

Tine Murphy

Sense from Silence  
– a Basis for Organised Action?

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How do Sensemaking Processes with Minimal Sharing  
Relate to the Reproduction of Organised Action?

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# SENSE FROM SILENCE - A BASIS FOR ORGANISED ACTION?

How do Sensemaking Processes with Minimal Sharing  
Relate to the Reproduction of Organised Action?

Ph.D. Dissertation by Tine Murphy, 2009  
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To Brian Murphy

and our children Liv and Thomas.

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# Guide to the Reader

Chapter 1, the Integrative Chapter, contains a synthesis of the whole thesis combined with a final discussion of the results. In this manner Chapter 1 builds on the whole of the subsequent thesis. It is, however, presented first because for most readers the Integrative Chapter gives a sufficient overview of the body of research contained in the thesis.

The reader looking for an even briefer introduction is advised to read the summary in Chapter 9 or the Danish summary in Chapter 10.

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# 1 Integrative Chapter

## 1.1 Introduction

The thesis examines an under-explored area in sensemaking theory. The theme for the thesis is to examine the relation between sensemaking and the reproduction of organised action. Existing sensemaking theory focusses on how shared organising processes support the reproduction of organised action (Smircich & Morgan, 1986; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Weick, 2004; Maitlis, 2005; Donnellon et al, 1986). This thesis' contribution is to examine sensemaking processes which do *not* spring from shared articulation within the formal organisation and these processes' relation to the reproduction of organised action.

In the thesis the phenomenon is illustrated with a case consisting of a younger voluntary organisation (called the Network Group) whose purpose is to provide tuition for children with another ethnic background than Danish. The organisation survives and meets its purpose. This, however, takes place largely without the voluntary tutors talking with each other to make sense of their shared action. This falls outside the expectations produced in the greater part of existing sensemaking theory.

Apart from the relevancy for organisation theory, the interest in the phenomenon - organised action with limited shared sensemaking and limited shared articulation – comes from a hypothesis that actors in late-modernity will be less inclined to invest in shared sensemaking because they zap between organisational contexts (Bauman 2000, Beck 1986, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002 and Bellah et al 1985). This is a phenomenon which has drawn particular attention within the Danish voluntary sector in the last 10 years (Isen<sup>1</sup>, 1999; Goul Andersen et al, 2000; Hermansen & Stavnsager, 2000; Stavnsager & Jantzen, 2000; Christensen & Isen, 2001; Børch & Israelsen, 2001; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002; Nielsen et al 2004; Murphy 2004). Similar concerns in the U. S. are most notably expressed by Putnam (1990) in the book “Bowling Alone”. In Denmark the phenomenon is linked to perceived difficulties with filling positions at boards of voluntary organisations with younger volunteers.

---

1 Formerly Tine Isen, now Tine Murphy.

The original research question for the thesis has been:

*How are sensemaking processes with limited articulated interaction related to the reproduction of organised action?*

The research question springs from that sensemaking theory expects that sensemaking processes about organised actions which are unfolded through shared articulation will strengthen various aspects of the organised actions.

More specifically it is primarily through two mechanisms that shared sensemaking is expected to support shared action: through increased *coordination* and through increased *motivation*<sup>2</sup>. While developing the concept of double interacts with Bougon in 1986 Weick argued that it is when cause maps are *coordinated* that organised action is reproduced. Maitlis (2005) and Smircich & Morgan (1982) also underline how shared articulated sensemaking processes are requisite for sufficient *coordination* of shared action.

In the analysis of the Mann Gulch disaster (1993) Weick expands on how *motivation* to act depends on sensemaking processes. In the Mann Gulch case the construction of clear roles motivated actors to continue to act. Maitlis (2005), Smircich & Stubbart (1985) and Donnellon et al (1986) uncover how shared talk is crucial for shared action because shared talk generates *motivation* to act.

In the case organisation there is only limited shared sensemaking through shared articulation<sup>3</sup>. So we cannot expect sufficient motivation and coordination of the actors' acts to spring from shared articulation. The mechanisms which have been identified by other theorists are seemingly not present here. Therefore it is surprising that the actors are sufficiently motivated to continue to act and that the actions are sufficiently coordinated that the organised act is not considered illegitimate. The aim of the thesis is to examine the mechanism which enable the reproduction of organised action in the case organisation in spite of the limited level of shared talk. The thesis focusses particularly on how the two aspects (motivation and coordination) which have already been identified as prerequisite for organised action are reproduced in the absence of shared articulation.

---

2 As an extension of the focus on sensemaking processes motivation is defined as rendering ones own actions sensible.

3 In order to avoid linguistic monotony the thesis uses "shared articulated interaction", "shared articulation", and "shared talk" as inter-changeable synonyms.

The original research question is furthermore revised so it becomes clearer that this is a thesis about sensemaking processes and not taken-for-granted routine actions. The two cases which are analysed are cases of action in spite of that the actors experience something which trigger sensemaking. In other words they experience cognitive dissonance in connection with the actions (Weick, 1995). This indicates that they are non-routine actions. Already in 1958 Simon and March thoroughly examined the mechanisms which can underpin the reproduction of routine actions. These mechanisms could explain how routine actions can be reproduced without shared articulation. The thesis, however, seeks to explain actions which cannot be performed by solely drawing on taken-for-granted routines. Simon & March (1958) characterised actions which were not routine actions as problem-solving actions. With the introduction of the garbage-can model (Cohen et al, 1972) problem-defining behaviour was included in the range of non-routine actions.

This integrative chapter will through a synthesis of the voluminous thesis bring the discussion of the results further. As a starting point for this a new research question is formulated. It more explicitly addresses the surprising generation of motivation and coordination in spite of limited shared articulation in connection with sensemaking about non-routine actions:

*How do mutually dependent actors in the same formal organisation become motivated to continue to perform coordinated non-routine actions when shared articulated sensemaking is limited?*

With this research question it becomes clearer that:

- The thesis addresses the question of *motivation* as a precondition for reproduction of organised action.
- The examined cases are not cases of individual actions but cases of actions amongst mutually dependent actors who therefore need an element of *coordination* between them. They build on each others' actions. Participation in a specific manner from a certain number of actors are prerequisite for that the activity as a whole can continue.

- The thesis examines the reproduction of *non-routine actions* which therefore entail a sensemaking process. It is this sensemaking process which is normally assumed to unfold through shared articulation.
- One of the mechanisms which the thesis identifies as underpinning the reproduction of organised action is contingent on that the case organisation is a *formal organisation*.

The thesis focusses on articulated sensemaking and actions amongst tutors who define themselves as belonging to the same formal organisation (the Network Group). There are several reasons to focus on actors within the same formal organisation; both Smircich & Morgan (1982) and Smircich & Stubbart (1985) who contributed to the subsequent emphasis on shared sensemaking in organisations examined cases of formal organisations. More recent studies, however, have a higher degree of an open-systems approach. Rouleau (2005) includes the interaction between middle managers and customers in what affects the consolidation of organisational change. I think, however, that a focus on the formal organisation is justified by that managers will still have a tendency to emphasise the boundaries of the formal organisation and to focus on what they can achieve within those boundaries.

There is also an empirically founded reason why the formal organisation delimits the empirical study. Actors in the case themselves emphasise the formal organisation. The thesis presents two empirical cases of the reproduction of actions in spite of disturbances. They are the reproduction of tutoring in spite of noise and the reproduction of having meetings in spite of low attendance. In both cases the tutors construct the actions as something which is undertaken by tutors. Tutors being those who have registered themselves as tutors in the Network Group. They were the ones who had access to meetings and they were the ones who tutored. The parents of the children who received tuition did not participate in the meetings and neither did the children. The consultant from the DRC participated in a number of meetings but did not have the right to vote and she never tutored.

The focus on the reproduction of shared action and the degree of shared talk within the formal organisation has not excluded analysing the interaction tutors has with stakeholders external to the organisation. This interaction represents part of the explanation why action could be reproduced without shared talk amongst the tutors. It constitutes an important point for voluntary organisations that the



reproduction of their activities can be stabilised through interaction with their recipients.

## **1.2 The Presentation of the Cases and their Validity**

The two empirical cases are cases of organised action which is reproduced in spite of cognitive dissonance and limited shared articulation. The cases have a number of characteristics which make them suitable for exploring the research question. The first case examines which mechanisms encourage enough tutors continue to come to tutor in spite of a perceived high level of noise so that the activity survives. Noise are the sounds the children make when they play or engage in other activities instead of doing their home work. The second case examines the reproduction of having meetings legitimately in spite of the repeated frustrations with the low number of tutors who attend meetings. In both cases of organised action (tutoring and having meetings) the tutors are provoked to engage in sensemaking processes in order to be able to continue participating. This means they are cases of non-routine actions.

The empirical data is constituted by two cases where organised action rather than individual action is reproduced and where sensemaking takes place in connection with these non-routine actions. This is because the actors are mutually dependent on each other. During tuition they are dependent on that a sufficient number of other tutors show up. If this does not happen there is a risk that the children experience that they get so little help that they will stop coming and thereby fundamentally undermine the reproduction of tuition. Having meetings in a legitimate manner is essential to the survival of the formal organisation. The survival of the organisation depends on that someone “acts” on behalf of the organisation and maintain relations with a number external stakeholders. If these relations are not maintained this too can undermine the survival of the formal organisation. It is two cases of mutually dependent actors who reproduce organised action. The mutual dependency implies an element of coordination between the actors: I will do this if you do that, or I can only continue to do this if you continue to do that.

The analysis builds on two cases rather than one in order to increase the richness of data obtained. Although the two cases are similar in the aspects outlined above they provide a richer insight by focussing on different aspects of organised sensemaking and action. Both cases apply an analytical strategy of paying attention to identity formation and the behavioural implications as a central aspect of the relation between organised sensemaking and action. The case of tutoring in spite of noise is used to explore the role of interaction with external stakeholders in sensemaking and action when shared sensemaking is limited. Whereas the case of having meetings in spite of low attendance also makes it possible to examine mechanisms which explain why the formal organisation does not move towards generating more shared meaning over time.

## **1.3 The Main Conclusions**

The thesis identifies a number of mechanisms which enable actors to generate sufficient motivation and coordination of organised activities. In the noise case it was discovered that actors make sense of the joint actions through an actualisation of multiple frames of understanding with associated behavioural implications. The lack of shared talk creates space for that the diverse behavioural implications can co-exist without articulated conflicts between the tutors. The tutors generate motivation to continued participation through sensemaking about self and the activity where they enact a range of, for them, meaningful contexts for the activity. These diverse contexts are rarely negotiated between tutors.

In the meetings case it is found that actors have a tendency to make sense about their co-actors which affirms their own patterns of action. This does not happen because actors have spoken to one and another but because they fundamentally trust their co-actors. There is nothing in the cases which indicates that shared talk has to be a precondition for mutual trust. On the contrary actors create so divergent sense of their participation that the mutual trust would be likely to be undermined if they were ever confronted. The loose coupling between actors (limited communication and thereby limited transparency) seems to support rather than hinder trust in co-actors (and the predictability of their actions). Both in the noise case and in the meetings case there are indication that ambiguity facilitates rather

than hinders the reproduction of coordinated action amongst mutually dependent actors who enact ambiguous contexts.

In the meetings case the sensemaking processes about own and co-actors' actions is analysed as a process of adoption of roles and ascription of roles to co-actors. This did not happen as a result of shared talk but as a distributed and multiple process. The thesis finds that the adoption and ascription of roles supports the reproduction of organised action and is driven by:

- the actors identity formation across time and interactive arenas
- distributed and fragmented interaction within the formal organisation
- institutionalised frames of understandings

In the meetings case it turns out that the construction of own and co-actors' roles is not so much fuelled by shared words but rather extracted cues<sup>4</sup> of various kinds taken to indicate co-actors actions. Seemingly the loose coupling and associated ambiguity in sensemaking in the two cases facilitate rather than hinder shared action.

## 1.4 The Contributions

By being a detailed longitudinal empirical study of sensemaking processes the thesis constitutes an empirical contribution:

”Considering the modest amount of empirical work on sensemaking that has accumulated so far, the question of ”future directions” pretty much takes care of itself.” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005:417).

The thesis constitutes furthermore an empirical contribution by uncovering a case of sensemaking processes which only to a limited extent takes place through shared articulation within a formal organisation.

The thesis extends the explanatory power of sensemaking analysis into contexts where actors only have limited shared articulation. The thesis makes a theoretical contribution by highlighting that ambiguous sense can support the reproduction of organised action under certain circumstances.

---

4 “Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring.” (Weick, 1995:50”).

## 1.4.1 Key Theoretical Constructs and Concepts

The thesis defines sensemaking as processes of creating meaning with 7 properties: grounded in identity construction, largely retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focussed on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick 1995).

In the empirical cases which Weick has analysed (Weick, 1993, Weick & Roberts, 1993, Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) organised action emerges as action which is undertaken by members of the same formal organisation. These are the actions whose reliability in the face of challenges Weick has analysed. To be able to perform the assessment of the adaptability and resilience of the organisation he refers to the goals of the formal organisation and survival.

This thesis also examines the reproduction of actions characterised by being undertaken by mutually dependent actors within the same formal organisation. They are coordinated actions which are reproduced in spite of experienced challenges. The formal organisation displays a resilience in spite of limited articulated sensemaking processes amongst actors in the organisation.

As mentioned on page 2 the revised research question is: *How do mutually dependent actors in the same formal organisation become motivated to reproduce coordinated non-routine actions when shared articulated sensemaking is limited?*

The explicitation of motivation and coordination as key factors in the relationship between sensemaking and actions is inspired by the sensemaking theory which are the springboard for the thesis (Weick 1969/79, Weick 1976, Smircich & Morgan 1982, Eisenberg 1984, Smircich & Stubbart 1985, Donnellon et al 1986, Weick & Bougon 1986, Eisenberg 1990, Orton & Weick 1990, Weick 1993, Weick & Roberts 1993, Morris & Milliken, 2000, Weick 2004, Maitlis 2005, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005).

In 1969 Weick argued that double interacts and not shared goals are the precondition for organised action. He, thereby, proposed a model for how actors could reproduce organised action without sharing talk. According to Weick & Bougon "A double interact forms when we discover that I can be a cause of your X, and you can be a cause of my Y..." (Weick & Bougon 1986, reprinted in 2005:314). As extension of this Weick & Bougon emphasised that the precondition for joint action is *coordinated* cognitive "cause maps". Cause maps are created

when actors identify variables in their surroundings and construct causal connections between them. Weick & Bougon find that collective action will happen if actors mutually see each others' action as instrumental to achieving their own goal. In this manner they rejected the notion that shared action required shared values or a shared organisational culture (Schein, 1985). Weick & Bougon identified *coordination* as the connecting element between sensemaking and joint action. It is when cause maps are *coordinated* (through double interacts) that concerted action is possible. The thesis discusses the adequacy of Weick & Bougon's model in the light of the two cases and suggests further developments to it.

In the analysis from 1993 of the Mann Gulch disaster Weick emphasises another mechanism between sensemaking processes and organised action – that is the *motivation* to action. He finds that action is paralysed in the absence of perceived clarity. The absence of clear roles limits actors' ability to act in spite of perceived problems. They lack *motivation* and a clear image of the way forward. Thereby the other mechanism apart from *coordination* between sensemaking and shared action is underlined that is that sensemaking generates *motivation* for continued action.

*Coordination* and *motivation* are also identified as driving forces behind organised action by Maitlis (2005). Maitlis (2005) finds that when issues are only treated through minimal organisational sensemaking processes (characterised by limited shared articulation and ambiguous meaning) it does not produce sufficient discursive resources for organised action. More specifically she argues that minimal organisational processes poorly support joint action because of the lack of both *motivation* and *coordination*.

Also Donnellon et al (1986) examines the degree of *motivation* to joint action which springs from shared articulation. Smircich Morgan (1982) underline both the *coordinating* and the *motivational* element of sensemaking which is articulated together. Smircich & Stubbart (1985) find that shared meaning makes it more likely that actors will understand co-actors actions in ways which reaffirm their own actions and their continuation. Thereby they too insert *motivation* to action as a mechanism between sensemaking and action. The shared action is maintained because the sensemaking process is creating sufficient *motivation* to continue the action.

Morrison & Milliken (2000) analyse an empirical case where the minimal shared sensemaking is a result of former shared sensemaking that it is unwise to speak up in the organisation. They find that a low degree of shared talk is demotivating and thereby a hindrance to shared action. In Morrison & Milliken's case the actors drew on sense made through earlier shared sensemaking processes within the formal organisation. This is distinct from the Network Group where there had never been any shared sensemaking processes. Furthermore the lack of shared talk was based on fear of the consequences rather than, as in the Network Group based in lack of desire to participate in arenas for articulation and generally loose coupling where "hails" to enter into being someone who talks are limited.

In short when the relationship between the reproduction of organised action and sensemaking processes are discussed in sensemaking theory (Smircich & Morgan 1986, Smircich & Stubbart 1985, Weick 2004, Maitlis 2005, Donnellon et al 1986) the reproduction of organised action is assumed to require shared articulated meaning with the action. It's absence will create confusion, frustration, lack of drive for action, action which pull to opposite directions, demotivation and thereby lack of action.

In spite of this Weick attempt several times in his authorship to make it possible to understand processes of organising amongst actors who act together even if they have not formulated shared goals and values.

Weick & Bougon (1986) indicated the cause maps coordinated through double interacts could be enough to support the reproduction of organised action. Weick (1993) found that actors need clear roles to act in an organised manner but that these roles can be idiosyncratic and therefore not shared or articulated together. He did, however, find that the ability to create new action facilitating roles was improved through face-to-face interaction. The conclusion to Weick's (1993) analysis of the Mann Gulch catastrophe indicates that idiosyncratic roles are better than no roles in stimulating action. His point is reminiscent of the story about how a wrong map is better than no map for the support of continued action (Weick 1995:54). In both cases the sense of having found meaning in a confusing situation is sufficient to enable actors to continue to act. By adapting the meaning they create to the unfolding situation the situation is in turn increasingly ordered by their actions.

In 1993 Weick and Roberts find that organised action can be stabilised even

when challenged depending on the quality of interrelation between each participant's actions rather than depending on collective cognitive processes. Inspired by Ash (1952) and based on an empirical analysis of cooperation amongst landing crew on a flight deck they find that when actors enact their actions as meaningful because they contribute to the needs of a social system then they exhibit “heed”. Weick & Roberts conclude that the more heedful the actors' actions are the more robust the systems actions will be in the face of external disturbances. The interesting point for this thesis is that Weick & Roberts emphasise that heed does not require shared articulation. They find that when actors in a system act with heed their organised actions can be stable even if the actors of the system are not well established as groups, meaning that they do not have to have developed shared goals for their action through shared talk (Tuckman, 1965).

I think the Weick and Robert's (1993) introduction of the concept of heed sharpens the researcher's attention to that not only the social construction of roles but also the construction of co-actors can be the basis for organised action. The analytical concept “heed” emphasises the responsiveness to co-actors. Thus Weick emphasises both the type of attention to the context as well as roles as preconditions for organised action.

Apart from the above direct discussions of the possibility for shared action without shared talk Weick's general formulations of sensemaking processes contain tools to examine the relation between shared talk and shared action, therefore they will briefly be introduced. In 1995 Weick outlines two positions within sensemaking theory. On the one side there is Westley (1990) who regards the reproduction of organised action as a result of “... *inter-woven patterns of taken for granted routine actions...*” (Weick 1995:74) which therefore are not dependent on shared talk but routines. Weick also identifies the opposite position which is represented by Smircich & Morgan (1985) who emphasise that shared talk rather than routines keeps organised action together. They argue that organising processes are driven by “... *a quality of interaction*” between actors who share meaning through communication...”(Weick 1995:73).

So Weick sketches the possibility of seeing organising as something driven by shared action or shared articulation. His own position is that both shared talk and shared actions drive processes of organising. Weick emphasises that groups of actors who act together over time will have a tendency to create shared meaning

through shared articulation. He took the position already in 1969 when he conceptualised it as the convergence – divergence cycle. With that model he illustrated the groups who act together seem to have a tendency to develop shared goals over time. His states in both publications, however, is that it is possible that this shared articulation will not take place even over time, but it is not a point he develops further empirically. The thesis examines an organisation which has not developed shared meaning over time and where non-routine action is undertaken.

By examining the stabilising influence of idiosyncratic roles, double interacts, coordinated cause maps and heed, and by identifying stages in an organisation's development where one can expect to find shared action without shared sensemaking Weick has answered part of the research question. It has not, however, received the same attention and central position as the research question has in this thesis. And we still need a richer empirical analysis of how mutually dependent actors can reproduce coordinated actions without shared articulated sensemaking.

Based on newer publication by Weick (2004) and Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2005) one could question whether sensemaking without shared articulation is sensemaking at all. On the other hand in the characterisation of the social aspect of sensemaking Weick (1995) emphasises that processes without shared articulation can be social all the same. Inspired by Blumer (1969) and thereby Mead (1934) he indicates that sensemaking processes also are social in cases where there is not direct interaction between actors but just an awareness of others. This is a mechanism Mead calls the effect of "the significant other" in our understanding of the world and our selves. This cognitive conceptualisation of the social aspect of sensemaking theory is challenged and changed in the later publications by Weick where he follows the general discursive turn in organisation theory (Clegg, Hardy & Nord eds. 1996:13). In 2004 and 2005 Weick et al narrow the sensemaking concepts by asserting the sensemaking takes place in talk.

This thesis has an ambition of contributing to the development of sensemaking theory by maintaining the more inclusive definition of the social aspect of sensemaking which does not presume shared articulation or the formation of a shared discourse. The motivation for making this contribution to sensemaking theory is to ensure that the sensemaking concept remains a relevant analytical concept in a late-modern society where it may be the case that we are increasingly



anchored in more temporal and imagined communities (Bauman 2000, Beck 1986, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002 and Bellah et al 1985) which therefore do not contain the same possibility for and desire to engage in shared articulation with co-actors.

This thesis follows the trajectory from Weick (1995) and focus on processes of organising amongst actors who do not partake in shared articulated sensemaking. The dissertation is inspired by the discursive turn in organisational analysis in one respect because it draws on recent theory of identity formation which sees identities as discursive phenomena. The thesis, however, seeks to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater and maintains an interest in settings where *shared* discourse is not produced in spite of inspiration from discourse theory. It does not mean that I think discursive production isn't central to sensemaking. On the contrary, I find that discourses affect organised action, but not as a joining force on the organisation, but in a more distributed and fragmented manner.

## 1.4.2 The Controversies in Extant Theory

I find that at the heart of existing discussions of the relation between shared action and shared articulated meaning lies a disagreement about the effect of ambiguity on organised action. Weick (1995) recommends that organisations faced with complex problems should sit down together and "hammer out" shared meaning i.e. reduce ambiguity to facilitate action. Maitlis (2005) also argues that there is a direct causal relation between unequivocal sensemaking and organisations aggregated ability to act together:

"...sensemaking allows people to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts of the world that enable action." (Maitlis, 2005: 21).

Thereby she identifies the degree of uncertainty and ambiguity in constructed meaning as that which affects the ability to act. The clearer, the more unequivocal and rational, meaning that is created the stronger the drive to act.

This is contradicted by Eisenberg (1984) that ambiguity in the sense made in organisations can in certain instances enhance the inclination to act. Eisenberg

finds that this can be the case when there are contradicting interests amongst actors. In case of contradicting interests imprecise formulations of means and goals can enable each actor to feel that their particular approach has been validated. If actors perceive that there is consistency between their interests and organised actions they will be more inclined to participate in the organised action. Eisenberg thereby argues that the causal connection between unequivocal shared meaning and shared action in some cases can be the reverse of what Weick and Maitlis find. This thesis takes a position similar to Eisenberg and contributes further with an empirical analysis of the phenomenon and a coherent presentation of the otherwise fragmented and peripheral discussions (in relation to other aspects) of the theme in extant sensemaking theory.

