the potential of inspiring similar experimentation in organizational learning and management research. And third, this study demonstrates how researching practitioners can make an impact on successful adaptations to organizational change management situations such as the ones presented by organizational mergers by bridging the gap between theory and practice, and building on research-oriented knowledge through AR and professional doctorate programmes.

Although this research study is based on a specific and potentially unique context, the ontological foundations of this study including the research approach, methodology, methods, questioning insights, interventions, and reflections can be of interest to practitioners and academics working around similar organizational challenges. The findings of this study highlight the significance of focusing on the key expectations from a merger that can be summarized as growth and sustainability, as opposed to focusing on merger-related issues or failures.

This study demonstrates how AR, post-positivist research philosophies, and complexity science can be put to good use for achieving desirable merger outcomes such as synergy realizations, fostering team spirit, building strong support system for dealing with uncertainties and anxieties, and working in a Leaderful manner amidst accelerated change management situations that are typically characterized by anxiety, resilience, and cynicism.

The primary focus of this research study was to conduct "An insider AR study focusing on synergy realizations during post-merger integration phase between competing organizations", aiming towards making a positive impact on a real-life post-merger integration situation. The literature review revealed some theoretical concepts and methodologies that could add value to this research and also presented an opportunity to empirically validate these concepts which are in the state of gaining recognition and awareness. Some of these concepts included CAS, SSM, CLT, and LiC. Some additional

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but related concepts such as Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 2008), Stakeholder Strategy Matrix (Raelin, 2010), Schein's ORJI Framework, and Hang Time Exercise (Raelin, 2010) were also utilized and their effectiveness were validated within the context of this study. It is noteworthy that the impact of AL and LiC was limited to the AL set participants, while concepts such as CAS, CLT, and SSM were the real drivers for facilitating synergy realizations.

From a CAS point of view, this research study looked into the post-merger activities as the environment wherein the organization was co-evolving to adapt to the changing environment. This study discusses how CAS can influence the larger organization having an impact at personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels, effectively dealing with interrelated issues such as personal attitudes, organizational complexities, power dynamics, and organizational politics. However, CAS could also have a wider impact at the industrywide, countrywide and societal levels as illustrated in figure 30. Other professionals and academics working with CAS may like to build upon this construct.
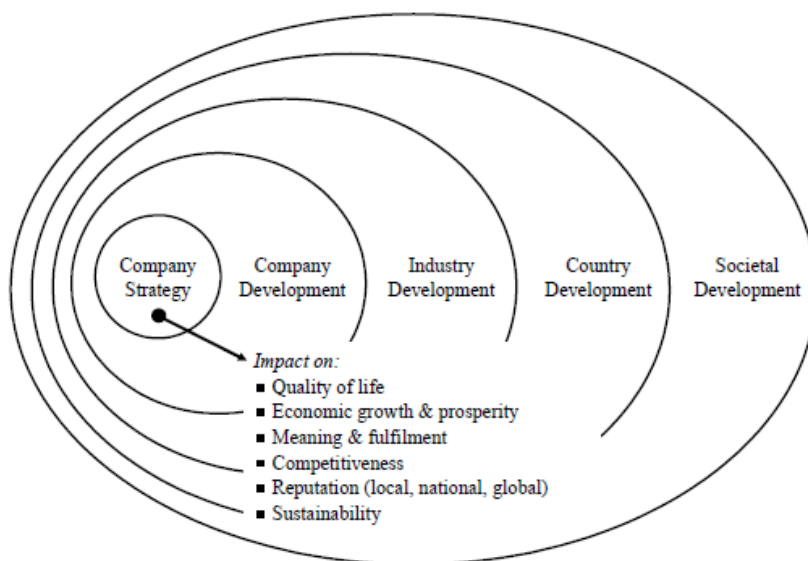
Figure 29: Strategy in organizational and societal context (Galbreath, 2009, p.122)

CLT helped in catalyzing as well as providing manageable structure around the evolution of CAS. I would, however, like to suggest practicing caution when referring to my work and findings around CLT, especially in sensitive and high-risk contexts such as healthcare, construction, transportation, mining, and so on, where a small mistake could have huge consequences. For e.g. Pablo et al's (2007) discussions around giving more autonomy to nurses in the healthcare sector, and Eisenhardt and Martin's (2000) discussion around the

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risk of failure in high-velocity markets provide some caution against autonomous teams, which other researchers and especially practitioners should be aware of while working with CAS and CLT.

I could not find examples of empirical research studies making use of Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer's (2013) concept of LiC. This thesis study provides empirical validation for LiC and highlights the potential of LiC to be explored further in relation to organizational learning, change management, and management research, especially within crisis-prone contexts such as organizational mergers.

6.1. Critical reflections on what could have been done differently

The entire research process involved engaging in critical reflections, both as the primary researcher working independently on my thesis project and as the Core AR team working collectively on a real-life organizational problem. All of the outcome from critical reflections could not be applied during the "defining moments" due to constraints such as the risk of losing participants' interest, time limitations for AL meetings, and thesis project deadlines, amongst others. This Chapter outlines some of my critically reflective thoughts on what could be done differently if I were to carry out this research study all over again.

I think SSM was not utilized to its full potential, or even to an extent that was envisioned while designing the research as discussed in Chapters 2.5.3 and 3.2.4. This was primarily due to SSM's seemingly overwhelming effect on the participants due to various jargons and terminologies. If I were to carry out this research study again, I would gain a better understanding of SSM and its facilitation, or avoid using SSM entirely. I, however, don't think that use of SSM was by any means limiting for this research study as I did learn something through active experimentation; for e.g. the rich picture and root definitions provided the much required deep insights of the problem situation and helped the Core AR team to work more collectively.

Referring to the AL routine of the Core AR process discussed in Chapter 4.3.2, taking turns for chairing and scribing the meetings was not implemented until the 4th AL meeting as can be seen in the meeting transcripts available in Appendix E. If I were to carry out this research study again, I would not wait until the 4th AL meeting to rotate facilitators and scribes, which would not only take away some burden from me as the primary researcher but also provide more time for the participants to develop their leadership skills. I would

also introduce the key concepts such as CAS, CLT, and SSM much earlier. I didn't introduce CAS, CLT, and SSM sooner as I feared losing interest of the participants, and was also concerned about the limited time granted by the sponsors.

If I were to carry out this research again, I would try to spend more time on the Core AR process even if it requires cutting down on pre-study interviews, and instead only taking inputs from some key stakeholders such as SLT members who served as sponsors for this research study. The AL meetings were conducted on a weekly basis which kept the interest alive and enabled me to gain most out of the limited access available to the participants. However, the weekly frequency gave us less time to carry out some agreed actions or reflect upon our actions. If I were to carry out this study again, I would consider reducing the frequency of the AL meetings which could allow more time for actions and reflections. I would also consider including participants from other units to form a part of the Core AR process.

6.2. Limitations and future work

Although this thesis report predominantly follows a classical academic structure and provides relevant references, the main focus has been on producing and recording new actionable knowledge amidst real-life challenges. This research study is based on post-positivist research paradigm which contends that all observations are contextual and prone to imperfection, and should consequently be challenged. Reviewers of this research study should, therefore, reuse any direct or indirect suggestions with their discretion, and by all means, validate or even challenge my approach and findings.

Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey (2007) which has been my key reference for CLT have provided sufficient information on characteristics of CLT but did not discuss how CLT could be efficiently utilized in a multi-level and multi-dimensional organization such as the context of this study. The authors also did not discuss how CLT could help towards channeling informal discussions at all levels in the organization, which I think is a gap that future research work could address, perhaps by building upon SSM. Due to the constraints and limitations of this specific research study, I was unable to carry out extensive work on SSM. SSM requires a thorough understanding of complex terminologies and significant experience, which I lacked, and can be considered as one of the limitations of this research study. Use of SSM for fostering CAS and streamlining CLT are areas that can be

further explored by me or other practitioners and academics through future research. However, since this research study did not focus or depend entirely on SSM, I do not consider SSM's minimal use as limiting towards my findings, but one may like to consider gaining a thorough understanding of SSM when working with large groups and complex contexts.

This research study demonstrated harmonization of relevant theoretical concepts, tools, and methods, for carrying out interventions and group reflections as a part of the AR process. Experimenting the use of various concepts together is an area that Organizational Learning and Management Research scholars and practitioners may like to seek inspiration from and explore further. Furthermore, scholars and practitioners may also like to consider making use of these concepts beyond their intended purposes envisioned by their respective founders. For e.g. this research study made use of ORJI Framework not only for reflecting upon unpredictable outcomes but also for collectively reflecting on the effectiveness of the various theoretical concepts as discussed in Chapters 4.3.4 and 4.3.5.

Being a relatively unseasoned Action Researcher working on a DBA thesis project, I realized that there was a lot of guidance during the DBA modules on how to conduct AR, but most of the literature reviewed during the modules and the literature review process were from reputed academic or business journals written in conventional format. I found it challenging to find good examples of relevant AR based thesis as most of these are not available in the public domain due to confidentiality issues. This research study will also face a similar dilemma of confidentiality and will most likely not receive the permission to be published in the public domain. I will attempt to seek the necessary permissions and anonymize this study, following which I will strive to share the findings of this research study by presenting papers at relevant conferences, which could be of interest to practitioners and academics who would like to explore examples related to organizational mergers, role of tacit knowledge in innovation, and how researching practitioners can bridge the gap between theory and practice. I will also gain the necessary approvals to develop a training program within my organization focusing on some of the key findings of this research study, which will focus on disseminating some of the learnings, concepts, tools, methods, and techniques. If deemed relevant by my thesis supervisor, I will also strive to get a paper or article published in one of the relevant organizational learning and management journals, which could enable me to spread my ideas to a wider audience, encourage further research, and serve as reference for other practitioners who are taking a

scholar-practitioner approach for solving real-life organizational problems through AR and DBA programmes.

An obvious limitation of this research study due to being anchored in Mode 2 knowledge creation is the lack of generalizability beyond the specific contexts, constraints, and limitations of this study. I nevertheless hope that this study can provide some critical reflections and inspiration to some scholars and practitioners who would like to heed to Clayton's (2010) appeal for bold and innovative approaches to M&A research. I would go one step further and appeal for innovative approaches to the application of AR and complexity science concepts as well.

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UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Participant Information Sheet for my DBA Research

Document Version: Rev 5, 16 May 2014

Dear Colleague,

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your line managers, colleagues, friends, relatives and GP if you wish. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this and I hope you will be able to participate in my research study.

Research Title: Insider Action Research focusing on "synergy realizations" during post-merger integration.

Purpose of the study:

I am scheduled to carry on an Action Research for the Thesis project of my ongoing Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme. My research is based in context of ongoing post-merger integration in our organization and I am aiming to focus on realizing synergies during merger integration. The study will make use of the established research methodologies anchored in Mode 2 research which basically means real world knowledge production.

The significance of post-merger integration cannot be overstated towards deciding fate of a merger. Although the main purpose behind organizational mergers and acquisitions is "One plus one makes three", most post-merger integration studies have focused on failures. My study will focus upon finding out how and whether clashing worldviews during a merger integration can be channelled as a source of motivation and creativity that could eventually help the employees and organization to synergise and reap benefits from the merger.

The findings of my research study would appeal to both academics and practitioners who are looking for empirical examples around synergy realization during post-merger/acquisition integrations through Action Research.

Why have you been chosen to take part?

I am inviting research participants as a result of both purposeful and convenience sourcing. I am working closely with one of the integration managers who's mentoring me with my Thesis and some SLT members who have been supportive of my research; it is quite possible that your name has been nominated or recommended by one of them.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary and you will have the right to withdraw from the research study anytime without need to provide any explanation and without incurring any disadvantage.

What will happen if you take part?

You will have the option to become part of an Action Research team, which will give you an opportunity to get familiarized with some of the Action Research methodologies and indulge into collective reflections on problem situations, taking actions on the identified problems, and learning from actions. Your participation will provide you the opportunity to identify and work upon resolving real-life workplace problems (which will be part of normal job/leadership functions for some of you) and will also help you to develop your network, competencies and Action Research skills.

Those of you who will be a part of the Action Research team would need to spend about 16-24 hours over a period of 4-6 months during 3rd and 4th quarter of 2014, but most of the time invested during research could coincide with your normal job responsibilities and functions.

Some of you may only need to participate for interview, focus groups and/or surveys. Your responsibility as a participant will be to provide your candid inputs during interviews, group discussions and surveys. Those of you who will be participating in selective interviews, group discussion and surveys may need to collectively spend about 2-4 hours between 3rd and 4th quarter of 2014.

I may choose to record some of the Action Research team discussions, interviews and focus group discussions upon mutual consent (audio only), which will of course be optional as clearly specified in the participant consent form.

Expenses and / or payments

Most of our meetings and interactions will be through emails and online discussions and I do not foresee any expenses or payments for participation. You will however be able to be

a part of the Core Action Research team and develop additional leadership and research skills by participating in this research. The research findings will be shared with everyone who participates in the research study.

Are there any risks in taking part?

The research is expected to take an insider Action Research approach and could reveal some real-life workplace problems that could surface tensions between and across team members. The purpose of my intended research is to focus on synergy realizations, and therefore these risks will be seen in positive light as improvement opportunities. Should you experience any discomfort or disadvantage as part of the research please make this known to me immediately, and I will take all necessary measures to resolve the issue. You are also at liberty to withdraw from the research anytime without need for any explanation.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

Participating will help you as a participant to identify and work upon real-life challenges and identify synergies at work which most certainly develop your network, give you more visibility and most importantly help us to function as a "leaderful organization". You will develop as an experienced Action Researcher if you participate as the Action Research team member through developing your competency and Action Research skills.

What if you are unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know by contacting [Ravi Tahilramani ravi.tahilramani@my.ohecampus.com, +971503528212] and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk or Research Participant Advocate on phone by dialling +1-612-312-1210 or emailing liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com. When contacting the Research Governance Officer or Research Participant Advocate, please provide details of the name or description of the

study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

I intend to anonymize all collected data. If we as an Action Research team decide to identify ourselves within the organization, this will be a unanimous team decision. The Thesis research data will be maintained for at least 5 years and will not have permission to be available in the public domain unless requested by our SLT.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the Thesis Action Research project will be available as a Thesis document and shared with all participants. The results of our Core Action Research project will be an ongoing activity, which I hope will benefit us as an organization. Your identity will not be identifiable from the research results unless you have requested or consented to being so.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You have the liberty to withdraw from this research at any time without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that they are destroyed and no further use is made of them. Results may however only be withdrawn prior to anonymizing them.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Please contact Ravi Tahilramani, ravi.tahilramani@my.ohecampus.com, Mobile: +971503528212 in case you have any further questions or concerns.

Duty of care to research participants

This research study is supported and overseen by a couple of Senior Leadership Team members. I will identify these individuals and their contact details upon receiving your consent and you will be free to contact them in case you have any concerns. All our values as an organization will be sincerely followed throughout the research.

DBA Thesis, University of Liverpool, Student ID: H00025015

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:	An insider Action Research focusing on "synergy realizations" during post-merger integration.
Researcher(s):	Ravi Tahilramani

Please insert your initials or put a cross (X) if you do not agree

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 16th May 2014 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications

5. I understand and agree that my participation can be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for data recording and analysis purposes as long as my anonymity and confidentiality is maintained

DBA Thesis, University of Liverpool, Student ID: H00025015

6. I would like my name used and I understand and agree that what I have said or written as part of this study can be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. Please initialize only if you wish to be identified as a research participant.

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____   _____   _____

Participant Name   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Person taking consent   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date

Signature

Appendix C: Pre-Study Interview Transcripts

Interview 1:

Regional Sales Manager

a) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

The merger is one of the biggest if not "the biggest" of its kind in the industry. Coming from legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons], I personally am not in favor of the merger and do not understand as yet how is it going to benefit what I do in my day to day work.

b) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to know if we are going to make any changes to our management structure. For example are we going to move from hierarchical to matrix, or is the dominant management culture going to be influenced due to the merger. There are a lot of changes and restructuring going on right now but there is no clarity on framework and where we are heading at least at my level.

c) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

I have read some publications and there are some goals and visions defined by management, marketing and PR teams which to me is not much different from the pre-merger days. In general it's about growing our market share, establishing ourselves as industry leaders in areas where we are lagging and maintaining our leadership status in areas where we are well established. Safeguarding Life Property and the Environment is retained as our purpose and our vision still remains Global impact for a safe and sustainable future.

d) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

We obviously have new offices and colleagues around the world, which helps to add to the local flavor but it's not yet clear at my level what these colleagues do. While working on an opportunity for a customer in the region, I was able to leverage on one colleague from the merged organization who joined me for a meeting and highlighted local presence and strength. This helped me winning the customers confidence as they were assured that although we do not have specific experts in local office they at least have someone to contact locally who can coordinate internally. Furthermore, local presence smoothened the procurement processes, which saved us a lot of time and negotiations.

e) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

I am experiencing a lot of focus on internal agendas and meetings at senior and mid management levels which is kind of taking our eyes away from the ball if you know what I mean. We are asked to submit and confirm to ambitious forecasts which appears like paining a rosy picture for the merger to succeed. I think we need more time to educate ourselves and our customers on what's going on during the merger integration and how is it going to affect us and them instead of focusing on our internal meetings and agendas. Don't get me wrong, it's nice to get to know new colleagues but the focus seems to be all internal as of now. I foresee that this will not only affect our targets but also develop resistance to change or worse speculative rumors.

f) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think that the senior and mid-level management teams should facilitate networking of colleagues from different levels and local offices and this could be done through encouraging working together across different business units or even moving offices or offering flexible work desks in different offices.

Another aspect that can help us is transparent and continued communication both internally and externally. I think our senior leadership team is doing a good job at keeping us updated, but the communication is only top-bottom and appears to be focusing on success stories and not challenges that we face and how to overcome them.

Amidst the ongoing merger we all have our individual and group KPIs and I hope that our managers who are spending a lot of their time working on the post-merger integration can bring something back to local offices and guide how ongoing merger can be leveraged upon for meeting our KPIs.

Interview 2:

BD Manager

1)   What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

We seem to be catching up with the ongoing trend in corporate world; this was bound to happen and I think our leaders know what they are doing; so it looks all good to me!

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

With an organization as diverse as ours it often becomes difficult to gain a holistic view of the organization. I know about the merger in bits and pieces and would be interested to know of high level stuff that's going on that's going to impact our brand and identity. On a similar note, I am not too sure about the new branding which has made us dump 150 years of branding efforts; I would like to know why did we have to rebrand ourselves and what implications this could have – both positive and negative.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Our vision remains unchanged coming from legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]. If you are asking about the benefits we aim to achieve from the merger, my understanding is we want to cut off competition in some areas, establish ourselves as world leaders and become a much larger organization.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

Yes, I think we are now working much closer across business areas, have much better customer insights, and everyone seems to be open and adaptive to new ideas and changes. This according to me did not exist earlier when I think most of us were too comfortably into established routines and working in silos.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

I can see that our cost of operations are going up mainly due to travel and lots of expat managers moving across, which is affecting business development budgets. Also, a lot of our resources such as business development, product management and marketing are getting busy with understanding how to merge the previously competing products, which is good but taking away focus from customers and might benefit our competitors.

6)   Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think we need to move people at all levels across business areas and legacy organizations, get them talking and identify more and more synergies. At the same time we need to ensure that we do not lose focus

from the customer and keep them updated on our development and most importantly how we will add more value to them through the merger.

Interview 3:

Product Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I think it\s a wicked problem situation as there is no right or wrong answer to this question. My personal take on the merger has been changing from the time it was announced to when we started the integration planning and the present post-merger integration phase. There is still some insecurity and lack of clarity but as we are getting through the integration it's sinking in better. There are a lot of distractions for me though as I now need to rethink the product strategy in light of avoiding duplication of competing products with legacy companies.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to know the basis behind some of the soft issues such as new organizational structure, choosing the right people for the right role and how are we addressing the change management involved behind this reorganization.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

We are going to be a bigger and stronger company with achieving market leadership in some areas and increasing our market share in others.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

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I am not sure if this can be classified as a synergy or a wicked problem at hand, but we are now looking into combining the strengths of competing software products offered by the legacy organization, and this is one of my most critical challenge as of now for which we are working in several dimensions in the product management team as these software products also involve significant consultancy work during deployment.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

I am experiencing and also foresee more and more power play rooted in difference of opinion between colleagues from the legacy organizations. There are also discussions around discontinuing some of the products, which will pose challenges of finding new roles for the team members or even having to make some people redundant.

6)   Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think more management support and understanding at granular levels will certainly help. Also the product managers need more resources to communicate the changes both internally and externally. I understand that we need to communicate at higher levels but there are customer representatives whose relation with our organization is based on certain software products and that's all they are concerned about. I think giving more authority and resources to product managers would help my unit to succeed with our KPIs as well as being aligned with the merger integration process.

Interview 4:

Projects Manager

1)   What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I think it's a good decision, as more and more competing organizations are going through horizontal mergers; I think that the merger will only strengthen our position especially where project deliveries are concerned.

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to know the quality of financial figures, the due diligence behind organizational & management restructuring, and expertise of merging resources.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Our corporate vision does not change as far as we from legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]are concerned. However, if you ask me about the software project delivery team my understanding is that our vision is to be able to deliver projects more efficiently at more competitive cost to our customers.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

We now have project resources in more parts of the world, which makes it easier to leverage on local resources and reduce project delivery time and cost, which according to me is a win-win situation to our organization as well as our customers. This synergy did not exist prior to the merger.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

We need to get up to speed with getting to know our new colleagues and

calibrating our skills to be able to deliver projects related to legacy products from both organizations. Furthermore, we have a herculean task of aligning our systems, processes and guiding principles. We also have challenges with some of the legacy contracts especially with mega projects.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think communication is the key for us to succeed, and our managers at all levels need to be involved in open transparent communication both internally and externally.

Interview 5:

Marketing Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

The ongoing merger is a great opportunity for us to be positioned as the leader in the Maritime industry, and also strengthen our position in the Oil and Gas sector. I think our leadership team is doing a great job with the integration process and we do indeed have some expert integration managers guiding us through the process.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

As a marketing manager I would be interested to know what our customers think of the merger. You might say that as a marketing manager it's my job to communicate the desired message to customers but I am more interested to know about what's been said about the merger in grapevine networks if you know what I mean.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

We have clear goals and vision communicated for every business area. As far as our corporate vision is concerned it remains the same as legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]i.e. "Global impact for a safe and sustainable future".

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

Since this is a horizontal merger, there's a lot of synergy in several dimensions across business areas. For e.g. legacy consultancy services and software products where we used to compete can now be combined and offered to customers so that they get best of both worlds.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

One of the biggest challenges we had was around rebranding ourselves as the merged organization, and we are still facing challenges around employee and customer resistance or rather affection towards the legacy brands.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think marketing team has a big challenge to communicate the right message both internally and externally, which will certainly add value towards our post-merger integration objectives. In addition honest and transparent communication by the senior leadership team is crucial for us to succeed.

Interview 6:

Regional Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

Changes, a lot of changes! I think we are moving at a very fast pace which I think becomes very sensitive in a cross-border merger with multiple business areas.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to know how we are dealing with employee resistance during the ongoing integration.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

My understanding is that our financial goals are much higher now that we are industry leaders in maritime classification, and I think that it is fair to say that we are on our way to becoming the largest and the no.1 classification society in the world.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

The merger has certainly changed the game for us as far as maritime classification business is concerned, and we are now larger than either of the legacy organizations have ever been.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

We need to align our core processes and systems, which according to me

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is a challenging task, for e.g. what happens to all the classification certificates provided by the legacy organizations, and how will these be reclassified? There may also be some staff-related matters that need to be better identified and itemized, for e.g. redundancy.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think better communication across the board and most importantly to our customers will help us to succeed. We also need to be more open minded and embrace change, which is one of the values we have adopted from legacy GL "We embrace change and deliver results".

Interview 7:

Business Development Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I have mixed feelings about the ongoing merger. At times I am awed by the almost exponential growth the merger has provided and at times it's overwhelming to see how quick we need to adapt to the changes. I am now heading a team most of who I have never worked with before, and it's both exciting and unsettling at the same time.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to understand some of the key milestones so that we work towards them collectively and identify and celebrate when these milestones are met.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Ours can be perceived as a merger of equal firms but legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]clearly seems to have an edge as the dominant firm, and apparently most of [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]purpose, vision and values have been inherited by the merged company.

If you ask me my thoughts on what do we intend to become as a company after the merger, I think it's all about accelerated growth that could not have been achieved in an organic manner and the key goals would be to gain more market share and reduce competition.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

Absolutely yes, and as a matter of fact my new role would not exist without this synergy. The legacy companies are very complimentary in nature although there is significant overlap, but the merger will certainly help us to add more value for our customers as we are now able to offer more comprehensive services at optimized costs.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

There are often differences of opinions when working with team members from across the legacy organizations as both organizations have had their own distinct cultures. We need to tighten up the processes which will enable us to proceed in a disciplined manner. There's also been a lot of reshuffling of senior and mid-level managers which can potentially create clashes and disharmony.

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6)   Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think that our fundamental aspects are already in place, thanks to the senior leadership team who have assigned the right resources as integration managers. In my opinion the soft issues of post-merger integration such as restructuring the organization and change management will be the key to succeed. Additionally it is important that we do not alienate our customers during the integration process and identify any signs of weakening in the marketplace, in fact we should be getting stronger in the market during the integration phase.

Interview 8:

Administration Manager

1)   What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I think that the merger will benefit all of us and our customers in the long run, but honestly all the accelerated changes are making the situation very stressful as of now. We have been through some major structural changes and are now managed more centrally as opposed to before. Also merging the processes of the legacy organizations is a challenging task, not only while understanding and merging the processes but also while disseminating the new processes. Most of us now have new colleagues and new bosses to report to, which makes one feel like working in a new job all together.

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to gain more clarity on roles and responsibilities in the restructured organization.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Our vision has been adopted from the legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]organization. If you ask me the vision specific to my department, we aim to be a global support hub for employee support within the organization as opposed to autonomous regional units.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

We now work as a global support hub which in principle means more flexibility while dealing with employee support and HR issues. In simple terms, we are now a large global team who can potentially assist anyone from around the world although our focus will still be supporting employees within the region. We now have several new colleagues working together from the legacy organization which brings in a lot of additional experience sharing and best practices.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

The work culture and processes in both legacy organizations have some remarkable differences and these are now being streamlined. Our biggest challenge now is the high learning curve required in order to align ourselves to the new structure and practices without causing any disruption to our responsibilities, which by the way has increased due to several employees being moved across positions and regions.

6)   Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think our pace of change is too fast and at times becomes challenging to keep up with the changes. It could help if we could spend more time in communicating the changes through periodic short meetings as opposed to memos and guiding/governing documents.

Interview 9:

Sales Manager

1)   What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

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2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to gain more clarity on roles and responsibilities in the restructured organization.

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5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

We are experiencing challenges with aligning processes that were followed by legacy organizations, which ones to retain, merge and discard. This could cause issues underpinning resistance, ambivalent behavior, power play, cynicism and even undesirable silence.

6)   Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

Open communication and egalitarian participation at all levels would help us to succeed in my opinion. We also need a good and effective dissemination of new practices, policies and guidelines.

Interview 10

Integration Manager

1)   What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

The merger seems to be in a good shape, and the focus has now moved

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from "make it work" to "make it good". The joint organization is in place, where cross-selling takes place, joint delivery projects are performed, joint reporting is produced and collaboration in software development has led to new product releases. Nevertheless, many of these processes are still "bumpy" – making them better is our current focus.

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would be interested to know how the merger is truly being received at all levels in customer organizations, and what's the impact to us.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

The organizational vision remains similar to that of legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons], but I would like to tell you that our goals keep getting more and more ambitious, which I think is a good thing. This becomes all the more complex when we consider that various business areas we operate.

We began the process for developing and defining 2016 -2020 strategy at the Senior Management Council Meeting in Hovik earlier this month. This process will lead to the development of the group strategy for 2016-2020 which in turn will drive the strategies for the individual business areas including the Software Business.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

Absolutely! For e.g. we have a joint project with Business Assurance targeting US market initially aimed at establishing a new joint value proposition. Progress is being made. Several similar initiatives are

emerging, and we are happy to see that Software is increasingly being seen by other business areas as a partner in driving sales and brick-walling against competition.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

There is a lot that needs to be done with limited time and resources, but the biggest challenge is to disseminate strategies at ground levels across different business areas and regions around the world.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

Transparent communication, positive reinforcement by senior leadership team and keeping everyone highly motivated should help us to succeed.

Interview 11

Projects Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

It's a part of business and will help us to build a sustainable and larger organization. There are two perspectives of looking at the merger namely employee and employer perspectives, both of which look positive to me for our growth both as an organization and individually especially for deserving candidates.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate

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Online Education, 2012).

There are a lot of mysteries attached with the ongoing merger integration process both positive and negative. Personally at individual level I would be interested to know about the job security plan as this could be based not only on competence but also some strategies that emerge during the ongoing integration process.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

We have 4-5 business units and my feedback will be based on a relatively smaller software business unit. The focus is often higher on larger business units and I think that we have similar goals and vision focusing on broadening our value offering to customers, gaining more market share and being able to manage more and larger projects more effectively.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

I have witnessed a transition in my reporting line from sales and support team to a newly formed consultancy team, and this is possibly a result of synergy between the merging organizations. We are now a much larger team completely focused on project implementation and presales support, which not only helps us to work more efficiently but also work on larger projects by leveraging on best practices and resources established by both legacy organizations.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

Operational and executional practices have been different in the legacy

organizations, and it is challenging for us to align them, especially on the operational front. Coming up with the right approach and most importantly acceptance by everyone to a common practice is one of the important challenges we need to deal with.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

We need to accept the ongoing change management with a positive attitude. We need to be patient and more accommodative to new challenges, new colleagues and processes at all levels in the organization.

Interview 12

Projects Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I have mixed feelings about the merger. At times I think it was not at all necessary especially considering the branding overhaul and change of our identity that's been established since over 150 years, but then I have faith in our leadership team and look forward to our accelerated growth and increased market share.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I would like to know how the merger integration process will impact ongoing projects and the ones in the pipeline. For e.g. not too long ago

the legacy organizations were competing and bidding for the same projects. Now that we are merged and working together, what strategy do we have in place to convince our customers that they have made the right decision and that the merger will be beneficial for them?

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Our common vision remains the same as legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]organization. There is one addition to our values which instigates us to embrace change and deliver results, which makes perfect sense to me in light of the ongoing post-merger integration.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

We have a lot of synergy between product lines of the legacy organizations but at the same time it looks quite challenging for the products and projects teams to decide how to merge and integrate the product features and which ones to discard. We obviously want to use the best features from products of both legacy organizations but at the same time we do not want to maintain parallel offerings.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

I can see a lot of movement within the organization across roles and locations, which has kind of disturbed the harmony we had established by working together for many years. Although these changes are good in the long run, they are causing disruption for ongoing projects. I wish that the resource related transitions could be more gradual.

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6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think it's important for all of us to adopt the new addition to our values, namely "We embrace change and deliver results". Furthermore clear, honest and transparent communication within and outside the organization is important for us to succeed.

Interview 13

Director

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I think it's a great opportunity for both legacy organizations to grow at a rapid pace, gain increased market share and build a more sustainable business together.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I think mergers of equals is almost impossible and I would like to know how our colleagues at ground level and mid-level management are thinking about the restructured management teams.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

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To summarize in a nutshell, our common vision is to work safer, smarter and greener than before. In addition we want to be world leaders in our areas of operations with more happy employees and customers.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

One of the core expectations from a merger is to establish synergies, and we can see synergies in every business area and in all locations around the world as both legacy organizations have been globally present and competing in several areas. After the merger the competitive energies are being channeled as synergetic energies, which is great for us as an organization as well as for customers.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

We are moving at a high pace with a lot of change management that could be perceived as chaotic by some albeit this is organized chaos. It could appear as if we are biting into more than we can chew, and ensuring that this accelerated change succeeds is one of the challenges we are experiencing and will keep experiencing during the coming months. The good thing is that we have now moved from the "making it work" to "making it good" phase.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

We need to be adaptive and flexible and have a clear communication strategy for our employees and customers.

Interview 14

QHSE Manager

1)   What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

       I think that the merger will benefit not just our organization or region but
       the entire industry since this merger is giving rise to a new world leader in
       the maritime, oil and gas and energy sectors.

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know
       and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate
       Online Education, 2012).

       From the QHSE point of view, I would like to know if there was any due-
       diligence done on the QHSE practices of legacy organizations and also
       what plans do we have in place to integrate and disseminate the QHSE
       policies.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

       Our common vision is Global impact for a safe and sustainable future,
       which is the same as legacy [company name anonymized for
       confidentiality reasons]organization.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration
       which you think did not exist before the merger?

A lot of employees are being shuffled to make the most out of this merger, and I consider this as a synergy. For e.g. I have been moved from a unit level role to a regional role during the merger integration process.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

One of the challenges is to integrate all the legacy data from disparate systems and planning one integrated approach and system to capture future QHSE data for reporting, trending and performance management.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

I think being focused, open communication and acceptance at all levels will help us to succeed with the ongoing merger integration.

Interview 15

Projects Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I think overall the merger is good in the long run, but it's causing a lot of turbulence presently especially considering the tug and pull between restructuring, internal focus and the high profile customer projects we are managing.

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

Are we planning for any planned redundancies or discontinuing any specific services or products?

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Bigger and better organization with a wider global footprint. It is perhaps safe to say that we are now one of the largest organizations in our service areas and can be a rightful industry leader.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

There are a lot of resources that can now be utilized across projects and good customer relations from both legacy organizations is now working in our favor as the customer now benefits from the best of both worlds considering that both legacy organizations were the strongest competitors in most areas, which has now synergized and we are now able to offer more value to our customers.

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

Maintaining focus on sensitive projects amidst ongoing changes is getting too challenging, and I foresee that there will be another round of

restructuring after we are able to measure the effectiveness of the newly restructured organization.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

It would help if we communicate with our customers through some of our senior leadership team members and assure them that the ongoing merger integration will benefit them and not have any impact on ongoing projects and the ones in pipeline.

Interview 16

Sales Manager

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

As far as business assurance division is concerned there is no direct impact due to merger since the legacy organization did not have any overlap with our services. However, we are now a much larger organization almost overnight with more assets, and I think that the merger will only help in increasing our market share and credibility.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

I wish there was a crystal ball to see how we look like five years from now, but I think this is not what you mean by this questions. I would be very interested to learn how our customers are reacting to the rebranded

merged organization, especially for their business assurance certificates such as ISO and other business performance management certifications.

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

As far as I know we are retaining the vision of the legacy [company name anonymized for confidentiality reasons]organization. If we reflect on this question specific to Business Assurance, I think we may have more aggressive growth plans as opposed to the legacy organization.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

There has been some restructuring in our geographic areas of operation and this has introduced some synergies through teams of the merged organization, especially in terms of cross-selling.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

There's a lot of restructuring going on in terms of employees, managers, polices and branding all of which involves a lot of change management efforts. The pace at which we are moving with these changes is a bit challenging to comprehend and convey to our customers.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

Clear and transparent communication at all levels and also keeping an open ear to feedback from all levels both internally and externally.

Interview 17

Sales and Support Admin

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

It's one of the largest mergers in the industry. For us in the software business area this means a larger organization with a much larger portfolio that will most certainly strengthen our competitive position in the market, and also open new markets.

2) "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

How will support be organized considering contrasting support structures in the legacy organizations?

3) What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

My understanding of our common vision after the merger is that we will be functioning as one organization where our purpose, vision and values are embedded in our daily work.

4) Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

With all the restructuring and increased internal communications going on, I can see a lot of cross-selling happening not only across product lines but also across business areas.

5) Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

It is getting quite challenging to manage contracts that were established by the legacy organizations prior to the merger, but could now have potentially conflicting interests. It's also getting challenging dealing with multiple systems, processes, rules, standards, and guidelines.

6) Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

We need to remain focused in working towards our common goals and vision, and need to be open to changes.

Interview 18

Support Engineer

1) What do you think of the ongoing merger? (Monin et al, 2013, p.260)

I think it's a strategic move to experience exponential growth, reduce competition and catapult the organization as an industry leader.

2)   "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012).

What impact will the support resources have especially in areas where we have overlapping legacy products.

3)   What is your understanding of the common vision after merger

Working safer, greener and smarter as per our new organizational motto. As far as the support team is concerned I think we are now aiming to be a veritable global support team with 24X7 support capability.

4)   Have you seen any synergies during the ongoing post-merger integration which you think did not exist before the merger?

We have been able to attract a lot of colleagues to accept new roles, which I think is a great synergy that will enable us to channel our energies and competencies more effectively add more value for our end users (internal and external customers).

5)   Are there any particular challenges you and/or your team members are experiencing or foresee?

There's a steep learning curve for some of us and the restructuring is causing us to develop new relationships, which is an opportunity in disguise but brings in some level of insecurity.

6)   Now that we are already in the post-merger integration phase what do you think can help you to succeed?

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I think we need to be more flexible and receptive to the rapid changes and remain focused on serving our customers while demonstrating more value due to the synergies presented by the merger.

DBA Thesis Proposal

Student Name: Ravi Tahilramani

Time Zone: GMT + 4 hours (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)

Personal Background and Professional Experience: I am a full time employee working for a multinational company named DNV GL whose purpose is to safeguard life, property and the environment. I work for the Software division presently in charge of account management and sales for our customers in the maritime and oil & gas industry. I live and work in Dubai, and am primarily focusing on our customers based in Middle East, North East Africa and India.

I have earned Masters in Information Technology with distinction from the University of Liverpool (UOL) and hold a few industry certifications including Certified Usability Analyst from Human Factors International and Microsoft Certified Professional.

I am approaching mid-thirties and have over 14 years of full time working experience with start-ups as well as large multinationals. Most of my experience has involved working as a Product/Project Manager for IT products/projects related to streamlining business processes, wherein I have had the opportunity to manage several in-house and contractor teams. Some notable organizations I have worked with include Microsoft Corporation, Nike, Government institutions in USA and Middle East, and several global Oil & Gas and Maritime companies.

I have recently taken up the challenge of sales and account management for our customers in Middle East, North East Africa and India, which not only introduces me to new challenges but also provides me with the much required flexibility to pursue my ongoing DBA programme.

Company and Job Title: DNV GL, Regional Sales Manager – QHSE and Risk

Proposed Thesis Title: An insider Action Research study focusing on synergy realization during integration phase of an ongoing merger between competing consultancy firms.

Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions has become one of the strategic ways in global corporate dynamics for organizations to grow and diversify rapidly, and the significance of post-merger integration cannot be overstated (Shrivastava, 1986). Although the main theory behind organizational mergers and acqusitions is "One plus one makes three", most post-merger integration studies focus upon failures (Dutta, Dutta and Das, 2011). My research study is based in the context of the post-merger integration of a large merger and aims to present an empirical Action Research study focusing on "synergy realization" during merger integration by leveraging upon Complex Adaptive System (Stacey, 2011) as the primary theoretical framework and Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland and Poulter, 2010) as the methodology involving qualitative data collection methods anchored in Mode 2 research. The findings of my research study would appeal to both academics and practitioners who are looking for empirical examples around synergy realization during post-merger/acquisition integrations through Action Research.

A merger has been recently announced between the organization I have been working for since the past seven years and one of our most prominent competitors. There are several wicked problems associated with the ongoing merger, which is presently in the "operational combination phase" as per Seo and Hill (2005) or "integration phase" as per Schweiger (2002) that often surfaces issues rooted in leadership, change management, organizational behaviour, emergence, co-evaluation, and innovation related changes amongst other management and leadership concepts.

Research around mergers and acquisitions is a relatively recent trend in organizational dynamics/behaviour study and can be reviewed through several theoretical lenses (Larson and Finkelstein, 1999). Several studies indicate that the answer to success of mergers lies

in effective integration (for e.g. Shrivastava, 1986) and most merger oriented research studies have focused on merger failures that are often rooted in issues such as impact of local sentiments and practices on global planning (Fox, 2012), stressors such as uncertainty, loss of identity, intergroup conflicts, perceived unfairness, acculturation stress, role conflict and ambiguity (Seo and Hill, 2005), change management and turnover concerns (Rafferty, 2010), issues related to customer relationship management (Lukkari, 2010), and so on. There are relatively few research studies focusing upon leveraging on the potential opportunities and synergies presented during the "integration phase of a merger" (my emphasis) through initiatives such as cross-selling, value proposition calibrations, and so on (Maire and Collerette, 2011; Dutta, Dutta and Das, 2011; Lukkari, 2010). Practitioners in particular would be more interested to learn about how to facilitate successful mergers through synergy realization during the integration phase, and I would therefore like to focus upon this aspect while working upon my research study which is based amidst the integration phase of a merger between two multinational organizations, which I hope will not only help me to address a potential gap in literature but also help me to contribute to towards the intended success of the ongoing merger.

Another apparent gap in literature is that most of merger and acquisition related studies are around industrial organizations, financial institutions and healthcare, and there is relatively less research in the context of consultancy firms which are unique in their organization and function as they are predominantly knowledge worker oriented. My proposed empirical Action Research amidst the integration phase of a horizontal merger (Dutta, Dutta and Das, 2011) of two competing multinational "consultancy firms" (my emphasis) working predominantly in maritime, oil and gas and cleaner energy domains could bridge this potential gap in the literature, which I believe will not only be of interest to academics but also practitioners looking for learning from empirical case studies especially in context of consultancy firms. The literature review process will focus upon justifying these potential research gaps, but I think my research will regardless be useful for both academics and professionals due to the following reasons:

1) Validation and application of organizational and business management theories/frameworks such as Complex Adaptive Systems (Stacey, 2011), Complexity Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey, 2007), Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland and Poulter, 2010), Larson's (1999) integrative framework for synergy realization during mergers, and Hofstede's (1993) cultural constraints in management theories, amongst others.

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2) Serve as an empirical reference for a mode 2 knowledge creation (Huff, 2000) leveraging upon cogenerative Action Research (Greenwood and Levin, 2007)

3) My research can be reviewed by practitioners as a case study on conducting and facilitating an insider Action Research within context of a consultancy firm while academics can benefit from empirical evidence of application of some established theoretical frameworks or possibly generating new theories by exploring my Thesis

It is important to highlight the difference between a Ph.D. and a DBA research study as the former typically attempts to fill up a gap in existing literature while the latter focuses on live business or management challenges experienced by an organization where the researcher ventures into the area "what we don't know we don't know" which is not tackled by traditional Ph.D. researchers (Bouner, Ruggeri-Stevens and Bareham, 2000). Mine being a DBA research following an insider Action Research approach will leverage upon understanding the epistemological and ontological foundations and applications of established management and leadership concepts while exploring and dealing with real-life organizational challenges. My research will begin by focusing upon exploring synergy realizations from merger integration in local contexts while simultaneously attempting to highlight and solve some of the real-life wicked problems taking a cogenerative Action Research approach as illustrated in figure 2 below.

1.0 Conceptual development

The evolving body of knowledge in management and leadership studies has highlighted several concerns around corporate mergers and acquisitions including management of turnover issues (Iverson and Pullman, 2000; Karitzki and Brink, 2003; Krug and Hegarty, 2001), correlation between employees' vulnerability/performance and their age, tenure, education, gender and experience during "defining moments" such as mergers (Badaracco, 1998; Posner, 2010; Iverson and Pullman, 2000), comprehending the worldviews of key players during merger of competing organizations (Checkland and Poulter, 2010), gaining cooperation and resources from stakeholders such as customers, government agencies, regulatory bodies, NGOs, competitors, and suppliers by highlighting CSR issues such as equal opportunities, labor practices, and impact from pressure groups and corruption (Porter and Kramer, 2006), correlation between people, cultures and politics (Søderberg and Vaara, 2003), and impact of national laws and regulations on global operations (Fox, 2001). All these studies highlight the contextual significance and impact of local contextual

elements on the overall merger strategy in addition to the impact of merger related activities at local levels.

Some of the constructs explored during the Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) module such as organizational behaviour, CAS, emergence, co-evaluation, SSM and leadership will be relevant while exploring the chosen research topic, which I think could help me in understanding and dealing with some of the underpinning constructs such as boundary management, converging different worldviews, and assessing the state of chaos (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1998 cited in Stacey, 2011, p.275) while working on my identified research problem. Relating with the CLT, the merger situation can be seen as an environment wherein the employees from the merging organizations (agents) are co-evolving in a Complex Adaptive System (CAS) like manner in order to adapt to the changing landscape. The CAS theoretical framework and SSM could be explored in conjunction with CLT (Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey, 2007), Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and situational leadership theory (Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, 2008) in order to gain additional insights and channel the outcome of the ongoing CAS phenomenon related to my identified research area. I think that concepts such as systems thinking, co-evaluation, SSM and CLT will be very useful while conducting insider Action Research as a researching professional.

Taking an Action Research approach through collaborative inquiry and joint action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.93), fostering Leaderful Practice (Raelin, 2003), collective sense-making (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005), and LMX theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) are some of the management and leadership concepts that will add value to my research. In addition I could benefit from dealing with boundary management issues through application of Checkland and Holwell's (1998 cited in University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2013) three elements of research, and Brown and Eisenhardt's (1998 cited in Stacey, 2011, p.275) questionnaire for determining the state of chaos and other organizational dynamics while working on my identified research area.