Empirically the effect of ambiguous sensemaking in organisations has not been fully explored. Maitlis (2005) only examines sensemaking processes with limited shared talk briefly and sceptically and chooses in her conclusion to quote Weick (1993) rather than extract mechanisms from her rich empirical data.

### **1.4.3 The Empirical Cases and Contexts upon which Extant Theory has been Tested**

The empirical cases upon which the theory has been applied are distinguished by which qualities are emphasised in the organised actions. Whether it has been maximization of productivity (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985 – larger production companies), (Smircich & Morgan, 1982 – an insurance company), whether it has been precision through mutual adjustment (Weick & Roberts, 1993 – landing-crew on a flight deck, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005 hospital employees, and Eisenberg, 1990 – jamming in a jazz orchestra) or the ability of groups of actors to reproduce organised actions in the face of changeable or chaotic contexts (Weick & Roberts, 1993 – landing crew on a flight deck, Weick, 1993 - fire-fighters, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005 – hospital employees) or whether it has been the ability to reproduce organised action at all (Donnellon et al, 1986 – lab experiment, and Maitlis, 2005 – symphony orchestras).

This dissertation belongs to the latter category. It focusses on the ability to reproduce organised action at all since it only has the ambition to understand how organisations survive rather than assess the quality of the activities or the extent of

them. The challenge faced by the case organisation is to motivate and coordinate the participating actors sufficiently to enable the organised actions to be reproduced in spite of minimal shared articulation. This puts less emphasis on the volume and details of the coordination among actors and each actors' motivation to participate becomes more prominent in the results of the analysis.

Existing empirical sensemaking analysis also differs by being conducted in different time periods. Together with Maitlis (2005) the empirical study of this thesis constitute contemporary contributions to studies which build on empirical data generated in the 1970's, the 1980's or the beginning of the 1990's (Weick 1976, Smircich & Morgan 1982, Smircich & Stubbart 1985, Donnellon et al 1986, Weick & Bougon 1986, Eisenberg 1990, Weick 1993 drew on Mclean 1992, Weick & Roberts 1993 drew on Rochlin, LaPorte & Roberts 1987, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005 draw on Benner, 1994).

The financial frame for the organised activity possibly has affects which frames of understanding actors draw on and thereby their motivation to participate. The existing semitropical cases cover both public organisations (Weick 1976 – educational institutions, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005 – hospital, Weick 1993 - fire-fighters) and private for-profit organisations (Smircich & Stubbart 1985 – larger production companies, Smircich & Morgan 1982 – an insurance company, Weick & Roberts 1993 – a flight deck, Maitlis 2005 – professional symphony orchestras). This thesis is distinguished by representing a non-profit organisation. I hold that since actors are not motivated by money to participate the case is all the more suited to examine how central shared articulated sensemaking is in relation to stimulate motivation to participate.

Existing empirical case are also differ as regards to the extent to which they focus on the leader (Smircich & Morgan 1982, Smircich & Stubbart 1985, Gioia & Chittipedi 1991) or on the whole organisation (Donnellon et al 1986, Weick & Roberts 1993 and Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). This thesis (as Weick, 1993 and Maitlis, 2005) examines patterns of actions and sensemaking processes in the whole organisation and at the same pays attention to the sensemaking processes of each actor.

## 1.4.4 The Thesis' Proposed Synthesis of Theories

The thesis pays particular attention to two aspects of processes where shared action is reproduced without shared articulation. The one aspect is the range of frames of understandings which actors draw on in the sensemaking process. The other aspect are the cues which actors extract and take to indicate the actions of their co-actors.

The one aspect is that when actors do not draw on shared articulated frames of understanding in their sensemaking process<sup>5</sup> they can draw on frames of understanding from other interactive arenas to make sense. This is analysed by uncovering the range of frames of understanding which each actors draws on in their sensemaking process and analyse whether these frames of understanding have been generated through shared articulation within the formal organisation or not.

The other aspect, which is examined in the case of having meetings, is that since the actors are responsive to each other the action of one actor affects other actors even when this is often indirectly. If this impact is not transmitted through language then it must happen in another way. The approach of the thesis is to examine how each actors *extracts cues of their co-actors actions*. I thus pay attention to which extracted cues that fuel actors' sensemaking about of their co-actors as part of their sensemaking about their own actions. The extracted cues are, to some extent, what their enacted co-actor say but in many cases the extracted cues are what the co-actors do.

The thesis extends the synthesis Weick made between sensemaking and identity theory by emphasising discursively constituted behavioural implications as an analytical unit between processes of identity formation and actions. In order to do this the thesis takes inspiration from one of the fields of research where there is intense development of the analysis of identity and social interaction that is gender studies.

“Contemporary feminist debate constitutes a rich and fruitful terrain of interdisciplinary research on the self and identity” (Elliott 2001:103).

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5 Throughout the thesis the concept "shared" sensemaking implies sense which has been negotiated through articulated interaction among the actors. So "shared" does not connote meaning that is coincidentally similar.

It from there that the thesis draws theoretical concepts for analysing discursive identity formation. One of the most acknowledged researchers in gender studies in Denmark is Søndergaard (2000) who draws inspiration for the analysis of identity formation from Davies & Harré (1990) amongst others.

Davies & Harré (1990) have a post-structural approach to identity formation. It is a non-essentialist approach. This means that identity is regarded as being under ongoing negotiation and varying with the context in which it is negotiated. Davies & Harré contribute by developing the concept "discursive positioning" as an alternative to the concept "role". This supplies the thesis with analytical tools to identify "roles" (subject positions) and associated behavioural implications in the actualised frames of understanding without resorting to reifying "roles" as something stable and context independent.

That means that an actor's "identity" varies over time and across arenas of interaction depending on the discursive practices and the positions within these that the actor is offered or acquires access to. (Søndergaard 2000:60).

It may appear counter-intuitive that this thesis which examines contexts with limited shared articulation within formal organisations applies a discursive approach to the analysis of identities and social processes. There is much discursive identity formation but not through talk which is shared in the whole organisation. The frames of understanding which are actualised can be alternatively be conceptualised as discursive resources. It is these discursive resources that the actors draw on at interviews and at meetings in order to construct meaningful selves and enact meaningful actions. There is a fundamental accordance between sensemaking theory and this branch of identity theory as it underlines that actor and structure emerge through an ongoing process of mutual construction (Weick 2001:15). Davies & Harré (1990) treat roles as linguistic categories that link a position to a set of expected actions but also as something that is under negotiation.

It is based on this theoretical approach that part of the thesis' analytical strategy is to identify the subject positions which are manifested in the frames of understanding that the actors actualise in their sensemaking about the organised activities and the actors temporary and contextual positioning of selves in relation to them.

The thesis applies the concept "frames of understanding" as parallel to "generic

subjectivities” such as Wiley (1988) conceptualised them. These are generic constructions of the world wherein there are no concrete individuals but rather generic selves. Weick (1995) argues that it is in bridging to these generic subjectivities that organising takes place. If the processes of organising that structure the actions of the actors in the case organisation were processes of shared sensemaking as it is described by Smircich & Stubbart (1985), Donnellon et al (1986) and Weick then the generic subjectivity bridged to would be shared and rather unambiguous. Actors would draw on products of former shared sensemaking processes and these products would function as generic subjectivity (crystallised nuggets of text from a previous sensemaking process with shared articulation (Weick, 2005)) This is what other sensemaking theorists assert will enable actors to pull in the same direction with their actions and enable them to act in a coordinated manner.

This thesis finds a case with limited shared sensemaking and treats it as an empirical question how each actor makes sense enough to participate in joint actions. This makes the analysis sensitive to the actualisation of a range of generic subjectivities.

## **1.5 Methodology**

### **1.5.1 The Data Sources**

The data generation took place over 6 months. The period was relatively short since the goal was not to follow organisations changes over time but rather to perform a thorough concentrated study and unfold the mechanisms which drove organised action in the formal organisation at that time. The period was still long enough to give insight into the degree of volatility versus stability. During these 6 months tuition was observed both in block D and in block G and on all the weekdays where there was tuition. Field notes were taken in-situ or immediately after observations. Since the fieldwork was performed with a view to uncover sensemaking processes they were semi-structured field notes (Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999). Since both I and those observed were aware that I was there to observe and since I participated in the tuition itself I took according to Kristiansen

& Krogstrup (1999) the role as observing participant. The interaction with the children who insisted that I was only recognisable in the role as tutor meant that I placed myself in interaction with the children similar to that experienced by other tutors and observed tuition primarily while acting as a tutor myself. At the end of each session I made notes not just of the evening's events but also of my own feelings in relation to them. When I was confused or frustrated I noted which resources in the context offered themselves to help me make sense. Inspired by Goffman (1989) these notes of subjective feelings that occurred while I tutored are treated as is they likely reflect the experiences other tutors may have had. This was sought further triangulated through analysis of the tutors articulation at the individual interviews.

The formal organisation with formed the frame for tuition called itself the "Network Group". It is sensemaking and actions in this formal organisation which the thesis explores. All meetings held within the Network Group or about tuition were observed and, when allowed, recorded. In this way 9 meetings were observed and transcribed verbatim. At the meetings I took up the role of passive observer. I consequently declined to contribute to the unfolding sensemaking or to pass on information or messages. Particularly external stakeholders who interacted with the organisation requested information. An important aspect of the study was, however, to examine the effects of limited shared sensemaking. As a researcher it was therefore crucial not to install more shared sensemaking than what was already there. That is also why focus-group interviews were not applied as a method for generating data. Focus-group interviews would have created arenas for shared sensemaking which would not have existed otherwise.

I made 16 interviews of a duration between one to three hours. I aimed to let the interviews become an arena for a narration of selves in general and more specifically in relation to the two cases of organised action. This was done because the thesis explores how discursive identity formation (Davies & Harré, 1990) may be factor in the reproduction of organised action. In this way the interviews took the form of facilitated personal narratives (Kohler-Riessman, 2002) where the interview reflects and exposes the way the interview person organises their life. The approach is in accordance with the analytical strategy of examining which frames of understanding and which subject positions actors actualise. The interview persons were selected formally and informally. The volunteers who had

assumed responsibility for official posts such as coordinator and treasurer were interviewed. External stakeholders such as the consultant from the DRC, the contact person from the local council, the Father Group, and the Womens Group were interviewed. Apart from that there was an informal snowball selection of the rest of the interview persons which produced a selection covering tutors who had participated for a long and a short while, some from both blocks, from all the Days and both actors who came to meetings and who didn't. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Exclamations, pauses, giggles, laughter and an ironic tone of voice were noted in the transcripts. this is one of the methods to identify ambiguity. When actors said something which they at the same time wished to distance themselves from.

A comparison of the lists of tutors from 2005 and 2001/2002 showed that after three and a half years a third of the tutors were still listed as tutors. I find this number remarkably high just based on a common sense comparison with other voluntary organisations which I have been in contact with. In 2007 I presented my findings to the DRC and contact persons to the Network Group. The formal organisation still exists and has approximately the same number of tutors who tutor approximately the same number of children. At that point, however, only few of the tutors from 2001 were still tutors. The presentation of the thesis' results was met with recognition. They expressed that the sensemaking processes and the mechanisms which support and challenge organised action outlined in the thesis mirrored those still unfolding in the organisation.

## **1.5.2 The Analytical Strategy**

The applied analytical strategy was inspired by Søndergaard (2000). This implies that data is reviewed in several rounds in order to identify patterns in the meaning created. In her analysis from 2000 Søndergaard identified cultural codes which were manifested in interview data and analysed them specifically with a view to contexts in which they were asserted and the reactions to them. This was done to explore the socially defined behavioural implications associated with the cultural codes. After that process the data material is reviewed again to examine whether the identified codes are still reflected in what is being said. This process was repeated in a circular manner. In the work with this thesis the frames of



understanding and the subject positions with associated behavioural implications which the actors actualise were identified through the same strategy. The transcribed interviews, meetings and field notes were reviewed. Based on this two issues which were central to the survival of the organisation and in general triggered sensemaking were selected for further analysis. Tutoring in spite of noise and having meetings in spite of low attendance were the two issues selected as cases. Then two raw cases were put together containing all the places in the empirical data where the two issues emerged. On the one hand this because a list of who spoke to whom about the issue and which actions were undertaken relevant to the issue. On the other hand it was an analysis of all the constructions of the issue in conjunction with an analysis of whom they had spoken with in connection with the sensemaking process over time.

The thesis identifies some distinct frames of understanding which were actualised in the sensemaking processes of the actors. The frames of understanding are distinct either in the elements constituting them, I focus primarily on subject positions, or partly in the relation which is constructed between the elements, or finally in the behavioural implications defined by the frame of understanding. The distinct frames of understanding are characterised by the subject positions which the actors according to Davies & Harré (1990) take up themselves and their co-actors in their identity formation process. The frames of understanding cannot be reduced to one and another. There is a difference in at least one of the subject positions they define or in the relation constructed between them. The thesis does not assert the ability to make a contribution on the level of institutional fields about the existence of such frames. The central point for the analysis in the thesis is the the frames of understanding are actualised in the local context. The frames of understanding are generated based on their manifestation in the empirical data and are not based preconceived notions about their institutionalisation in contexts outside the formal organisation.

Smircich & Stubbart (1985) found that the reproduction of organised action was promoted by shared meaning articulated clearly and unambiguously through shared talk. Weick (2005) emphasises the potential for each actor's sensemaking which lies in shared meaning crystallised in language. He argues that the crystallised “nuggets of meaning” can function as resources (frames of understanding) for those who did not participate in the original articulation. By

identifying which frames of understanding are actualised in the limited interaction at meetings and during tuition the thesis analyses the extent to which actors draw on overlapping frames of understanding. It was furthermore analysed whether these frames had been developed through previous shared articulation within the formal organisation as in the cases unfolded in other sensemaking studies. The latter analysis was based on interviews with actors about with whom they had interacted in relation to the sensemaking process.

The analysis of observations, interviews and written sources generated an overview over where and amongst whom shared talk was produced and over whether this talk was disseminated to others. It also gave an insight to which organised activities took place with which participants. To achieve an overview that was concurrent with as many sources as possible the different sources were triangulated. In the analysis of sensegiving about the minimal organisation at the introduction meeting, for example, I asked several actors who had participated in the introductory meeting about how they remembered the meeting which had taken place a year earlier. The various versions were compared with each other and the written sources. In this example there were significant differences in the accounts of the meeting. To handle this analytically the thesis does not presume to be able to tell the truth about what took place but focusses on how references to the meeting is used in sensemaking and identity formation at the time of data generation.

### **1.5.3 The Analysis' Limitations**

The analysis does not take into account how gendered interaction affected the sensemaking processes. Furthermore neither the children nor the handful of retired tutors have a direct voice in the data material. There is unfortunately also an element of ethno-centricity in the thesis. The factors which structured the actions patterns of the parents and the children beyond the school and thereby also structured their interaction with the tutors was not examined. Thereby the thesis replicates the marginalisation of these groups that the tutors and the DRC produces.

The last mentioned ageist and ethno-centric bias in particular has influenced the conclusions of the thesis. As it stands the thesis has tentative but not

completely unfolded and well founded conclusions about the structuring effect of the interaction with the children and their parents. This has consequences for the general applicability of one of the thesis' conclusions. The conclusion which for this reason should be explored and documented further in future research is the one that asserts that it is only in formal organisations where participants interact with external stakeholders who are firmly structured in other contexts that organised action can be reproduced without shared talk.

## **1.5.4 The Choice of Cases and Research Setting**

The thesis examines two cases from the same formal organisation in order to give a deeper understanding of the mechanisms at play in this particular organisation to be able to contribute to theory development. Rather than examining one case the thesis examines two cases. This is done to get a richer data material rather than to gain insight through a comparison study. The choice of the case of reproducing tutoring in spite of noise and the case of reproducing having meetings in spite of a low number of participants in particular was based on that those two activities were frequently mentioned as crucial to the survival of the formal organisation by the tutors. The two cases are different from each other because they explore different aspects of the interplay between organised sensemaking and action.

The case of tutoring in spite of noise enables me to highlight the role of interaction with external stakeholders in sensemaking and action when shared sensemaking is limited. Whereas the case of having meetings in spite of low attendance is closely linked to the level of shared articulation in the organisation. It therefore gives an insight into why the organisation does not develop a higher level of shared meaning. If they had changed the way they were having meetings it could mean increasing the number of meetings – increasing communication from meetings to tutors and vice versa – perhaps instituting frequent plenary meetings or Day meetings all of which would significant have altered the present level of limited shared talk. So while the having meetings case is still an analysis of a case of reproduction of organised action it is also an analysis of the reproduction of limited shared articulation.

The analytical strategy outlined above is applied to both cases whereby special attention is paid to identity formation and the behavioural implications as a central aspect of the relation between organised sensemaking and action.

The formal organisation was founded to provide tutoring for children of immigrants living in the housing estate Vestplanen. The Network Group is affiliated with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and has appointed a voluntary coordinator, Sharmeen. The case is selected as an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2004). According to Flyvbjerg (2004) extreme cases are particularly suited for theory development. The case is extreme because according to the consultant from the DRC the Network Group experimented how little “organisation” they could make do with and still keep up the core activity of tutoring<sup>6</sup>.

The Network- group consisted of around 50 tutors who were 18 to 25 years old and a handful of tutors over 60, the majority were female students. A group of women (the Womens Group) and a group of men (the Father Group) resident in Vestplanen were already organised in two separate groups and acted as hosts for tutoring at the two addresses. The women hosted tutoring in block D and the men in block G. At both locations there were a number of tables and chairs and a small cupboard for materials that could be locked. The Womens Group and the Father Group were based adjacent to the rooms for tutoring or in the same room. Male tutors were not welcome in block D hosted by the Womens Group. The children were not divided between the two locations based on gender. The tutors were each allocated two hours on a fixed weekday between 17 and 19 either in block D or in block G which was their “Day” for tutoring. The children who were tutored were primarily children of the organised women and men or their friends. There was no register of the children who came to be tutored. Over the course of my observations there were typically between 10 and 30 children present at each location on each Day.

At an introductory meeting early in the history of the organisation, one year prior to the data generation, a coordinator, Sharmeen, was elected. Sharmeen was the one volunteers could call if they wanted to become tutors. She would then allocate the a Day and location. Sharmeen would also in conjunction with

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6 This is a far more strategic explanation of the absence of shared articulation than I ever encountered in the organisation. here were no indications of experiments with how “little organisation” they could make do with. Meaning that there was no debate or reflection on indicators as whether they had gone too far and needed to strategically act differently.

changing other tutors call meetings every month to every second month. Those who were invited to these meetings were the tutors.

## **1.6 Case 1: Tutoring in spite of Noise**

The empirical cases are meant to contribute to the thesis' analysis of how mutually dependent actors in the same formal organisation are motivated to reproduce coordinated non-routine actions when shared articulated interaction is limited.

The one of the two cases in the thesis is a case of reproduction of tutoring in spite of perceived noise. That is a case of reproduction of organised action in spite of perceived cognitive dissonance experienced in connection with the activity. When there is noise the motivation of the tutors comes under pressure and they are challenged as to how to act. This can be conceptualised as that they lack both motivation and coordination. It is a situation where one can reasonably expect that the continued participation in the organised activity depends on whether the actors can make enough sense in spite of the cognitive dissonance. “Noise” was the expression the tutors used when they described what many of them perceived to be a problem in connection with tuition. There was no shared definition of when sounds were noise. But the sounds were roughly the sounds that the children, and sometimes the parents, made when they were not doing homework. That is the sounds they produced in connection with play, waiting and initiation of other forms for contact with the tutors than receiving tuition.

### **1.6.1 Distributed Sensemaking**

Sensemaking theory in general produces the expectation that actors who are acting together need to share talk to be coordinated and motivated. So that each actor bridges to the same generic subjectivity. If that were the case the tutors who were motivated enough to continue to tutor would reproduce roughly the same narration of tuition. It would furthermore be reasonable to expect them to enact a similar context for tuition, drawing on similar frames, and create similar subject positions for themselves. The thesis demonstrates that this is not the case through a number of summaries of the individual interviews. The summaries have been chosen to represent a range of tutors. Tutors from the various Days and locations, tutors with

extra formal responsibilities and new and experienced tutors.

Lone has tutored every Tuesday in block D for almost a year. She says she rarely talks to the other tutors. She has not felt the need, so she has not sought out the conversation. Lone comes to interact with the children. The only source of communication with other actors in the organisation are notices on the noticeboard. Lone narrates her life as a limited reservoir of time to be distributed among competing activities. In this light the involvement with the Network Group competes with paid work, education, leisure activities – and is thus separated from and defined by not being these. It is because she enacts that she has time for allocating this timeslot in her weekly schedule that she continues to tutor, not because of meaning provided by the formal organisation. When dealing with noise in the interaction with the children she takes the role of a teacher guided by their books and her own school experience. She explains that if they "act up" she sends them away: If they won't study she won't help them.

Mette is a new tutor in block D. She lives locally and has a child. Interaction with the children over noise during tuition represents for her direct interaction with children in the local community whom she worries about and has worried about for several years. Tuition offers a platform for taking responsibility for her local community as a mother. She tries to encourage the children to focus and learn even when they challenge her by making noise. Prior to coming to tutor she has had a phone conversation with Sharmeen to be allocated a Day. She doesn't narrate a formal organisational context. She enacts a context of interaction with the children.

Louise has participated in several meetings and she talks to the Father Group in block G regularly after tuition. She is anchored in the formal organisation and in the interaction with the Father Group. The interaction with the Father Group represents an integration effort that she constructs as being as important as the work with the children. In sensemaking about noise she primarily considers how to construct a role for the Father Group in her response to noise which leaves the Father Group with dignity and a position for herself of showing them respect through her reaction to noise.

Signe from block G, the treasurer, narrates tuition as representing another arena – the local but exotic "barrio" - for her to meet the world and grow. The way she narrates herself in relation to noise is closely linked to how she narrates her life story. She narrates herself as being different, insisting on pursuing what pleases

her rather than formal agreements, and that she contributes with something unique. This makes her tolerate a higher level of noise because she enters into a wider range of interactions with the children than tuition.

Mathilde & Marlene from block D are also new. They have a background in “integration studies” at college. Their narration of self and activity is structured around a narration of a cultural distance and a difference between themselves and the children/parents. They draw on meaning they have negotiated at college to make sense of interaction during tuition. They have also been employed in a voluntary organisation and draw on this when they position themselves discursively as being volunteers who should therefore receive respect and support. They foreground the subject positions as volunteers when they are confronted with noise. Noise then becomes the sound of disrespect and inappropriate behaviour from the children. Marlene & Mathilde withdraw from tuition.

Klaus from block D sensemaking about noise at the individual interview is tied to what he narrates as his own background as a troublemaker. In that narration he pulled himself out of his problems when he joined the army. For him it is significant that he can be like a big brother for them and understands them. This makes him tolerate a high level of noise.