3.0 Methodology

My initial thoughts on the research methodology is that the research will be exploratory in nature based in Interpretivist research philosophy but would take a more grounded approach wherein I will continuously attempt to identify themes and images for generating theory as opposed to deduction (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008, p.104), which could be initiated by asking some of the key stakeholders the following question "If there's one thing about the ongoing merger that you would like to know and you don't know, what would it be?" (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2012). I will then narrow down my focus upon a research area that is:

2) considered worthwhile for my organization

3) gain me access and resources for conducting the research

4) add value to the existing body of knowledge as per the literature review conducted during the research

5) worthy of a doctoral Thesis research as per feedback from my Thesis supervisor.

My early thoughts about the design of this research study is that it could benefit by taking a qualitative research approach but there may be some quantitative triangulation involved. The study would benefit the wider body of knowledge as there is not sufficient literature around understanding successful elements associated with mergers and acquisitions considering local factors, especially in a cosmopolitan Middle East context where I am presently based. The probability of failure for mergers of global organizations is as high as 50% primarily due to integration challenges, which have been categorized in six distinct themes by theorists, namely:

a) anxiety theory

b) social identity theory

c) acculturation theory

d) role conflict theory

e) job characteristics theory, and

f) organizational justice theory

…all of which in turn affect the four stages of merger and acquisitions as illustrated in table 1 below from Seo and Hill (2005).

Effects of Different Sources of Problems in Different Integration Stages of Merger and Acquisitions (M&As)

Stressor	Underlying Theory	Impact of Stressors in Each Phase of M&A Integration			
		Premerger	Initial Planning and Formal Combination	Operational Combination	Stabilization
Uncertainty	Anxiety theory	Medium-large	Large-medium	Small	Small
Loss of identity	Social identity theory	Small	Large-medium	Medium-small	Small
Intergroup conflict	Social identity theory	Small	Medium-large	Large-medium	Small
Perceived unfairness	Organizational justice theory	Small	Medium-large	Medium	Medium-small
Acculturation stress	Acculturation theory	Small	Medium	Large	Medium-small
Job environment changes	Job characteristics theory	Small	Small	Medium-large	Medium-small
Role conflict and ambiguity	Role conflict theory	Small	Small	Large-medium	Small
Prolonged uncertainty	Anxiety theory	Small	Small	Small-medium	Small or high

Table 1: Effects of different sources of problems in different merger integration stages (Seo and Hill, 2005).

4.0 Study implications

I think that merger is not an easy to summarize theme and there are disparate views about mergers and related concepts as it is relatively a new and evolving topic. I do not consider the merger itself as a messy situation, but it does have some consequences which call for actions related to integration of cultures, change of power dynamics, and revisions to established organizational norms. I would therefore focus on more specific and workable messy problems such as impact of having a German manager for a predominantly Scandinavian team, or relocation or reshuffling of certain offices, or worldviews on changing the goals/direction of a specific business unit. The scenarios and approach followed in my research could be referred and validated by other professionals and researchers working on similar challenges.

From a CAS point of view, I will be looking at the merging organization as the environment within which my unit and co-workers are co-evolving in order to adapt to the changing environment. I will attempt to take a more structured approach towards collecting worldviews of key players in line with academic requirements (Clayton, 2010). With my position as someone who can connect with and influence middle level managers within my organization, I will be cognizant of the external stimulus provided by the merger, internal conditions within my organization, and the market dynamics, and utilize the learning from the CAS module for building dynamic capabilities within my organization through boundary management and reconfiguration of resources as discussed by Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) and Pablo et al (2007). I will work on the identified problems using CAS as the theoretical framework and SSM as the methodology to carry on insider Action Research

within my organization, and while doing so, I will leverage on relationships as per LMX theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and implementation of specific leadership behavior in accordance to the situational leadership theory (Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, 2008). The outcome of my research study shall therefore benefit professionals and researchers who are working on CAS and Change Management issues within the context of mergers and acquisitions.

5.0 Feasibility

I am cognizant of some of the challenges that can be faced by insider Action Researchers, and how to deal with these challenges. I will need the right level of support from my superiors and colleagues in order to gain the required access and resources for carrying out an insider Action Research within my organization. I have attempted to frame my research problem as a legitimate organizational development project, which can be achieved through avoiding use of overtly academic language (Roth et al, 2007, p.57). I have also attempted to relate the identified problem with some of the red-hot issues within my organization (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2007) which could help me to involve some of the influential and well-connected colleagues as Action Learning participants during the insider Action Research thereby helping me to overcome some of the access related challenges. Role-duality is another important challenge that I will need to deal with as an insider Action Researcher wherein I will be dealing with dilemmas related to being pulled between core responsibilities as an employee and meeting academic requirements and deadlines as a DBA candidate which according to Moore (2007) could sometimes have dire consequences for researching professionals. Furthermore, the requirements for balancing the core and Thesis Action Research projects as discussed by (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.11) and as illustrated in figure 1 below can be another challenge that could affect the timeline of my Thesis project.
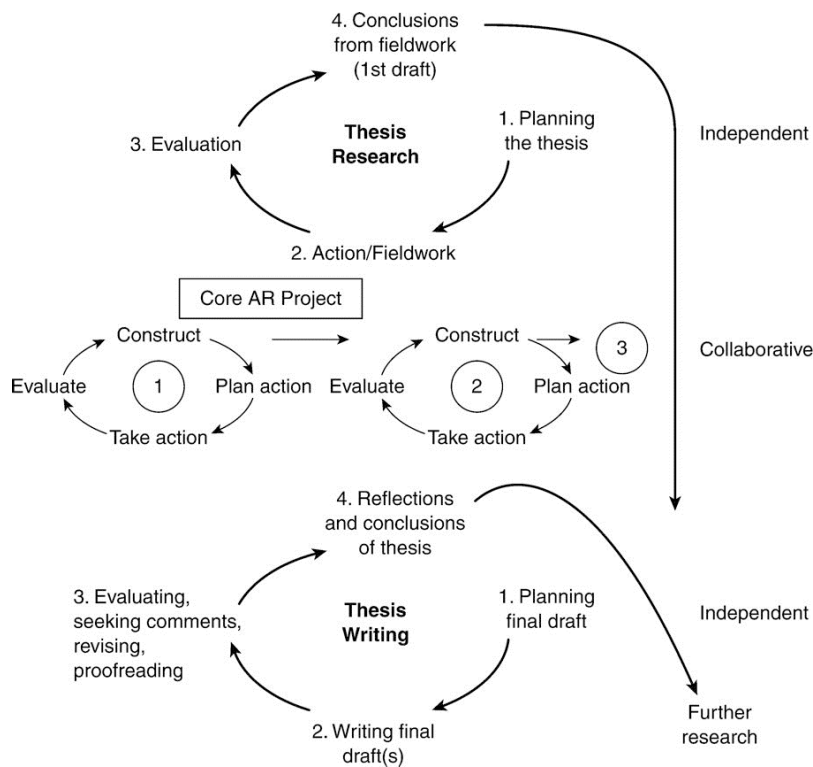
Figure 1: Core and Thesis Action Research Project (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.142).

I have already informed my Line Manager, Regional Director as well as our Managing Director about my Thesis project and have gained their cooperation and support. Furthermore, I have also liaised with one of the integration manager, who's a Ph.D., and has been kind enough to provide me the required support for my Thesis Action Research.

I will leverage on Roth et al's (2007) recommendation for managing between multiple roles of insider Action Research, employee and a DBA candidate such that these multiple roles are being used as a win-win advantage as opposed to being seen as a drawback or risk. Some of the actions involved to achieve such a symphony include being aware of the potential threats and staying prepared to deal with them by being street-smart (p.52) and politically astute (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2005) while dealing with the role-duality challenges. I will be mindful of implementing Roth et al's (2007, p.56-58) recommendations for dealing with organizational politics, preunderstanding and role-duality through a research team within my organization by framing my research as a competency development project for colleagues involved in my Action Research underpinned by Action Learning that could serve as a structural learning mechanism focusing on long term objectives benefitting our organization through clear definition of the scope and

expectations of various stakeholders, which I think will help me to maintain legitimacy and serve as a political entrepreneur.

I will implement some of the research techniques I have learnt during the DBA modules which have the potential to make the most out of insider Action Research projects such as implementing Torbert's four parts of speeches, namely, framing, advocating, illustrating and inquiring as discussed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.30) and combining this with sparring sessions that will be used for interventions during my research for making collective-sense making (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005). Soft System Methodology will be used for consolidating the worldviews of various stakeholders (Checkland and Poulter, 2010). I shall also make use of Argyris et al's (1985 cited in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.30) hypoThesis testing rules which proffers combination of advocacy and inquiry (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.30), Raelin's (2003) Leaderful Practice which promotes working collectively, collaboratively, concurrently, and compassionately, and Greenwood and Levin's (2007) cogenerative Action Research model that presents a framework for connecting the research activities aimed towards gaining collective insights towards working on the problem through collaborative inquiry and joint action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.29) as illustrated in figure 2 below.
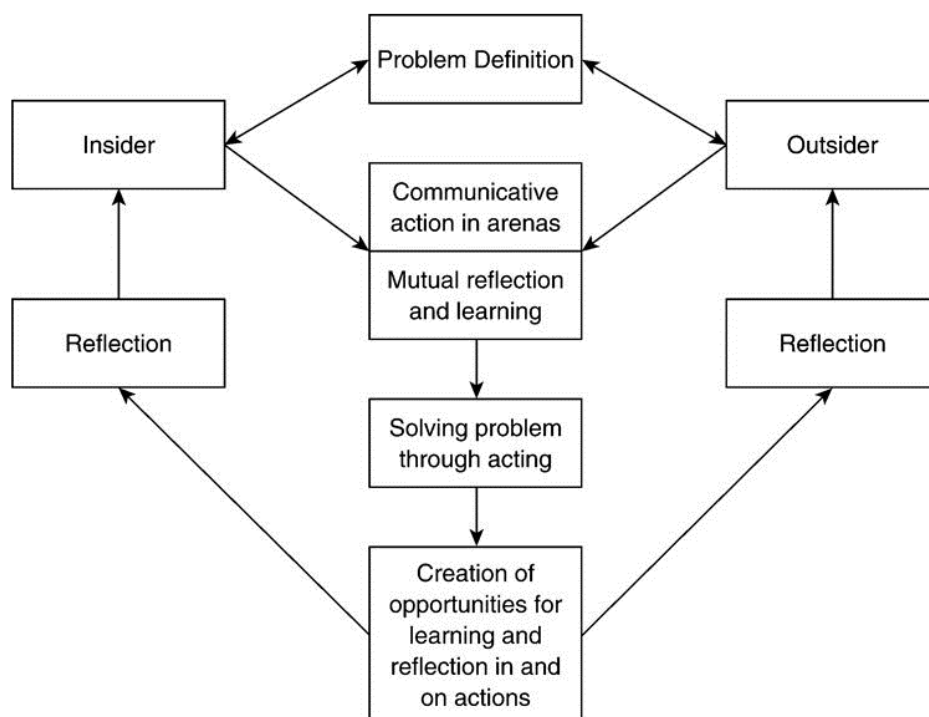
Figure 2: Cogenerative Action Research model (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p.94)

Although this proposal outlines my current thinking in terms of the development of my Thesis project and my plan towards approaching the research design and delivery, my thinking, design and delivery is likely to change based on the critical Action Research process, wherein I might discover and debunk some of my existing assumptions. Being open minded through practicing reflexivity and reflectivity will be the key for succeeding with the Thesis Research project, and I do not intend my research to progress in any other way.

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6.0 Work plan

I intend to progress with my Thesis as per the timeline outlined in figure 3 below, but this could change based on some factors and discoveries as I progress with my research. I aim to dedicate at least 25-30 hours each week towards my Thesis project, and hope to take a 1 week break after every 8 weeks.

Activity	Project Plan for Thesis															Comments
	Ravi Tahilramani. Student ID: H00025015															
	Project Calendar Year 2014-2015 (Starting from January 2014)															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
	January 2014	February 2014	March 2014	April 2014	May 2014	June 2014	July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	October 2014	November 2014	December 2014	January 2015	February 2015	March 2015	
Stage 1: Area of interest identified	▨															
Stage 2: Specific topic selected	▨															
Stage 3: Topic refined to develop Thesis proposal		▨														
Stage 4: Proposal written and submitted		▨	▲													
Stage 5: Ethical Approval		▨	▨	▲												
Stage 6: Literature review			▨	▨	▨	▨										
Stage 7: Data collection and information/action					▨	▨	▨	▨								
Stage 8: Data analysis								▨	▨	▨	▲					
Stage 9: Writing up										▨	▨	▨				
Stage 10: Final draft													▨	▲		
Stage 11: Final submission														▨	▨	
Legend																
▇ (green)	Completed															
▇ (red)	Ongoing															
▇ (yellow)	Planned															
▲	Milestone															

Figure 3: Draft Project Plan for DBA Thesis Project

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Word Count: 2608 words

Thanks and Regards,

Ravi Tahilramani

Student ID: H00025015

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Appendix E: Transcript of AL Meetings

1st Meeting (21 August 2014): Kicking off the process and defining the Action Research problem

Invitations were sent via email to 8 participants located in the same business unit where I was stationed, out of which 5 of my colleagues confirmed their voluntary participation in the Action Research project. An initial meeting was scheduled to familiarize the participants with Action Research process, set expectations, and establish ground rules. The initial meeting lasted for over 1 hour out of which the initial 20 minutes were spent in familiarizing the participants with nature of Action Learning and Action Research, and summarizing some of the key findings from initial round of interviews. Four out of these 5 Action Learning team members had participated in the initial interviews and were quite familiar with my Thesis project. All participants had signed the consent form and were therefore already familiar with this research project.

All Action Research team members were provided with a quick overview of the current status of my ongoing Thesis research project and what was expected from them as Action Research team members. I discussed and clarified that "Action Learning" will be the key driver for our meetings while I will be working on my Thesis project problem independently wherein my key deliverable will be a written Thesis project that would contribute towards my DBA degree. I clarified to all participants that as far as my Thesis work is concerned I would be solely responsible for the research design, conducting required interventions and presenting a Thesis document with dual aim of gaining insights about and solving the identified workplace problem and generating new actionable knowledge that could add value to the existing body of knowledge around my research area. I also familiarized the participants with some of my research work within the merger related context which was carried out as a part of Critical Action Learning (CAL) projects during the DBA modules, which as per Herr and Anderson (2005) can be considered as pilot study. 4 out of 5 team members were familiar with some of these projects since they had participated in some of my CAL projects during the past couple of years. After providing everyone with an overview of my Thesis project and Action Research project, it was established that the key purpose of this team was to help us as

a unit to succeed at some of our work related KPIs by leveraging upon identification of synergies amidst the ongoing post-merger integration phase.

Some ground rules were established by going around the table in a round robin format and making notes on a flipchart. Some of the ground rules that were unanimously agreed by the group included confidentiality, respect for each other's opinion, commitment to action and not getting personal while working together. We also included some basic courtesies as a part of the ground rules such as respect for everyone we would interact with during the project, making every attempt to participate in planned meetings and informing the group well in advance of any anticipated absence or withdrawal. We also agreed to refer to our meetings as "Action Learning" meetings wherein the key purpose of these meetings would be to reflect upon work related problems, take action and learn through the process.

Since most of the Action Learning team members had sales related KPIs, it was unanimously decided to include pursuing cross-selling challenges as a part of our Action Learning Problem which after some discussions was initially framed as "How can we leverage on synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process?" I shared with the group that our Action Research and learning approach would be more along the lines of Argyris' thought-model of taking a holistic approach for sustainable continuous organization learning as opposed to Lewinian principles of episodic stability (Herr and Anderson, 2005), by which I hoped to gain long term commitment and team work and improving a larger problem situation as opposed to solving smaller pieces of the puzzle. During this initial meeting we took turns to discuss some of the key challenges faced by each of the sales managers along the lines of our defined problem and each one of us was encouraged to reflect upon what could be done to overcome these challenges which was in turn followed by a round of reflections and suggestions from all team members. We then summarized what actions will be pursued as a group and brought back to the group for further reflections during the next meeting. We decided to meet on a weekly basis and planned that every Action Learning cycle will last for about 4-6 weeks, and we committed towards at least 3 such rounds of Action Learning cycles.

One of the problems that was of common interest to all participants was associated with introduction of new team members from the merged organization who we didn't know prior to the merger, and there was some natural resistance to change that which according to Armenakis and Bedeian (1999, p.304) could be due to threatening of self-interests of certain individuals which in turn could lead to failed cooperation and eventually give rise to a crisis (Turner, 1976). One of the sales managers raised a concern around large groups of colleagues from legacy organizations not being cooperative in helping us with cross-selling to which we brainstormed upon the plausible root causes. We identified and brainstormed on root causes such as lack of awareness, lack of relationship building, preoccupation, workload, inability to look at the benefits from cooperation on a holistic level, misconceptions about our value addition to customers, and so on. It was identified as an action for us to ensure spreading awareness and trying to gain cooperation from at least 2 colleagues from the merged organization with whom we have never worked before with an objective to identify synergies and help us in cross-selling. Each one of us was expected to report our approach and outcome during the next meeting and then reflect upon learning from this process together during the next meeting.

Before ending the meeting I made the group aware of Raelin's (2010) Leaderful Practice that proffers the 4 C's of leadership namely, concurrent, collective, collaborative and compassionate as opposed to serial, individual, controlled and dispassionate traditional leadership model as illustrated in figure 10 below.
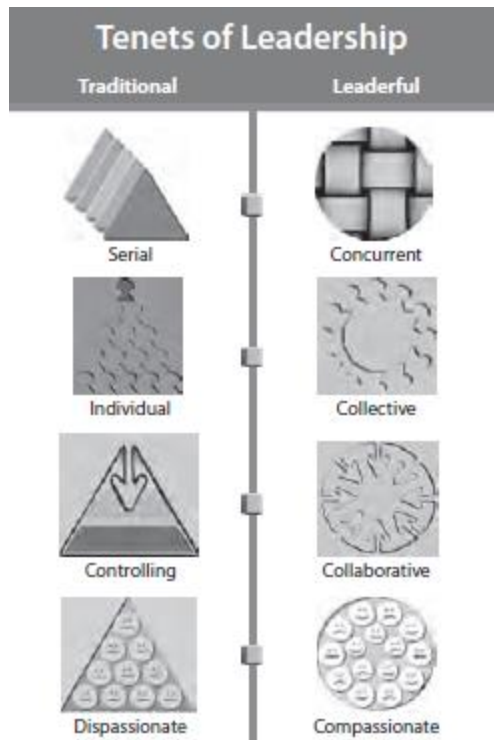
Figure 30: Four C's of Leaderful Practice (Raelin, 2010, p.16)

I shared with all a link to download 'The Leaderful Field Book' by Raelin (2010) which I thought would help everyone to understand the underpinning concepts of collaboration and concurrence expected from Action Learning team members and also introduce everyone to some of the strategies and activities for developing leadership skills which was one of the intended deliverables of Action Research project.

My observations and reflections:

I thought we had a good start with the first Action Learning meeting and I deliberately introduced some interesting concepts such as Leaderful Practice that I had learned during the DBA modules to foster team spirit, motivate, and make the session interesting for all participants. I however realized that I was deviating from the findings made from Phase 1 pre-study interviews, and made a note to myself to be mindful of relating Phase 1 findings with the Action Research activities. I had to exercise some flexibility in my core Action Research project as a result of the problem defined by the Action Learning group, but I was mindful that the problem definition would evolve or possibly change during subsequent meeting.

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As discussed in the methodology Chapter, I could sense some resistance from participants to get involved in a research project that was focused upon my DBA milestones especially considering the participants' increased work responsibilities due to ongoing post-merger integration related activities and uncertainties. I therefore framed the Action Research meetings as "Action Learning" as suggested by some Action Research and Action Learning scholars such as Zuberarnirritt and Perry (2002), Pedler (2010) and Kember (2000) who imply emphasizing on "Learning" when involving participants as opposed to using the term "Research".

I realized that we are dealing with a "teleological change" (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995) wherein change is enacted through negotiations and adaptations amongst group members thereby generating "team agency" (Caldwell, 2003) wherein the change agents are working at process levels. I could relate with "dispersalist and constructionist discourses" (Caldwell, 2005), wherein employees at all levels were contributing towards cultivating an autonomous learning organization.

Overall, I think we made a good start and everyone seemed to be interested in the process. However, only the following meetings would decide the fate of the Action Research project.

Due to some business travels and summer vacation period, the second Action Learning team meeting had to be conducted 3 weeks after the initial meeting. One of the shocking and unexpected events that occurred within the span of these 3 weeks between the first and second Action Learning meeting was sudden resignation of our Regional Manager who was a part of the Action Learning team and also served as the Sponsor for this Action Research project. The Regional Manager however confirmed his support to continue with the action learning process during his notice period but was put on a gardening leave soon after his resignation which limited his participation. Everyone else in the Action Research team was committed to continue with the planned meetings.

I initiated the second meeting with a recap of our discussions from the previous meeting and emphasized upon the significance of "collaborative inquiry and joint action" that is always desirable from an Action Research teams (Coglan and Brannick, 2010, p.29). We then took turns around the table in a round-robin format to explain what actions were taken towards spreading awareness and trying to gain cooperation from at least 2 colleagues from the merged organization with whom we have never worked before with an objective to identify synergies and help us in cross-selling as was agreed from the previous meetings.

One of the sales managers digressed from the topic and used this meeting as a forum to discuss his concerns around the sudden resignation of our regional manager and stated *"We really enjoyed working under his (referring to the resigned manager) leadership and it now feels like being headless chickens."* Another sales manager added *"It's more of a feeling like being seated as executives on a chartered plane scheduled to take off (referring to merger associated accelerated growth actions) and the pilot has resigned. What's worse is that a bus driver would most likely be nominated to fly this plane by someone sitting in an ivory tower (referring to our head office based in Europe) and the bus driver would then sit in the cockpit wondering what to do next, while the executives onboard are wondering why there is no movement or*

announcement!" Some of the Action Learning team members got emotional and the discussion seemed to head nowhere. I then proposed if we could leverage upon one of the exercises called "Hang Time" from The Leaderful Fieldbook referred to the group during our previous meeting, which could perhaps help us to make the best out of our limited Action Learning meeting time (Raelin, 2010).

The primary idea behind Hang Time exercise is to step back and take a more holistic view on a problem presented by a protagonist before taking any actions, thereby taking a collaborative approach towards reflecting upon the problem from different perspectives. Each participant is required to pick up one of the nine shapes illustrated in figure 11 below and make contributions relating to these shapes.

I then asked if one of the sales managers who volunteered as the protagonist for the hang time exercise to describe his actions, learning and challenges faced. He described how he proposed "lunch and learn" sessions to the section heads of a couple of business units within our organization that he's never worked with before. His intention behind these lunch and learn sessions was to spread awareness of how the software product and services he's responsible for could benefit colleagues and their respective customer contacts thereby establishing synergies for cross-selling. The key predicament he faced was availability of various team members and convincing the respective unit managers to support and facilitate these meetings. Most of these unit managers were new in their roles due to the ongoing restructuring in light of the recent merger, which made the protagonist think that these managers had other priorities at that point in time. He initially framed his problem as *"How can I improve cooperation from various Section Heads for helping in Cross-Selling through establishing synergies?"* We then moved on to the Q-Storming phase of Hang Time exercise wherein each one of us selected a couple of shapes out of the nine shapes as illustrated in figure 11 below and each one of us offered some questions to gain additional insights and offer reflections to the protagonist.

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Minus You tend to point out any omitted details or facts

Plus You like to ask about the benefits of any plan for change and what difference it would make if it succeeds

Stop Sign You point out the cautions, constraints, and contradictions and ask about the things that can prevent the plan from succeeding

Yellow Sign You point out the ways that any cautions, constraints, and contradictions can be overcome

Light Bulb You like to bring up new, even wild, ideas and alternatives

Question Mark You like to ask about the assumptions underlying the approach being taken

Connector You look for connections among disparate ideas and point out emerging patterns or principles

Heart You like to ask about any gut feelings toward the plan

Arrow You focus on next steps and ask if the planning can make way for implementation

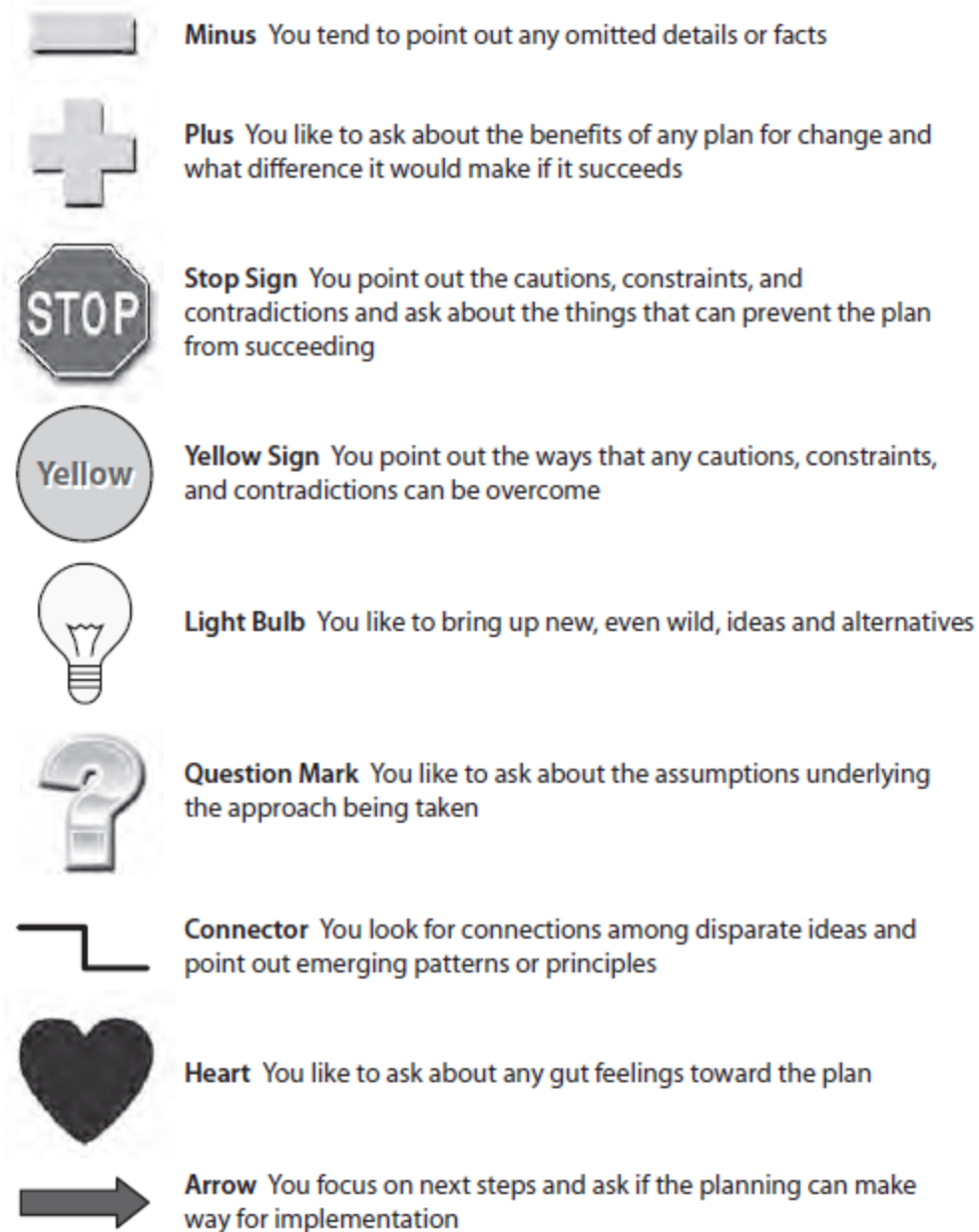**Figure 31: Nine Shapes as Q-Storming cues during Hang Time Exercise (Raelin, 2010, p.20)**

Some of the questions that surfaced during the Q-storming exercise included:

- Who else do you think would have a similar problem as yours?
- What are the consequences of you not addressing this problem?
- Who do you think could help you?
- How do you think you can win the time and confidence of these managers?

- Did you try asking one of our top managers to facilitate the required cooperation?
- Do you think that they are not able to trust you enough?
- How could you make your session more attractive for them to attend?
- Do you think other units have similar attrition and change management challenges which are bothering them at the moment?

After reflecting upon these questions the protagonist offered his insights which were mostly related to the protagonist's lack of thinking about how the ongoing merger related challenges and restructuring may have affected colleagues from other units which could in turn have affected their lack of response towards conducting the proposed lunch and learn sessions.

We then progressed to the "Assumption" phase of the Hang Time exercise wherein all team members offered their respective assumptions and suggestions to the protagonist's problem, and some of these assumptions included:

- There may be some people in other units who really empathize with you or may be genuinely interested in learning how they could synergize with you
- You may perhaps like to try by-passing the unit heads and approaching the cross-unit team members directly
- You could be more clear while communicating your intent and purpose of these meetings
- You could connect your intent with the values of our organization as we strongly encourage learning and helping each other
- You seem too focused on arranging the lunch and learn sessions as opposed to being more creative on the underlying objective of establishing synergies and facilitating cross-selling

Upon further reflections on these Assumptions, the protagonist remarked that he was probably not creative enough in making his proposal for these sessions and we progressed to the "Problem Reframing" phase of Hang Time exercise. Everyone in the group offered suggestions on how the problem could be reframed which included:

- How can I attract colleagues from other units to collaborate in cross-selling amidst the ongoing post-merger integration?
- How can I create awareness about my aim to facilitate more cross-selling?

We then spent a few minutes to conclude and debrief. We realized that it really helped us to "hang" around the problem which was deemed relevant by all team members. Not only the protagonist but all participants could now view the problem through fresh perspectives and we all agreed on exploring the reframed problem and sharing our experience and learning during the following meeting.

Before we wrapped up the meeting a couple of participants shared how they managed to achieve success towards actions agreed upon during the previous meeting. Both these sales managers had approached a couple of individuals working in different business units whom they either knew directly or through other known colleagues but had never worked with before, and they managed to secure joint customer meetings which is a clear demonstration of how synergies were established. Reflecting upon their learning through their action they mentioned how they tried to offer value for customers by emphasizing upon a synergetic relationship wherein both parties could benefit rather than one seeking for help from the other.

We then decided to organize a joint "lunch and learn" session with the 5 sales managers who would be delivering these sessions to colleagues from various business units in our work location in order to spread awareness. This was noted as an action for all participants who were then expected to share their experiences and learnings during the next meeting.

My observations and reflections:
I thought that the inevitable delay in scheduling the second meeting due to availability of participants was a setback. However, after the meeting started I could feel the energy in the team and everyone seemed to be interested and engaged although we initially digressed from the researched problem due to the sudden resignation of the Action Research project sponsor.

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Our manager's resignation seemed like an undesirable distraction to my Action Research project initially but upon further reflection it eventually helped in shaping up our Action Research problem. Such turnovers are expected during mergers and acquisitions for several reasons as discussed by various scholars who have researched on mergers and acquisitions such as Marks and Mirvis (2011) who state management of culture as one of the reasons, Clayton (2010) who states individual interactions associated with alignment and commitment to change as one of the reasons, in addition to other reasons related to mismanagement of expectations and even misinterpretations as discussed by Krug (2003). I was able to relate my analysis of some of the discourses carried out around the managers' dismissal and the group behavior using some of the concepts I had learned during the Change Management module of my DBA programme; organizational change management behaviors including ambivalence (Piderit, 2000) and cynicism (Fleming and Spicer, 2003) appeared to be the most prominent reactions at individual levels which have the potential of transitioning into defensive group behaviors (Vince and Broussine, 1996).

The hang-time exercise received very good response from all Action Research team members and induced a lot of energy amongst group members. I reckoned it would be useful to use more of such group activities from the toolbox I had developed from learnings and CAL projects during instructor led modules of my DBA programme.

The following 2-3 meetings were quite crucial for setting the pace and deciding the fate of the Action Research project.

3rd meeting (18 Sep 2014) Establishment of a regime and inclusion of theoretical concepts

Soon after the second meeting, I had a chat with my Line Manager who was serving as a part of the Action Research group as well as the sponsor. He was available for comments and feedback although he was on a gardening leave. He asked me to facilitate and demonstrate developing leadership and research skills in the research participants during future Action Research meetings as a part of his expectation of

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sponsoring this research process. Based on my discussion with the line manager I proposed to the action research team members taking turns for chairing the meeting and taking notes, which would help us all to develop our facilitation, leadership and scribing skills in addition to learning how to organize and run Action Research/Learning team meetings; everyone agreed to this suggestion and I offered to provide any required support and guidance. We brainstormed on a basic structure for these meetings which was supposed to serve as a guideline while the respective meeting chairmen had flexibility to amend the agenda should they feel necessary. The structure for our Action Learning team meetings was defined and agreed as follows:

1) Introduction of at least one concept (could be theoretical or based on experience) that would help Action Learning process.
2) Recapitulate actions agreed during the previous meeting(s)
3) Reflect upon status and learnings from these actions
4) Discuss existing challenges in a round robin fashion
5) Unanimously pick up a challenge discussed during the meeting and reflect upon it using the following questions illustrated in figure 12 below as recommended by Raelin (2010, p.54) as a guideline:

1. Why is this challenge important to me?

2. Whose opinions must I consider in solving this problem?

3. Who has to be involved in the solution before it will succeed?

4. What assumptions am I making that may be unfounded?

5. What are the key success factors?

6. What lessons from the past can I bring to this problem?

7. What led to this problem in the first place?

8. How did I contribute to the problem?

9. How can I contribute to the solution?

10. How can I bring others who are resisting on board?

11. What agreements do I need before I can proceed with confidence?

12. What is already working well?

13. What is pulling me and others forward?

14. What barriers are holding me and others back?

15. What supports are already in place?

16. Which stakeholders need to be consulted outside the organization?

17. What skills are required to make particular solutions work?

18. What attitudes or self-beliefs do I need in order to be successful?

19. Do I need to invest in technologies to help me solve the problem?

20. What might happen if we did nothing?

Figure 32: Twenty Great Coaching Questions (Raelin, 2010, p.54)

6) Brainstorm on further actions

7) Summarize and outline any specific agenda for the next meeting. Volunteer or nominate the chair person and a scribe for the next meeting.

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Since nobody was prepared for chairing this meeting session, I continued as the facilitator and chose to introduce the theory of primary differences between enacted and espoused values as illustrated in figure 13 below which is an excerpt from Raelin's (2010, p.119) Leaderful Fieldbook through which I was hoping to inculcate a culture that would be more acceptable and conducive to our ongoing endeavor towards synergy realizations. I also introduced some key aspects of "network-level change" as I thought this construct would help us to understand the paradigm shift we were going through from working in silos to working as a team and eventually work as complex networks (p.121-123).

Current Enacted Values	Future Espoused Values
Work is done as individuals	Teams outperform individuals
Someone else tells you what to do	Decisions should be made at the lowest competent level
External controls are needed	Employees can be trusted
No one owns the problem	Teams should "own" the solution
We react to the customer	Problems should be anticipated
Costs are someone else's problem	Everyone should work to reduce costs

Figure 33: Differences between Enacted and Espoused Values (Raelin, 2010)

We then discussed status of actions from the previous meeting, and figured out that a couple of participants had made significant progress on organizing the lunch and learn sessions with other units and offices in the region with clear goals of realizing synergies especially considering the ongoing post-merger integration process.

While reflecting upon the learning from facilitating these 'lunch and learn' sessions, one sales manager commented *"We had to move the focus away from our primary intention of cross selling and rather emphasize on how we could make the session more attractive for the respective unit managers. In addition to emphasizing on the potential synergy, we highlighted how our unit could help in cross-selling and providing value addition to the services provided by these respective units as opposed to merely educating them about our services and looking for means to boosting the sales of our respective products and services. The path we followed can be related to the future*

espoused values and network theory we discussed about in today's opening session which makes a lot of sense now." Another sales manager commented *"It was my feeling that our colleagues at ground level more than welcomed the opportunity for a lunch and learn session. I am not sure whether the lunch part or learn part interests them more, but it's a good sign that they are at least taking out the time and are willing to listen to us which could hopefully help towards establishing a strong synergetic relation. It may be interesting to reflect on why some of the unit managers were earlier resisting to such initiatives"*.

Upon further reflections we realized that it was unfair for us to assume that everyone would be interested in our objectives around cross-selling as each unit and individual had their own priorities and set of KPIs. However, our strong organizational values, vision, and regular merger updates from the group CEO helped us to encourage the need for such collaboration and synergies, and also guided our communication with some of the key stakeholders who were then obliged to support our initiatives as they were now being communicated in alignment with our key values as an organization, the most relevant organizational values being "We are committed to team work and innovation" and "We embrace change and deliver results."

We then reflected upon the existing challenges, and one of the sales manager commented *"We seem to have moved our focus from the key problem defined during our first meeting which was framed as "How can we leverage on synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process?"* He further added, *"It might be useful for us to identify more ways of enhancing cross-selling by making the best out of ongoing post-merger integrations instead of merely focusing upon lunch and learn sessions".* Everyone agreed to this suggestion and another participant commented *"The success of organizing lunch and learn sessions is without any doubt a good initiative in line with our identified problem, but it seems like we need to take a more holistic approach towards working on our problem".* The leaderful practice approach discussed during the second meeting and espoused values discussed during the opening session of this meeting were deemed as relevant constructs towards taking a holistic approach on our identified problem. We felt that

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there was no need to redefine the problem statement but we all needed to work more collectively.

We then brainstormed on how could we take a more collective and holistic approach of working on the problem using twenty great coaching questions (Raelin, 2010, p.54) (refer figure 12 above) which helped us to clarify and map some of the key stakeholders, shortlist some of the success factors and measures, identify alliances and existing methods that could work, and brainstorm on consequences of not taking actions. Some of the actions we identified in order to take a more holistic approach to working on our problem included:

- Mapping the key stakeholders, both internal and external
- Aligning our problem and actions with the larger vision, values and merger related objectives communicated by the Senior Leadership Team
- Framing our problem and proposals as an organizational development project in line with KPIs of most stakeholders and units we anticipate working with in order to gain access to the required resources
- Gaining commitment at all organizational levels we are aiming to influence

It was decided to continue taking actions considering the above action guidelines and discuss them with the Action Learning team during the next meeting. I asked if anyone would like to volunteer as meeting chairperson/facilitator and scribe for the next meeting, and there were volunteers for each role.

My observations and reflections:

While preparing for the third meeting, I felt a lot of burden upon myself trying to manage both Action Learning process at work and Thesis Action Research process, and I proposed to the Action Learning team that we could take turns in chairing and scribing our meetings, which was very well received and strongly recommended by my line manager who served as the project sponsor.

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Based on the experience from previous meeting wherein the agenda went out of order, we managed to define a structure for the Action Learning team meetings which was agreed by all, and I hoped that future meetings would be more streamlined and focused. There was however a risk with taking turns to chair the meeting, but as a contingency plan I was always be prepared to take over.

We finally started to see some actions and learnings happening within the team and seemed more focused towards redefining and working upon our problem. Our actions now seemed more specific and measurable.

4th Meeting (25 Sep 2014) Leadership Development of Participants and Stakeholder Strategy Matrix

One of the sales managers who had volunteered to chair this meeting opened the meeting with sharing a Stakeholder Strategy Matrix as shown in figure 14 below and explained how this matrix could help us to map the key stakeholders which would help us to consolidate and provide a more structured approach to discuss and work upon one the actions we agreed upon during the previous meeting related to mapping internal and external stakeholders associated with our defined problem.

Figure 34: Stakeholder Strategy Matrix (Raelin, 2010)

We then went around in a round robin format recapitulating actions from the previous meeting, and filled up the stakeholder strategy matrix on flipchart. The completed stakeholder strategy matrix looked as follows.

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
Senior Leadership Team	Successful post-merger integration through establishing strong synergies and success stories	Strategy, guidance and access to resources	Support to succeed in merger objectives in alignment with organizational vision and values such that there is an impact to the	

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			overall value chain and benefits everyone involved in the value creation process	
Unit managers and section heads from various Business Areas/Units	Collaboration and synergies across units	Motivation and access to resources that these respective managers can influence	Support towards meeting their unit KPIs and making work more enjoyable for their unit team members	
Sales Managers from other Business Areas and Divisions	Increased sales and customer satisfaction	Cross-selling synergies, continued enthusiasm and support	Cross-selling synergies which will eventually help them to meet their KPIs and also make their work processes more enjoyable.	
Consultants who work with Customers on daily basis	More value addition to customers which will in turn have positive impact on ongoing projects	Leverage on existing customer relations for cross selling	Meeting project delivery KPIs, better customer satisfaction & referrals and upselling consultancy jobs.	
Customers	Better value creation, smooth execution of projects and long	More business and positive references	Meeting their business critical objectives in an efficient and	

	lasting relationship with their preferred vendor		professional manner	
Regulatory bodies	Strong impact on safe and sustainable future	Knowledge and cooperation. Also preferably nominate us as the preferred solution partner for our target customers	Help them to achieve the desired regulatory compliance by providing optimal solutions and services to target customers	

Table1: Stakeholder Strategy Matrix

We came to a realization that even an apparently focused problem such as ours which is concerned with leveraging on synergy realizations for enhancing cross-selling during an ongoing post-merger integration process involved a complex matrix of various stakeholders at various levels thereby emerging into a complex network citizenship behavior and associated dynamics which brings out a sense of ownership, responsibility and accountability in everyone (Raelin, 2010) as discussed during the previous meeting. Our actions would therefore require adaptations and actions at various stakeholder levels.

This in turn correlated to another action we had identified during the previous meeting concerning gaining commitment at all organizational levels that we were aiming to influence through our identified problem wherein we would frame these desired actions as organizational development project in line with KPIs of most stakeholders and units in order to gain the required levels of access and commitment from the relevant resources. To this effect, I highlighted a recent announcement made by our CEO on our intranet site which provided a status update after 1 year from the merger announcement that highlighted some of the key achievements including a uniform strategy, new visual and brand identity, establishment of new organizational structure, implementation of a

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common management system, establishment of some joint offices, common IT platform, and ongoing harmonization of common career models and HR processes. In summary the announcement highlighted that we have successfully achieved "make it work" phase and are now focusing on "make it better" phase which would be eventually followed by a "make it excellent" phase, which related to one of the themes that was emergent through the initial pre-study interviews as discussed in section 4.2. The announcement had a strong emphasis on how we have managed to achieve this success independently within the organization without involving any external consultants while maintaining our commitment and focus on quality, market and customers. An excerpt from this announcement stated *"We still have a lot to gain from cross-selling and collaborative business development across both service lines and business areas. This is an area where I expect your customer focus and foresight to generate results."* I emphasized on how this timely announcement is very relevant and conducive to our identified problem and discussions, and could help us gain the required support and commitment from some of the stakeholders.

The meeting chairman connected this revelation to the stakeholder matrix and challenged everyone to identify a plan to meet the mutual needs for our team and stakeholders by leveraging on the recent announcement from the group CEO and our learnings so far through the Action Learning process. This was then brainstormed upon using the twenty great coaching questions introduced during the previous meeting, and each one of us decided to work on one stakeholder category each and present our plans, take some actions and share learning from our respective actions.

The meeting chairman/facilitator then proposed a feedback mechanism for facilitators which would help us to demonstrate learning and development through the Action Learning/research process while serving as a feedback mechanism for every team member to improve their Action Learning/research facilitation skills. Everyone agreed with this proposal but decided to provide a combined feedback after each meeting as opposed to completing the feedback sheets individually as the team only comprised of five members. The following feedback sheet from Raelin (2010, p.66-68) was proposed by the meeting chairman upon my suggestion and was agreed by all.

1. The session improved in its effectiveness as a result of the facilitation (please circle one).

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. If the session improved, what specifically did the facilitator do to assist the team?

b. Do you recall any specific interventions by the facilitator that were helpful? Not helpful?

c. If the session did not improve, did the facilitator do anything to hold the team back? If so, what specifically would you point to?

2. The facilitator was helpful to me.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. How was the facilitator helpful to you?

3. The facilitator was helpful to other group members.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. With whom and how was the facilitator helpful to others?

4. The facilitator helped the group learn.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

5. The facilitator helped me or other individual group members learn.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

6. The facilitator helped the team manage conflict.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

7. The facilitator helped the team face some deep emotions.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

8. The facilitator helped the team by encouraging all to express their ideas freely, even if outside the norm.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you cite any specific instances?

9. The facilitator modeled for the team how to be a sensitive team member.

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	Somewhat	Not at all
	4	3	2	1

a. Can you point to what he or she did that revealed a degree of sensitivity?

10. Are there any other attributes of the facilitator that you would like to mention, either positive or negative?

Figure 35: Facilitator Feedback Sheet (Raelin, 2010, p.66-68)

The meeting was then summarized by the chairman. The scribe for this session volunteered to serve as the facilitator for the next meeting while another team member volunteered to serve as the scribe.