Marie from block G has been a tutor for a year. She frames her participation in tutoring against layers of interactive arenas: The tuition, the meetings in the Network Group, national integration efforts, national party politics, the local community, and resistance to the present Government. She narrates herself into these contexts when she explains why and how she participates in tutoring. Marie does not narrate the Day she tutors as a significant context for her participation in the activity. Sitting on a committee formulating input to national integration policy is within what she establishes as a viable course of action in parallel to tuition. Across the contexts she narrates herself as someone who obviously should sit in meetings and committees to have her voice heard. During interaction with the children over noise she conceptualises who she is and how to respond by, on the one hand, enacting a context of a national integration project which enables her to understand the children and put up with noise. On the other hand, she actualises that if she wanted to “do something” about noise she could go to a meeting in the formal organisation and “deal with it”.

Sharmeen, the coordinator of both block D and G, foregrounds the tutors in the

formal organisation and the interaction with the parent groups and the children. She focusses on the efforts to help the children with their school work. She actualise an integration frame of understanding tuition but she also challenges it. Refusing to position herself and the children unequivocally. Sharmeen sees noise as unavoidable when dealing with young children.

The above summaries show that each tutor enacts a variety of contexts while making sense of tuition and noise: National politics, integration efforts in Danish civil society, the local community, the formal organisation, their “Day” or a time slot. They have not negotiated one shared enactment of the context for tuition. The diverse narrations of anchorings in various communities across the boundaries of the organisation acts as sources of meaning and provides motivation for them to continue to tutor.

## 1.6.2 The Frames of Understanding

To examine the diverse behavioural implications of the different enacted contexts for tuition all articulated sense about tuition and noise across meetings, tuition and in the individual interviews has been analysed. A result of this analysis is that 5 frames of understanding could be identified. Each frame outlines the subject positions or generic subjectivities which the tutors bridge to as they make sense of their participation in spite of noise. When the tutors actualise the frames they also narrate associated behavioural implications regarding how to handle the problem of noise in tuition.

The following outlines the 5 frames which were actualised in Sensemaking about about tuition, self, and noise. The tutors who actualise the frame at some point are listed in brackets.

**School: (Lone, Mette, Klaus)** The children should learn as much as possible. The subject positions “teacher” (teaches and keeps order) and “pupil” are made available. The behavioural implication as regards noise is that the children should be controlled by either parent groups or tutors.

**Integration: (Mette, Louise, Marlene & Mathilde, Marie)** Foregrounds differences between actors along ethnic lines. The subject positions are “integrator” and “integratee<sup>7</sup>”. The behavioural implication as regards noise is that

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7 The person being integrated.



the integrators should be tolerant and accept noise.

**Family: (Mette, Klaus, Sharmeen)** Foregrounds differences between actors based on age. The subject positions “parent” and “child” are produced. The behavioural implication is to embrace the children and to shelter each child on an ad hoc basis. So the tutors give by living with noise.

**To Volunteer: (Marlene & Mathilde)** “The good Samaritan” should be respected and “the recipient” should express gratitude. The behavioural implication is that noise should be reduced to protect the tutors.

**My self-development: (Lone, Signe)** The central subject position in this frame is the tutor who is reflecting on their own development. The children get their significance through how they affect the tutor. The behavioural implication is to accept the noise and to focus on the stimulating challenges it provides. The subjects who need to develop and grow are the tutors rather than the children.

The associated range of frames have contradictive behavioural implications going from that the tutors should control the children collectively to that there is no noise or that they should tolerate it. This challenges the coordination of the tutors. The following is an analysis of the confusion and frustration this generates and of how the actions of the tutors are coordinated if not through shared sense.

The level of cognitive dissonance (in this case provoked by noise) and elements which guide action in spite of it are illustrated by an extract from the field notes. The extract is included because the sensemaking process accompanying my participation in tuition on this first day closely resemble the explanations which are expressed in a more fragmented manner by other tutors at the individual interviews.

“Lone, another volunteer, arrives. She sits down at the same table as Yasmeen and they speak briefly. Yasmeen exchanges a few words with Suad from the Women’s Club. Otherwise all attention is on the children. The children who are not getting tuition form small informal queues or squabble over whose turn it is to get help. At the busiest time there are around 14 children, almost more than there are chairs. It is difficult to count the children as they drift in and out. They come in all ages up to around 10 years – the youngest are toddlers wandering around sucking their dummies. Also

children without books hang out and chat with the volunteers and the children who are trying to do their homework. I feel there is a lot of noise. I am unsure of how to deal with the children who have finished their homework. They are very disruptive with the other children. Chatting with them, teasing them and telling them to hurry up. I glance over at Yasmeen and take a cue from her. She asks the children to leave once they have finished their homework. So I feel justified in doing the same.”

There is very limited talk amongst the tutors. The children draw the tutors attention – and they create sound barriers for talk between tutors. The tutors can see each other but not really talk during tuition. This means that the cues each tutor gets as to the thoughts of their co-actors are mostly not verbal – but that they can see their actions. So when each tutor are making sense of how to act during tuition they sometimes mimic and sometimes perform alternative actions compared to their co-tutors.

The limited amount of sharing between tutors and the perceived level of noise formed a sufficiently strong downside to tuition to make one tutor, Lise, leave the organisation after only two sessions. Although new tutors stayed on in general and Lise is not typical in that respect I have included Lise's remarks to represent the cognitive dissonance without any mitigating explanations that could justify staying on. She described the first day of tutoring at block D like this:

“I felt it was very unstructured. Yasmeen collected me (at the station) and then we walked down there and then I could just start and there were screaming kids all over the place – running around and playing. Again there was no... there was no peace and quiet around the children who were trying to do their homework... I wasn't introduced to any of the other volunteers. I didn't get any printed welcome material. It was more like – OK, you can start today.”

The cognitive dissonance described in the quote was felt by several tutors. Few, however, decided to stop tutoring as Lise did. Most tutors made enough sense to continue. The following extract from the field notes expands the illustration of what contributes to guide tuition in spite of noise.

“A boy comes over and stands in front of me. He asks me if I am a teacher. I am confused, and say “no” initially thinking that is not my profession, but he insists. He keeps asking “are you a teacher” and I realise I gave the wrong answer. I ask Yasmeen if it is OK that I help out – she says yes. Then I turn to the boy and say “yes, I am a teacher”, and he pulls me over to a chair by an empty table and points to his book. It is a Danish reading book, and he tells me he needs to read out chapter four...

A few more children drift in and are helped. The volunteers do not say goodbye to one another as they leave. Suad from the Women’s Club comes and locks the doors. The children who continue to play in the hall in the basement help me to find the way through the maze of basement doors back up to the court yard.”

There are a number of references to various sources of meaning in the field notes. Drawing on impressions of the housing estate distributed through the mass media and on the initial instructions from Sharmeen received over the phone. The physical layout and the children guided my actions through entry, tuition and exit. There were several factors which meant that there was no doubt about how to act. The little boy, his book, the table, and chair indicate to me: sit here, read this. I also drew on my (institutionalised) experiences with schools to make sense of which actions might be required of me as a teacher.

Approximately 50 tutors show up for tuition once a week and interact with the children. They overcome the noise they meet by drawing on the sense they make of themselves and the context in which they feel anchored as tutors. Most make this sense without going to meetings to share talk with others. During the 6 months of observations only 16 different volunteers participated in a meeting at least once. Sharmeen, Yasmeen, Klaus, Morten, Louise and Anne participated at least twice. Two thirds of the volunteers did not participate in any interaction amongst tutors outside tutoring sessions. The tutors who did not go to meetings had very limited communication with other tutors. Occasionally Sharmeen, the contact person for the Network Group, would send out e-mails, but many e-mails bounced as the addresses were not up to date<sup>8</sup>. Ordinary mail was occasionally used but it was felt

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8 The obstacles in using e-mail as a communication channel were largely due to this being 2001/2002.

to be time consuming. The noticeboards at each location were used irregularly by Sharmeen or the person who had taken on writing the summary from a meeting they had participated in. Mostly Sharmeen relied on the House Hosts formally appointed to each day and each location (block D and block G) to communicate information to the volunteers of their day. On the majority of Days, however, no one acted as House Host and so there was no communication.

### **1.6.3 Sensemaking about Noise at Meetings**

Although most tutors made sense of noise in connection with tuition in relative isolation being guided by acts of co-tutors, children and drawing on a variety of frames. There was some interaction between some tutors at meeting, but as we shall see, the sense generated was ambiguous, fragmented and not shared with tutors throughout the organisation.

Many tutors had from varying angles an expectation of that noise might be “dealt with” at meetings. Some of them went to meetings as a way of “dealing with” the problem. For those tutors the analysis indicates that the meetings functioned as a valve for letting off steam about frustrations over noise. An illustration of this is at the meeting on the 15/4/2002 Jane raises the problem of noise. It is something she feels she has to “kick in” since it is not on the agenda. She presents that the older children in block C cannot concentrate on their homework because the younger children are disturbing them. Jane explains how “we” (the tutors on her Day) repeatedly have asked the women in the Women's Club next door to keep the small children out to no avail. The consultant, Dorthe, from the DRC who participates in some meetings refers to the contracts drawn up between the parent groups and the DRC. The contracts indicate that the parent groups should control the children so the tutors don't have to. She says the tutors on Jane's Day should act as a coherent unit and negotiate this with the Women's Club..

Another tutor, Line, says that this is the kind of process which takes place in block G. Jane and Line both actualise the school frame – we need the children to behave more like pupils. Dorthe supplements with the volunteering frame where the tutors should be shown respect and the parents should discipline the children. Sharmeen does not disagree but neither does she encourage the tutors to share

meaning on the Days and act strategically as a group as Jane and Line suggest. Sharmeen suggests a solution which neither requires the Women's Club nor the Network Group to act as coherent units. The solution which she proposes is to order the children's behaviour through a wooden sign which can indicate which children are allowed in or not – a physical artefact. Just as it is done in Tivoli<sup>9</sup> or at McDonald's. Jane says she will take on the task of talking to Suad about putting up a sign and get it done. To my knowledge, however, the sign was never put up.

A month later there is another meeting. The only people who were also present at the previous meeting are the coordinator Sharmeen and Signe, the treasurer. At the meeting they discuss whether the younger and older children should receive tuition at separate locations in order to reduce the level of noise around the older children. This is referred to as having been the plan originally when tuition started. There is no mention of the wooden sign which was discussed at the previous meeting

An older tutor participating in the meeting suggests that they should try to affect a change in the children's current pattern of behaviour so that they stick to the original decision and separate them based on age. Sharmeen interrupts the older tutor to explain why they should live with status quo. The older tutor reiterates her point of trying to enforce a change in the behaviour of the children. I observed a pattern across meetings whereby the older tutors who happen to participate enact a more coherent organisational context. They enact that the organisation has so close communication and coordination mechanisms that strategic action is possible. The enactment of tighter couplings<sup>10</sup> means that it is meaningful to make strategic decisions at meetings and in general the older tutors press for clarity and agreement – shared sense. Whereas Sharmeen, here supported by Morten and Signe, enacts an organisational context of loosely coupled units. This means that strategic choices at meetings lose their importance. Since there are no or only limited control mechanisms to affect the actions of tutors on various Days. Sharmeen, Morten and Signe will only to a limited extent invest in “hammering out” (Weick 1995) longer unambiguous cause chains at meetings. They limit articulated sensemaking at meetings which contrasts conflicting “frames/logics” and avoid choosing one over the other.

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9 A Danish amusement park.

10 Orton & Weick, 1990.

At this meeting, however, Sharmeen, Morten and Signe do unambiguously insist on a cause chain where small children should be allowed into where the older children receive tuition because this is what “they” - the integratees - do. So both unambiguous and ambiguous meaning about noise is produced at this meeting. The organisation is consistently enacted as loosely coupled by Sharmeen and thereby are the behavioural implications of the meaning made at the meeting to leave things as they are or to put up a wooden sign since couplings are not tight enough to affect changed behaviour amongst neither tutors nor children.

What are the consequences for the reproduction of organised action when there is sensemaking with so limited shared articulation? This is illustrated by a sensemaking process over time. I met the tutors Marlene and Mathilde shortly after they have joined the organisation. They are close friends and speak to each other frequently. They have known each other for several years and have studied Integration Studies together at college. They have also been employed as paid staff in a voluntary organisation. After having tutored a couple of times they have become frustrated with the high level of noise. As a consequence they have decided to initiate their own activity: an Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange for women. They would like to negotiate the inauguration of this new activity with the organisation the Network Group. Therefore they come to a Saturday meeting where the following extracts are from.

At the Saturday meeting Mathilde and Marlene start out with a School and a Volunteer frame for their proposed activity. They don't bring the Integration frame into play. At the individual interview they draw on it, but here their concern is: How could they ensure sufficient peace and quiet for their activity?

Sharmeen: ”You will probably be working closely with the Women's Club down there.”

Mathilde /Marlene: ”I don't think we intend to do it down there. That is not my intention. Not yours either is it? (Laughter) Because there is too much noise – it wouldn't be profitable for either party.”

Sharmeen”... But I think in general if you want to avoid too much noise then you should do it in the mornings when the children are at school. Because as soon as it is after school there will be children. Also because they have a very different attitude. You can easily have 30 children and do Arts and

Crafts Exchange. It is no problem for them. It is natural that there are children.”

Sharmeen brings the integration frame into play here. Sharmeen has rejected this frame on other occasions where *she* is being made different. Here, however, she narrates herself into the Danish group while still asserting privileged knowledge of “the others”. Sharmeen and her sister, Yasmeen, argue to make it illegitimate to enter into a position from where one does not tolerate noise. Marlene and Mathilde react by ending the conversation and in this way they refrain from “hammering out” shared sensemaking:

Mathilde & Marlene: ”We (Mathilde and Marlene) will have to figure that out.” (Recording of Saturday Workshop 18/3/2002:13)

After the meeting and this exchange Mathilde and Marlene pursued negotiations directly with the Women’s Club about where and when the Arts and Crafts Exchange Activity might take place. The difficulties they experience in making sense of tuition and the noise they experience in connection with it does not make Mathilde and Marlene leave the organisation, instead they loosely couple themselves to the rest of the organisation by initiating an affiliated but independent activity – an Arts and Crafts Exchange. In this manner the ambiguity between the sense for example Sharmeen makes of the children and noise and that of Marlene and Mathilde does not result in that the reproduction of tuition is undermined, instead it is contained through the establishment of loose couplings.

They do not produce a durable sense of noise and of how the tutors ought to handle the noise. This is due to the pattern of low attendance at meetings and limited communication across the organisation. Guided by Sharmeen the articulation is interrupted and limited at meetings and the solutions which are identified are either live with it or put up a wooden sign. None of the solutions require close communication or control with the tutors. The structural fragmentation which is created as Mathilde and Marlene loosely couple themselves to the rest of the organisation have the effect that ”strained relations are contained” (Eisenberg, 1984). Thereby the tutors are left to make sense alone in interaction with the children, the physical layout, and the mostly non-verbal extracted cues of

their co-actors sensemaking. In this sensemaking process they draw on a range of enacted contexts and frames of understanding and their behavioural implications. These are not confronted with each other because the tutors rarely talk to each other. Some of them choose to vent their frustrations at meetings only loosely coupled to the tutors on each Day.

## **1.7 Case 2: Having Meetings in Spite of Low-attendance**

Having meetings in spite of low attendance is a case of coordinated non-routinised action undertaken by mutually dependent actors which is reproduced in spite of limited articulated interaction. The sense that there are meetings lends legitimacy to the organisation as a social construction – the tutors feel they have influence, and the external stakeholders feel they have a legitimate partner to interact with. If the legitimacy of the way they are Having Meetings was challenged on any of the two accounts it would threaten the survival of the formal organisation. However, Having Meetings threatens to collapse as a credible and legitimate activity at the start of every meeting because the meetings are only attended by what is perceived to be a low number of participants. Making sense of meetings with only the contact person and two or three other participants is thus essential to the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings and by extension to the survival of the organisation. Having Meetings in this manner is not even a routine-action for those who position themselves primarily as tutors and who do not go to meetings. They too experience cognitive dissonance in relation to asserting their subject position<sup>11</sup>. They experience a lingering feeling that it is not legitimate not to go to meetings.

The Meetings case is not only a case of non-routinised action essential to the survival of the organisation it is also a valid case of organised action since it is performed by mutually dependent actors. Those who go to meetings are dependent on being able to feel that they are acting on behalf of the others. If they enacted that their perceived co-actors did not acknowledge their contribution to the organisation at meetings – if they felt that the others did not feel represented and

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<sup>11</sup> At least at the individual interviews.



part of what happens at meetings – then it would undermine their participation in the reproduction of organised action. Those who do not go to meetings rely on enacting that others go to meetings in order to render the organisation legitimate in their own eyes.

## **1.7.1 Distributed Sensemaking Outside Meetings**

The arena for sensemaking by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings is characterised by that they to varying degrees have no access to communication across the organisation. Since articulated sensemaking during tuition is limited the majority of tutors engage in distributed rather than shared sensemaking processes about Having Meetings. The tutors engage in sensemaking processes which render their own continued pattern of action as regards Having Meetings sensible. The thesis finds that part of making sense of their own role is to make sense of the roles of their co-actors in relation to Having Meetings. There are two subject positions (roles) which are enacted by the tutors as constituting recognisable patterns of action related to Having Meetings. To be someone who-goes-to-meetings, or: To be someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings.

Lone actualises a subject position as tutor as opposed to being someone who-goes-to-meetings. When Lone talks about herself – and her life in general during the interview she narrates her life as being divided into a limited amount of time slots. This is not as prevalent with the other tutor, but it is general that the volunteers' sensemaking about their role in Having Meetings is in part communicated through what orders the narrative about other activities in their life.

Lone: “But I am interested in this and only this<sup>12</sup>. Because that is what I can find time for on a weekly basis - and I think it seemed like one could just come and make an effort and go home again.” (Interview with Lone:4).

Apart from justifying not going to meetings by whether she has time or not Lone also draws on a shared local narrative about the minimal organisation where it is legitimate not to participate in meetings. Even though Lone does not go to the

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<sup>12</sup> Tutoring as opposed to meetings.

meetings she still co-produces Having Meetings by actualising a system/structure where others act on her behalf.

“We are all raised with that one ought to participate in the democracy. That you should get involved in all of that – sit on committees and boards and care about politics, and for many years I have really felt guilty about it...”

(Interview with Lone:8-9)

Lone actualises and needs to make sense of that she does not go to meetings even though she positions herself primarily as a tutor. So even those who enact that they do-not-go-to-meetings need to make sense of their roles in Having Meetings. By saying “we are all raised with..” and tracing the meaning she attaches to Having Meetings across time and arenas she indicates that the meaning is institutionalised rather than local.

Klaus expresses that for a long while he did not go to meetings because it did not seem rationally necessary. He did not think that the interaction with the children required further coordination or facilitation from meetings. Although Klaus did not go to meetings he labels it “a bit strange” that he did not go implying that one ought to go.

It is a general feature of Signes self narration that she is driven by desire and fancies.

Signe: “Sometimes I don't go because of a whim – life sweeps me away and I happen not to go – I don't feel like it. ” (Interview with Signe:8).

This is the predominant way she explains why she has done things. Signe refuses to take up an unequivocal position as either someone who goes or someone who doesn't go to meetings.

Mathilde and Marlene emphasise the power structure of the formal organisation and imply that it is not legitimate to make decisions when those attending meetings are not in close contact with the rest of the tutors. The new tutor Mette cannot be said to participate in the organised action of Having Meetings since she makes no sense of Having Meetings. Volunteering is solely related to tuition for her.

Those who go to meetings also take up a range of subject positions: Marie positions herself as someone who goes to meetings. On the other hand she doesn't participate in any meetings while I observe the organisation. Marie enacts that it is legitimate to zap in and out of attending meetings. This is why she “dares” to position herself as someone who goes to meetings - because she enacts that she does not thereby commit to long term attendance of meetings. Sharmeen positions herself as a leader who encourages a flat structure consisting of autonomous groups. She sees it as a virtue to limit the amount of time spent in meetings and channel the tutors' time and energy to tuition instead. Sharmeen refers to her previous experience in the squatters and feminist movement where centralised decision making is limited and performed by the ever-changing participants at plenary meetings.

In summary they all, except Mette, make sense of their own position in relation to Having Meetings: Even those who-do-not-go-to-meetings feel they have to justify not going. This need for justification is not based on articulated interaction within the Network Group but because it has been institutionalised in other arenas. Their accounts of going or not going vary from person to person and they draw on experiences from other arenas, to some extent local negotiations, and their identity formation process.

## **1.7.2 The Frames of Understanding**

Based on an analysis of all the articulations of Having Meetings either at interviews or during interaction at meetings or tuition the thesis identifies a number of frames of understanding that were actualised. The frames provide a shorthand for sets of subject positions and the relations between them. The case presented here focusses on the ordering effect of the actualisation of four such frames. Those four are the ones most comprehensively referred to when making sense of attendance/non-attendance to meetings.

*The traditional association: (Lone, Marie, Signe, Mathilde and Marlene)* foregrounds democratic processes. The subject positions in this frame are the those who-do-not-go-to-meetings and those who represent them at meetings. The two should communicate regularly so representation is possible. Those-who-do-not-go-to-meetings should read the agendas prior to meetings so they could express their

opinion/interests to their representatives. The representatives should commit to attend meetings for at least a year at a time. The behavioural implication in this frame is that low attendance indicates that the organisation is not legitimate since it indicates that those who-do-not-go-to-meetings are unable to exert influence. *The minimal organisation: (Sharmeen, Marie, Lone, Signe, Klaus)* foregrounds tutoring rather than democratic processes. The ideal in the minimal model is to limit the waste of energy and time at boring meetings. The most important position is that of being a tutor as opposed to being someone who-goes-to-meetings. Those who happen to show up at a meeting undertake the tasks to be performed there in isolation from the others. Going to meetings does not have to be performed by the same people at all meetings. The behavioural implication is that it is good that only a few tutors show up at meetings at least then the rest of the tutors are protected from getting bored and demotivated and can focus on tutoring. *Social cohesion: (Marie, Sharmeen, Mathilde and Marlene)* foregrounds each actor's emotional need to belong to a community. The subject positions in the frame are those who know others - and are motivated by it and those who do not know others and may be demotivated. Meetings in this frame are enacted as occasions for “getting to know each other”. The behavioural implication of this frame is that non-attendance to meetings threatens the reproduction of tutoring because when tutors do not get together and get to know one another, they become demotivated. *Competent Management: (Klaus)* foregrounds management structures. Actors who draw on the competent management logic talk about competences, making strategic choices, being in control, ensuring coordination, and monitoring. The subject positions are those of managers (who-go-to-meetings) and those managed. The behavioural implication of this frame is that the level of attendance to meetings should be judged based on which coordinative tasks need to be produced.

The traditional association frame is institutionalised historically in Denmark. The minimal organisation frame stems partly from the DRC's employment-like-contracts and is merged with Sharmeens experiences from the squatters and feminist movements. The Social Cohesion frame is also wide spread. The Competent Management frame is taught at the business school where Klaus studied and is widely institutionalised.

The various frames are actualised in sensemaking about Having Meetings. Part of this sensemaking is identity formation where each actor position themselves

discursively within various frames. This positioning of self is an emergent and multiple process. The process is multiple because as seen above in the overview of frames each tutor actualises several frames when they narrate Having Meetings. It is emergent because it is not just the attendance to meetings which indicate one's positioning – but also whether the actor makes it an articulated issue whether they are going or not – it is possible to enact one self as someone who-goes-to-meetings without actually going. This is the case for Marie who used to go to meetings – but is unable to attend for various reasons – but she is still considered as one-who-goes-to-meetings. because she explains why she will not attend before each meeting. Vice versa some actors go to a meeting but define themselves as someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings. They enact that them going was a once off. Klaus sets out to do this – but as it happens Klaus continues to go to several meetings. He is subsequently enacted as someone who-goes-to-meetings. Signe refuses to be defined and works hard to stay sitting on the fence. Once the tutors enact themselves as having one or another role they create further sense about this – sense that creates compatibility between their own actions and a legitimate system of “Having Meetings”.