My observations and reflections:

Our Action Learning team meetings were a bit chaotic in the beginning with no proper sense of direction or follow-up on actions. At times I felt as if we are losing focus but now that we were in

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our fourth meeting, we appeared to be on track and streamlined. We still had a long way to go but at least there was some sense of direction. Everyone seemed to get more and more involved and there was strong acceptance to the Action Learning approach which I think everyone understood quite well by now and seemed to enjoy. I hoped that we would continue the momentum and have a successful first Action Learning cycle.

The discussions during this meeting could be associated with one of the themes identified during the Phase 1 interviews associated with how discursive processes can help to overcome barriers such as employee resistance and anxiety as discussed by Rhodes, Pullen and Clegg (2010) and Beech, McPhail and Coupland (2009). I was mindful of discussing this with the chairman for the next meeting and equipping him with some resources for driving the discussions accordingly. This may be interpreted as insider researcher bias, but I had to be mindful of staying on track with regards to my Thesis research as there was a lot of room for the core research to digress and change course of the research process especially during the early phases. Such negotiations are essential as discussed by some insider Action Research scholars including Roth et al (2007, p.52) who have termed such (steering) behavior as street-smartness, Bjorkman and Sundgren (2005) who call this being politically astute, and Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.11) who consider such behavior essential for balancing core and Thesis Action Research projects.

5th Meeting 2nd October 2014: Organizational Citizenship and Change Agents

One of the team members was travelling and we conducted our 5th Action Learning meeting with only 4 participants. The meeting chairman however managed to receive the action updates from the member who couldn't make it for this meeting. The meeting chairman/facilitator started with discussing the theoretical concept of Network Citizenship behavior and related this concept to the emerging trend that we identified while working on the actions from previous meeting. Although this topic was touched upon during the third and fourth meetings, the meeting facilitator thought that that network citizenship behavior deserved to be further elaborated in relation to our ongoing discussions and Action Learning process.

His summary of the Network Citizenship Behavior or Organizational Citizenship behavior described it as a phenomenon which goes beyond normal job responsibilities and the typical give and take relationship between employees and employers. The behavior goes beyond individual, interpersonal, team and organizational level changes and demonstrates bonds and commitment beyond the formal rewards provided to employees by employers underpinned by empathy, sense of social belonging to a group, community or network. Such behavior eventually enables its members to take a more holistic approach towards solving problems that could help them, their groups and eventually the entire network. The facilitator cited Raelin (2010) who suggests that every network needs network weavers or change agents, and the facilitator prompted that we as the Action Learning team could serve as these agents by contributing our time and resources to the network especially considering that working on our identified problem involves several stakeholders and stakeholder groups as discussed during the previous meetings.

The agenda was then turned around to actions from our previous meeting, and everyone was asked to present their plans towards meeting mutual needs of stakeholders and proposed impact, the outcome of which is illustrated in table 2 below.

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	Successful post-merger integration through establishing strong synergies and success stories	Strategy, guidance and access to resources	Support to succeed in merger objectives in alignment with organizational vision and values such that there is an impact to the overall value chain and benefits	Gain support from SLT members for access to required resources and for channeling key communications. In return we would foster a spirit of synergies

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
			everyone involved in the value creation process	and joint actions towards realizing merger objectives in alignment with organizational vision and values and as per the direction set by SLT's expectations.
Unit managers and section heads from various Business Areas/Units	Collaboration and synergies across units	Motivation and access to resources that these respective managers can influence	Support towards meeting their unit KPIs and making work more enjoyable for their unit team members	Gain clarity on each other's KPIs and brainstorm on how we can achieve these through collaboration.
Sales Managers from other Business Areas and Divisions	Increased sales and customer satisfaction	Cross-selling synergies, continued enthusiasm and support	Cross-selling synergies which will eventually help them to meet their KPIs and also make their work processes more enjoyable.	Brainstorm on how we can achieve our KPIs by leveraging on each other. For e.g. joint events, meetings, and truly demonstrating a spirit of oneness.
Consultants who work with	More value addition to	Leverage on existing customer	Meeting project delivery KPIs,	Joint meetings with customers to

Stakeholder	Proposed Impact	What you need from them	What they need from you	How you plan to meet your mutual needs
Customers on daily basis	customers which will in turn have positive impact on ongoing projects	relations for cross selling	better customer satisfaction & referrals and upselling consultancy jobs.	demonstrate value addition. Lunch and learn sessions to share capabilities and identify synergies.
Customers	Better value creation, smooth execution of projects and long lasting relationship with their preferred vendor	More business and positive references	Meeting their business critical objectives in an efficient and professional manner	Joint meetings with existing customers, arranging networking conferences that would also involve regulatory bodies.
Regulatory bodies	Strong impact on safe and sustainable future	Knowledge and cooperation. Also preferably nominate us as the preferred solution partner for our target customers	Help them to achieve the desired regulatory compliance by providing optimal solutions and services to target customers	Sharing international best practices. Conducting joint industry projects and participations in strategic conferences. Sponsoring strategic meetings and events.

Table 2: Stakeholder Matrix with identified actions

A brainstorming session on the stakeholder matrix made us realize the extent of progress we had made since our initial meetings wherein we were merely focusing on

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working on a problem situation concerned with arranging lunch and learn sessions. The above matrix not only made us realize where respective actions are placed in the grand scheme of things but also made us look at our redefined problem more holistically. We realized that our key challenge now was to prioritize these actions and also come up with a practical approach for following up working upon our problem as a wider network since we had realized that we could not tackle such a large problem on our own as a small Action Learning team. We could however serve as change agents or network weavers and on this note I proposed that I could share some of the learnings from my DBA modules related to Complexity Theory and I volunteered to chair/facilitate the next meeting wherein I would share the concepts of Complex Adaptive Systems and Complexity Leadership Theory, which could not only help us to brainstorm upon working on our Action Learning problem but also enable me to progress with the plans I had laid out for my Thesis Action Research project through the literature review and research design/methodology process. The meeting chair appreciated this suggestion and we moved on to brainstorming on the learnings and key challenges faced while working on the actions agreed during the previous meeting.

One of the team members commented *"Taking a holistic approach is a great idea but this could reap benefits in the long run. There are some actions we have identified in the stakeholder matrix that we could implement on our own instead of serving as network weavers or change agents and I think we should work towards achieving some of the tangible results in parallel."* We then started to identify some of these actions which included pragmatic solutions such as organizing joint meetings with customers, organizing lunch and learn sessions, and identifying conferences and seminars that could be organized through joint contributions and investments across different business units and business areas in our organization that were emerging as a result of the ongoing post-merger related restructuring. Everyone agreed on these actions and we decided to present and discuss the outcome during the following meeting.

We then evaluated the facilitator using Raelin's (2010, p.66-68) feedback template and like the previous meeting this was done as a team as opposed to doing it individually. I

volunteered as the chairman/facilitator for the following meeting as I wanted to introduce CAS concepts, and another team member volunteered as the scribe.

My observations and reflections:

At this point I was gaining a sense of some structure in our Action Learning and my own Thesis research process. We were reflecting upon our problem, identifying actions, working on these actions, reflecting on learnings and agreeing on new actions as a cyclical process, and most importantly learning from the entire process. During some of the initial meetings I thought that the qualitative research approach is a mistake and the whole process appeared becoming too messy and complex to manage, especially considering my lack of research experience & credentials, but I had now started to feel more confident of my researching skills through outcome of the ongoing progression with the Action Research team which was discussed and validated with my Thesis advisor from the University who is a very experienced researcher and mentor for DBA students undertaking Action Research Thesis.

I was able to relate our discussions with a theme identified during the phase 1 interviews associated with complex adaptive systems as recommended by one of the interviewees who was in favor of leveraging on complexity science theories for realizing our strategy and objectives in a dynamic post-merger integration landscape, which also formed the basis of my research methodology.

I served as the chairman and facilitator for this meeting based on our discussions during the previous meeting. My reason for volunteering as the chairman/facilitator for this session was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to introduce and discuss Complex Adaptive System and Complexity Leadership Theory to the Action Learning Team members in order to attempt aligning the core Action Research process with colleagues at work to my independent Thesis research, and secondly I wanted to progress to the next phase or cycle of our Action Learning project which would give some sense of accomplishment to the participants.

All five team members were present for this meeting. I started the meeting with citing concepts and examples from Stacey (2011) in order to familiarize all participants with systemic ways of thinking about strategy and organization dynamics. I made mention of Kantian philosophy which according to Stacey (2011, p.52-54) facilitates taking a holistic view of systems wherein the parts that form these systems can be visualized as autonomous sub-systems which can potentially self-organize such that they interact with other sub-systems emerging without any prior design thereby having an impact on the overall system. Relating this principle to our identified problem, I emphasized how our Action Research team was working upon solving our identified problems but at the same time we were also shaping the entire organization and making an impact on the ongoing merger integration process. I used the analogy of fitness landscape (p.246-248) for emphasizing the significance of being able to adapt to the changing landscape and evolving during the process thereby emerging stronger individually and as a group, which relates to Darwinian Theory of being able to adapt and evolve or perish. The changing landscape in our case was the merger between two organizations and our survival strategies involved meeting our core KPIs while being able to keep up with the changes imposed by the merger; Furthermore, we were all aiming towards enjoying our work as individuals, teams and as a larger organization.

One of the team members commented *"This all sounds good in theory but how do we get our acts together to work on our identified problem using this principle"*. To this I agreed that it may seem as if there is no control on the direction of evolution, and introduced Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey's (2007) CLT, which could potentially enable some degree of direction and provide sense of control to complex adaptive systems through three entangled leadership roles, namely, adaptive, administrative and enabling leaderships, as discussed in the literature review and methodology Chapters. CLT takes a paradigm shift from bureaucracy and roots itself in complexity instead, with its epistemological foundations based in distributed, dynamic and contextual leadership through a combination of administrative, adaptive and enabling leadership functions working in tandem.

I then expressed how in relation to our identified problem and context, our Action Learning team members would be demonstrating Adaptive Leadership while emerging informally through our ongoing Action Learning process. Some of the unit managers and Senior Leadership Team members would be demonstrating Administrative Leadership that would set the direction through provision of enabling conditions by establishing alignment and control, for e.g. setting KPIs around cross-selling, establishing mandates for facilitation of joint meetings and learning, etc. Finally Enabling Leadership would serve as a conduit between Adaptive and Administrative Leadership through fostering, facilitating and encouraging Adaptive Leadership and at the same time providing the required guidelines, structure and culture through Administrative Leadership that would foster adaptations such that CAS evolves and flourishes. The below illustration in Figure 16 was used to summarize how adaptive leadership can take place in a CAS like manner.
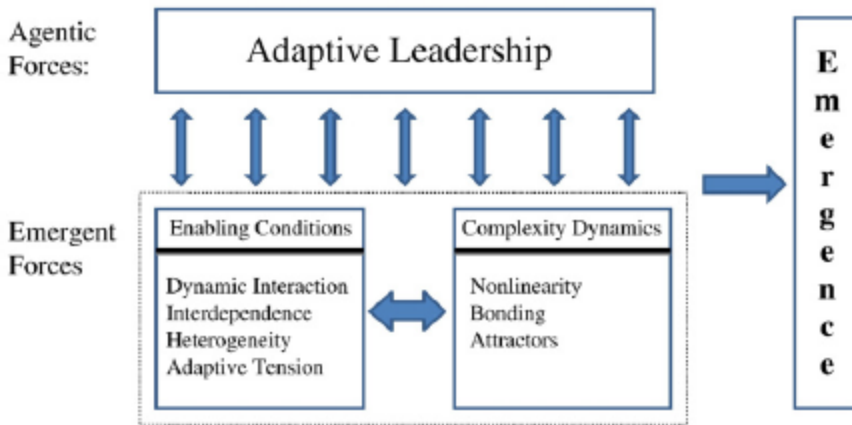
There were some clarifications and questions on both Complex Adaptive Systems and CLT which I could convincingly address based on my knowledge gained during the instructor led DBA modules and previous CAL projects. Everyone seemed to be convinced with the relationship and applicability of these systemic concepts to our identified problems. I proposed that we should try to implement these concepts to our problem during a second Action Learning cycle and conclude our first cycle after providing a status update and learning from actions agreed during our previous meetings. Everyone was in agreement with this proposal, which gave us all a sense of accomplishment of successfully completing one Action Learning cycle.

We then moved the agenda towards recapitulating actions from previous meeting and discussed the outcome, challenges and learnings from these actions. Most of the team members were successful in accomplishing some of the actions which included organizing joint meetings with customers along with colleagues from other units and business areas, organizing lunch and learn sessions, and identifying conferences and seminars which could be organized together through joint contributions and investments across different business areas and units. These actions enabled us to demonstrate reasonable success with leveraging on ongoing merger post integration process for establishing synergies and engaging in cross-selling activities.

We then reflected on our learning from the first Action Research cycle and the entire journey so far and everyone seemed to have had an enriching and enjoyable

experience. While discussing some of the key takeaways so far, one of the members said *"I have never been involved in Action Learning, at least not in a formal way wherein I was aware that I am doing Action learning/Research. This way of working on real-life problems is really effective, and provides one with an opportunity to look at the problem through multiple perspectives while fostering team spirit".* Another team member commented *"Not only do we have a sense of accomplishment for some of the actions we agreed upon while addressing our problems but we have also gained new knowledge and skills during the process. I am glad that we came together as an Action Learning team and I really look forward to continue working on our problem and learning during the process. Furthermore, all this is adding a lot of value and enthusiasm to our day to day work".*

We then evaluated the facilitator using Raelin's (2010, p.66-68) feedback template and similar to previous meeting this was done together as a team as opposed to providing feedback individually. We agreed upon the next meeting wherein we would begin the second Action Learning cycle. One of the sales managers in the team who had not yet chaired/facilitated any of the meetings volunteered to chair but requested my assistance to help him with the theoretical concept that he would be presenting during the next meeting especially considering that we would now be moving into the second cycle.

My observations and reflections:

I think that we had reasonable success with the first round of Action Learning process wherein the participants appeared to have a good understanding of how Action Learning works. All team members now seemed to have accepted that Action Learning is an effective approach towards working on our real-life workplace challenges. I had been working on transcribing our meetings and capturing my own reflections of the entire process which was helping me with my ongoing Thesis Action Research and enabling me to engage into double loop learning. I was looking forward to a relatively more complex combination of Action Research, CAS, CLT, SSM and LiC during the next Action Learning cycle in accordance to some of the assumptions made while designing the research methodology and findings from the phase 1 pre-study interviews as described in Chapters 3 and 4.2 respectively.

The feedback from team members helped me to demonstrate that the participants were indeed going through effective personal development while working constructively towards common organizational challenges which was contributing towards enhancing their efficiency and increasing the chances of achieving their individual and group level KPIs. I highlighted and shared the feedback from first round of Action Research with relevant stakeholders within my organization, which was my attempt to further validate and justify my research problem as an "organizational development project" while demonstrating making a contribution to red-hot issues in our organization that could provide me with ongoing support and resources to continue with the research, as recommended by Bjorkman and Sundgren (2007).

7th Meeting – 16th October 2014: Leveraging on Soft Systems Methodology for Consolidating Worldviews and Streamlining the Action Research Processes

The participant who had volunteered to chair/facilitate this meeting sought everyone's opinion on following the same guidelines and agenda that we had followed during the previous cycle to which there was an overall agreement. He then introduced Soft Systems Methodology (SSM), based on information and material I had shared with him upon his request for equipping him with a theoretical construct to be introduced during the meeting. I chose to provide him with SSM related material as I thought that SSM could serve as a systematic methodology that we could adopt during the Action Research process especially now that we were attempting to leverage upon CAS and CLT related constructs as discussed during the previous meeting, and would also provide me with an opportunity to work along the methodology planned for the thesis action research project.

Leveraging primarily upon Checkland and Poulter (2010), SSM was introduced as a pragmatic methodology to deal with problems through consolidation of individual worldviews and achieving a better state of being through taking a systematic approach by building consensus underpinned by critical reflections. Professor Checkland's video describing SSM (LancasterManagement, 2012) was played during the meeting and link

was shared with all for future reference and further exploration of SSM for those who were curious to learn more. The illustrations in figures 17 and 18 below were used to explain the systematic approach proffered by SSM.
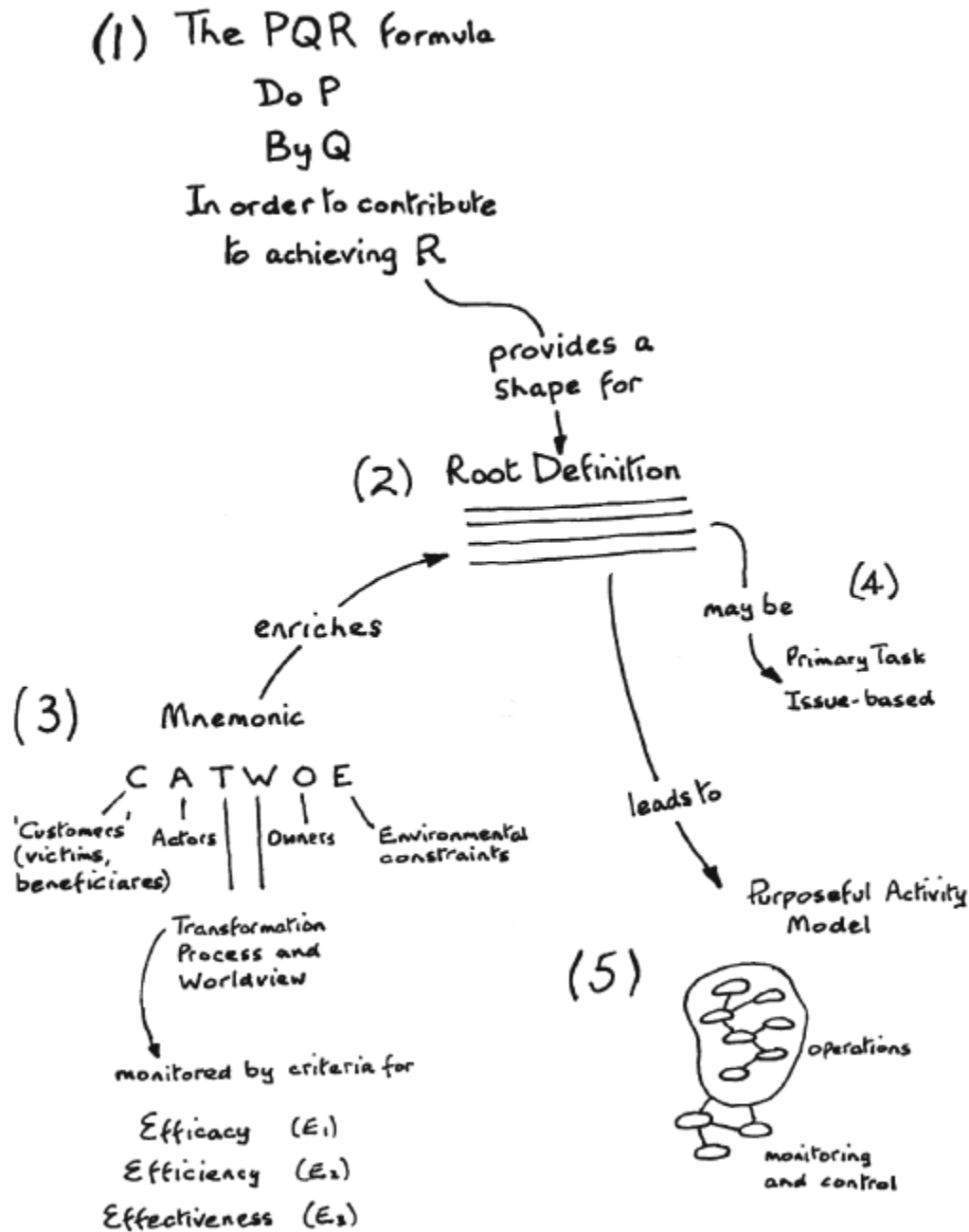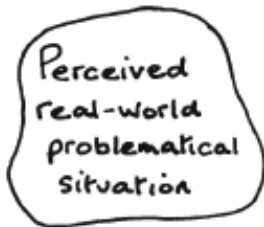

Figure 37: Guidelines for building models of purposeful activity (Checkland and Poulter, 2010, p.220)

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A Basic Outline of Soft Systems Methodology

o Think : 'problem situation'
     not 'problem'

o Find out about it :
     Rich Pictures
     Analysis One (the intervention)
            Two (social)
            Three (political)

o Think of some 'relevant systems'
     of purposeful activity ; name
     the worldviews they encapsulate

o Build the models of these notional
     systems (as on the left)
          • Root Definitions (PT/18)
          • PQR
          • CATWOE
          • 3Es   efficacy
                  efficiency
                  effectiveness
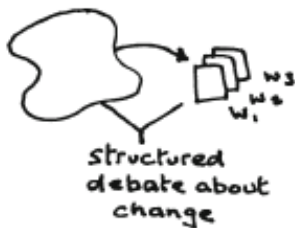
o Use the models to question the
     perceived real-world situation,
     structuring a debate about
     change

o Seek accommodations which
     meet criteria : systemically desirable
     (based on these models) and culturally
     feasible (for these people in their
     situation). An accommodation is
     a version of the situation which
     different people (different worldviews)
     can nevertheless live with.