The thesis has viewed the processes where the tutors take themselves up in various subject positions as a significant source of sensemaking about Having Meetings. They each derive motivation from the idiosyncratic sense they make. The range of subject positions emerged not only as the result of local negotiations, but also as a mixture of institutionalised elements and past experiences fused in ongoing self narrations. The thesis finds that the sense actors need to make is more related to their self construction than it is related to an instrumental goal achievement. This sensemaking process guide and motivates actors to continue to act even though they do not engage in articulated interaction with each other.

### **1.7.3 Sensemaking about Low Attendance at Meetings**

The above showed that the majority of the tutors' actions are rendered sensible through distributed sensemaking processes rather than through sensemaking shared with their co-actors. This section addresses how this navigation between multiple frames of understanding affect the reproduction of the pattern of Having Meetings in spite of low-attendance. Based on an analysis of sensemaking,

communication, and interaction in the Network Group the thesis identifies six types of mechanisms which contributes to that the meetings are held regularly even though they do not live up to the expectations to the traditional association. The mechanisms are presented in the separate section below.

## **1.7.4 Ambiguous Sensemaking and Non-strategic**

### **Decision Making**

At meetings the consultant, Dorthe, and Sharmeen, the coordinator, do what they can to enact a context of plentiful resources and this sense is reproduced by those who participate in meetings. They enact that there is an abundance of both finances and potential volunteers. As a consequence tutors are not invited to engage in shared unequivocal sensemaking about which activities should be prioritized over others at meetings.

It is not only in relation to prioritising one activity over another that Sharmeen, avoids acting as a sensegiver. An analysis of all the transcribed meetings indicates that she does not provide long and complex (rich<sup>13</sup>) narratives, but she acts as a sensegiver in another way. Along with others she stops extensive shared sensemaking at meetings. She facilitates multiple/open-ended viewing points. In this manner she initiates and encourages the production of ambiguity. The case indicates that when only few issues are perceived to need to be unequivocally solved diverse and conflicting frames of understanding can be actualised with minimal conflict.

The under-emphasis on decision making in the organisation gives legitimacy to the low attendance meetings which would otherwise threaten the legitimacy of the organised action of Having Meetings. Since if there are no contentious decision to be made then it is perfectly legitimate that only a few actors partake in the administrative tasks undertaken at meetings. The enactment of plentiful resources may, however, some day be challenged. The enactment could be challenged if the number of ideas for activities increased along with actors who were willing to see them through. Then the allocated monetary resources could run out. It would probably have a significant effect on the level of shared sensemaking in the

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13 As emphasised by Maitlis (2005).

organisation. Since it could spur on articulated attempts to secure funds for one's own idea.

The high level of ambiguity also undermines their ability to act strategically as a group. As they do not share an unequivocal story of how they are Having Meetings they are less able to act uniformly to ameliorate the shortcomings they might identify. So they are able to reproduce stability but hard pressed to produce changes or improvements which imply changed behaviour from a number of tutors.

One of the main things produced at meetings is the next meeting. One meeting produces the next. More so than it produces shared meaning. There are just about enough participants at each meeting to enable those present to enact a legitimate meeting and – with help from the minimal organisation frame – to enable that the next meeting can be planned. On the other hand it drains energy that they have to regenerate sense about low-attendance to meetings at the beginning of each meeting. The negative experience challenges the participants and may contribute to the big turn-over of participants at meetings. A stronger and more widely shared image of the minimal model would probably ameliorate this.

## **1.7.5 The Mirage of a House Host Day**

Another mechanism which contributes to the reproduction of Having Meetings in spite of low-attendance is related to the House Host System. Formally each Day has an appointed House Host who in an unspecified manner is supposed to facilitate tutoring on their Day and act as contact person between the tutors of their Day and others. Many Days, however, did not have a House Host and many tutors did not know who their House Host was.

A House Host Day is regularly suggested as the solution to the problem of low attendance meetings. A House Host Day would be a once-off meeting where all House Hosts attended. There the House Hosts could be convinced that they should come to meetings from now on. There is a in-built catch 22 in this reasoning. In order to be convinced to come to meetings the House Hosts should come to a House Host Day, which they will not come to because they do not come to meetings. The enactment of the House Host Day as a potential reality allows participants at low-attendance meetings to “do” something. By discussing and planning the elusive House Host Day and subsequently giving it up as unrealistic

because of the catch 22 they can enact that they address the problem and thus accommodate the traditional association frame while at the same time not changing action patterns and thus reproducing a minimal organisation. When they reproduce an unattainable ideal of a House Host Day they also increase frustration.

## **1.7.6 Ascribing Leadership to Meetings**

Coming to meetings to interact with or communicate with “the organisation” is an often cited reason for coming to meetings. It is an alternative reason for coming to meetings to positioning oneself as someone who-goes-to-meetings. The institutionalised script of coming to a meeting to interact with “the organisation” is challenged and renegotiated when they are faced with a low-attendance meeting where “the organisation” and leadership dissolves into a process of sensemaking where they themselves are hailed into recreating it. When tutors' actions are shaped by that they ascribe leadership to meetings they bulk up the number of participants and thus alleviate the low attendance to meetings problem.

That there is an absence of leadership does not affect the institutionally founded ascription of leadership to meetings. This is probably due to that there are not channels of communication which can reveal the state of affairs to a wider group of actors who have not yet participated in meetings. In general this indicated that when leadership has been ascribed (Meindl, 1993) to somewhere it takes a lot to change it. As in other sensemaking processes actors will as far as possible make the plausible sense that all is well and does not require changed action.

## **1.7.7 Buffering Pressure to Act as a Traditional Organisation**

The fourth mechanism which contributes to stabilising the reproduction of Having Meetings in spite of low attendance is that Sharmeen acts as a buffer towards External stakeholders who are putting pressure on “the organisation” to be more



coherent. They are hailing<sup>14</sup> the organisation into interacting with them, to respond as a consistent coherent unit to them.

Sharmeen: “...there is something new all the time just getting things up and running... but mostly because the Father Group and Suad they are standing outside and they get new ideas constantly, right – which they would like somebody to – me or us to have an opinion about.” (Interview Sharmeen:20).

But Sharmeen acts as a buffer between them and the meetings either by not bringing issues further or by not encouraging participants at meetings to negotiate a shared opinion about these issues. This mechanism means that a force that could have altered the way they are Having Meetings does not have any impact.

## **1.7.8 Structural Fragmentation**

Each Day of tutoring functions in a loosely coupled manner. It takes a long time for events on one Day to affect events on another. Information travels slowly if at all. The thesis finds that the structural fragmentation between various activities frees up the participants from agreeing on what they do and how they do it and they can continue to actualise a range of frames of understanding.

An example of this is if those who-do-not-go-to-meetings began to enact cues and meaning indicating that other tutors weren't going to meetings and that meetings were not being held in the organisation it is likely that it would make the frame for tutoring illegitimate. If they began to enact that nobody maintained administration and relations to external stakeholders or that decisions were made by just one or a few people without any restraint from others it would probably not feel legitimate within the framework of a traditional association. From the perspective of the researcher who travels across arenas in the organisation it is certainly possible to claim that this is the state of affairs in the organisation at the moment. It is, however, not an obstacle to the reproduction of organised action

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<sup>14</sup> The term “to hail” is used in the same way as Stuart Hall, 1996. He refers to personal identity. External actors are hailing “the organisation” to act like a unit a person and I think this makes Hall's concept appropriate for an organisation. It is being encouraged to create a suture of “itself” with a position of being a unit which can interact coherently and consistently with external stakeholders.

because communication across the organisation is so poor that those who-do-not-go-to-meetings never find out. So in this case the low level of communication enables a widespread enactment of that the organisation is coherent enough to be legitimate.

## **1.7.9 Extracting Cues of Actions Rather than Sharing Meaning**

Lone, who-does-not-go-to-meetings, looks out for and enacts cues about “the others” which fuels the sensemaking she engages in about Having Meetings and her own role in it. Those extracted cues are notices on the noticeboards and e-mails and elements of what her House Host might mention to her. She takes them to indicate that legitimate meetings are being held. At meetings the main extracted cue about enacted co-actors is whether these co-actors participate in meetings or not.

The thesis found that in this case actors can have defined themselves as a unit and are responsive to one another without engaging in articulated communication, and that the connection between them exists in the shape of that they attribute meaning to cues indicating each others' actions. The motivational effect of sensemaking driven by these cues then relies on that sense is made in an atmosphere of trust. In an atmosphere of trust such as in this case organisation actors display a tendency to make action-reinforcing sense of the cues they “get” as to the acts of their co-actors without seeking articulated negotiation of shared meaning.

## **1.7.10 Summary of the Case of Having Meetings**

The tutors make a wide range of sense of the organised activity of Having Meetings in spite of low-attendance. In doing so they draw on a number of frames of understanding with conflicting action implications. Since the actors rarely talk to each other the conflicting behavioural implications constructed by each actor do not deter continued organised action. These multiple frames range from being locally negotiated to being institutionalised in arenas outside the formal organisation. The sensemaking process about Having Meetings in spite of low-

attendance can be understood as a process of negotiating their own and enacted co-actors subject positions.

The thesis identifies 6 mechanisms through which this pattern of action as regards to Having Meetings is reproduced by actors whose actions are motivated and coordinated through distributed rather than shared Sensemaking processes.

First of all the enactment of plentiful resources reduces the felt need to prioritise and make unequivocal sense about issues at meetings. This means that actors can continue to make diverse sense, actualising a range of frames of understanding, so the overall sense made at meetings remains ambiguous. The ambiguity is further fuelled by a leader who seeks out physical rather than social solutions to practical problems which do not rely on that the tutors agree unequivocally to act in a certain manner. Secondly the recurrent enactment of an unattainable House Host Day as the solution to the low-attendance meetings enables a sense of doing something which does not necessitate changed action because it is enacted as an unattainable catch 22. Thirdly an institutionalised ascription of leadership to meetings bulks up the number of participants in meetings and thus alleviates the issue of low-attendance meetings. Fourthly the coordinator, Sharmeen, acts as a buffer against external stakeholders' pressure on the organisation to act coherently and make unequivocal sense. Fifth the structural fragmentation of the organisation contributes to that the tutors rarely engage in articulated interaction and this increases the organisations ability to navigate between conflicting institutional pressures by producing ambiguous meaning which can accommodate competing frames of understanding. Sixth the tutors make sense of cues rather than articulated words indicating the acts of enacted co-actors. This too enables them to makes sense of their actions drawing on conflicting frames of understanding.

The case indicates that limited articulated interaction between actors can facilitate organised action. This can be the case when the loose coupling allows each to continue to presume that the other is continuing to perform their part of a joint action. Whereas sharing and articulated interaction might have revealed that the performance of going-to-meetings was much weaker than assumed by those who-did-not-go-to-meetings, and that those who-did-not-go-to-meetings felt a lot less involved in what happened at meetings than those who-go-to-meetings think. The whole process was driven by a tendency to make action-reinforcing sense

supporting status quo in an atmosphere of trust. Although the reproduction of organised action is stabilised with the increased level of ambiguity it also creates a high level of confusion, isolation, and limited knowledge transfer. It is not a model suitable for all types of organisations.

## **1.8 Discussion of Extant Theory in Light of the Two Cases**

In order to address the research question *How do mutually dependent actors in the same formal organisation become motivated to continue to perform coordinated non-routine actions when shared articulated sensemaking is limited?* the thesis has presented two cases. Both cases are cases of reproduction of non-routine action amongst mutually dependent actors who only engage in limited shared articulation. In the first case actors make enough sense to continue to tutor in spite of the perceived cognitive dissonance they experience when the children make noise. In the second case actors make enough sense to reproduce the way they are having meetings in spite of the cognitive dissonance they experience when they discover that fewer attend meetings than what they enact is legitimate. In both cases actors make sufficient sense to continue a pattern of action in spite of a perceived disturbance. In both cases actors only to a limited extent make this sense by drawing on meaning which has been negotiated within the formal organisation.

The key findings are summarised in the following points:

- Sensemaking processes which draw on multiple frames can, to an extent, replace reliance on frames negotiated within the formal organisation.
- Ambiguous sensemaking can support organised action. Actors can be motivated by taking themselves up in multiple and ambiguous subject positions.
- Viewing action promoting sensemaking as being fuelled by identity formation rather than by regarding it as fuelled by goal achievement gives a deeper understanding.
- Exercising heed towards actors both within and beyond the formal organisation can stabilise the reproduction of organised action within the formal organisation.

- Sensemaking not drawing on shared talk can be fuelled and stabilised by interaction with external stakeholders.

In the following the key findings will be compared with extant theory and their general applicability will be discussed.

## **1.8.1 Making Sense by Drawing on Multiple Institutionalised Frames and Roles**

In both empirical cases several actors draw on more than one frame of understanding and take themselves up in multiple subject positions as they make sense of the two issues; noise in tuition and non-attendance to meetings. This perhaps reflects a more general characteristic of late modern identity formation. When identity is conceptualised as contextual (Davies & Harré, 1990, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and each actor engages in many contexts it is only reasonable to expect actualisation of multiple subject positions manifested in multiple frames of understanding. During the individual interviews these incongruities were handled through various narrative strategies intended to separate talking from either one or another subject position, or to let them clash and take an ironic distance from it. This is illustrated in the following extract from the field notes:

“I chat to Sharmeen and Yasmeen and they joke about the possibility of no-one else showing up: Sharmeen: “If the others don't turn up – then we will just decide everything!” Laughter. (Transcript of the Saturday Meeting 16/3/2002:2).

That an isolated minority can make decisions is accepted in the minimal organisation frame, but that is not legitimate in the traditional association frame. Both frames are actualised above and the inbuilt contradictions are handled through distancing indicated by laughter. From a sensemaking analytical point of view it means that even if the case organisation had a high extent of shared meaning the empirical data could still yield many examples of multiple meanings. Differentiating between levels of shared meaning thus becomes a task of judging the extent of and predominance of identical frames.

Weick (1993) found that the absence of clear roles would limit actors ability to act when faced with perceived challenges since they would lack coordination in the shape of a clear path forward. He found that idiosyncratic or even “wrong” roles would ameliorate this since this would provide a basis for adapting the roles to the unfolding situation and this would provide a basis for imposing order on the situation by patterning actions. The findings of the thesis support that idiosyncratic roles, such as can exist in the absence of shared talk, can be adequate facilitators for participation in organised action. The thesis furthermore highlights that some actors are motivated by a desire to not commit to roles and instead seek to span and zap between roles. This for instance as was the case with Signe and Marie only went to meetings because they did not have to *be* someone-who-goes-to-meetings in order to do it. Making it a case of action that is not driven by role-adaptation but rather driven by the reverse.

Organisations may differ in terms of the extent to which actors draw on institutionalised scripts to make sense of their activities. The results of the thesis are applicable to organisations where key activities are highly institutionalised through interaction in other arenas or where actors can or are encouraged to make parallels between the activities of the organisation and activities which they know from other arenas.

Maitlis (2005) found that minimal organisational sensemaking process with limited shared talk lead to fragmented and ad hoc organised action. This was supported by the findings of the thesis. For example at one meeting the tutors decided to reduce noise through the erection of a sign, at the next meeting this was forgotten. The cases also indicate, however, that fragmented ad hoc action produced in the absence of shared talk can be appropriate responses for organisations enacting conflicting institutional fields and with actors who take up multiple subject positions with conflicting behavioural implications. Fragmented ad hoc action allows the accommodation of enacted conflicting demands. This was for instance the case when the tutors decided as a once off occasion to present a “board” to the bank in connection with opening an account while at the same time refraining from enacting the existence of such a board internally in the formal organisation. Whereas Maitlis emphasises resolving these contradictions to facilitate action. I make the point that it may facilitate the reproduction of

organised action if an organisation does not resolve the contradictions but instead reproduces ambiguity.

## **1.8.2 Ambiguous Sensemaking can Support the Reproduction of Organised Action**

The key controversy within contemporary sensemaking theory that the thesis identifies is the impact of ambiguous sensemaking on organised action. On the one hand Weick & Bougon (1986) and Maitlis (2005) find an inverse causality between the level of ambiguity and actors inclination to engage in organised action. On the other hand Eisenberg (1984) suggests that ambiguity can strengthen the inclination to act together. The findings in the two empirical cases have indicated that in an atmosphere of trust ambiguous sense when coupled with lack of communication amongst actors can strengthen the participants inclination to continue to act even in the face of disruptions. This is because it allows them to draw on a range of frames of understanding and take themselves up in a range of subject positions with diverse behavioural implications without confronting their co-actors. These findings are only generalisable to other settings with an atmosphere of trust. If there is not an atmosphere of trust I hypothesise that actors may not be inclined to persevere with a current pattern of action in spite of disruptions. Since they will not trust “that all is well”.

When actors actualise conflicting frames of understanding such as the traditional association versus the minimal organisation in sensemaking about having meetings ambiguous sensemaking allows them to continue to express respect for both frames. Making ambiguous sense is not an ideal way of handling conflicting frames of understanding since it can lead to a frustrating sense of paralysis. In the case of tutoring in spite of noise the tutors also actualised different frames of understanding with conflicting action implications. Whether to discipline the children to be silent to promote learning (the behavioural implication of the school frame) or whether to tolerate the noise in an effort to emotionally reach and integrate the children (the behavioural implication of the integration frame). The case indicated that when ambiguous sense was made of an issue at meetings by actualising several frames the perceived legitimacy of the suggested

action was increased since it was made recognisable within all the actualised frames.

Smircich & Stubbart (1985) argued that shared meaning makes it more likely that actors will interpret the acts of co-actors in a way that confirms their own pattern of action. In the two cases of the thesis the opposite is true. If the actors were to start negotiating shared meaning it would make it harder for them to enact that the intentions of co-actors complemented their own since they would be confronted with the diversity in sensemaking.

In 1969/79 Weick proposed that organisations have a tendency to move from shared means and divergence on goals towards convergence on goals over time. It could be the case that actors in the Network Group through a period of shared talk would make shared sense rather than diverse sense. On the other hand it is also possible that this process would alienate those actors who could not reconcile this shared sense – or even the process of sharing - with their ongoing identity formation. This is a point of view held by the coordinator, Sharmeen. My aim here is not to fuel an argument over whether one or the other mechanism will dominate, but rather to point out that both mechanisms could be at play and that we will make better organisational analysis if we take that into account.

The case of having meetings identifies a number of mechanisms which explain why the organisation does not move towards more shared meaning in the way Weick (1969/79) anticipated.

- When actors enact that there are plenty resources it makes decision making less contentious. Thereby they are less inclined to increase the level of articulated interaction.
- Reproducing structural fragmentation whereby units within the Network Group remain loosely coupled with each other also contributes to limiting the level of shared articulated interaction.
- By identifying the solution to the problem of low attendance as a House Host Day which they enacted was unattainable they were able to create a sense of addressing the issue while at the same time not changing the pattern of limited shared articulation.

A visit to the DRC in 2007 to report the findings of the thesis revealed that little had changed in the patterns of shared talk since the time of data-generation in 2001/2002. This indicates that the mechanisms listed below did in fact stabilise the



reproduction of a low level of shared talk in the organisation. We can only expect to find similar mechanisms in other organisations where interaction with the surroundings of the organisation does not hinder the enactment that there are plenty of resources not least a vast pool of potential new participants.

### **1.8.3 Sensemaking Fuelled by Identity Formation**

#### **Rather than Goal Achievement**

Weick & Bougon (1986) suggested that actors will be motivated to act together if their cause maps are coordinated in the manner that they mutually see each other as instrumental in achieving their own goals. In the two cases the tutors did sometimes insert actions of co-actors as prerequisite for their rendering their own actions sensible. Such as those who-do-not-go-to-meetings justified not going to meetings by saying that others went instead. Thereby they were able to achieve their goal of having a legitimate organisation. On the other hand the two cases also showed examples of actors acting together even when their cause maps were disparate. This indicates that explanations for joint action should be sought in the scope for making sense of self rather than goal achievement. Indicating that rather than being driven by goal achievement they were driven by “doing” being sensible selves. As when Louise justifies her pattern of action as regards having meetings by positioning herself as someone who-goes-to-meetings because that is what she does regardless of context. She is still sensitive to extracted cues about her co-actors but she has a tendency to enact that those cues confirm her present pattern of action because she has invested that pattern with manifesting who she is. The imagery of overlapping cause maps (Weick & Bougon, 1986) cannot capture that. This may, however, be due to that the analysis builds on two cases of voluntary work where the individual incentives and goals may be somewhat obscured. It is possible that it would be less applicable to for-profit organisations.

The thesis formulates an analytical strategy to accommodate the analysis of the impact of identity formation on joint action. This is based on a synthesis of sensemaking theory with theory about discursive identity formation (Davies & Harré, 1990 and Søndergaard, 2000). The analytical strategy was to identify behavioural implications of the constructed subject positions. An analysis similar to the analysis of subject positions could have been achieved drawing on Wiley's

(1988) theory about subjectivities as Weick suggests in 1995. Wiley's conceptualisation, however, does not provide tools for identifying and analysing behavioural implications as Søndergaard (2000) does. The analysis of the behavioural implications of the sense made is particularly central when the thesis studies the relation between sensemaking and action. Drawing on discursive identity formation theory was even more appropriate since the data generated from the case studies was mainly in the form of texts.

## **1.8.4 Heed of Enacted Co-actors Within and Beyond the Formal Organisation**

Weick & Roberts (1993) found that the more heed actors displayed towards co-actors the more resilient would the reproduction of organised action be in the face of disturbances - independently of the amount of shared talk produced. Who they enact as co-actors is relevant for understanding who do they “look out for” cues from or in the words of Weick & Roberts (1993) who they are heedful towards. The case of having meetings demonstrated that the sensemaking processes which contributed to render their own subject position and their own pattern of action meaningful were driven by various extracted cues about their co-actors actions. For example the minutes from a meeting on the noticeboard was extracted as a cue by Lone who imbued it with the meaning that all is well there others who go to meetings – so I don't have to. This same indirect responsiveness to enacted co-actors existed in the noise case but in that case the enacted co-actors were beyond the boundaries of the formal organisation. For example, when the Danish Government cut back funding of integration activities some tutors took this as a cue for sensemaking about tuition. Several tutors responded by being more motivated to continue to tutor – even if they were put off by the noise. The thesis found that the motivational effects of the enactment of co-actors had a similar impact of action regardless of whether they were within the organisation or beyond its boundaries.

## **1.8.5 Sensemaking Guided by Interaction with**

### **External Stakeholders**

There is a bias towards focussing on formal organisations in the sensemaking studies from which this thesis springs. The focus is manifested when it is recommended that management act as sensegivers whilst involving other members (Smircich & Morgan, 1982), that there should be face to face meetings amongst members of the organisation to "hammer out" shared meaning (Weick, 1995) to that it is important that the organisation builds up shared "reservoirs of crystallised texts" which can act as resources for members sensemaking (Weick, 2004). In the case of tutoring in spite of noise, however, the tutors derived much of their motivation and certainly most of the coordination of actions through interaction with the children. The practical implication for management in a context where actors are coordinated through interaction with external stakeholder could be to recognise and protect this interaction because of its significance as a source of meaning to the members of the organisation.