Figure 38: Outline of SSM (Checkland and Poulter, 2010, p.241)

After gaining an understanding of the SSM methodology we then brainstormed on how we could provide a root definition to our problem "How can we leverage on synergy realizations to enhance cross-selling during the ongoing post-merger integration process", and we started to develop a Rich Picture of our problem, which according to Monk and Howard (1998) is a method to view real-life organizational problems in a holistic perspective illustrating various stakeholders, their biases and concerns. According to Pedler (2008, p.76) Rich Pictures help to get away from the words and creates clarity, honesty, openness. The Rich Picture in figure 19 below is a reconstruction of the Rich Picture that was produced during our meeting, which was deemed by the action learning team to be an efficient way of deriving our root definition.
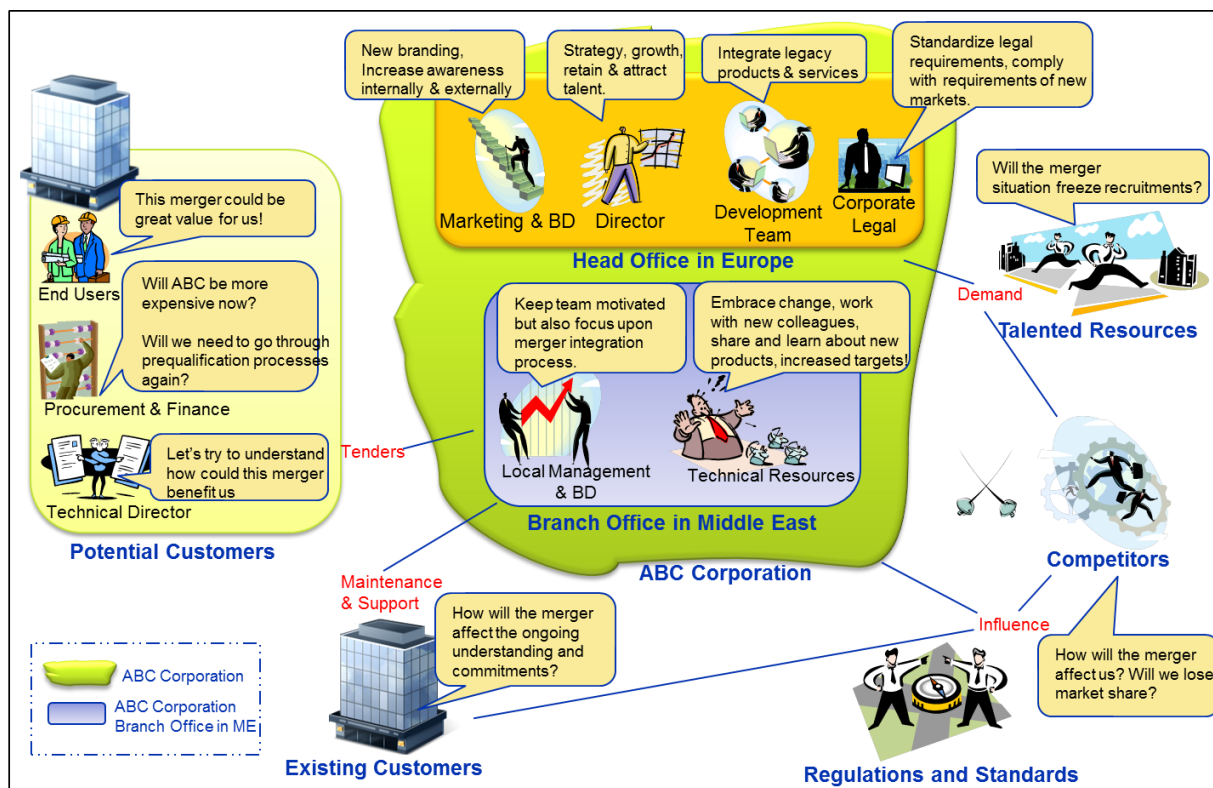
Figure 39: Rich Picture of the Action Learning Problem

The Rich Picture initiated a lot of interesting discussions and raised the overall enthusiasm in the group which reminded me of the impact that use of imagery can bring out for eliciting emotional responses of research participants as recommended by Vince and Broussine (1996) and also recommended by Pedler (2008, p.48) as an efficient

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research technique for reflecting upon shared understanding, which I think enabled us to enhance interpersonal communication between the team members and further explore inter-group identities and boundary relations, which was an essential aspect of our research context.

We then brainstormed on gaining clarity on PQR, Root Definition, CATWOE and 3Es. Everyone considered this to be a very organized and systematic way of thinking along our problem. Taking into consideration the CAS and CLT principles discussed during the previous meeting, our PQR formula was defined as "We had to **establish synergies** (P) by taking advantage of the ongoing post- merger integration **through leveraging on principles of CAS and CLT** (Q) in order to **achieve higher cross-selling** (R). Our CATWOE was identified as follows:

Customers – Unit Managers and Senior Leadership Team members

Agents – Our Action Learning team and various colleagues from other units who would be involved while working upon our identified actions

Transformation – outcome of actions for creating synergies

Worldview – refer to the Rich Picture in figure 19 above

Owners – Various unit managers and Senior Leadership team members; and potentially some customers or representatives from regulatory bodies

Environment – Post merger integration, high turnover rate, increased expectations from management and customers after the merger

Our performance criteria were defined as follows:

Efficacy – increased activities and harmony with various other colleagues and units

Efficiency – increased sales figures and customer satisfaction scores

Effectiveness – developing long-term synergies through establishing synergetic routines

Some of the actions and purposeful activities were summarized as fostering CAS through implementation of CLT. We realized that this is a very broad action and therefore brainstormed on the specific administrative, enabling and adaptive leadership actions.

Some of the administrative leadership actions were noted as follows:

7) Establishing KPIs for Conducting joint customer meetings
8) Establishing KPIs for knowledge sharing through lunch and learn sessions, seminars, meetings, networking, etc.
9) Establishing KPIs for cross-referencing value addition that can be offered through other units and business areas in tender responses
10) Establishing KPIs for conducting joint seminars to highlight collective strength
11) Establishing KPIs for sales and project successes achieved through collaborating across units and business areas
12) Alignment and integration of systems and procedures used by various legacy organizational units

Some of the adaptive leadership actions involved:

5) Active engagement with colleagues from other units and business areas
6) Making it attractive for other colleagues and units to work together and help in cross-selling
7) Being open minded and willing to adapt to the actions laid out through administrative leadership functions
8) Taking a holistic view of our organization and the entire supply chain including customers, regulators, and even competitors

Some of the enabling leadership actions involved:

4) Engaging in joint meetings and discussions

5) Leveraging on corporate networking tools such as discussion blogs and buddy programs

6) Regular sharing of opportunities and challenges in a collaborative manner

We then discussed the pros, cons and challenges around these actions and outlined a structured debate for change. It was decided that although SSM approach is very systematic and structured, we were presently brainstorming at a very high level and required to take a more piece meal approach towards our actions as some of the actions (especially when seen together) were seemingly daunting and overwhelming. It was therefore decided to take the following actions until the next Action Learning team meeting considering that we exceeded the time we had scheduled for this meeting.

3) Identify and invite one member of the Senior Leadership team in the next meeting to have their buy-in to the administrative leadership actions.

4) Organize at least one cross team meeting to discuss way forward on some of the actions noted in adaptive and enabling leadership actions

We then evaluated the facilitator using Raelin's (2010, p.66-68) feedback template and like the previous meetings this was done as a team as opposed to doing it individually. We agreed upon the next meeting and I volunteered to be the chair/facilitator since all of us had now taken turns to be involved in facilitating the meetings and/or scribing.

My observations and reflections:

I realized that we were working on an issue based model which concerns informal actions as opposed to institutionalized processes as in primary tasks. Some of the actions seemed repetitive from the initial Action Learning cycle, but SSM provided us with a more structured process in addition to a solid theoretical framework to describe our project.

I sensed that the technicalities and jargons introduced through SSM were overwhelming but introduction of SSM had most certainly provided the much required systematic approach towards working on our problem and also helped me with my Thesis research by making it more rigorous and potentially appealing to the academically oriented reviewers.

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The enthusiasm in team members was very high which was demonstrated by everyone willingly overstaying the scheduled meeting time, which as a matter of fact ran into our weekend hours. I could relate this to the coercive control due to network/organization citizenship behavior wherein our bonds and commitment were now beyond the formal rewards provided to employees by employers, and we were motivated through empathy and sense of social belonging to the Action Learning group.

8th Meeting 23rd October 2014: Success with CAS and Introduction of Situational Leadership Theory

I chaired/facilitated this meeting. Since we were all coordinating and communicating with various people within and even outside of our organization wherein we were either directly or indirectly responsible for managing (rather leading) individuals and groups, I thought it would be worthwhile to share Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson's (2008) Situational Leadership Theory as a part of our routine for introducing a theoretical concept. The developers of Situational Leadership Theory claim their proposed approach to be an effective practical model for influencing leadership relationships that and can be used by managers, leaders, teachers and salespeople (p.131). In addition, I also introduced leadership continuum by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973), which is a classic theory that helped us in referring to common metric and terminology when discussing performance readiness of various individuals and teams while working on our Action Learning project.

The illustration in figure 20 below was used to explain Situational Leadership Model which indicated what level of task and relationship behavior (S1, S2, S3 and S4) should be adopted by leaders when dealing with individuals and teams with different levels of performance readiness which has been referred to as R1, R2, R3 and R4 in figure 20 below.

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Situational Leadership
Influence Behaviors
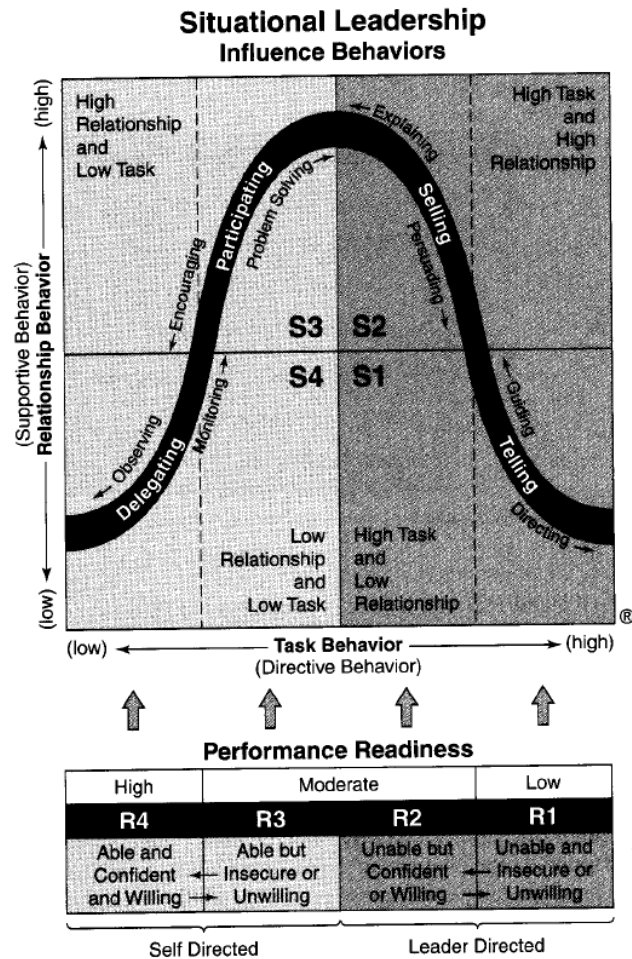
Figure 40: Situational Leadership (Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, 2008, p.142)

The continuum of leadership behavior was discussed using the illustration in figure 21 below which is an excerpt from Harvard Business Review article that correlates efforts and degree of influence expected and exercised by managers/leaders based on the degree of freedom offered to people and groups being influenced. Reflecting further on the leadership continuum and the situational leadership model we concluded that the skillset for being able to influence individuals and groups is essential for CAS to succeed.

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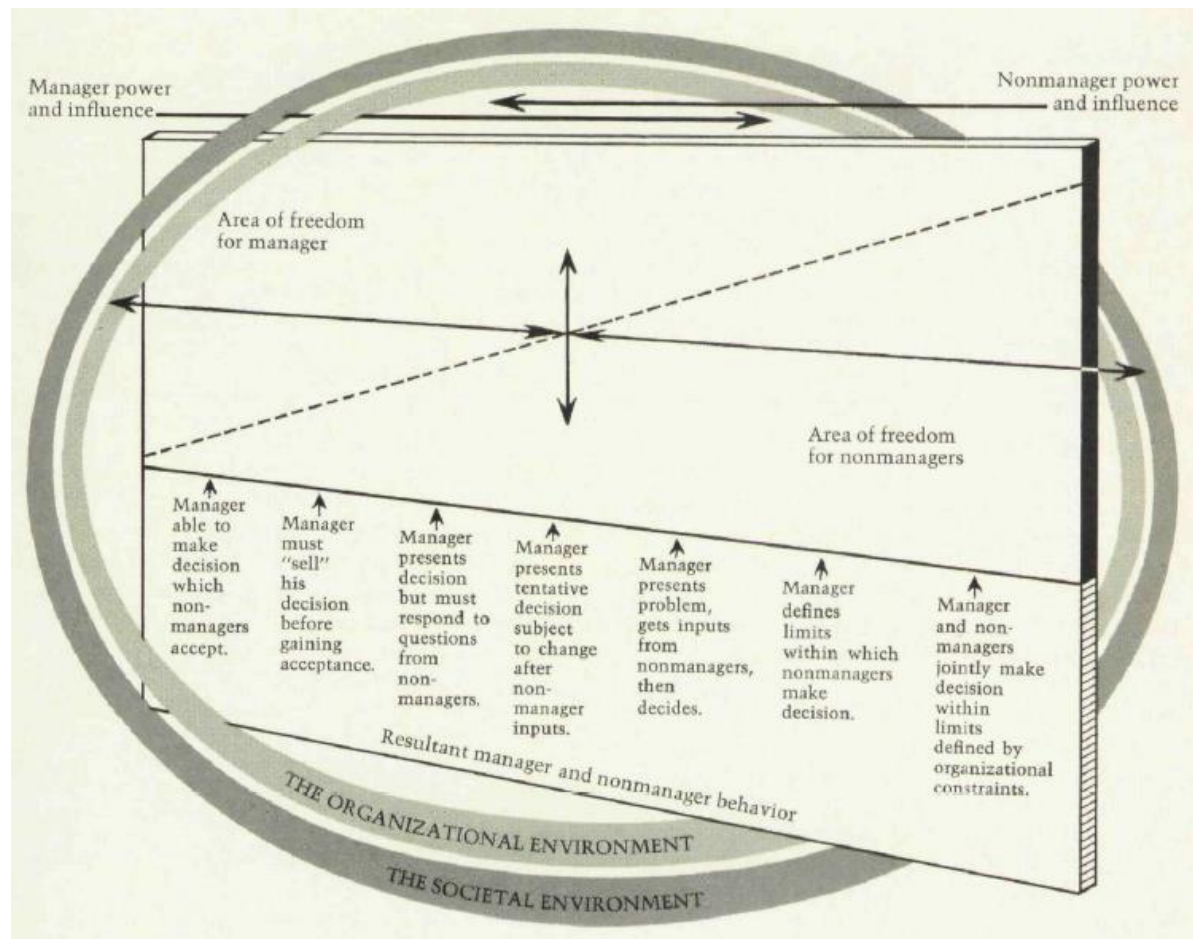Figure 41: Continuum of Manager-nonmanager behavior (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973, p.167)

We then objectively discussed as a group on how these theoretical concepts could be leveraged upon in relation to our Action Learning project. The situational leadership model appeared to be an instant hit amongst the team members, and we were able to relate the situational leadership model to enabling and adaptive leadership functions of CLT as discussed during our previous meetings. Referring to Situational Leadership Theory and the continuum of manager-non manager behavior, one of the participants said *"This is an excellent model which I think will serve as a valuable tool in my leadership toolbox, not just for our ongoing Action Learning project but for everything I will do as a leader and a manager."* Another team member remarked *"I think that we tend to lean more towards right end of the manager-nonmanager behavior continuum, which I think provides us a very fertile environment for CAS to thrive. Relating with the situational leadership theory, I think we have self-directed performance readiness in our*

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organization which will require us to leverage on S3 and S4 leadership behaviors with low to high relationship and low task behaviors as most of our colleagues seem to be quite able and confident, but some could also be able and insecure or unwilling, especially considering the ongoing post-merger integration related changes and high turnover rates."

We then discussed the outcome of actions agreed during our previous meeting:

3) Identify and invite one member of the Senior Leadership team in the next meeting to have their buy-in to the administrative leadership actions: We had decided to have the support of our Divisional Director since the Regional Manager's position was not yet filled up and our Divisional Director was acting as the Regional Manager. Due to ongoing travels we could not have the Divisional Director's participation in this meeting.

4) Organize at least one cross team meeting to discuss way forward on some of the actions noted in adaptive and enabling leadership actions: We managed to engage with some of the key team members from other business areas and also other regions, most of who comprised of individuals from both legacy entities whom we had not worked with before. We had reasonable success in initiating joint efforts for customer meetings, organizing and participating in conferences and seminars, and working more together in general. However, there seemed to be challenges around no clear establishment of routines and it was apparent that although everyone had good intentions of working together, other priorities superseded the limited time and resources. It was therefore deemed important by the Action Learning team to leverage upon CLT's administrative leadership actions as discussed and agreed during our previous meeting, and observe if there are any changes.

We agreed to speak to the Divisional Director and urge establishment of the administrative leadership actions that were outlined during the previous meeting which could help to create the dynamics for CAS to thrive by imposing coordinating constraints

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and demands. In the meantime we agreed to continue our ongoing efforts with colleagues from other business areas and report our learnings more systematically by leveraging on the various theoretical frameworks and terminologies that we had learned through our previous Action Learning sessions.

As a part of the established routine we evaluated the facilitator using Raelin's (2010, p.66-68) feedback template. We then agreed upon the next meeting and one of the sales managers volunteered to be the chair/facilitator while I volunteered to serve as the scribe.

My observations and reflections:

Reflecting upon the problem and challenges we were dealing with and seeing them through a theoretical lens, I realized that we were dealing with a "teleological change" process (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995) wherein some of the likeminded colleagues were striving towards working as a group and constructing an envisioned goal and taking actions to reach the goal as well as devising metrics to measure progress.

We were making use of CAS as a vehicle for forming goals, deciding on the implementation plans, evaluating our actions and modifying goals as required. Action learning provided us with an established routine and structure to work on this change, while giving a sense of individual development to all participants. We seemed to be working upon generating a "team agency" (Caldwell, 2003) wherein we aimed to negotiate our change management interventions as self-managed teams eliminating the need for central hierarchical controls, which was particularly important in context of the ongoing post-merger integration since such changes in some areas of the organization could have a positive impact on other areas.

As a primary researcher for my Thesis research project, I had also started to visualize approaching the change problem through a trialectical perspective (Ford and Ford, 1994) where loss (such as additional investment of time and resources required by various individuals and teams to realize cross-selling synergies) could be framed "positive" through active-attractive forces. I could relate with leveraging upon "dispersalist and constructionist discourses" (Caldwell, 2005), wherein employees at all levels were contributing towards cultivating an autonomous

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learning organization. I was trying to achieve this through sharing some of the useful techniques and methods I learned during my DBA programme such as the Situational Leadership model introduced during this meeting.

I was updating the key stakeholders on individual and team development and highlighted the overall enthusiasm and positive team spirit, in order to continue gaining the required access and support to continue with the Action Research process.

9th Meeting 30 October 2014: Good Progress on Actions, and Introduction to Schein's ORJI Framework

The sales manager who had nominated to serve as the chairman/facilitator for this meeting sought some inputs from me on gaining more clarity to an insider Action Learning/research process since he wanted to share some related concepts that could help us all in gaining more clarity on Action Learning and research process that we had been following and identify opportunities to further formalize our routines. I thought this was an excellent idea which could also provide some theoretical scaffolding to our ongoing research work while helping us all to build appropriate vocabulary for discussing our ongoing Action Learning project. To frame this in Lee and Greenley's (2010) words this session intended to provide a theoretical lens for some of our middle managers for sense-making and discussing ongoing organizational change.

The illustration in figure 22 below was used to highlight the complex dynamics of Action Research.
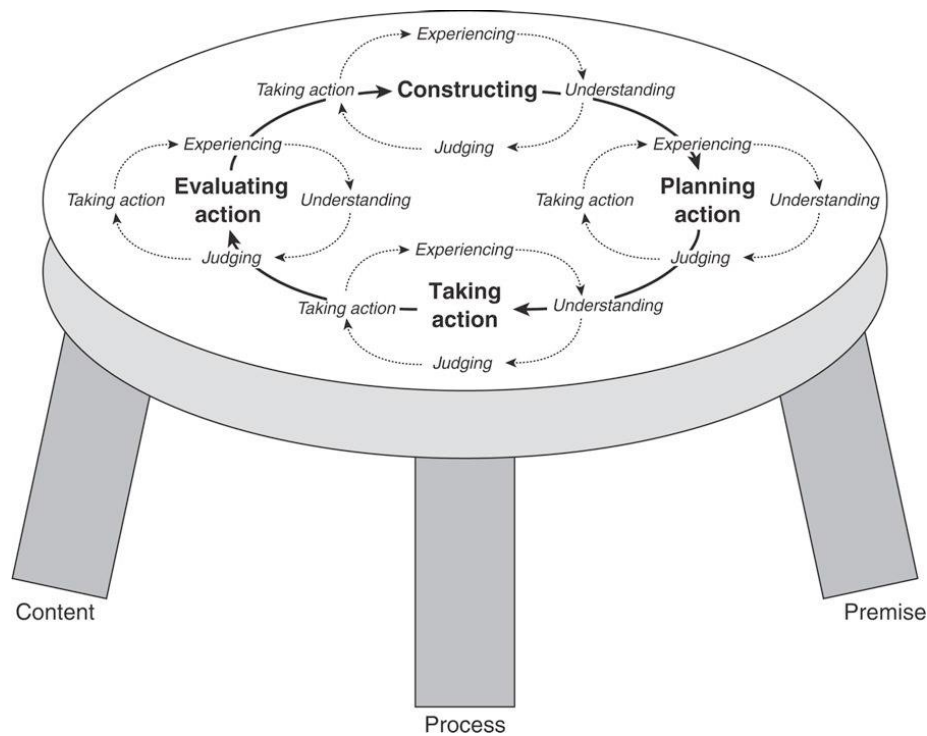
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Figure 42: The complex dynamics of Action Research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.31).

Based on my recommendation and inputs the meeting facilitator then shared an overview of Schein's ORJI model that can be used while working on organizational problems. I chose to have ORJI introduced as I could sense resistance around SSM due to its perceived complexity. The ORJI model is relatively straight forward going through a cycle of observing, reacting, judging and intervening that can be related to the reflexivity required by Action Learning/research process, wherein strong emphasis is placed on observations and reflections while cautioning against jumping straight into actions. This concept is particularly useful in situations where unpredicted outcome is encountered wherein ORJI suggests reflecting upon the following questions.

1) What was actually observed? Describe it
2) What was our reaction and what feelings were experienced?
3) What judgments and thoughts emerged?
4) What intervention was done? No action can also be recorded as an intervention.

The key message to everyone was that the kind of learning and research we were engaged into can be highly influenced by contextual elements and personal biases, which we all need to be aware of and try to eliminate through collective sensemaking by being more reflexive. It was suggested by the meeting facilitator to attempt leveraging on Schein's ORJI model and spend as much time as possible in the Observation phase. To this one of the participants remarked about the hangtime exercise with nine shapes used during one of the previous meetings as a good method to achieve better observation in a group setting, but this was considered as a time consuming activity and not carried out although everyone agreed that it's a valid and worthwhile suggestion.