The interaction with external stakeholders stabilises the reproduction of organised action in another way; the organised action of having meetings was in part motivated and coordinated by drawing on a locally negotiated frame of understanding; the minimal organisation. Although this frame had been negotiated through shared talk at a once-off plenary meeting early in the organisations history it conflicted with the institutionalised frame the traditional association. None of the frames of understanding were dominant. The reason why the frame which was strongly institutionalised outside the organisation – the traditional association frame - did not dominate within the organisation too was that the minimal organisation frame was re-actualised across time and space by the consultant from the DRC and the coordinator, Sharmeen. This indicates that if an "alternative" frame of understanding is to survive in an organisation with limited articulated shared sensemaking key actors need to repeatedly act as sensegivers championing the frame in the fragmented interaction which may take place.

The extent to which actors in a formal organisation can rely on generating stabilising motivation and coordination from interaction with external stakeholders varies from organisation to organisation. Depending on the nature of its activities

and its external stakeholders. The organised activities for which mechanisms similar to those unfolded in the two cases are likely to work are organised action where external stakeholders are firmly structured in their sensemaking through interaction in other arenas. In the having meetings case it is the consultant who is embedded in the DRC and has a long career behind her. This stabilises her sensemaking enough to enable her consistently to guide the tutors to draw on the minimal organisation frame. In the case of tutoring in spite of noise it is the children who are embedded in the ongoing interaction at their school.

## **1.8.6 Anticipated Criticism**

I anticipate that Weick's main criticism of this thesis particularly in light of his newer publications (2004 and 2005) would be that organised action accompanied by limited shared talk amongst the participants is a contradiction in terms. He might protest that if actors do not share talk about their activities they are not undertaking organised action. I hold that this limits the explanatory power of sensemaking theory unnecessarily. Something which is particularly detrimental if the hypothesis I have borrowed from Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) is true that late modern forms of organising will to an increasing extent leave actors to make sense in relation to imagined communities rather than ones constituted in face-to-face interactions.

Another possible point of criticism is that this way of reasoning about sensemaking and organised action shows a blatant disregard for seeking to optimise an objective quality of the organised action. Prioritising having an organisation with diverse and multiple sensemaking over having an efficient organisation is perhaps unusual. On the other hand it is an approach which can be relevant to some types of organisations. In the voluntary sector it can be a goal in itself that an organisation is a platform for as many actors' voluntary work as possible – with a slight disregard for the quality of their joint efforts. Simply because participation of many actors can be a goal in itself.

A third point of criticism may be that the thesis does not explicitly pursue the ongoing mutual constitution of action and meaning which is such a core construct in sensemaking theory. Weick (1995) offers a typology of sensemaking processes distinguished by whether they are action-driven or sense-driven. He argues that

this leads to sensemaking processes in turn characterised by justification and commitment. The thesis does not apply this categorisation to sensemaking processes but assumes a model of ongoing mutual constitution between the two. This is in part because it is empirically challenging to analyse an empirical case of sensemaking processes characterised by that the bulk of sensemaking is not articulated out loud except at interviews.

## 1.9 Contributions

The thesis found that the mutually dependent actors, rather than drawing on shared talk in their sensemaking processes, derive both motivation and coordination of their actions by actualising a range of frames of understanding in their process identity formation. The sensemaking process is not hindered by the lack of shared talk and the resulting increased ambiguity. This is because communication is so limited that conflicting sense is rarely contrasted. The thesis finds that in a formal organisation with limited shared talk and an atmosphere of trust actors will have a tendency to make action reaffirming sense of the acts of their enacted co-actors and when actors in the organisation draw on a variety of institutionalised frames the limited level of shared talk will facilitate rather than hinder continued shared action.

The thesis makes a theoretical contribution to organisational sensemaking theory by extending the explanatory power of sensemaking analysis into contexts where it is desirable for various reasons that actors only engage in limited articulated interaction. Which could be the case when actors make sense in an atmosphere of trust which encourages them to make the sense that their co-actors are acting in ways which means that their own pattern of actions are adequate and need not be changed.

The thesis makes an empirical contribution to sensemaking analysis by unfolding two cases of actors making sense of their shared actions with limited articulated interaction. Most empirical sensemaking analysis has unfolded contexts with extensive shared articulated sensemaking.

The practical implications of the findings in the thesis is that seeking to keep shared articulation to a minimum within a formal organisation can be a viable strategy that does not have to undermine the reproduction of non routine actions

among several participants. This point, however, needs to be qualified. It is only suitable if the following trade-offs are not a deterrent: The organisation is likely to have a degree of local adaptability and thereby be locally innovative, but there will be little scope for communicating these innovations to actors across the organisation. The organisation will not be able to operate with precision or optimised efficiency since there are limited control mechanisms. The lack of control mechanisms will also make this type of organising unsuitable for organisations who desire strategic control with external communication, or whose actors handle large funds or who interact with vulnerable external stakeholders. On the other hand there will still be some scope for control with the activities in the organisation. Mintzberg (1983) outlines a number of standardising procedures which do not rely on ongoing shared talk such as training prior to entry. I think that for many organisations it is not given how the trade-off should be between benefiting from limited investment in shared talk and diversity and multiple sensemaking on one hand and having a more centralised and communicating organisation on the other.

# 2 Introduction: Setting the Research Question

The ambition of this thesis is to explore a grey area in sensemaking theory. The introductory chapter will briefly identify the contribution in relation to the branch of theory for which the thesis contributes. The first chapter will also argue why the empirical case organisation which the analysis will be based on is relevant. Existing research in sensemaking theory will be unfolded and discussed in depth in chapter 2.

## 2.1 A Study of Organised Action with Minimal Shared Meaning

“Karl Weick...is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in the field of organizational studies.” (Sutcliffe, Brown & Putnam, 2006:1573)

Karl Weick contributed to an interpretive turn in organisation studies, when he began to study sensemaking in organisations (Hatch in Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2003). In 1969/79<sup>15</sup>, Weick suggested that we focus on ongoing processes of *organising* as opposed to *organisation* to remain alert to that organisations are accomplishments of ongoing social construction (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Weick theorised how groups go through shared sensemaking processes to deal with uncertainty. How especially young organisations which have not yet had an extensive reservoir of accumulated sense made about the organisation and its context will experience intense sensemaking processes.

In 1979, Weick also proposed that organisations develop through cycles of Divergence-Convergence. He makes the point that actors may converge in group action, not because they share goals and visions (common ends), but because they

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<sup>15</sup> “The Social Psychology of Organizing” was first published in 1969 and republished with revisions in 1979. The references in this thesis are to the republished version from 1979.

each expect to gain from the group action. In that manner actors meet over common means (the group actions they undertake together) rather than common goals. Weick thus distances himself from the “traditional assertion that groups form around common goals” (Weick, 1979:91). His position is inspired by March and Simon’s (1958) criticism of the rational decision making model. They suggest that it may well be the case in a garbage can decision making process that the means are settled upon before the ends. Weick suggests that this applies to actors acting in collective structures too. He argues that: Actors have diverse ends initially, as they meet around partaking in collective means, and then (possibly) develop collective ends. Sensemaking theory is distinguished from Decision Making Theory by seeking to understand a wider range of phenomena than decision making processes. Decision making processes would normally involve some kind of sensemaking process. But sensemaking processes are not necessarily oriented towards making decisions.

According to Weick's (1979) Divergence-Convergence model<sup>16</sup> we could expect to see a development from shared action (means) towards shared goals (ends) in a group which is undertaking collective action:

“Once members converge on interlocked behaviours as the means to pursue diverse ends, there occurs a subtle shift away from diverse to common ends. The diverse ends remain, but they become subordinated to an emerging set of shared ends. This shift is one of the most striking that occurs in a group life and is exceedingly complex.” (Weick, 1979:92).

Much subsequent sensemaking research has been devoted to analysing how one can facilitate shared sensemaking processes and cultivate shared ends, and thereby reduce uncertainty and ambiguity to reduce stress and facilitate organised action (e.g. Schall, 1983; Smircich & Morgan, 1984; Smircich & Stubbard, 1985; Westley, 1990; Weick, 1995:188). I believe, however, that more attention needs to be paid to understanding situations where organised action is reproduced with minimal shared sensemaking.

In his comments to the Divergence-Convergence model Weick allows for the possibility that the group acting jointly may in fact *not* develop common ends. But

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16 The Divergence-Convergence model is illustrated and discussed further on page 92.



it is a process he does not investigate further. In 1979, Weick focussed on examining processes of making sense, on an individual or a group level.

In 1995, Weick writes with explicit caution about the amount of shared meaning that can be attained in a group acting together:

“So if people share anything, what they share are actions, activities, moments of conversation, and joint tasks, each of which they make sense of using categories that are more idiosyncratic.” (Weick, 1995:188)

He then elaborates how shared meaning *can* be obtained:

“If people want to share meaning, then they need to talk about their shared experience in close proximity to its occurrence and hammer out a common way to encode and talk about it. They need to see their joint saying about the experience to learn what they jointly think happened” (Weick, 1995:188).

So in 1995 (inspired by Czarniawska, 1992) Weick emphasises that actors can share experiences and even joint sayings, but that meaning tends to be more idiosyncratic. This is in contrast to the assumptions from 1979 about group development embedded in the Divergence-Convergence model. The arrows on the Divergence-Convergence model indicate that we can expect a movement towards shared ends; towards shared meaning. It is this relationship between acting together and sharing meaning I am interested in.

Not much research has gone into understanding organised action accompanied by low levels of shared sensemaking. Empirical analyses of that type of organised action are few in numbers (Donnellon et al 1985; Eisenberg, 1990; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Maitlis, 2005).

The case I will present in this thesis aims to (1) add nuances to our understanding of whether sensemaking processes in organisations move through a cycle of convergence (on action) and divergence (on meaning) towards convergence on meaning (Weick, 1979:91) and (2) provide an empirical example and analysis of how organised action can be reproduced when meaning is not shared<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> By *not shared* I mean that the meaning is not the result of a shared sensemaking process where actors

This thesis aims to contribute to map out this under-explored area of sensemaking theory. In order to do that the research question for the analysis is:

*How do sensemaking processes involving limited articulated interaction relate to the reproduction of organised action?*

The reason why I think it is useful to analyse a case with limited shared talk is not just to contribute to widening the scope of sensemaking theory in the area. It is also because recent studies in sociology like Sennett (1998) argues that society develops in a direction that forces us to change (social) contexts faster, and to enter into briefer periods of organised action (such as employment) in any one place.

Bauman (2001); Beck (1986); and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have similarly indicated that post modern woman and man will find themselves to an increasing extent in transitory social contexts investing less time and identity in any one context. Assuming that it requires time and energy to produce shared talk, and assuming that these two “commodities” will be in shorter and shorter supply – it appears relevant to investigate how and through which mechanisms we can continue to act together – but based on a limited production of shared talk. From the view point of formal organisations the question then becomes how to survive by remaining an attractive platform for transitory and partial participation.

This question of how remain an attractive platform for participation is all the more pertinent for organisations which can not offer their members money in return for their participation but who rely on volunteers. The organisation which will be the empirical case of the analysis is a voluntary organisation.

A wide range of Danish researchers agree that the traditional associations<sup>18</sup> in the voluntary sector are facing a challenge of remaining an attractive platform for participation of new generations of volunteers (Isen<sup>19</sup>, 1999; Goul Andersen et al, 2000; Hermansen & Stavnsager, 2000; Stavnsager & Jantzen, 2000; Christensen & Isen, 2001; Børch & Israelsen 2001; Wollebæk & Selle 2002; Nielsen et al 2004;

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engage in articulated interaction with each other. Actors may make sense that coincidentally overlap but I will not label that *shared* in the analysis. This discussed in more depth on page 133.

18 “A Traditional Association” is a concept translated from the Danish “Forening”. It is introduced further on page 193.

19 Formerly Tine Isen, now Tine Murphy.

Murphy 2004). Similar concerns in the U. S. are most notably expressed by Putnam (1990) in the book “Bowling Alone”.

However, there are also indications of that memberships and board participation remains high (Haberman, 2000; Goul Andersen, 2004). Habermann (2001) argues that the dooms day predictions are unfounded. In general the average number of memberships per person has increased over the past 10 years. Papakostas (2004) who analyses developments in Sweden, suggests that it is not the new generations who turn their back on the traditional associations, rather it is the traditional associations who reorganise themselves in a manner which reduces the possibility for participation.

I will not attempt a realist analysis of whether or not the traditional associations really are threatened. But this thesis derives some of its relevance by exploring a case of how organised activity is reproduced when sensemaking processes only involve limited articulated interaction. A model which might suit a new generation of volunteers who prefer to zap from one organisation to the next without exhibiting the more traditional behaviour of sitting on boards and going to meetings to share talk.

The case I am proposing to analyse is a new organisation. When I did the field research upon which the analysis is based, the organisation was a year old. It had around 50 tutors. It is as mentioned a voluntary non-profit organisation.

The volunteers in the organisation participate in the activity of tutoring immigrant children. They act as tutors and help the children with their homework.

Each volunteer communicate with the voluntary contact person Sharmeen prior to becoming a tutor. She gives them a verbal introduction to the activity and settle a time and place of tuition. Each tutor tutors for two hours on a certain weekday (Day) in one out of two locations. There is no training programme or instruction manual.

The tutor is not in direct interaction with other tutors during tuition. There is a pattern upheld by children and volunteers alike, whereby each volunteer tutors one child and maybe persuade a few other children to work independently until what the children present as their homework is done for the day. Then the volunteer moves on to the next child.

I was often told that for each Day one of the tutors was appointed the “House Host”. However, not all Days have a House Host. For those Days that do have a

House Host it is not always known by all tutors on that Day. The House Hosts' function is enacted differently by various actors. Most of the House Hosts do not participate in meetings. Even though at meetings an ideal about them acting as communication links in the organisation is often expressed. This contributes to that for most tutors sensemaking is restricted to interaction within their Day. Some Days provide more opportunities for shared articulated sensemaking than others. This ranges from Days with no shared sensemaking before, during or after tuition, to Days where tutors have/take more time to talk to the parent group and each other.

If the contact person, Sharmeen, discovers that there is a lack of tutors on a Day she seeks to channel new volunteers over to that Day or ask existing tutors to change Day.

Approximately every second month a meeting is called (it isn't institutionalised to the extent of having a fixed name) The meeting is called sometimes by posting a notice on the notice board in the two rooms where tuition takes place and/or by sending out a notice to the e-mail list<sup>20</sup>. On average three to four volunteers out of 50 show up for the meetings. The contact person Sharmeen is always there and then normally one or two other volunteers who have participated in a meeting before along with one or two who have not. After each meeting one of the participants writes a summary which is either posted on the notice boards or sent out on e-mail. Occasionally neither happens. Meetings do not typically result in anybody speaking on behalf of the organisation to one or more of the tutors. Nor are any directions issued as to how to tutor or interact with the children.

The majority of tutors only interact with a few other volunteers briefly before or after tuition if at all. Unless the tutors go to the meetings or excursions or social arrangements they have no contact with tutors from other Days. It is perceived that it tends to be the same small group of tutors who participate in those cross-organisational activities. For the majority of volunteers there is thus limited communication and not shared sensemaking amongst the tutors who contribute to the organised activity.

The accounts tutors gave me about the structure of the organisation, their own position in it, how to interact with the children, the goals and history of the organisation, vary considerably.

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<sup>20</sup> This was in 2002 and not all volunteers had e-mail accounts, they changed addresses frequently, and not all volunteers used their e-mail account regularly.

So even though tutors are faced with confusing situations and they experience cues for sensemaking in relation to their organised activity, they do not to a great extent communicate with each other to create shared meaning which can help them overcome the frustration and confusion related to these issues.

This is not because they draw on sensemaking which has previously been created in the organisation and then become tacit the way Barley conceptualised institutionalised scripts (Barley, 1986). Communication that would give newcomers access to prior sensemaking to the extent that it existed did not take place.

## **2.2 Assumptions Confirming the Validity of the Empirical Case**

This thesis aims to analyse the relation between organised action and sensemaking processes involving limited articulated interaction. For the analysis to be valid<sup>21</sup> the empirical case must be a case of this section of phenomena. The argument that this is a case of an organised action with minimal shared meaning rests on two premises:

Premise 1: This is a case of organised action because: The actors in this in this organisation are mutually dependent on each other<sup>22</sup>.

Argument:

- The tutors are mutually dependent on each other to tutor. If only one tutor shows up for 15 children there will be too much pressure and distraction from the other children on the tutor to accomplish giving tuition to any one child. If it happens several times that no tutors show up for tuition the children will stop coming because they anticipate that there may not be any tutors and thus no tuition.
- The tutors are dependent on that “the organisation” maintains relations to certain external stakeholders for the joint action to continue. The organisation has external relations with at least the following stakeholders:

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21 Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999:203-204.

22 I here apply the definition of organised action which is generated on page 80.

- Two groups of parents co-host the rooms in which tuition takes place, they also secure a supply of children to the activity through their social network.
- The organisation is part of an umbrella organisation.
- The organisation receives some funding from the local council.
- The organisation borrows facilities from the local council for meetings.
- The organisation has a small amount of funds which are held in a bank account.
- The organisation operates in Vestplanen a housing estate whose tenants' board allows the use of two rooms in the basement of the estate.
- The organisation needs to attract new tutors on a regular basis.

The maintenance of the organisation's external relations forms part of and affects the continuation of the organised activity.

The other premise is one which clarifies that there are sensemaking processes taking place in relation to the organised activity:

Premise 2: The organisation is exposed to disruptions and can not rely solely on routines to continue the organised action.

Examples:

- The amount of children who come to be tutored sometimes drops.
- Tutors leave the organisation.
- The organisation is awarded funds to use in their work.
- The tenants' board in the housing estate initiates a formalisation of their interaction with the organisation.
- A couple of tutors seek to initiate new activities in Vestplanen under the auspices of the organisation.
- The Parents' Groups initiate developments in their interaction with the organisation.
- A local youth club, a school and the library invite the organisation to tutor on their premises.

These are all factors that present themselves as challenges to the routine activity of the organisation<sup>23</sup>.

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23 Some of them could be dismissed as cues for sensemaking without challenging the reproduction of the organised action. Others, like the turnover of tutors and children, could not.

On a more individual level the tutors experience the following obstacles to tutoring:

- Some of the children do not go to school yet, and therefore have no homework.
- The children initiate interaction with the tutors which some tutors can not reconcile with their perception of tutoring.
- There can be so few tutors present that the waiting children disrupt tuition.
- There can be so many children present that the waiting children disrupt tuition.
- The interaction with the Parent's Groups seems to sometimes act as cues for sensemaking for the tutors.
- The content of the homework varies across grades and subjects, and the methods for learning are sometimes different to what the volunteers have experienced themselves.

The contact person, Sharmeen offers a straight forward explanation as to why organised action can continue with only limited articulated shared meaning: She says that a Minimal Organisation (which I have translated as an organisation with limited articulated shared sensemaking) frees up time and energy for the activity of tutoring.

That is contrary to the gist of Weick's 1995 book:

“To reduce multiple meanings, people need access to more cues and more varied cues, and this happens when rich personal media such as meetings and direct contact take precedence over less rich media...” (Weick, 1995:99).

According to Weick actors *need* meetings and shared talk to make sense and reduce confusion in ambiguous situations. Whereas Sharmeen suggests that meetings take more energy from action than they give.

They may not be in disagreement. Here Weick does not explore actors' in organisations ability to live with ambiguity. Weick focusses on organisational situations where actors seek shared meaning and less confusion. Whereas I explore a situation where actors live with confusion and do not seek shared meaning.

These two situations may not be at odds, but just different possibilities in organisational life.

One sensemaking analysis *does* explore what happens when action is based on nominal accounts resulting from minimal organisational sensemaking processes. Maitlis (2005) concludes:

“The nominal accounts produced in these processes<sup>24</sup> provided very weak foundations for action. Accounts act as discursive resources for members as they attempt to respond to an issue (Weick, 1993): A nominal account will thus do little to foster either motivation (reasons for action) or imagination (ways forward).” (Maitlis, 2005:43).

So we have a case of a young organisation, wherein the actors are exposed to disruptions that create uncertainty but there is little communication between actors to create reassuring shared sensemaking and yet they continue to undertake organised activity. How can this be?

## 2.3 The Research Question

*How do the sensemaking processes involving limited articulated interaction relate to the reproduction of organised action in this organisation?*

The expression “shared” in the research question and in the thesis will specifically refer to that the actors have shared the sensemaking *process* and not just that they happen to make overlapping sense.

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24 Minimal Organisational sensemaking processes.



# 3 Theory

## 3.1 Introduction

Before I start on the discussion of theory I will briefly explain its role. Hopefully it will make the extended theoretical discussions more palatable to the reader.

This thesis is driven by twin forces; on the one hand a theoretically inspired curiosity and on the other a desire to inform and inspire actors trying to do their best in postmodern organisational contexts. The theoretically inspired curiosity stems from that in this case it seems that the reproduction of organised action *can* coexist with low levels of articulated interaction. The other force propelling me forward through the analysis are the aforementioned indications that actors in organisational contexts in late modernity need to have a better understanding of the possibilities for stabilising organised action without requiring participants to invest in articulated interaction and shared discourse.

As one typically does in empirically based social science I want to create a dialogue between theory and the empirical case. In order to do that I identify central theoretical concepts and existing explanations of causal connections between them. I then approach the empirical case both to compare existing research to the case and attempt to generate new insights which can be tested further by fellow researchers. To be able to generate new theoretical insights I approach the empirical analysis in an open-minded manner. My research question is of the nature: Something unexpected is happening here. Organised action is undertaken in spite of limited sharing. There must be other mechanisms at play than is normally assumed. What are they? Do they work differently?

The analysis will be an exploration of how much existing the literature in sensemaking theory can explain the phenomena I uncover in the empirical analysis and how much can not be captured with existing binoculars – and can I based on that suggest new ways of understanding this type of situation?

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of theory. It will be divided into four sections. The first section will place the research interest within the wider field of organisation studies. The second section introduces the concept of sensemaking according to Weick's two books: "The social Psychology of Organizing" (1979)

and “Sensemaking in Organizations” (1995). The third section presents the answers to the research question implied in other works of Weick and co-authors. The fourth section will present the contributions which other sensemaking researchers<sup>25</sup> have made to answer my research question.

### **3.1.1 An Analysis of How one Phenomenon Relates to Another.**

In this thesis the goal is to explore how minimal sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action. In the following I shall attempt to translate these two concepts into everyday words.

I want to contribute to counter the current emphasis on shared (developed through articulated interaction within the formal organisation) meaning and shared culture as the ubiquitous basis for joint action. Why bring in sensemaking at all if I am interested in the connection between the degree of shared talk and organised action? Because I assume that action is intimately connected with sensemaking. I think that for actors to voluntarily continue to act they need to be able to make sense of their actions. Shared talk is often assumed to be the fuel for the sensemaking process that enables action to continue, but it may not be the only one.

### **3.1.2 Types of Sensemaking Processes.**

I will apply the definition of sensemaking which Weick outlines when he defines the seven properties of sensemaking. See page 94 for a presentation.

Differences between types of sensemaking processes can be identified based on whether actors spend a great deal of time talking to each other, sharing and creating a language together to describe what they perceive to be issues of common concern, or whether they silently interact, making sense of puzzling issues and everyday actions without discussing them with other actors in the same formal organisation. Maybe actors in an organisation where things are not discussed much use past experience or discussion-partners outside the organisation to make sense of challenging occurrences? Different types of sensemaking processes can also be distinguished by whether actors adopt the interpretations and

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<sup>25</sup> Other than Weick.

views imparted by leaders or whether they are actively making sense themselves<sup>26</sup>. These variations in the degree of articulation between actors, the origin of the frames they draw on to make sense of activities in the organisation, and who they interact with - all characterise different types of sensemaking processes.