The above illustration in figure 22 from Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.31) was referenced in order to summarize the loops involved while we moved from constructing to planning actions to taking actions and finally evaluating actions. One of the participants commented *"This is something we were going through in all our Action Learning meetings but we sometimes take focus away from process and premise. Hopefully Schein's ORJI model could help us to be more streamlined and reflexive".*

We then followed up on actions from the previous meeting:

1) I spoke to the Divisional Director regarding my research and provided an overview of our ongoing Action Learning project since the regional manager who served as the sponsor for this Action Research and was also one of the Action Research team members had been put on a gardening leave and was no longer involved in work related matters. I also provided a quick summary of CAS and CLT to the Divisional Director and sought support from senior leadership team in order to establish some administrative leadership actions that could help us cultivate the conditions to foster CAS by increasing adaptive and enabling leadership activities. Some suggestions and potential actions from previous meetings were discussed such as issuing formal memos for taking some of the planned administrative leadership actions and providing the requisite resources for conducting knowledge sharing sessions, cross-referencing value addition from other business units in tenders and proposals going out to customers,

conducting joint meetings with customers and regulatory authorities, joint participation and presentations in conferences and seminars, and any other actions for imposing coordinative facilitation that could eventually help towards CAS to thrive and potentially help us in our problem definition around cross-selling. The Divisional Director had agreed to this proposition as it very well aligned with the ongoing post-merger integration activities and senior leadership team expectations. It was decided that these administrative actions would be discussed and actions would be communicated during the next monthly meeting scheduled in a couple of days, and a proposal/memo would be shared with relevant team members, heads of other units as well as senior leadership team members.

2) We discussed our ongoing actions related to interactions with colleagues from other units and one of the sales managers shared his recent experience and challenge while trying to attend an industry exhibition together with a unit manager from another business area that served in a business domain similar to ours and had complementing customer interests. Despite of providing all the funding the unit manager from other business area did not show much interest to participate.

At this point the meeting facilitator proposed that we could leverage on Schein's ORJI model to reflect upon this unpredictable outcome. Our observations included lack of senior leadership support (administrative leadership), prior commitments and someone even suggested that the sales manager should have asked the unit manager to contribute towards the required funding as opposed to simply inviting him to join which could have drawn more commitment. One participant also probed the sales manager on his choice of communication medium and expressed his curiosity to conduct a discourse analysis. After some discussion we concluded that the chosen means of communicating through a formal email exchange was not a good choice made by the sales manager; he should have rather tried to meet up in person or tried to arrange a video

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conference, preferably involving other stakeholders who would appreciate this initiative.

3) Another participant highlighted the following excerpt from one of the recent publications on how the merger has been performing specifically for the Software Business Area (all learning set members belonged to Software Business Area) and he related this announcement to a good example of administrative leadership action but criticized the lack of specific expectations, measurement metrics and actions. The announcement being referred to read *"The merger is now in a closing phase and we are more and more entering the operational phase as one company and "business as usual". The temperature check status for Software is overall very positive and we are performing very well compared to the other Business Areas. We have the highest score on commitment, readiness to take on challenges, management support, level of trust in the company, and positive feelings overall. We have acceptable scores on the belief that "we work in a customer focused way," but we also realize that we can improve on certain aspects of this, like customer communication."*

We then brainstormed on how we could work towards having better success in our efforts and everyone seemed to agree upon having strong administrative leadership processes and actions in place. I volunteered to share some learnings and experiences from my Critical Action Learning projects where I faced similar challenges during the DBA modules, and I also volunteered to follow-up on the administrative leadership processes and actions discussed with the Divisional Director, and provide an update. As a separate action everyone agreed on paying attention and taking notes of their discourses while working on adaptive and enabling actions related to realizing synergies with colleagues from other units and business areas amidst the ongoing post-merger integration process with enhancing cross-selling being the primary area of focus.

As a part of our routine we evaluated the facilitator using Raelin's (2010, p.66-68) feedback template and like the previous meetings this was done as a team as opposed

to doing it individually. We then agreed upon the next meeting and we had a volunteer each for chairing/facilitating and scribing the next meeting.

My observations and reflections:

Schein's ORJI model helped in providing a structure in journalizing the events and made the reflection process more effective, which helped us in not jumping into conclusions, and provided a good means for capturing emotional responses without the need for lengthy exercises such as nine shapes or leveraging on SSM which in turn involves lengthy processes and jargons. Schein's ORJI model seemed to follow the ladder of inference as discussed in section 2.2 of the literature review Chapter wherein we were moving from data to reasoning to conclusions and actions, building upon reflection and learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.26) thereby facilitating 'double loop learning' (Argyris, 1994).

I was now more confident of CLT after speaking to the Divisional Director who agreed to establish some of the administrative actions that would be crucial for CLT to thrive within our organization. I think everyone in the team was now more confident about Action Learning/Research as an efficient collaborative process for working on common challenges and co-generating actionable knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

I reviewed some of the recent publications on merger updates, which helped me in understanding the ongoing activities at a larger (global) level within the organization, and made me realize the significance of organizational discourse amidst the ongoing changes. I made it a point to equip the facilitator for next meeting with some material related to organizational discourse with emphasis on how new organizational discourse especially in context of knowledge workers relies upon socially constructed realities.

10th Meeting 6th November 2014: Emphasis on Discourse Analysis and Sense-Making

4 out of 5 members could make it for this meeting and we started the meeting discussing sudden resignation of one of the Action Research team members who

worked as a Sales Manager. He was present for this meeting and serving a 2 month notice period; he however confirmed his willingness and availability to participate for the following Action Learning meetings as he was still committed to work on our Action Research/learning project benefitting from the process as an individual and professional. This further validated the fact that the Action Learning/research process was adding value to all participants at individual level.

The meeting began with the facilitator discussing Organizational Discourses and made use of the following table from Marshak and Grant (2008) in figure 23 below which illustrates the classical and new organizational discourses trends pre and post 1980s.

Classical OD (1950s onward)	New OD (1980s onward)
Based in classical science and modern thought and philosophy	Influenced by the new sciences and postmodern thought and philosophy
Truth is transcendent and discoverable; there is a single, objective reality	Truth is immanent and emerges from the situation; there are multiple, socially constructed realities
Reality can be discovered using rational and analytic processes	Reality is socially negotiated and may involve power and political processes
Collecting and applying valid data using objective problem-solving methods leads to change	Creating new mindsets or social agreements, sometimes through explicit or implicit negotiation, leads to change
Change is episodic and can be created, planned and managed	Change is continuous and can be self-organizing
Emphasis on changing behaviour and what one does	Emphasis on changing mindsets and how one thinks

Figure 43: Trends in Organizational Discourse (Marshak and Grant, 2008, p.8).

The purpose of this discussion was to have a sense of shared meaning of the discursive practices within our organization and to help us recognize between classical and new organizational discourses as we experienced and perceived them while working on our Action Learning project.

The meeting facilitator then touched upon the concepts of sense-making and sense-giving in organization studies, which involved a very high level discussion of Karl Weick's classical work in this area with emphasis on how individuals and groups can be affected by ambiguity and uncertainty during organizational changes. Such uncertainty could in turn impact change management initiatives such as ours. During further discussion on sense-making I highlighted some learning from my literature review process related to significance of sense-making and sense-giving of justice during post-

merger integrations as discussed by Monin et al (2013) which according to the authors is a fundamental building block for organizational mergers to succeed. The authors believe that organizational discourses can highly influence sense-making and sense-giving in a change context that is typically dictated by simultaneous emotional, cognitive, social, psychological, and political forces which according to Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer (2013) can be managed through implementing LiC underpinned by organizational discourses, which in turn calls upon stakeholders to undergo critical reflections about their worldviews thereby clearing their blind spots and learning traps.

The meeting facilitator then emphasized on how important it is for us to understand the underpinning emotional responses in ongoing discourses in order for us to reach a state of workable certainty while working on our Action Learning project. Emphasis was placed on interpersonal communications, sense-making and sense-giving while working with colleagues from other units, senior leadership team members, and even customers and regulatory bodies.

This theoretical discussion was followed by going through the actions from our previous Action Research meeting. I had followed up with our Divisional Director and provided some insights of the ongoing Action Learning meetings at work as well as my ongoing DBA Thesis work. The recommended actions such as encouraging all in our team to conduct knowledge sharing sessions, cross-referencing value addition in proposals going out to customers (both ways), conducting joint meetings with customers and possibly also with local regulatory authorities, participating and presenting in conferences together, and so on were discussed and refined during a monthly team meeting that was conducted in a couple of days after the previous Action Learning meeting. Everyone seemed quite receptive to the proposed administrative leadership actions especially taking into account the following excerpt from our CEO's recent announcement was highlighted during one of the previous Action Research team meetings *"We still have a lot to gain from cross-selling and collaborative business development across both service lines and business areas. This is an area where I expect your customer focus and foresight to generate results"*. Everyone reinforced their

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commitment to the actions and the Director confirmed all the required support from Unit Managers and Senior Leadership Team members.

While providing action updates, one of the sales managers discussed his experience related to collaboration with a Customer Service Manager from a different unit who had earlier joined him for a joint meeting with a customer. The Customer Service Manager from another unit had recently submitted his resignation and was due to join a competitor to the software product and services that was proposed by the sales manager. The Customer Service Manager from another unit had good relations with the customer representatives and could now potentially influence them to consider his future organization instead; especially considering that the typical sales cycles was 6-9 months. The sales manager's initial efforts were now jeopardized and there was lack of support from the Customer Service Manager for obvious reasons under an alibi of having to focus on a smooth handover. The sales manager commented *"I am relatively new in this region, and a lot seems to depend on strong relations with key customer representatives. I am afraid all the leg work I have done so far could be wasted as it is very likely that the Customer Service Manager will influence his contacts to consider the software product and services of the competitor organization he is now joining. Furthermore, he will have a sales oriented profile in his new job."*

At this point the meeting facilitator proposed that we make use of Schein's ORJI model which we had learned during the previous meeting as an effective framework for bringing out emotional responses and could possibly provide a structured approach for reflecting upon the unpredicted outcome and challenge faced by the sales manager. Contemplating on this situation using Schein's ORJI model, we recorded the following:

5) Observations: The Sales Manager had started to feel insecure about his sales opportunity. The Customer Service Managers' cooperation seemed to have ceased in light of his recent resignation.

6) Reactions and Feelings experienced: Insecurity, lack of cooperation and lack of commitment to make cross-selling work were some of the initial feelings

experienced by the Sales Manager. He wanted to react by notifying this change of behavior to the Customer Service Manager's Line Manager and request for the Customer Service Manager's continued support until the served his notice period.

7) Judgments and thoughts that emerged: Initially the judgments were based on the reactions and feelings noted above, but upon further reflection we started to discuss that this behavior is only natural for the Customer Service Manager in order to safeguard his personal interests considering his imminent transition. Furthermore, the Sales Manager should not think negative about the opportunity as he would probably not have had established contact and rapport with the customer representatives without the Customer Service Manager's support.

8) Intervention: It was proposed that the Sales Manager should consider this opportunity a result of inter-unit collaboration and continue to build relation with the customers' representatives while the Customer Service Manager was serving his notice period, or even without his support. It was also proposed that the Sales Manager should try and engage the customer in a pilot project as soon as possible in order to set his foot inside the door, and in order to build trust and confidence with the customer representatives.

Schein's ORJI model was once again deemed to be an effective process for reflecting on a problem situation. We conducted a quick discourse analysis of the above experience, and realized how reflecting upon situations through different perspectives can put a positive spin to seemingly despairing situations.

We convened the meeting agreeing to continue establishing synergies across colleagues from other units and business areas, this time focusing on the Administrative Leadership actions assigned to us during the monthly meeting, and we agreed to report how this is received by everyone and if these actions have any impact on facilitating CAS like behavior. Since there were no volunteers, I volunteered to chair/facilitate the next meeting and one of the sales managers volunteered to scribe the next meeting.

One of the participants mentioned that he would not be able to join for the next meeting due to planned holidays and it was mutually agreed that we would still go ahead with the meeting at same day and time following week.

My observations and reflections:

I reviewed my classroom discussions and notes from the Knowledge Management module which was one of the nine instructor led modules of my DBA programme, and I could relate our ongoing Action Learning discussions to the subjective aspects of management research which is typically characterized by organizational culture, regional and ethnical idiosyncrasies, leadership, and employee behavior. The philosophical foundations of our Action Research team seemed to be based in a combination of post-positivist approaches that leveraged on multiple perspectives of the world (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.155) and constructivism which is a result of negotiated views of realists and idealists who together argue that all human knowledge is warranted by social processes (p.56-57). Ours was a multiple paradigm approach that was providing alternative images of our organization (Hassard, 1991).

The CEO's announcement was highlighted a very appropriate time which catalyzed the administrative leadership actions and helped me in gaining further recognition and support for our ongoing Action Research project. It was interesting to note that Schein's ORJI model was deemed to be quick and efficient method for reflecting on a problem situation as opposed to SSM, which was without any doubt an effective methodology but involved relatively daunting processes and jargons.

Conscious of the timeline of my Thesis Action Research project and limited availability of participants and other resources at work, I was aiming to propose closing the second Action Research cycle during the following meeting. Based on my literature review themes and mention of LiC during this meeting, I decided to introduce the Action Learning set members to Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer's (2013) LiC as a part of introducing a theoretical concept during the following meeting. My choice for introducing LiC was also based on my notes from the

previous meetings wherein a couple of participants had made remarks about the recent resignations befitting a "crisis" (my emphasis) situation. Another objective for introducing LiC was also to cover research areas identified during the literature review process and attempt to address the gap of lack of empirical implementation of a relatively recent concept such as LiC through my ongoing research.

11th Meeting 13th November 2014: Introduction of LiC and Concluding Second Action Research Cycle

As the facilitator for the meeting I started the meeting with introducing the theoretical concept of LiC as a construct which has the potential to provide a fresh perspective to learning amidst difficult and turbulent times that may be perceived as "crisis". I highlighted upon the fresh perspective and new mode of learning proffered by LiC at individual, group and organization wide levels. I placed strong emphasis upon LiC's notion of crisis which according to founders of LiC should not be necessarily seen as a negative situation because effective learning can take place amidst a crisis situation. LiC encourages embracing tension and critique as key criteria for learning and is defined as an approach for learning amidst crisis through dynamic engagement with the unknowns wherein individuals and groups develop new understanding through experimentation with existing knowledge and letting go their biases in order to come up with improved actions that shape learning and eventually the crisis situation itself. The learning practices in LiC transcend across individual, group and organization wide levels and brings about learning practices that involve cognition, emotions, social and psychological engagement, and political dynamics. Individuals and groups involved in LiC take actions to change the status quo and are committed to learning in the process which leverages heavily on practical judgment or "Phronesis" with strong emphasis on shunning any biases or narcissist views.

<div align="right">Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer (2013)</div>

One of the Action Learning Participants commented that *"the concept of LiC sounds very similar to the Action Learning routine we have established during the past weeks"* to which I partly agreed. I highlighted that the key is for us not to be complacent and

blinded by the assumption that we now have all the knowledge to deal with our defined problems. We should rather aim to stay at edge of chaos and continue learning and improving, and a crisis situation provides us with such an environment that is desirable for effective learning. I also highlighted that LiC does not focus upon being adaptive such as in CAS which is often unpredictable, but LiC rather requires one to be reflexive and reflective by engaging in double loop learning.

We then focused upon actions from the previous meeting and learned that a few Administrative Leadership actions had made good progress which included making formal arrangements and securing the required support and funding for organizing cross unit lunch and learn sessions, and arranging joint trainings, but none of them had been implemented between the previous meeting and this meeting.

I suggested that we should conclude our second Action Learning cycle and focus upon stitching together all the theoretical constructs and concepts we have learned so far in the third and final Action Learning cycle. Everyone seemed to agree to this suggestion and we started to plan the third Action Research cycle schedule. We were soon approaching end of the year and most of us were planning to take holidays around Christmas. We therefore planned to have only four meetings for the third Action Research cycle such that we conclude all meetings before mid-December that would give us sufficient time for the end of year closing and reporting before most of us left for our planned holidays. I proposed to everyone that we could continue with the "core" Action Learning/Research at work after everyone is back from holidays, if everyone thinks it's a good idea to do so.

I then proposed that we should reflect upon on our learning from the first two Action Research cycles. Everyone agreed with the proposal and the overall feedback was very positive wherein everyone seemed to have not only learnt through the process but also enjoyed the journey so far, which is very well reflected in a comment from one of the participants *"The entire journey so far has been very rewarding for me not only at work but also personally. I think I have discovered a very effective process for working on real-life problems as a team, and I have learned to be more reflexive as an individual."*

Another participant commented *"We should make these Action Learning meetings a part of our work routine".*

We then carried out facilitator evaluation using Raelin's (2010, p.66-68) feedback template and like the previous meeting this was done as a team as opposed to doing it individually. We agreed upon the next meeting the following week wherein we would begin the third Action Research cycle that would primarily focus upon how the theoretical concepts learned so far have worked for us. I was nominated by a couple of participants to chair/facilitate the next meeting and I accepted to do so.

My observations and reflections:

We seemed to have a reasonable sense of achievement after the second Action Research Cycle and I could see each one of us developing remarkable Leadership and Action Research/Learning skills while engaging into double loop learning and metacognition (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). There was a fair degree of involvement and commitment from everyone involved and we had managed to maintain a good balance between learning, knowledge creation and solving workplace problems which is the characteristic of an efficient Action Research process according to Cassell and Johnson (2006).

My Thesis research was clearly anchored in a post-positivist approach leveraging on multiple empirical ways of understanding the world (Holt and Thorpe, 2008, p.155) underpinning constructivism which takes a middle way between realism and idealism arguing that all human knowledge is warranted by social processes (p.56-57). I found that "critical realism" was best suited to define the leadership that was emergent from our Action Research process wherein we focused upon changes in motion through "withness thinking" (Shotter, 2006) that had enabled us to influence organizational development while experiencing and analyzing the changes first-hand. We had been working as a part of the system and not as detached objective researchers as in typical positivist research approaches, or ignoring historical learning as in a typical social constructivist research approaches.

The entire process was underpinned by Antonacopoulou (2004), Argyris (1994) and Marshak and Grant's (2008) emphasis on practicing critical reflections, double loop learning and engaging in dialogic inquiry in a leaderful manner (Raelin, 2003). I was now hoping to leverage on the final round of Action Research to stitch together all of the research themes identified during the literature review process and findings and actions from the research process conducted during the past several months.

12th Meeting 20th November 2014: Beginning of Final Action Research Cycle and Shifting Focus to Thesis Action Research Objectives

This meeting marked the beginning of 3rd and final Action Learning / Research cycle and I had agreed to chair this session which also enabled me to set a precedent in order for me to be able to make the most of the remaining meetings towards addressing my Thesis research requirements. I had an honest and transparent discussion with the Action Research team members that I would require their support and cooperation in order to meet my academic goals in addition to working on our identified Action Research problems, which made me relate to the role-duality challenges discussed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), and how being street-smart (Roth et al, 2007, p.52) could help insider researchers to balance the core and Thesis Action Research projects while serving as a political entrepreneur (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.11). I clarified the key distinction between core and Thesis Action Research projects by leveraging upon the below illustration in figure 24 below as discussed by Coughlan and Brannick (2010, p.143).
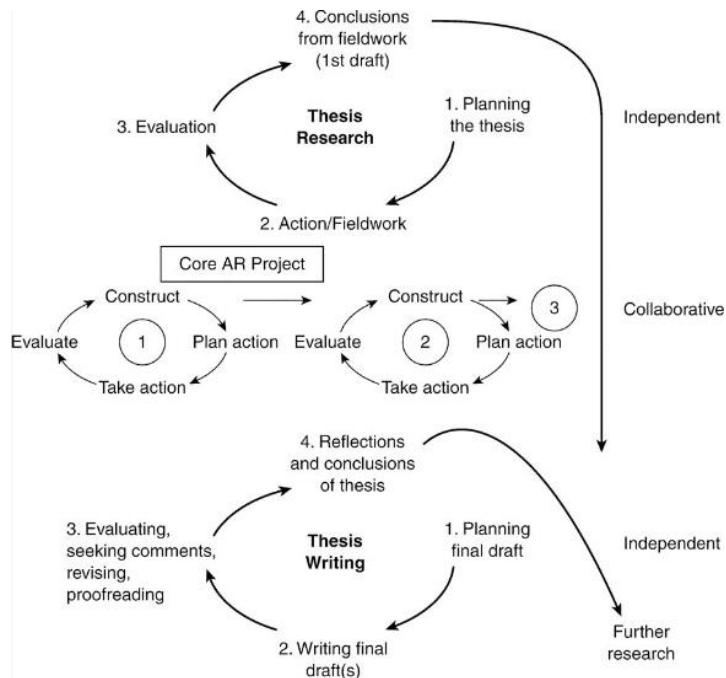
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Figure 44: Core and Thesis Action Research conceptual model (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.143).

All Action Learning team members confirmed their support towards my academic milestones and deadlines. I then outlined the following research topics that were developed following my research design, literature review and research methodology phases, and I emphasized the following areas that my Thesis research study aimed to focus upon with hope to address some existing gaps in literature and aspiring to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

1) Use of Complex Adaptive Systems to Foster Synergy Realizations during Organizational Change Management

2) Influence of Action Research on achieving Synergy Realizations during Post-merger Integrations

3) Effectiveness of Soft Systems Methodology Framework and Methodology in Context of Post-Merger Integrations

4) Use of Complexity Leadership Theory to Manage Synergy Realizations during Post-Merger Integration

5) Use of Learning in Crisis to foster synergy realization in post-merger integration situations.

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One of the Action Learning participants commented *"Had I not been involved in this Action Learning Set during the past months, these jargons would have sounded like Greek and Latin to me. I am quite impressed with how much management research theory we have learned about during the previous weeks while working on a real-life workplace problem".* Another participant added *"Referring to your research themes and the management research concepts and methodologies it is quite amazing to see how much of management research knowledge we could actually leverage upon in our practice and put to effective use while working on our identified problems. We should continue referring to the vast ocean of management research theory that's available in various books and journals."*

I proposed that we could try to find out if our ongoing research has had any impact on the above constructs. We also agreed to work upon the actions agreed during the previous Action Research cycle in parallel. One of the participants proposed that we could streamline the process of reflecting upon each of these research themes by defining a method or structure in order to optimize our limited time. To this I proposed that we could make use of Schein's ORJI model which all of us were familiar by now, and was very well received by all participants during recent meetings. One of the research studies conducted by Haalien, Edseth and Stensby (2004) which intended towards highlighting the significance of critical reflection as an andragogy (adult learning) method for daily learning and enhancing work experience had made effective use of Schein's ORJI model for facilitating structured reflections, which validated leveraging on ORJI model beyond using the model for reflecting upon unpredictable outcomes. Furthermore the model is fairly straight forward and simple to follow and all participants seemed to agree with this suggestion.

We then began applying the ORJI model to the first theme "Use of Complex Adaptive Systems to Foster Synergy Realizations during Organizational Change Management" and following reflections were captured during the discussions.

(O) What did we observe?