The case I propose to examine is one where articulated shared sensemaking is limited. The reasons why this type of processes may dominate in a setting can be many. Just to give an idea of the direction of the thesis I will mention some of them here: Maybe actors do not want to invest in sharing, maybe there are few opportunities for interaction between actors or maybe they perceive their actions to be taken-for-granted routine actions.

### **3.1.3 The Reproduction of Organised Action.**

I have termed the other variable of the analysis the reproduction of organised action. Organisation theory has long been concerned with not just understanding why actors act as they do in organisations but also how particularly managers can ensure that actors act in a manner which enables the organisation to reach its goals effectively (Yukl, 1989).

I want to define “the reproduction of organised action” so it is recognizable to practitioners<sup>27</sup>. I also want to use a definition where the reproduction of organised action is not a derivative of the extent of shared meaning or the levels of shared talk since that is the other element I want to explore. I therefore suggest a definition of the reproduction of organised action as:

The process of *stabilising patterned activities* which contribute to the *survival of the formal organisation* and to achieving its overall purpose in which *one actor's ability to undertake their part is dependent on the actions of other actors within the formal organisation.*

Actors must be dependent on the actions of co-actors before I define it as organised action. I have added this requirement to ensure that I do not study

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26 I draw on Maitlis (2005) and Smircich & Stubbart (1985) for these initial outlines of types of sensemaking processes.

27 One of the requirements for logic consistency is fulfilled... “If the construction is understandable and recognizable for the actor as well as his co-actors in the common sense interpretation of everyday life.” (Own translation Schutz, 1975:56 paraphrased in Kristiansen & Krogstrup (1999:95)).

individual action. It is the ability to handle mutual dependence without extensive sharing that is interesting.

An interpretive approach to organisation studies implies that one should reflect on the construction of the very phenomena one sets out to study<sup>28</sup>. “Organisation” is not just something that is out there to be discovered. What the organisation is and appears to be is profoundly affected by the perspective from which you view it<sup>29</sup>.

Scott suggests that there are three different ways to conceptualise the organisation:

1: As a rational system “*collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting highly formalized social structures*” (Scott, 1987:22 quoted in Weick, 1995:70).

2: As a natural system “*collectivities whose participants share common interest in the survival of the system and who engage in collective activities, informally structured to secure this end.*” (Ibid:23).

3: As an open system “*coalitions of shifting interest groups that develop goals by negotiation; the structure of the coalition, its activities, and its outcomes are strongly influenced by environmental factors.*” (Ibid:23).

I will view the organisation from two perspectives:

The first concept of organisation I shall apply in the analysis is a rational/natural notion of the organisation. I am concerned with the formal organisation as an analytical entity. I want to explore how the activities (which I term organised because I believe they are undertaken by mutually dependent actors contributing to the survival and furthering the goals of the formal organisation) are reproduced, patterned, stabilised and coordinated. I thus attempt to contribute to what we would normally assume to be the concerns of managers of formal organisations; how can one ensure the survival of the organisation, how can one ensure sufficiently good coordination of action. I use the term *organised action* to indicate that I am identifying elements I think furthers the purpose of the formal organisation that I study. I do not apply the distinction between formally structured or informally structured systems suggested by Scott and Weick. I am open to

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28 Hatch (1997).

29 Scott (1987).

through which processes actions towards the goals and survival of the organisation are stabilised and coordinated as long as they are undertaken.

I will not assess effectiveness. I will not give advice as to how to optimise coordinated action. I am not interested in evaluating the effect of the organised action. I will, however, try to understand how organised action is reproduced sufficiently in the case organisation to enable it to survive. So the thesis will explore reproduction rather than optimisation.

The other conceptualisation of organisation I will apply is seeing organisation as a product of ongoing social construction distributed amongst participants inside and outside the formal organisation. This is closer to the open-systems view of organisations as defined by Scott (1987).

I expect that there is a connection between the phenomena I create through the two perspectives – the realist concern and the analysis of processes of social construction. That is why, even though my starting point and ultimate interest is to give participants in organisations a wider choice of tools for ensuring the survival of their organisation through the reproduction of organised action, I anticipate that the way people act, and thus contribute by doing their bit towards the reproduction of organised action, is affected by the meaning they attribute to their action. I believe an important part of the sense they make of their actions is whether and how they perceive it to be part of joint action.

Even though I focus on the reproduction of organised action from a rational/natural perspective the social construction of joint action amongst actors in the empirical case is still central to the analysis. I want to examine how the socially constructed connection between own action and others' action (whom the actors feel they act together with, and how?) – the product of a sensemaking process – affects the reproduction of organised action. Does it affect their contribution to the reproduction of organised action?

It follows from the above that to understand how the formal organisation can survive we must analyse the processes of its social construction. This is an approach shared by other sensemaking theorists. This quote from Weick assuming a “world of multiple realities” illustrates it:

“1. A basic focus of organizing is the question, how does action become coordinated in the world of multiple realities?” (Weick, 1995:75).

Weick does not give a final answer to this question. His point is that analysis which seek to answer it are likely to focus on sensemaking processes.

Weick shares a realist element with my approach, by asking how action becomes coordinated. To answer it the researcher will install a distinction between what contributes to coordinating action and what does not. Researchers are unlikely to base this distinction between what actors partaking in the coordinated action perceive is contributing or not to the coordination of action. Since that could lead to circular reasoning á la actors act together because they feel they act together. The actors' perception is almost certainly a factor in how action is coordinated, but the ultimate yardstick in academic writing for identifying coordinated versus uncoordinated action is typically constructed and applied by the researcher.

If I were to let the perceptions of actors be the yardstick for measuring how collectively organised action is, then the analysis becomes much less interesting. I might identify that these actors undertake organised action because they feel their actions are organised in relation to one another. But this state of affairs could exist even if they were busily undoing each others work and undermining the continued existence of the organised context. The actors might have a very different perspective on the context for their activities than the “privileged” researcher<sup>30</sup> who can travel across organisational contexts.

Having said this I want to emphasise that both organised action and joint action are social constructions just of different orders<sup>31</sup>. Organised action refers to a class of activities I construct with reference to what I imagine is central to the formal organisation – which too is a social construction. Actors' sensemaking about organised action is again my construction but this time of what I think the participants themselves think.

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30 Czarniawska (2002).

31 Chia (1996).

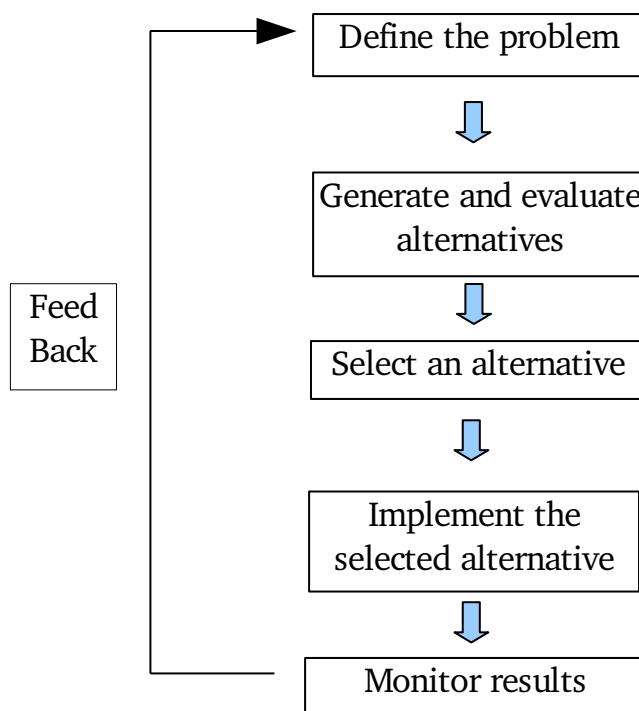
## 3.2 Positioning the Research Interest in Organisation Studies

I focus on sensemaking processes as opposed to other factors which have also been found to affect the reproduction of organised action.

### 3.2.1 Decision Making Theory

Decision Making Theory analyses the reasons why people decide to act as they do. Organisational decision making theory investigates why people in organisations decide to act as they do. Different branches of decision making theory assume that the decision making process takes different forms.

In rational decision making theory it is assumed that the steps involved in decision making are as follows:



**Figure 1:** Rational Model of the Decision Making Process(Hatch, 1997:273 figure 9.4).

In the model of rational decision making rational deliberation is separate from action. Actors make deliberate decisions before they act; they make sense before they act. They then monitor the effects of their actions and adjust subsequent decision making based on that feed back.

The model of rational decision making was formulated by Simon in 1957 as he made an effort to formulate its limitations and offer an alternative model – bounded rationality, which emphasised that actors have limited information and processing power. Behavioural decision making theory (Simon, 1957 )<sup>32</sup> provides an alternative view to rational decision making theory.

Cohen, March, and Olsen formulated an alternative model for decision making in 1972: The Garbage Can model for decision making wherein organisations are likened to garbage cans where flows of problems, solutions, actors and choice opportunities meet and interact:

“An organization is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work.” (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972:2)

In this model the crucial element affecting decisions (to act) is timing – which actors, problems, solutions, and choice opportunities happen to intersect?

Sensemaking theory as formulated by Weick draws on (behavioural) decision making theory but focusses on how actors make sense in a wider sense than how they make decisions. The wider focus enables theorists to include action driven sensemaking in their understanding of processes of organising. Processes of sensemaking are usually part of the decision making processes, but not all sensemaking processes are aimed at solving problems. As we shall see in the discussion of contributors to sensemaking theory some tend to treat the reproduction of organised action as a decision making process (Donnellon et al, 1986).

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<sup>32</sup> One of the historical roots of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995).



### 3.2.2 Management Studies

Management Studies are primarily concerned with discovering how to optimise the actions of managers to achieve the highest efficiency of the organisation.

“... the predominant concern has been leadership effectiveness” (Yukl, 1989:2)

Management studies would evaluate the output of the organisation, the quantity and quality of the “production”. That lies outside the scope of the dissertation. The “output” I am interested in is purely the continued existence of organised action.

Mintzberg (1983) is a central contributor to the part of management studies which is focussed on organisation design. He argues that organised action – or organisation requires two counterbalancing movements: Division of labour and coordination. He argues that coordination of divided job functions can take place through five different types of mechanisms. The coordination mechanisms are “...*the glue the holds organizations together.*” (Mintzberg, 1987:4):

- Mutual adjustment – coordination through informal communication
- Direct supervision – one person supervises the work of others
- Standardization of work processes – the content of the work is specified
- Standardization of work output – the result of the work is specified
- Standardization of skills – the kind of training required to do the work is specified

Mintzberg argues that the mix of coordination mechanisms depends on the complexity of the work – the more complex the work is the further down the list will the coordination mechanism be found. If we were to characterise the case organisation I will analyse it seems to be performing a simple task and many people are performing the same function. Mintzberg expects the undertaking of simple tasks to be coordinated through mutual adjustment – possibly supplemented by direct supervision because of the number of tutors. My case data indicates that if Mintzberg is right we could expect to see processes of mutual adjustment under these circumstances. However, the type of sensemaking characterised by little articulated communication both amongst volunteers and between leader and volunteers indicates that coordination might take place through some type of standardisation or unarticulated mutual adjustment rather than mutual adjustment.

Mintzberg provides a vocabulary for discussing coordination mechanisms. Coordination mechanisms of some kind must form part of what enables organised action to be reproduced. Whether the categories provided by Mintzberg are adequate to capture the mechanisms in my empirical case remains to be seen. The three types of standardisation each suggest ways in which organised action which is not supported by ongoing articulated interaction can be reproduced.

### **3.2.3 Neo-Institutional Theory**

Neo-institutional theory revived by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) emphasise how isomorphic forces in institutional fields covering several organisations affect the way action is organised within individual formal organisations. They argue that recipes for organising travel throughout institutional fields and are adopted in local organisations. Other contributors to neo-institutional theory have refined the model of dissemination by arguing that it is mainly the elements of organising which are visible to the outside which are affected by isomorphic forces, and that the way action is organised internally may be decoupled from external legitimising elements of organising (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Others have analysed the way ideas of how to organise action travel in a manner a kin to fashion waves (Røvik, 1998).

Friedland & Alford (1991) analysed how institutionalisation takes place through the spread of institutionalised logics. They find that the institutional logic that orders action in a single organisation is subject to local negotiations of several logics. Brunsson (1989) identified characteristics of logics of organisation that stimulate action and has pinpointed how they differ from institutional logics that stimulate external legitimacy. From Brunsson's point of view shared meaning can be counter productive to organised action if meaning is shared between the "action layer" in the organisation and the "management/legitimacy layer". He is thus able to explain how a certain type of limited shared sensemaking can facilitate the reproduction of organised action.

From highlighting how macro level structures affected local organisational structures neo-institutional theory is now being developed in the direction of understanding micro- and organisational level processes too. The following contributions form part of this movement: Translation processes (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Borum & Westenholtz, 1995); how new/potential macro-level

institutional ideas grow out of local micro-processes (Boxenbaum, 2004); or even seeking to transcend the distinction (Westenholz, 2006); and how institutional fields develop around issues (Hoffman, 1999).

Following a line of enquiry similar to Hoffman analysing how an institutional field develops around the negotiation of an issue, a branch of neo-institutional theory now also draws on discourse analysis. In that line of analysis historic changes in institutionalised discourse is being explored (Peter Kjær, 2005).

I mention the discursive turn in neo-institutional theory in particular because I draw on theory about the discursive production of selves in analysing identity formation as part of the sensemaking process.

In spite of a recent focus on micro processes as well as macro processes Neo-institutional theory tends to view organised action as the result of institutional forces. In opposition to institutional theory sensemaking theory emphasises a range of factors that affect how organised action is reproduced, not just institutionalised logics, frames, and scripts, but also articulated interaction, chance and processes of identity formation.

From a Neo-institutional point of view it is not puzzling that actors in an organisational context are able to reproduce organised action without verbal interaction. Institutional theory would explain it as being the result of actors acting based on institutionalised scripts (Barley, 1986). Weber & Glynn (2006) bring this reasoning one step further by distinguishing between three different mechanisms through which institutions affect sensemaking: Priming (guides identification of situation and roles and subsequent sensemaking), editing (taken-for-granted expectations of others make them respond to (edit) your actions), and triggering (institutions create built-in contradictions in contemporary life thereby triggering sensemaking to handle the contradictions).

This may well be part of an explanation of the dynamics of this case. However, the important difference between the perspective of a sensemaking analysis and neo-institutional theory is that in sensemaking theory it is not assumed that institutional forces are the prime factor shaping the reproduction of organised action. Institutional forces may not be a factor at all. It is possible that actors purely refer to negotiations and discourse developed in the local context or that they refer to institutionalised scripts and reject them.

### **3.3 Sensemaking Theory According to Weick**

The aim of this section is on one hand to introduce sensemaking theory and on the other hand to discuss how far other contributors to sensemaking theory have come in providing an answer to my research question.

The discussion is divided into two; first an introduction to sensemaking theory as it has been developed by Weick and a discussion of how this thesis is related to his work. Secondly a discussion of a range contributions from other sensemaking theorists whose results are relevant to the research question.

The initial three parts of the chapter (section 3.3.1 to 3.3.3) will introduce the ideas Weick draws on regarding what is minimally required for an organised system to be reproduced. The ideas are both fundamental to sensemaking theory and they are directly relevant to the research question, as far as they have implications for which types of sensemaking processes one would at minimal expect to be required for the reproduction of organised action. One set of ideas were formulated by Allport (1962), and Wallace (1961) and were adopted by Weick (1969/79). The other ideas came from Blumer (1969) and symbolic interactionism and enter Weick's writings in 1995.

To be able to draw on sensemaking theory in the empirical analysis some key sensemaking concepts will be introduced and their relevance to the analysis will be discussed in section 3.3.4. Those key sensemaking concepts are “the seven properties of sensemaking”. As an extension of the discussion of the property of identity formation I introduce inspiration from outside sensemaking and organisation theory which I will draw on the empirical analysis. That is theory about identity formation as a discursive process (Davies & Harré, 1990).

After that section 3.3.5 will focus on how Weick conceptualised processes of organising in 1995. He drew on Wiley to conceptualise organising as processes of bridging different levels of subjectivities. The section will also introduce Weick's discussion of whether organisations are reproduced through communication and the sharing of meaning (Smircich & Morgan, 1985) or through inter-woven patterns of taken-for-granted routine actions (Westley, 1990).

To focus further on the conceptualisation of shared talk in sensemaking theory section 3.3.6 will present a recent contribution by Weick to organisational discourse theory.

Section 3.3.7 will introduce the centrality of cues, frames, and connections to sensemaking processes.

To be able to characterise the connections between actors section 3.3.8 will introduce Orton & Weick's (1990) concepts of loose coupling and decoupling.

The second part of the section presents findings by a range of sensemaking theorists other than Weick who more narrowly address the research question of this thesis.

### **3.3.1 Symbolic Interactionism, Sensemaking and Significant Others.**

Weick draws on Blumer (1969) and his formulation of Symbolic Interactionism. It is the unofficial theory of sensemaking<sup>33</sup>.

“...to use the images of symbolic interactionism is to ensure that one remains alert to the ways in which people actively shape each other's meaning and sensemaking processes”. (Weick, 1995:41).

Symbolic interactionism focussed on understanding the formation of meaning as a result of interaction between actors.

Whereas Neo-institutional theory, as mentioned in the previous section, is positioned at the structuralist end of the spectrum of organisation studies, Symbolic Interactionism is positioned at the agency end of the spectrum of sociology. Blumer was a student of Mead and thus drew on American pragmatism and German phenomenology as formulated by Schutz. Symbolic interactionism emphasises - in contradiction to institutional theory - how it is micro interaction and not macro structures which shape the way people act. Blumer argues that it is through ongoing micro level negotiations that relationships between actors are continuously shaped and renegotiated. The negotiation of self in relation to others actors creates the foundation for how actors act. In Blumer's words actors create lines of action, and he argues that it is through the alignment of lines of action rather than by relying on shared values that actors can act together.

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<sup>33</sup> Weick (1995:41).

Blumer argues that we take the actions of others into account as we are forming our own lines of action even when co actors are not physically present. Weick uses this point made by Blumer with inspiration from Mead (1934) to formulate that even without face-to-face interaction sensemaking is still a social process:

“Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others. Even monologues and one-way communication presume an audience.” (Weick, 1995:40).

This means that when I want to explore how sensemaking processes, which are social in a sense other than shared articulation, affects the reproduction of organised action I could investigate who are the significant co actors whose action the actors take into account when negotiating their lines of action or in the words of Mead “*who are the significant others?*”

### **3.3.2 Positioning the Contribution in Relation to Weick**

By seeking to understand the reproduction of organised action I share a fundamental interest in the survival of the formal organisation with Weick. We both try to understand how organisations survive, how they are reproduced – why do actors sometimes act in a patterned, stabilised manner?

Sensemaking theory was developed by Karl Weick. Weick had a profound influence on organisational theory in general by insisting on analysing organisation as processes of social construction (Clegg, Hardy, & Nord, 1996:2). His most influential publications were “The Social Psychology of Organizing” first published in 1969 and republished in 1979, and “Sensemaking in Organisations” from 1995. In his first book he began to develop the sensemaking concept within a frame of behavioural organisation theory. That meant that he along with many of his time sought to understand why actors acted as they did. The second book reflect a general shift towards a more cognitive focus on the way actors think and perceive.

Sensemaking theory has since been taken up and developed as a field by several other researchers (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Eisenberg, 1984; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Donnellon et al, 1986; Weick & Bougon, 1986; Porac et al, 1989; Westley, 1990; Eisenberg, 1990; Orton & Weick, 1990; Czarniawska, 1992; Weick

& Roberts, 1993; Maitlis, 2005). A newer comprehensive publication sharing the social constructivist view on processes of organising has been the special issue of *Academy of Management Review* 2000, vol. 25 (with contributions from amongst others; Morrison & Milliken, Eisenhardt, M.W. Lewis, and Piderit).

I will now go into some detail about the models for organisational cognition and action which Weick introduced.

### **3.3.3 Minimal Building Blocks of Organising**

Weick proposes an answer to my research question in “The Social Psychology of Organising” (1979). He says that:

“...sharing of beliefs is not essential to the perpetuation of interlocked behaviors.” (Weick, 1979:98).

The implication of this is that for organised action to be reproduced (I take this to be the meaning of “the perpetuation of interlocked behavior”) the underlying sensemaking processes do not have to produce shared meaning. Weick's point is, inspired by Allport (1962), that the crucial requirement for coordinated stabilised action is not shared meaning but shared means or more specifically shared instrumental acts. According to Allport collective structures form...

“...because each wants to perform some act and needs the other person to do certain things in order to make the performance possible. People don't have to agree on goals to act collectively.” (Weick, 1979:91, paraphrasing Allport, 1962).

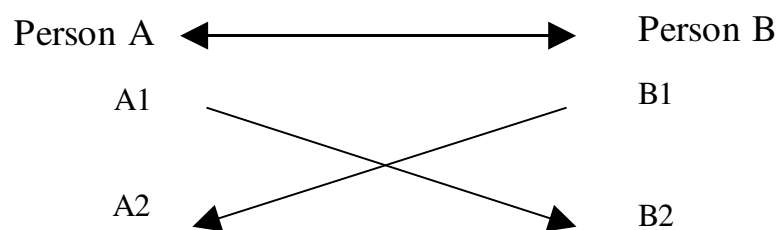
The centrality of Allport's work with “structuring” to Weick's development of the concept of “organising” is also highlighted by Czarniawska (2006). Weick uses the word “double interacts” to describe situations where one person's behaviour is mutually contingent on the behaviours of another person<sup>34</sup>. Weick also calls this that the persons have “interlocked behavior”.

Weick draws on Wallace's (1961) concept of “mutual equivalence structures” to explicate further.

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<sup>34</sup> Paraphrasing Weick (1979:89).

“A mutual equivalence structure comes into existence when my ability to perform my consummatory act depends on someone else performing an instrumental act. Furthermore, my performance of my instrumental act has the function of eliciting the other's instrumental act. If this pattern holds, and if I keep repeating my instrumental act, then the two of us have organized our strivings into a mutual equivalence structure.” (Weick, 1979:98).



**Figure 2:** A Mutual Equivalence Structure (Weick, 1969/79:98, figure 4.2).

“Person A and person B are two different people. Fig. 4.2 shows that each persons consummatory act (A2, B2) is released by the instrumental act (A1, B1) of the other.” (Weick, 1979:98 drawing on Wallace, 1961).

Weick underlines that the beauty of Wallace's Mutual Equivalence Structure is that it can be built and sustained even if the actors are not aware of the complete system, and even if they have different views of it. All that is required is that the cognitive maps the actors each have of the situation

“... permit each person to sustain the same social interaction...” (Weick, 1979:101).

As long as the situation in which the actors are participating is mutually perceived to be useful to achieving the goals of each participant – they contribute to stabilising the pattern (and thus the reproduction of organised action) without the



actors needing to shared the meaning they attribute to the action, or said in the words of Weick:

“...a mutual equivalence structure can be built and sustained without people knowing the motives of another person, without people having to share goals.” (Weick, 1979:100).

In these early writings Weick has a tendency to ignore the emergent and enacted quality of goals and instead view goals as identifiable and stable, and as having qualities as instrumental or consummatory.

This is remedied in Weick's sensemaking book from 1995 where he in general underlines how goals emerge and are often generated *after* action.