Complex adaptive systems did indeed foster synergy realizations. One of the participants discussed the example of how reshuffling of team members helped us to connect various teams and capabilities from across geographical locations and business areas. Another participant commented that the continuity of our Action learning meetings and associated actions is also a good example of CAS leading towards synergy realization.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?
The initial emotional reaction was that of confusion and skepticism, but gradually our hope of solving bigger problems together took over and emotions related to building trust and new relations were emergent.

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?
Resistance to any change is human nature but we had to get along with the ongoing changes that nurtured complex adaptive systems. Once synergies were emergent, we could leverage upon them and realize higher potential not only towards adding more value for customers but also enriching our individual and team level work experiences.

(I) What is our intervention of what can be done?
We discussed that we could continue to benefit from the adaptations and new relations achieved through CAS and continue realizing synergies.

We then went around the table to discuss action status and any challenges and/or learning and one of the participants who worked as a sales manager raised a concern around lack of cooperation from some of the new colleagues based in another continent in a trans-continental opportunity he was working upon. This was a good example where CAS was not working as required and the sales manager was not receiving the expected level of cooperation and synergy from some of the new colleagues in another geographical division, and commented that things could have been different if there was no reshuffling in the management team. After reflecting upon this incident, we thought of

leveraging on Complexity Leadership Theory and Learning in Crisis and then come back with an update during the following meeting.

Some of the other action updates included successful lunch and learn sessions and a couple of successful joint customer meetings. There was also a mention of a successful joint proposal and external seminar, all of which validated favorable outcome of our Action Research process being able to realize synergies amidst ongoing post-merger integration changes.

We ended the meeting and it was unanimously decided that I should facilitate rest of the meetings as these meetings would involve my Thesis work. We also decided to not evaluate meeting chairman/facilitator during the last Action Learning cycle as everyone had the opportunity to facilitate and receive feedback for improvement during previous meetings. The next meeting was scheduled for the following week and we concluded our meeting aiming to cover validation of CLT and LiC, and include an update from the non-cooperation in trans-continental opportunity incident highlighted during today's meeting.

My observations and reflections:

Referring to the researcher and intended self-study correlation as illustrated in Coghlan and Brannick's (2010, p.103) graph in figure 23 below, I could sense that we were transitioning from quadrant 3 wherein I was functioning as a self-motivated researcher working on my DBA Thesis to quadrant 4 wherein we were experiencing a large scale transformational change and indulging in double loop learning, well at least within the influence sphere of our Action Learning team.
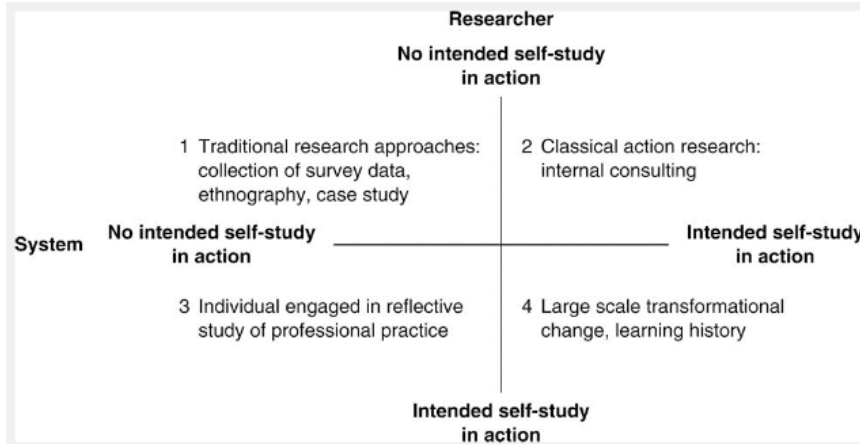
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Figure 45: Researcher and System Focus (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.103).

I felt as if I had successfully fulfilled the internal Action Researcher criteria by demonstrating that good research is for me, for us and them, through synthesis of first, second and third person research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.149). I was successfully able to highlight some of the red-hot issues in our organization (Bjorkman and Sundgren, 2005) and move to quadrant 4 (refer figure 23 above) by gaining the necessary resources and access to information. We now had the required commitment to continue with our core Action Research and I had gained support from my colleagues to help me with realizing the objectives of my Thesis Action Research process, which in turn helped me to avoid getting trapped into eating the forbidden fruit trap as discussed by Moore (2007) wherein I could have been pulled between core job responsibilities and pursuing my academic deadlines. The path ahead now appeared much clearer to me and I could see light at end of the tunnel considering my Thesis objectives.

13th Meeting 27th November 2014: Discussion on impact of CLT and LiC

As agreed during the previous meeting, we started this meeting with discussing how CLT and LiC have made an impact to our Action Research problem. We made use of Schein's ORJI model for reflection.

I provided a quick recap of CLT and LiC concepts and how these were used during our Action Research project which was followed by a discussion of these concepts using ORJI.

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Discussion around "Use of Complexity Leadership Theory to Manage Synergy Realizations during Post-Merger Integration"

(O) What did we observe?

Complexity Leadership Theory, especially the Administrative Leadership actions such as motivating individuals and teams to organize Lunch and Learn sessions, participating in joint events and meetings, inclusion of cross business area capabilities in proposals and tender responses, and so on, did indeed make notable difference to foster more Adaptive Leadership functions. CLT had indeed helped in boosting CAS networks at least within the area of influence of our Action Learning team.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?

The Administrative Leadership Actions appeared as additional work initially and there was some resistance to perform these additional tasks over and above our normal job expectations. However, once we included these actions into our routine, we were surprised with the results and realized how small initiatives could bring unexpected favorable results that added value to our primary KPIs. For example, one of the sales managers who had organized a Lunch and Learn session along with several colleagues that had recently relocated into his office building from other offices as a result of the merger integration discussed an unexpected outcome during the meeting. He mentioned that *"It was amazing that one of the sales managers from another Business Area and region asked me to share with him a few slides for an upcoming strategic meeting with C-Level executives of all significant Maritime companies in South Asian region as he considered what I shared today could add value to these VVIP customer representatives, and in turn make him and our organization look good during his presentation."*

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?

The Administrative Leadership actions had direct impact on our KPIs as these were measurable actions that influenced our individual as well as unit level performance

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assessments and appraisals. We therefore included these actions in addition to our day to day work. After realizing some successes as a result of CLT oriented actions we were more enthusiastic of the newly established routines and relations, which most certainly enhanced CAS as well as Synergy Realizations amidst the ongoing post-merger integration process.

(I) What is our intervention of what can be done?
CLT can be leveraged upon not only for facilitating successful Synergy Realizations but also for continued benefits through CAS that can emerge and be fostered through successful implementation of CLT.

Discussion around "Use of Learning in Crisis in post-merger integration situations"

(O) What did we observe?
The post-merger integration period was indeed perceived as a turbulent or crisis situation by most participants, particularly due to high attrition rate either due to internal transfers or resignations, which is an expected outcome in most merger situations as also discussed by Iverson and Pullman (2000), Karitzki and Brink (2003) and Krug and Hegarty (2001). The reflective approach recommended by LiC was effective in stimulating "learning" and perceiving crisis situations conducive for learning.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?
With the high level of uncertainty and fast pace of changes, the emotional reaction was that of "one must change or perish", and LiC provided us with high hope for change and adaptation by not giving into external pressure but rather leveraging on our own reasoning as individuals and teams. Furthermore we were able to choose our own pace of learning by leveraging on LiC. The LiC approach also provided us with the much required support system amidst what was being perceived as a crisis situation. We observed that participants were more open to learning when they came together as a group and followed a structured methodical approach.

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(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?

We engaged into group reflections on periodic basis and observed that the LiC process had helped us to learn from our own actions, come up with better action plans and then reflect and learn again from our actions, thus helping us to engage into double loop learning. The LiC process also enhanced our interactions thereby helping in synergy realizations during the post-merger integration phase.

(I) What is our intervention of what can be done?

We realized that the structured Action Learning/Research process that we were engaged into as a group encouraged us to experiment and improvise. We discussed that it could be beneficial for us if we could come up with actions for getting better at juggling with multiple tasks while being in a state of flux that's typical to LiC contexts.

We were running late than the scheduled time and moved on to discussing updates on actions. One participant commented *"I think some of the action updates were discussed while discussing CLT and LIC".* Another participant expressed his disapproval of the third Action Research cycle and commented *"I think we are moving focus to more theoretical foundations which is good for our personal development and for developing our vocabulary around our work related problems but I think our progress on core Action Learning has slowed down during the third cycle".* I discussed this concern and clarified that I was indeed obliged by the team in taking out the time for contributing towards my academic goals, and agreed that our core Action Learning project should not suffer. I challenged the participants that we all had developed sufficient skills to drive the core Action Learning project and urged everyone to not lose focus of our core Action Learning project as the Thesis Action Research project was only my responsibility and should not concern the participants. I also emphasized that the validation of theoretical concepts we were going through during the third Action Research cycle should only be perceived as a means to revise these concepts and reflect upon how these concepts can help us while working on our chosen Action Learning problem, and how can we leverage better on these concepts.

We then concluded the meeting with a schedule to meet up the following week and agreed to reflect upon "Influence of Action Research on achieving Synergy Realizations during post-merger Integrations". As the facilitator for next meetings of the third Action Research cycle, I assured everyone that we will be spending more time on discussing actions.

My observations and reflections:

My role-duality was posing dilemma between me being pulled into core job responsibilities as an employee working on the core Action Research process and fulfilling my academic interests/deadlines. I reflected upon Roth et al's (2007) recommendation of learning how to manage and shuffle between multiple roles and using multiple roles as an asset (p.51) which helped me to overcome some of my dilemmas and encouraged me to continue with the 3rd Action Learning/research cycle without losing focus on my Thesis Action Research work. I had reasonable success in justifying the Action Learning/research at workplace as an "organizational development project" which was also validated by one of the participants in today's meeting.

We only had two more weeks to go with the planned meetings and I wanted to maintain the momentum. At the same time I was trying to be sensitive about the feelings of my colleagues involved in the core Action Research, especially considering the high degree of changes we were experiencing due to the post-merger integration processes.

14th Meeting 4th December 2014: Discussion on impact of Action Research on Research Problem

We had now entered the last month of the year and one of the participants commented during beginning of the meeting *"Since most of us in the Action Learning team are working in sales oriented roles, this is a crucial month for us to meet our yearend goals and deadlines. The Action Research process has without any doubt helped us to meet our goals but I would appreciate if we can stay focused during our last two scheduled meetings and optimize our time, and perhaps also use these meetings to brainstorm on meeting our targets as a group."* Since I was chairing/facilitating this meeting, I commented that this is an excellent feedback and the suggestion will be definitely incorporated.

We then moved on to discussing "Influence of Action Research on achieving Synergy Realizations during Post-merger Integrations", and made use of Schein's ORJI model for reflecting like the previous meetings.

(O) What did we observe?

Action learning and Action Research processes were known but not practiced earlier by most of the participants and everyone seemed to appreciate actions, learning as well as the research oriented processes. One of the participants commented *"I have observed that besides the obvious benefits of the Action Research process, the routine we have established has united us as a group and most definitely helped us to identify synergies within our group, in addition to identifying the intended cross unit and cross business area synergies"*. Another participant commented *"I agree and would like to add that these processes not only helped us to identify synergies but also helped us to leverage on these synergies and continue to nurture our newly discovered symbiotic relations"*.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?

When discussing our emotional reaction to the observations one of the participants commented *"I felt like we have a good support system during uncertain and stressful times amidst post-merger integration related changes"*. Another colleague agreed and commented *"We could indeed talk about our problems and worries without hesitation and the Action Learning group provided us with not only the required sounding board but also helped us to find some pragmatic solutions to our problems"*.

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?

One of the participant commented *"Action research has provided us with the much required reflections in a structured and organized manner that helped us to take actions on our problems and then learn from these actions"*. Another participant added *"I agree that Action Research process helped us to engage into activities that in turn helped with synergy realizations but the influence of actions and learning per se was only confined to our Action Learning group. Other processes and methodologies such as CAS, CLT and SSM were in fact the real drivers for facilitating synergy realizations. I found some of the methods and techniques such as situational leadership theory discussed during our Action Learning process very effective in my practice."* The Action Learning process had veritably helped us to be more reflexive at individual and group levels, and enabled us to work more efficiently.

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(I) What is our intervention of what can be done?

We discussed and concluded that although the impact of Action Learning and Action Research had direct influence on the participants' personal development, the actions carried out as a part of the Action Research project had a strong impact on synergy realizations. We considered discussions and implementation of other concepts such as CAS, CLT, SSM, and LiC as a part of the actions from the Action Research project. Furthermore, the post-merger integration process fuelled the required energy to drive the Action Learning process. We agreed to continue benefitting from the established Action Research routines while working on our current and future workplace problems.

After going through the ORJI model process for Action Research theme, we opened up to discuss any challenges and/or learning from the ongoing actions from previous meetings. One of the Sales Manager discussed a dilemma of a Sales Representative in his region getting demotivated due to ongoing changes wherein he was asked to give up responsibility for certain portfolio of products he was handling and rather focus more on some other product portfolios. Reflecting on this problem, one of the participants recalled Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson's (2008) Situational Leadership theory which was well received by rest of the participants. After reflecting upon the Situational Leadership theory in relation to the situation, we positioned the Sales Representative in question in the performance readiness area of R3 i.e. Able but Insecure or Unwilling which required Participatory Leadership style according to the Situational Leadership theory that required the Sales Manager to get engaged into supportive behavior through high degree of two way communication, collaboration, encouragement, facilitation and showing commitment, all of which can be summarized as High Relation and Low Task behavior. The Sales Manager responded saying *"This is exactly what I needed to be reminded of, and I think I have been enacting high task low relationship behavior instead of the desirable low task high relationship behavior"*. The Sales Manager then agreed to implement the outcome of our discussions and share his observations during the next meeting. There were some more positive updates on successful cross-unit and

cross-business area collaboration through joint customer meetings and better knowledge sharing through lunch and learn and other organized meetings/forums.

Conscious of time, we ended the meeting with plan to validate the only undiscussed theme around "Effectiveness of Soft Systems Methodology in Context of Post-Merger Integrations" during the next meeting.

My observations and reflections:

I felt more confident of the benefits of insider Action Research as a means to solve real-life workplace problems and learn from the experience. I also felt more confident and experienced in dealing with challenges related to internal Action Research within my organization. It was obvious that the process had been very effective in influencing all three audiences i.e. my own personal growth as a researcher and practitioner, learning and growth for my colleagues who participated in the research process and finally contribution to my organization by adding value to solving real-life organizational challenges. I as well as my colleagues who had been involved in the Action Research project seemed to have developed strong vocabulary, knowledge and skills to discuss organizational issues and frame them in terms of Action Research.

Furthermore, I was hopeful that my ongoing Thesis project would enable me to contribute to the body of knowledge in my research area as per the insider Action Research expectations discussed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.5-6).

15th Meeting 11th December 2014: Discussion on Effectiveness of SSM and Concluding the Final Action Research Cycle

All participants were present for this meeting, which was supposed be the final meeting of our Action Research project, at least as far as my Thesis Action Research was concerned. We had scheduled to discuss "Effectiveness of Soft Systems Methodology in Context of Post-Merger Integrations". Since it had been a few weeks from when we discussed SSM, I made use of the following illustration from Checkland and Poulter (2010, p.241) in figure 26 below to recapitulate the concept of SSM.

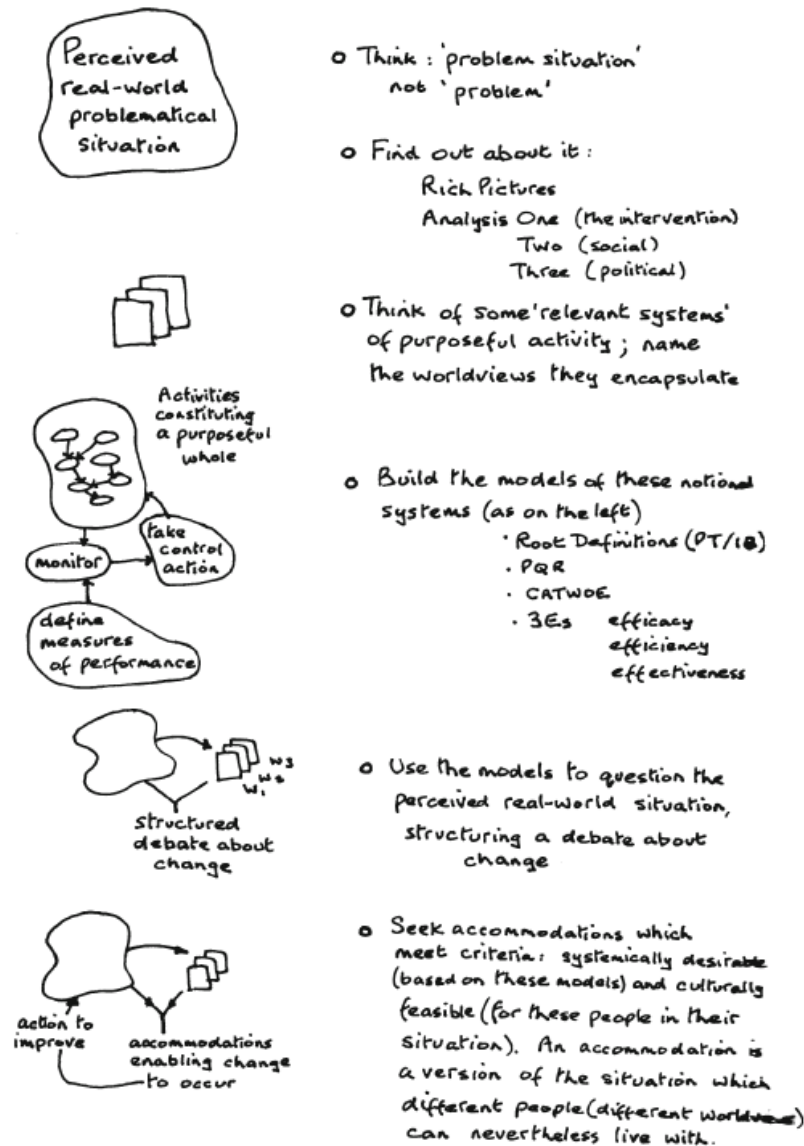DBA Thesis, University of Liverpool, Student ID: H00025015

Figure 46: Outline of SSM (Checkland and Poulter, 2010, p.241)

We then made use of Schein's ORJI model to reflect, which was by now a very familiar routine during our third Action Learning/Research cycle.

(O) What did we observe?

We observed that SSM is indeed an effective methodology for helping people to solve complex organizational problems where one is not sure of the basic what, why, how and when in relation to the problem situations. There were several stakeholders involved

with our Action Research problem and all of them had different perspectives or worldviews of the same problem situation. For e.g. the leadership team was concerned about making the merger succeed, the HR team was concerned of harmonizing the policies and processes of the two legacy organizations and their various business units, IT team members were concerned about optimizing the IT platform and infrastructure, several middle level managers were concerned about losing their jobs due to abundance of similar competencies after the merger, and customers were concerned about how the merger would affect their ongoing and future business relations. SSM provided us with an organized way of thinking and combining various worldviews, and the Rich Picture in particular was a very effective tool for visualizing the various factors affecting our problem situation such as those affected by the problem situation, those influencing the problem situation, the processes and systems involved, and various contextual elements affecting our problem situation.

(R) What was our emotional reaction to what we observed?

One of the participant commented "*SSM was quite overwhelming for me to begin with due to the unfamiliar jargons such as worldviews, PQR, CATWOE, 3E's and so on. However the methodology itself provides an effective structure to work around messy problems that are hard to define especially amidst a dynamic post-merger integration situation such as ours wherein we are exposed to constant changes*." Another participant echoed this feedback and added "*I think we were following the SSM process through the Action Learning and Action Research methods, and in my opinion SSM is only an extension to these methods. Although the methodology may sound theoretical with all the jargons, it is however very effective for solving complex real-life problems with a pragmatic approach*."

(J) How did we judge and assess our observations?

SSM provided us with an organized way of understanding where we are with the given problem situation, where we could be and what actions can we take in the given situation. The people oriented nature of this methodology also helped us to strengthen relations and consolidating various worldviews together increased our acceptance of

each other's' perspectives and priorities. We realized that problems are interrelated and it's important to take a people-centered holistic view considering various worldviews.

We also judged that we didn't spend considerable time with the SSM process and thought that we needed better understanding of the methodology itself, since we had discussed and implemented SSM only during one of the meetings.

(I) What is our intervention of what can be done?
We realized that SSM can be used effectively to provide a reliable structure for working on complex problems enabling us to understand and work on the problem situation in an organized manner. SSM can also help to bridge the gap between people and systems thereby facilitating resolving of complex and wicked problems, conflicts and/or issues. We decided to work upon gaining further understanding of SSM process and attempt to leverage on the process better in future while working on our core Action Learning project and future Action Learning/research projects.

The outcome of our discussion from applying ORJI model to the discussion confirmed that Soft Systems Methodology is an efficient framework and methodology for achieving desirable synergy realizations during post-merger integrations. We however felt that we had not leveraged on full potential of SSM during our Action Learning project due to limited time and experience with the SSM methodology.

Since this was the last scheduled meeting for the Thesis Action Learning/Research meetings, we took some time to go around the table and seek everyone's feedback on the entire journey so far. One of the participant commented *"This has been a great learning and development experience for me, which has been a great blend of theoretical knowledge and practical Action Learning"*. Another participant added *"It's also been a great opportunity to be a part of a doctoral level Action Research project, and at the same time create great bonds and synergies with colleagues at work, both old and new"*. All participants seemed to be convinced that participating in the research activity helped them towards their personal development, especially research and

leadership skills, and confirmed that this also helped them to succeed with their responsibilities at work especially considering the ongoing post-merger integration related changes. One participant mentioned that he would like to make Action Learning meetings a regular routine and continue implementing some of the theories, methods and methodologies learned during this project. Everyone agreed with the proposal and decided to establish a routine continuing with Action Research and Action Learning at our workplace.

I thanked everyone for their involvement and valuable contribution towards my research project and we ended the meeting with a small celebration.

My observations and reflections:

I think we successfully managed to complete the desired Action Learning/research cycles which I think made valuable contribution towards working on our defined workplace problem as well as my Thesis research.

During the research I was able to avoid using overtly academic language and relate organizational issues to the theoretical concepts introduced to the Action Learning team which according to Roth et al (2007, p.57) is a good technique to receive participant cooperation while conducting an insider Action Research project. My next step was to focus upon the academic requirements for submission of my doctoral Thesis for which I had to review all the artefacts gathered during the research process and start compiling a Thesis document with active discussions and guidance from my Thesis Supervisor.