### **3.3.4 The Seven Properties of Sensemaking**

The aim of this section is to emphasise the elements of sensemaking theory which are central to the research question:

*How do sensemaking processes involving limited articulated interaction relate to the reproduction of organised action?*

To answer this it is important to define what is meant by sensemaking processes. It is tempting to equate sensemaking with interpretation because they both describe how actors attach meaning to something. However, there is the important difference that sensemaking is enactive of sensible environments (Weick, 1995). When we use the concept “interpretation” we normally assume that there is something there to be interpreted. It already has a form and a correct interpretation imputed by its creator. However, with the sensemaking concept actors co-create what they make sense of. In a sensemaking process actors enact – make real – the things they make sense of. They do this both by bracketing events or phenomena from the flow of life, by attributing meaning to them, and enacting them as real<sup>35</sup>.

This introduction of sensemaking processes is based on Weick's book from 1995. We have established that “sensemaking” is different from “interpretation”

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35 “If men define situations as real they are real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928:572).

because it is enactive of the phenomenon it makes sense of. But there are other distinguishing properties – 7 to be precise according to Weick (1995):

The seven properties of sensemaking:

- Grounded in identity construction
- Retrospective
- Enactive of sensible environments
- Social
- Ongoing
- Focused on and by extracted cues
- Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

### **3.3.4.1 Grounded in Identity Construction**

That sensemaking is grounded in identity construction means that as actors make sense they inextricably make sense of themselves too and they make sense of other phenomena based on the identity they are constructing for themselves – and others.

“Sensemaking begins with a self-conscious sensemaker” (Weick, 1995:22).

The two are interwoven. As we construct sense about something we also construct our own position in relation to that thing – that is part of what the thing is, and as we construct sense of ourselves we do it in relation to the sense we construct of whatever thing is central to us at the time:

“What the situation will have meant to me is dictated by the identity I adopt in dealing with it, and that choice, in turn, is affected by what I think is occurring.” (Weick, 1995:24)

The position sensemaking theory takes in relation to identity formation is that identities are fragmented, multiple, and mutable, grounded in interaction. It is not assumed that actors have a stable essential inner self. Identity construction is an ongoing contextual process and we can take on many identities. So sensemaking processes relating to organised action not only produced sense of the action but also of selves.

### Bringing in Discursive Identity Production

To analyse the drive in sensemaking provided by identity formation I take inspiration from theory about the discursive production of selves (Davies & Harré, 1990; Søndergaard, 2000; Elliott, 2001).

Davies & Harré develop poststructuralist discourse analysis. It is poststructuralist in the sense that they emphasise both the social restraints and the agency which can be exercised by the individual within constitutive discursive practices:

”At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices<sup>36</sup> that each person could engage in.” (Davies & Harré, 1990:46)

Davies & Harré provide a framework for studying the discursive production of selves. Discourse becomes not just a medium for communication between selves, but the very fabric of self. That means that when I analyse the discourse produced through different types of sensemaking processes. I don't just get access to accounts that are fragmented or rich or not rich as Maitlis indicated. I also get access to which subject positions are made available and taken up by various actors, which again makes it possible to analyse how the way actors partake in organised action is a product of both how context and self are negotiated in discourse.

”With **positioning** the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which the speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. A **subject position** is a possibility in known forms of talk; **position** is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons.” (Davies & Harré, 1990:62)

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36 Davies and Harré's definition of discursive practice is “...*all the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities*”. (Davies & Harré, 1990:45).

### Action Implications

As the focus of the analysis is the relation between sensemaking and the reproduction of organised action I am particularly interested in which actions the identity formation process renders recognisable. I suggest that in the analysis it will be useful to identify the action implications which are constructed by the actors as they make sense of themselves and their context. An example of an action implication which emerges in connection with having meetings is to go or not to go to meetings. An action implication is not the same as a "role" or a "subject position" but I think that a "subject position" can be partly constituted through a set of legitimised actions or scripts. The strength of this angle is that I can use it to merge an analysis of identity formation processes with an analysis of the reproduction of organised action. As the actors discursively negotiate their self they also render certain actions sensible. This, I hypothesise, may impact how and whether they reproduce organised action or not. So action implications are ways of acting which are made legitimate and intelligible in a discourse or frame.

#### **3.3.4.2 Retrospective.**

The process of sensemaking is retrospective:

“Reality is always the moment of vision before intellectualization takes place. There is no other reality.” (Pirsig quoted in Winokour, 1990:82 quoted by Weick, 1995:24).

By quoting this statement in 1995 Weick draws our attention to that sensemaking brackets the ongoing flow of events retrospectively. We try to make sense of our actions, but according to Weick we do not have access to the experience of our actions until after we have acted.

“How can I know what we did until I see what we produced?” (Weick, 1995:30).

This property highlighted by Weick links sensemaking and organised action differently than rational decision making theory<sup>37</sup>. In rational decision making

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<sup>37</sup> As introduced on page 84.

theory we would expect actors to engage in making sense first, then decide a course of action, and then act. By emphasising retrospective sensemaking we can expect actors to act first and make sense of it afterwards – at least as often as the opposite.

### **3.3.4.3 Enactive of Sensible Environments**

The first distinguishing feature of sensemaking processes which I mentioned in the introduction to this section is that they are enactive. When I use a sensemaking perspective I strive to pay attention to that the attribution of meaning is not just a matter of interpretations of social facts, it is a creation of “social facts”.

“They act and in doing so create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face” (Weick, 1995:31).

Sensemaking theory tries to alert us to that we often do not first perceive a stimulus and then respond to it by acting – we mostly act and then discover which stimuli might have prompted us to respond like that.

“As we perform a certain action our thought towards it changes and that changes our activity” (Follett, 1924:62 quoted in Weick, 1995:33).

The quotes highlights that making sense of something (an action) changes the action; it co-creates the action, and conversely acting makes us think differently of the action.

I take this to mean that the sense actors make affects whether they continue to participate in certain situations and thus whether organised action is reproduced. Weick, however, alerts me to that action is part of sensemaking and so we have to be cautious when attempting to gauge the effect one has on the other. In terms of the research question it means that we should expect action to stimulate sensemaking as much as we should expect sensemaking to stimulate action. Weick argues, in the words of Follett (1924), that people act and thereby contribute to create the stimuli they react to, or more precisely it is meaningless to talk about stimuli and response as fundamentally different classes of phenomena. One

process' response is another process' stimuli – we will never discover what came first and they co-constitute each other.

That sensemaking involves enactment means that the context actors in an organisation make sense of and react to is partly of their own construction.

#### **3.3.4.4 Social**

It is primarily this aspect of sensemaking – the way it is a social process – this thesis aims to contribute to. The contribution I would like make to sensemaking theory is to unfold an empirical case of reproduced organised action. The case is significant because the sensemaking processes accompanying the coordinated action only seem to be shared in a very limited sense. There is not much shared articulation of the organised action and understandings are diverse. The way that the sensemaking process accompanying this organised action is social seems different to what we find when actors share talk about the sense they make of coordinated action through articulated interaction (such as meetings where they formulate common or even diverse views on what they do together and why).

According to Weick (1995) there is a tendency for sensemaking to be thought of as an overly individual pursuit. However, he argues, it is profoundly social. Weick underlines with reference to Blumer (1969) and Mead (1934) that a sense of self is profoundly social. We only have a sense of self because we have the capacity to look at ourselves from the perspective of imagined others.

Weick argues that it is not just our sense of self that springs from a social process but the way we make sense (of action) in general:

“Conduct is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those others are imagined or physically present.” (Weick, 1995:39).

Weick points out that interaction does not have to be face to face to affect the meaning created by actors – it can be imagined interaction.

Symbolic interactionism is one of the main sources Weick refers to for unfolding how sensemaking can be social even when it does not involve the sharing of meaning, but rather, as he says, the fitting together of lines of action. That it addresses situation with limited sharing of meaning makes it a key point to my thesis.

“Blumer (1969:76) summarizes well the reasons to be cautious about overestimating the extent to which social sensemaking means simply shared understanding. He notes that investigators often note that common values are the “glue” that holds society together, whereas conflicting values destabilize. Blumer (1969) goes on to observe that this “conception of human society becomes subject to great modification if we think of society as consisting of **the fitting together of acts to form joint action**. Such alignment may take place for any number of reasons, depending on the situations calling for joint action, and **need not involve, or spring from, the sharing of common values...**” (Blumer quoted by Weick, 1995:42).

Most sensemaking research has examined groups characterised by much articulated interaction and shared sensemaking, where the interactive articulated social aspect of sensemaking was very manifest (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985; Donnellon et. al. 1986; Maitlis, 2005; Schall, 1983).

This thesis will make a contribution by analysing a group of actors acting together but not articulating meaning together. What distinguishes articulated interaction from other types of interaction is the production of talk. I will be focussing on a case of joint action which is extreme because of the limited amount of shared talk that is produced amongst the participants in the joint action. By selecting this case I hope to develop further which sensemaking processes kick in when actors reproduce organised action together without sharing talk about it. In that situation the social aspect of sensemaking is less obvious.

### **3.3.4.5 Ongoing**

Weick alerts us to the ongoing property of sensemaking by paraphrasing Burrell & Morgan (1979):

“...there are no absolute starting points, no self-evident, self-contained certainties on which we can build, because we always find our selves in the middle of complex situations which we try to disentangle by making, then revising, provisional assumptions.” (Weick, 1995:43).

In other words we are constantly drawing on made sense and revising it.

But if sensemaking is forever ongoing and never stops I think it introduces a kind of limitlessness to the sensemaking concept – are all cognitive processes sensemaking processes? Is sensemaking never ending and ever beginning? In order to sharpen sensemaking as an analytical concept by defining its limits, Weick suggests that sensemaking is characterised by an increased level of arousal. Weick mentions emotions:

“The perception of arousal triggers a rudimentary act of sensemaking.”  
(Weick, 1995:45).

I think we can take this to mean that when we do not feel aroused, but calm and life feels like plain sailing then we are not engaged in intense sensemaking processes. This distinction enables us to distinguish between sensemaking and non sensemaking.

Weick links a feeling of negative arousal to the interruption of organised sequences:

“Emotion is what happens between the time that an organized sequence is interrupted and the time at which the interruption is removed...” (Weick, 1995:46).

Weick addresses the same point when he quotes paraphrases Louis (1980):

“...to understand sensemaking is also to understand how people cope with interruptions. The joint influence of expectations and interruptions suggest that sensemaking will be more or less of an issue in organizations, depending on the adequacy of the scripts, routines, and recipes already in place.” (Weick, 1995:5).

This would indicate that we engage more in sensemaking when we are interrupted in tightly organised actions. Whereas if action is loosely organised there will be fewer instances that fall outside what we would expect. Since we have not formed expectations (yet) and we will engage less in sensemaking.



However, one could also argue against this by assuming that in circumstances where many possible options seem open actors would engage in intense sensemaking to create a sensible and somewhat predictable environment. Such an intense sensemaking process is, I think, what normally takes place in new groups. I think that in new groups it may be precisely the lack of tightly organised action sequences that prompts sensemaking. This initial intense sensemaking process could also be sensemaking occasioned by socialisation. Schutz' essay "The Stranger" (1962) describes how a newcomer gradually develops a cognitive map of a new social context and of himself in it.

It would be tempting to operate with two distinct types of sensemaking processes. One occasioned by interruptions of expectations, and another occasioned by a formulation of expectations. What is common for the two types is a feeling of uncertainty. I think they are best conceived of as varying degrees of the same phenomenon. We always have some level of expectation even in unknown situations and some level of socialisation is always taking place through interaction even in well known settings with well established relationships.

#### **3.3.4.6 Focussed on and by Extracted Cues**

To emphasise that cues do not exist objectively. We could say that sensemaking is driven by *enacted* cues. They are created as much as perceived by actors and they fuel sensemaking processes. Part of the analysis of sensemaking processes will be to identify what is enacted as cues for Sensemaking.

According to Weick what an extracted cue will become depends on the context in two ways. The context affects what is extracted as a cue for sensemaking in the first place (bracketing), and second: the context also affects how the extracted cue is interpreted (attaching meaning). The enacted cue then subsequently alter the perception of the context in a dialectic process.

#### **3.3.4.7 Driven by Plausibility rather than Accuracy**

We tend to make sense that enables us to preserve the sense we have already formed (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking tends to stop as soon as we have made sense that is plausible. Sensemaking is driven by a desire to handle cognitive dissonance – when we have resolved an uncertainty we tend to rest. Until the next dissonance

or uncertainty comes along (in most contexts on an ongoing basis) and the process goes on.

So from a sensemaking perspective we expect actors to settle for plausible rather than accurate sense. Plausible in the sense that it renders the current line of action sensible.

### **3.3.5 Sensemaking and Processes of Organising According to Weick**

“There is no such thing as a theory of organizations that is characteristic of the sensemaking paradigm. Nevertheless, there are ways to talk about organizations that allow for sensemaking to be a central activity in the construction of both the organization and the environment it confronts.”  
(Weick, 1995:69).

The seven properties of sensemaking mentioned above are not strictly related to organising. Actors make sense in and enact many different contexts, not just organisations, and sensemaking processes need not be processes of organising. Although sensemaking theory draws on psychology and sociology it is fundamentally a branch of theory developed to understand organisations. It is the conceptualisation of processes of organising in sensemaking theory which will be the focus of this section. I have divided the discussion into two parts; one where I present and discuss the reproduction of organised action as proposed by Weick and his co-authors; and another where I present and discuss contributions relevant to my research question from other theorists who draw on and contribute to sensemaking theory.

When Weick discusses organising he too, like Mintzberg, sees organising as processes of balancing the spontaneous, chaotic, innovative sense born out of here-and-now interactions with the structured, stable sense; balancing decentralisation with coordination. In other words Weick finds that processes of organising can be understood as efforts to bridge inter-subjectivity with generic subjectivity. These are concepts he borrows from Wiley (1988).

Wiley is a sociologist who contributes to the conceptualisation of micro-macro levels of social analysis. Building primarily on Durkheim he outlines a conceptualisation of four distinct levels of subjectivity: The individual level which he calls “intra-subjective”; the interactive level which he calls “inter-subjective”; the structural level called “generically subjective”, and finally the cultural level he labels “extra-subjective” (Wiley, 1988:256). I will go into some detail with these definitions because I can use them directly in the analysis of interviews and observations. They enable me to analyse how the reproduction of organised action is affected by the way actors bridge different levels of subjectivities.

– The self or the individual level: “**The intra-subjective**”.

Wiley has difficulties arguing for that there is a level of subjectivity – a self – which is not derivative of the social. But he insists that there is a type of subjectivity which is less a “creature of of the social structure”. I too find it hard to reconcile this level of subjectivity with the non-essentialist relational<sup>38</sup> perspective I take to identity formation. However, the other levels of subjectivity will be more relevant to conceptualise processes of organising from a sensemaking perspective.

– The interaction level: “**The inter-subjective**”.

It is one of Wiley's main contributions to define and highlight this level as opposed to Durkheim. This is the level between the individual and the collective/structural. Wiley argues that individual representations become merged or synthesised, in the limited sense into face-to-face conversations and interactions – rather than directly into supra-interactive structures.

“The interactive synthesis of meaning is captured in Schutz’s notion of the “we-experience” or Blumer's the “joint-act”...Intersubjectivity is emergent upon the interchange and synthesis of two, or more, communicating selves” (Wiley, 1988:258).

Weick interprets this level as:

“.. when individual thoughts, feelings, and intentions are merged or synthesised into conversations during which the self gets transformed from “I” into “we” (e.g., Linell & Markova, 1993 paraphrased by Weick,

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38 Here I draw on Elliott's (2001) overview over newer identity theory.

1995:71).

In the analysis of, for example, interview data I would view narratives which constitute the self through membership of various enacted social entities as an expression of the inter-subjective; a “we”. They would represent processes of merging or positioning the self with the “significant other” - who may or may not be present. With whom one may or may not be in interaction and communication. I would consider inter-subjectivity to be invoked in a quote like this:

“Louise and I discussed this and we decided to...”.

- The structural level: **“The generic subjective”**.

I can identify generic subjectivity in empirical data by that it, as opposed to inter-subjectivity, does not refer to actual actors, but only to actors in a more abstract, generic, sense.

“The defining feature of the structural level is that concrete human beings, subjects, are no longer present. Selves are left behind at the inter-active level. Social structure implies a generic self, an interchangeable part – as filler of roles, and follower of rules – but not concrete, individualized selves.” (Wiley, 1988:258).

A typical quote displaying this type of subjectivity would go: *“Tutors come at four o'clock every Thursday...”*. Expressions of generalisations, and rules and roles, scripts would be generic subjective.

- The cultural level: **“The extra-subjective”**:

“...the generic self drops out. The abstract subject of social structure, occupying positions and obeying rules, is no longer implied.” (Wiley, 1988:259).

Weick likens the extra-subjective level to the institutional realm as it is conceptualised by Barley: “...an abstract idealized framework derived from prior

interaction.” (Weick, 1995:72 paraphrasing Barley, 1986:82). In the empirical data statements like *”To promote integration of ethnic groups it is important to...”* would be indications of references to generic subjectivity.

Weick defines processes of organising as efforts to bridge the inter-subjective with the generic subjective. When actors enact an issue and themselves as a unit and make sense of the issue by referring to the generic subjective, they are engaged in a process of organising.

Weick phrases it this way:

“...I would argue that organizing lies atop that movement between the intersubjective and the generically subjective. By that I mean that organizing is a mixture of vivid, unique intersubjective understandings and understandings that can be picked up, perpetuated, and enlarged by people who did not participate in the original intersubjective construction.” (Weick, 1995:72).

If generic subjectivity has a form where it can be picked up by others, it indicates that it lends itself to being analysed as a discursively emergent phenomenon embedded in language, rather than through an analysis of cognitive understanding. This is a point Weick develops further in 2004 (see the following section). This thesis will draw on discursive identity theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) to analyse the interplay between different types of subjectivity during interviews and observations and how it affects the reproduction of organised action. The reasoning being that each actor's inclination to contribute to reproducing organised action may be linked to their ability to carve a self in the discourse constituting the organised action.

The extent actors draw on generic subjectivity negotiated in arenas outside as well as inside the formal organisation will constitute a distinction between types of sensemaking processes when they reproduce organised action<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> This is similar to approaches adopted in open-systems theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966) and Actor-Network-Theory (Czarniawska, 1992; Law, 2001). However, I make no claim to contribute to these theories and I have had to limit my self from studying them in depth.

### 3.3.6 Organising and Discoursing According to Weick

The connection between organising and discoursing<sup>40</sup> is discussed in more depth by Weick in 2004<sup>41</sup>. The process of discoursing is an ongoing process of discursive acting in such a manner that the chaotic flow of life is crystallised into nuggets of texts.

“Organization is talked into existence when portions of smoke-like conversation are preserved in crystal-like texts that are then articulated by agents speaking on behalf of an emerging collectivity. Repetitive cycles of texts, conversations and agents define and modify one another and jointly organize everyday life.” (Weick, 2004:406).

This view of organising is compatible with the view of organising as bridging processes between intersubjectivity and generic subjectivity because it identifies discourse as the medium in which bridging takes place. The discursive act is in focus. When an actor is “...speaking on behalf of an emerging collectivity” she or he is bridging to an enacted generic subjectivity.

The point that organising is embedded in discourse was not pronounced in Weick's discussion of organising in 1995. Cognitive categories and processes of cognition were central elements in understanding sensemaking. In 2004, Weick follows a more general move in organisation theory towards a focus on discursive practices<sup>42</sup> which relinquishes some of the ambition of understanding what goes on inside actors heads and instead explores what is manifest in language – in discourse. An exponent of this move is Tsoukas contribution to “The Oxford Handbook of Organisational Theory” (2003). He states that:

“A more rounded view of organizational life is possible when we discard ontological individualism and begin to appreciate that inter-subjective meanings, manifested in discursive practices, are constitutive of individuals; and, that at a higher level of analysis, that societal self-understandings are

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40 Just as he advocated a focus on organising as opposed to organisation Weick continues to suggest applying the adverb of discourse to alert researchers to the emergent nature of organisation processes.

41 “A Bias for Conversation: Acting Discursively in Organizations” by Weick (2004).

42 Clegg, Hardy, & Nord eds. (1996:13).

constitutive of organizations.” (Tsoukas in Tsoukas & Knudsen eds. 2003:613).

Tsoukas refers among others to Harré whom I shall come back to in the section where I position my own research design by fusing sensemaking theory with discursive identity theory by Davies & Harré (1990) and Søndergaard (2000).

“For an activity to be said to be organized, it implies that types of behavior in types of situations are systematically connected to types of actors... An organized activity provides actors with a given set of cognitive categories and a typology of actions.” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002:573, quoted by Weick, 2004:408).

Here Tsoukas & Chia suggest that organising (which Weick suggested in 1995 could be seen as bridging between inter-subjectivity and generic subjectivity) can be conceptualised as discursive acting which bridges types of actions in certain situations with types of actors.

### **3.3.7 Elements of Sensemaking; Cues, Frames, and Connections**

I am tracing the influence sensemaking has on the reproduction of organised action. That means I pay particular attention to which sensemaking processes enable actors to make sense of theirs' and others' behaviour in a way which encourages them to continue acting within the same context<sup>43</sup> and what (which sensemaking processes) induce actors to continue to fulfil roles, to act so they uphold a pattern of organised action?

The way Weick describes processes of organising as bridging intersubjectivity with generic subjectivity is similar to processes of sensemaking where actors connect cues with frames. I think certain frames are generic by nature because they

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<sup>43</sup> In the empirical case “to continue to act within the same context” will be seen as equivalent to for example to continue to be a volunteer in the organisation.

have been “pulled” from one concrete context into to give sense to another. They are institutionalised to the extent of being made relevant across the organisation.

In this thesis will analyse how sensemaking affects organised action in a setting where there is seemingly little articulated interaction. I have already indicated that to the analysis it is important to distinguish between whether actors draw on frames generated inside or outside the formal organisation. This is because I question the centrality of sensemaking processes within the formal organisation for the reproduction of organised action.

As we shall see later in the discussion of the contributions from other sensemaking theorists Smircich & Morgan (1982) propose that it is important that leaders provide frames and identify cues for employees to make sense of so that shared meaning is promoted within the organisation and organised action reproduced effectively. That means that Smircich & Morgan emphasise shared meaning in the sense of shared frames and shared focus on cues and they emphasise the importance of frames generated within the formal organisation.

I expect the concept of framing to be relevant. I borrow this way of conceptualising sensemaking process from Weick:

“...the content of sensemaking is to be found in the frames and categories that summarize past experience, in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experience, and in the way these two settings are connected.”

(Weick, 1995:11).

Put simpler; sensemaking consists of frames, cues, and connections between them.

Since other sensemaking theorists emphasise the centrality of shared frames originating within the formal organisation as a basis for organised action, one of the key elements in the empirical analysis will be the frames which actors actualise. I will also analyse the origins of the frames in terms of whether they are negotiated within the formal organisation or not. This is discussed further in connection with the design of the empirical analysis on page 190.



### 3.3.8 Responsiveness and Loosely Coupled Systems

In order to add nuances to the scale of shared/not shared I will draw in Orton & Weick's (1990) concept of loosely coupled elements in a system. By considering both distinctiveness and responsiveness the concept breaks the dichotomy between shared not shared, and makes it richer.

Orton & Weick (1990) argue that units in coupled social systems can be characterised along two dimensions. One dimension is the degree of distinctiveness between units, the other is the degree of responsiveness between units. The combined character of the responsiveness and distinctiveness indicates the character of the coupling between the two, whether they are decoupled, loosely coupled or tightly coupled.

	<i>Distinctive Units</i>	<i>Not Distinctive Units</i>
Responsiveness	Loosely Coupled System	Tightly Coupled System
No Responsiveness	Decoupled System	Not a System

**Figure 3:** Matrix of Various Degrees of Coupling based on Orton & Weick, 1990:205.

The distinguishing feature between loosely coupled and decoupled units is the degree of responsiveness. The relationship between loosely coupled units in a system was suggested in the article “Management of Change among Loosely Coupled Elements” from 1982 by Weick. It provided a detailed breakdown of “...five adverbs which characterise the relationship between any two components in a system” (Weick, 1982, republished in 2001:383). Loose coupling between A and B exists if A affects B:

- Suddenly (rather than continuously)
- Occasionally (rather than constantly)
- Negligibly (rather than significantly)
- Indirectly (rather than directly)
- and Eventually (rather than immediately)

Weick here defines the nature of responsiveness as how one unit affects the other. The five adverbs may prove illuminating to characterise the responsiveness between actors in the empirical case.

If actors not are responsive to one another at all then the system is decoupled, and we can hardly consider the actions undertaken as joint actions. This is what I have taken into consideration when I made some degree of mutual dependency part of the definition of joint action. If actors are mutually dependent on each other then one actor's failure to perform to a certain minimum will affect another actor – possibly indirectly, with a delay, and only a little. But the effect will be there. Thus follows that: If actors are completely decoupled then I would not consider their efforts organised action.

### **3.3.9 Weick on the Effect of Sensemaking on Organised Action**

Weick poses the question he finds most central for organisation analysts working from a sensemaking perspective;

“A basic focus of organizing is the question, how does action become coordinated in the world of multiple realities?” (Weick, 1995:75).

I share his ultimate concern with how action becomes coordinated by focussing on the reproduction of organised action. My research question is essentially a subquestion to that since I examine how a type of sensemaking process relates to the reproduction of organised action.

Weick suggest one answer to the question :

“One answer to this question lies in a social form that generates vivid,

unique, intersubjective understandings that can be picked up and enlarged by people who did not participate in the original construction.” (Weick, 1995:75).

Weick says that if we view action as being coordinated through a social form that bridges inter-subjectivity and generic subjectivity then we can understand how it is possible for action to become coordinated in a world of multiple realities – it happens through discursive organisational sensemaking, where concrete interaction within the organisation produces discourse which can travel to those in the organisation who did not take part in the original interaction. They can then draw on the organisational discourse to make sense.

In 1979, Weick proposed, inspired by Allport and Wallace, that the minimal building blocks in organised action are double interacts; a mutual equivalence structure. They argued that as long as each actor perceives that they need the actions performed by the other actor(s) to reach their own goal they would continue to contribute to the reproduction of organised action.

Inspired by recent development in sociology I would hypothesise that we need to pay more attention to actors' processes of self construction.

This implies that tightly coupled systems (as defined by Orton & Weick, 1990, see page 110) are only more susceptible to interruptions if they rest on inadequate scripts, routines and recipes. Whereas if the scripts, routines and recipes are adequate they are adequate in the manner that activities structured by them are unlikely to be felt interrupted.

One possible explanation for why organised action is reproduced in the case organisation seemingly without much shared sensemaking could be that there simply isn't much occasion for sensemaking be it based on interaction or not. Orton & Weick (1990) and Weick (1995) present the idea that the tighter the coupled action is the more sensemaking would be triggered because abnormalities would stand out more. From that line of reasoning an explanation of why there is not much shared sensemaking in the case organisation might be explained by that there is not much cause for sensemaking at all because activities are *loosely* coupled and there is a higher threshold for abnormalities. On the other hand it might be explained by the existence of adequate institutionalised scripts for the activities (Weick, 1995 drawing on Barley, 1986).

## **3.4 Other Sensemaking Authors' Answers**

Other researchers contributing to sensemaking theory have argued that the relationship between the sensemaking processes and organised action is as follows:

### **3.4.1 Shared Meaning Is the Basis for Organised Action**

Smircich & Morgan (1982) share an interest in the cognitive aspects of organising with Weick. They too link the reproduction of organised action with the production of meaning.

“Approaching this subject from a perspective that treats organization as a phenomenon based on the management of meaning...” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982:273).

Smircich & Morgan use an empirical example to show that the creation of meaning is the basis for organised action. They argue that actors in organisations act based on their interpretations (figure 1 page 262) and that it is these interpretation leaders should try to affect if they want to secure the reproduction of organised action.

Smircich & Morgan argue that multiple and contradictory interpretations in organisations are common and can undermine organised action. “Organised action” defined by Smircich & Morgan is action undertaken by various members of the organisation based on shared meaning and aimed at achieving the overall goals of the organisation. As they include shared meaning in the definition of organised action, they have a different definition of organised action than my analysis. I will be treating the two as separate but possibly dependent factors to avoid tautological reasoning along the lines of: Organised action requires shared meaning because without shared meaning it would not be organised action.

Smircich & Morgan's contribution is central to this thesis because they too focus on how sensemaking affects the reproduction of organised action. They highlight how diverse sensemaking in the formal organisation can stop the

management reaching the goals of the organisation. This can happen if, for example, management are unable to bring problems to the front and deal with them. It happened in their case organisation because of an enactment created by a group of employees:

“Their group enacted a continued pattern of not dealing with problems effectively.” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982:267).

Smircich & Morgans conclusion is that there was not enough shared meaning in the organisation – and that this could be remedied through on the one hand more influential management, and on the other hand a more inclusive sensemaking process which invites all actors to participate.

Smircich & Morgan conclude that in order to maximise power equality, learning and adaptability sensemaking should be locally (within each level of the organisation) participative, and should be facilitated, and inspired by, the leader. They argue that the shared meaning underlying the generation and sustaining of organised action can best be generated through non-hierarchical modes of organisation.

“It is important to investigate forms of organised action that depart from the traditional leadership model...Patterns of organization that replace hierarchical leadership with patterns of more equalized interaction in which each has an obligation to define what is happening, and respond accordingly, changes the very basis of organization.” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982:271).

In spite of concluding by encouraging the active production and negotiation of reality by all members (p. 271) Smircich & Morgan emphasise the importance of that this meaning is shared amongst members of the organisation and that it is primarily created by the leader.

“Effective leadership depends upon the extent to which the leader's definition of the situation, e.g. “People in this office are not working hard enough,” serves as a basis for action by others. It is in this sense that effective leadership rests heavily on the framing of the experience of others,

so that action can be guided by common conceptions as to what should occur. The key challenge for the leader is to manage meaning in such a way that individuals orient themselves to the achievement of desirable ends.” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982:262).

In the quote Smircich & Morgan emphasise that action should be “*guided by common conceptions as to what should occur*”. This normative emphasis on leadership creating shared uniform meaning as a prerequisite for organised action is frequently quoted (Donnellon et al, 1986; Weick, 1995).

While Smircich & Morgan went a long way towards highlighting the centrality of sensemaking to organised action they concentrated on the undesired effects of diverse sense. They did not explore whether diverse sense could have an enabling effect on the reproduction of organised action.

### **3.4.2 Shared Meaning Encourages Action Reinforcing Interpretations**

In the article from 1985 “Strategic Management in an enacted World” Smircich & Stubbart apply an interpretive approach. This time to strategic management. They are inspired by Pfeffer (1981) and Weick (1979) and along with other sensemaking theorists form part of the cognitive turn in organisation studies. Their point is that the dichotomy between the organisation and its environment is artificial. It is the members of the organisation who enact their environment and not the organisation which has to adapt to a given environment (as assumed in population ecology). I introduce Smircich & Stubbart here because they are exponents of the interpretive view of organisations. According to the interpretive view:

“...organizations are socially constructed systems of shared meaning (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, 1979).” (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985:724).

Just as for the definition advanced by Smircich & Morgan shared meaning is also fundamental to Smircich & Stubbart's definition of the organisation. Without

shared meaning, there is no organisation. Organised action, they state, is based on an interpretive process:

“People make sense of their situation by engaging in an interpretive process that forms the basis for their organized behavior. (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985:730).

However, this cognitive definition of organisation (emphasising shared meaning) is the supplemented by an action focus:

“Organization exists in this pattern of on-going action-reaction (“interacts”, Weick, 1979) among social actors.” (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985:727).

They analyse the enactment of the environment; that members of organisations act as if – and thereby make real. In that way Smircich & Stubbart take into account that meaning might spring from action and not the reverse.

Smircich & Stubbart assume that it is a shared<sup>44</sup> set of meaning which encourages participants to make retrospective sense of shared actions in a manner which is mutually reinforcing (and hence enables the reproduction of organised action):

“Organization is defined as the degree to which a set of people share many beliefs, values, and assumptions that encourage them to make mutually-reinforcing interpretations of their own acts and the acts of others.” (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985:272).

Compared to the article Smircich wrote with Morgan in 1982 Smircich & Stubbard (1985) here introduce an extra element between shared meaning and organised action; mutually reinforcing interpretations of acts. I take this to mean that actors interpret the actions of others in such a way that it encourages themselves to

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<sup>44</sup> Here we need to start separating whether it is meaning that is developed together and shared in an interactive sense, or meaning that happens to be equivalent. Smircich & Stubbart do not make that distinction.

continue to act as they are acting. This continuation of ongoing action is the reproduction of organised action.

Smircich & Morgan have not investigated whether mutually reinforcing interpretations could exist independent of shared meaning, or whether organised action could take place without shared meaning developing.

To summarise: Smircich & Stubbart's reply to my research question would be that strategic management (can and should) shape the sensemaking processes leading to shared meaning within the organisation and thereby encourage the reproduction of organised action.

Both Smircich & Morgan and Smircich & Stubbart emphasise how shared meaning is essential to the reproduction of organised action. That is what I want to question. Rasmussen et al sketch the possibility of that distributed meaning as opposed to shared meaning can be sufficient to enable the reproduction of organised action.

### **3.4.3 Distributed Decision Making Needs High Levels of Communication**

The contribution from Rasmussen et al (1990) is relevant because it identifies mechanisms that can enable a system to reproduce organised action even in the absence of a central decision making agent.

Rasmussen is positioned at the opposite end of the spectrum to Smircich & Morgan and Smircich & Stubbart when it comes to epistemological paradigm. Rasmussen operates within the positivist paradigm whereas the other sensemaking theorists work within a social constructivist paradigm.

Rasmussen et al combine research in Artificial Intelligence with organisation theory research into self-designing organisations (Thompson, 1967; Rochlin et al, 1987). According to Rasmussen et al communication mechanisms are required along with a developed problem-handling ability of each agent for an organisation to be able to perform distributed decision making. The arguments are reminiscent of the insights presented by Mintzberg (1983). That organising is, at its core, a question of balancing the division of labour against the need for coordination.

Rasmussen et al argue that distributed decision making without a central controlling agent (as opposed to shared decision making) *can* support the



reproduction of organised action. To optimize the functioning of this type of organisation subunits must be self-organising and adaptive to the problems they face locally, and the subunits must communicate adequately with each other. Therefore resources must be allocated to communication. Also the decision makers in the organisation need to

“...be able to reason about their own decision making activities in relation to those of other decision makers in the network” (Brehmer in Rasmussen et al, 1990:17).

Therefore the organisation will not function adequately before

“...the mutual processes of improving communication and reflectiveness have had a chance to develop.” (ibid:18).

The managers' ability “to reason collectively” resonates with the point Weick & Roberts (1993) make about heed (see page 342).

Rasmussen et al are not able to explain why a new organisation with little communication is able to sustain organised action even when it faces problems which must be solved. According to Rasmussen et al especially new organisations would require high levels of communication to develop subunits and relations between subunits which could sustain distributed decision making.

Rasmussen et al's approach departs significantly from a sensemaking perspective: Rasmussen et al assume that information is “out there” - they apply no concept of enactment. They assume that the best basis for organised action is optimised problem solving through improved information processing.

Whereas Smircich & Morgan (1982) and Smircich & Stubbart (1985) are concerned with which types of interaction and sensemaking could create enough meaning to underpin organised action, Rasmussen et al (1991) focus on how organisations can handle complex decision making in an optimised way. I believe that Brehmer (1991), who is one of the contributors to the book, disregards problems which may not be challenging because of their informational complexity, but because they are politically or morally ambiguous. This could well be the case

if actors enact an environment with contradicting or ambiguous demands to the organisation.

### **3.4.4 Ambiguity and the Reproduction of Organised Action**

When the organisation faces ambiguity<sup>45</sup> Weick (1995) recommends that it develops sophisticated and multifaceted gauging instruments to adequately perceive the complexity of the challenge. Preferably through sitting down a diverse group of actors and hammer out a way to deal with the challenge together:

“To reduce multiple meanings, people need access to more cues and more varied cues, and this is what happens when rich personal media such as meetings and direct contact take precedence over less rich impersonal media such as formal information systems and special reports... The problem with ambiguity is that people are unsure what questions to ask and whether there even exists a problem they have to solve. These are issues that need to be hammered out through subjective opinions...” (Weick, 1995:99).

Eisenberg, however, suggests that instead of seeking to eradicate and reduce ambiguity it may in some cases promote the reproduction of organised action if ambiguity can be sustained.

That ambiguity undermines organised action is one of the assumptions made by theorists who see shared meaning as prerequisite for organised action (Smircich & Morgan, 1982 and Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). One of aims of my project is to investigate whether it is really the case that types of sensemaking processes which sustain ambiguity undermine organised action – or whether in some cases they can be necessary for the reproduction of organised action. This is a mechanism which has been explored by Eisenberg whom I will introduce now.

In 1984, Eisenberg published “Ambiguity as Strategy in Organizational Communication”. In the article he highlights the advantages of the strategic use of ambiguity, which he argues, is often neglected in an ideological strive for clarity.

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<sup>45</sup> Weick distinguishes between uncertainty caused by lack of information and ambiguity caused by multiple meanings. I follow his distinction.

His starting point is that organisations often have many and conflicting goals. Eisenberg argues that one way of managing these goals is to sustain them rather than choose between them:

“Contrary to traditional arguments, the “problem” of divergent goals is not always best resolved through consensus (through socialization or accommodation) but instead through the development of strategies which preserve and manage these differences.” (Eisenberg, 1984:231).

One such strategy to preserve divergent goals is according to Eisenberg to state core values in abstract terms only. In that way individual actors can maintain their own interpretations and still feel they are in agreement. Other strategies mentioned by Eisenberg are “...*avoiding interaction altogether, remaining silent, or changing the topic.*” (Eisenberg, 1984:228). Eisenberg is primarily a theorist who focusses on organisational communication as opposed to other types of interaction, and he does not pursue the indication he here makes; that patterns of interaction “avoiding interaction altogether” also constitute a way of sustaining ambiguity. My thesis will supply further exploration of the effect of not just the content and type of communication, but also of the effect of patterns of interaction on whether organised action is reproduced or threatened.

Eisenberg limits himself to a discussion of divergent goals, but I think that with inspiration from Friedland & Alford (1991) we can extend his arguments to be relevant for how to handle the existence of divergent generic subjectivities or (extra-subjectivity) institutional logics/frames; or in the words of discourse theory: competing discourses. We will see from the empirical analysis whether ambiguous discursive action facilitates or hinders the reproduction of organised action.

Eisenberg defines strategic ambiguity as;

“... instances where individuals use ambiguity purposefully to accomplish their goals.” (Eisenberg, 1984:230).

Eisenberg argues that strategic ambiguity can promote unified diversity. He states that there is always “...*a tension between between the individual and the aggregate.*” (Eisenberg, 1984:230). He quotes Kant (quoted in Becker, 1968) who

argued the social systems should have as their goal “*Maximum individuality within maximum community*”. His point is that actors want both to belong and be part of a whole, but they also want to be individuals and have their freedom. This dilemma is more pertinent than ever for contemporary youth (Ziehe, 1989; Beck & Beck-Gerststein, 2002; Bauman, 2001). I think this is also reflected in my empirical findings.

Eisenberg argues that the strategic use of ambiguity i.e. “...*the ambiguous statement of core values allows them to maintain individual interpretations while at the same time believing that they are in agreement.*” (Eisenberg, 1984:231). This is a radical departure from emphasising how the communication of core values functions by moving actors in the same direction, which I think we found in the works of Smircich et al's analysis of sensegiving processes. Eisenberg suggests that

“Vagueness in communication can cause problems to be sure, but it can also serve to hold strained relations together and reduce unnecessary conflict.” (Eisenberg, 1984:231).

Whereas Eisenberg has specialised in the analysis of organisational communication my approach is a little different. By focussing on the characteristics of the communication I think he forgets the importance of patterns of interaction, how they create or withhold various opportunities for sharing and communication. This is an aspect which is explored further by Maitlis (2005). She paid more attention to patterns of interaction by characterising sensemaking processes by who participated and how much and I will return to her shortly.

### **3.4.5. Jamming as a Model for Organised Action**

Eisenberg (1990) equates organising with coordinated action. He continues to look for a model of social interaction or organised action that can satisfy the individual's drive towards both community and self actualisation. The solution, he argues, is not as Krippendorff (1989) said; shared values – but “...*shared reality as opposed to common reality.*” (Eisenberg, 1990:144). Eisenberg defines “shared reality” as reality which is experienced together, but not necessarily made sense of similarly. Whereas common reality – the much rarer phenomenon, if it exists at all – happens

when actors experience the same *and* make the same sense of the experiences. He uses the example of musicians jamming to illustrate coordinated action in a situation where actors share reality without having it in common. He defines “jamming” as: “personally involving minimally disclosive exchanges”.

Eisenberg takes for granted that “getting to know each other” is normally an element in joint action. In that manner he introduces shared sense not only of the shared context but also shared sense of selves as part of what one might consider necessary for joint action.

Eisenberg identifies four requirements for jamming (organised action that can take place with minimal self disclosure):

- Skill level: The actors must possess a sufficient skill level which engenders a logic of confidence which can decentralise and liberate actors.
- Structure: “*This improvisational freedom is only possible against a well-defined (and often relatively simple) backdrop of rules and roles.*” (Eisenberg, 1990:154). I take this to mean that - to perform collective action under conditions that do not accommodate shared communication about the action - the action must be made predictable to a certain degree by shared basic expectations to behavior.
- Setting: It must be separate from daily life (draws on Myerhoff (1975) who argues that settings separate from daily life reduce the need for self disclosure and self consciousness). I interpret this as that when situations are perceived to be separate from daily life actors are free from the need to construct self perceptions which are consistent with self-perceptions in other contexts.
- Surrender: Surrender of control and thus the suspension of self consciousness “*facilitates seamless coordination...*”(Eisenberg, 1990:157)”. Eisenberg draws on Eastern philosophy to make the point that consciousness gets in the way of acting. He also argues that surrender and the suspension of self consciousness allows a sense of community without cognitive sharing.

Eisenberg focusses on ways to reduce self consciousness, and thereby enable jamming. He is looking for ways to liberate us from ourselves. He argues that this is important because undertaking self-disclosure deflates action (Eisenberg

drawing on Sennett, 1978). According to Sennett and Eisenberg self disclosure drains away energy and focus from acting together:

“As concern for questions of selfhood has grown greater, participation with strangers for social ends has diminished; people feel the need to get to know each other to act together; they then get caught up in the immobilizing processes of revealing themselves to each other as persons, and gradually lose their desire to act together” (Sennett, 1978:11 Quoted by Eisenberg, 1990).

This reasoning is similar to the reasoning by Sharmeen the contact person of the case organisation: “*We prioritise action over sharing to preserve energy.*”. Whether such an inverse causality between sharing and acting exists remains to be explored in the empirical analysis.

The quote from Sennett is from 1978. Today late modernity is assumed to engender a need for self expression (Beck, 2001; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994) rather than a need to get to know others.

Eisenberg tends to treat “personal information” as a constant context-independent property which the actors can share or not share at will. That is an odds with the more relational identity view I share with Weick and which is unfolded by Davies & Harré (1990)<sup>46</sup> in their discussion of the discursive production of selves. However, what is interesting about Eisenberg's example is that jamming not only requires no self disclosure it also requires no articulated interaction guiding the joint action. It is fluid behavioural coordination. Eisenberg likens the characteristics of the interaction in jamming to a loosely coupled system.

Whereas Eisenberg develops the concepts of ambiguity and jamming he does not make a link to the reproduction of organised action in the formal organisation. However, both Donnellon et al and Maitlis whom I will introduce shortly address organised action in a more narrow sense.

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<sup>46</sup> I will present their views in chapter 4 where I introduce their contribution as the theory I want to merge with sensemaking theory for my analysis.

### 3.4.1 Equifinal Meaning Enables Organised Action

Donnellon et al's article from 1986 is contemporary with the article by Smircich & Stubbard (1985) and share the same ambition to develop a cognitive focus on organisations. Like Smircich & Stubbard (1985) and Smircich & Morgan (1982) Donnellon et al are inspired by Weick's book from 1979 about cognition and organisation.

Like Smircich & Morgan, Smircich & Stubbard and my thesis Donnellon et al are concerned with the connection between meaning and organised action. Donnellon et al's contribution is a focus on communication mechanisms. They start with the assumption that communication leads to shared meaning which then leads to organised action:

“...we began with the heuristic: communication develops shared meaning, which leads to organized action.” (Donnellon et al, 1986:45).

However, they discovered that meaning amongst actors deciding to undertake organised action was diverse, and so it seemed like shared meaning was *not* a prerequisite for organised action. Further analysis of the communication amongst actors deciding to undertake organised action revealed that they did not need to share interpretations of the prospective organised action, they just needed to attribute *equifinal* meaning to their joint action.

Donnellon et al define equifinal meaning as: Meanings that have similar behavioural implications.

“Equifinal meanings, then, are interpretations that are dissimilar but that have similar behavioural implications.” (Donnellon et al, 1986:44).

This could represent a significant contribution to answer my research question: How do the sensemaking processes affect the reproduction of organised action in a particular organisation? Donnellon et al would reply that sensemaking processes which produced equifinal meaning would be conducive to the reproduction of organised action.

They emphasise a distinction between the products of sensemaking processes. Whereas Smircich & Morgan (1982) emphasised more participative yet leader driven sensemaking processes.

But Donnellon et al are also distinct by analysing the effects of the communicative aspects of the sensemaking process. They find that anticipative and retrospective communication about organised action should have certain qualities in order to sustain the reproduction of organised action:

“.. in the absence of shared meaning, organized action is made possible by the shared repertoire of communication behaviors group members use while in the process of developing equifinal meanings for their joint experience.”  
(Donnellon et al, 1986:44).

These communication behaviors identified by Donnellon et al are as follows:

- To render the meaning of potential action ambiguous through the use of metaphors.
- To sway another person to ones own point of view through the use of logical argument.
- To affect emotions associated with a point of view through the use of affect modulation.
- To create ambiguity through the use of linguistic indirection.

The two middle behaviours “logical argument” and “affect modulation” both represent situations where meanings end up being shared because they both describe mechanisms that change the interpretation a person has. Whereas the first and last behaviour; “the use of metaphors” and “linguistic indirection” seem to represent communication behaviour that produces and sustains ambiguity as explored by Eisenberg.

Donnellon et al did not consider consequences of minimal communication or of minimal interaction – and their affect on organised action. That is what I propose to do with my case. The study Donnellon et al undertook is different to the one I undertake. They studied communication behavior amongst a group of students engaged in role play. However, I have observed interaction in a “real” organisation over 6 months and have interviewed actors about their experiences. This means



that I have had access to data about sensemaking after organised action as well as before. In Donnellon et al's case there is much communication that leads to agreement on action but not on interpretation of that action. In my case there is little communication about action, but yet there seems to be a reproduction of organised action.

Donnellon et al use a range of concepts as synonyms for organised action; joint action, collective action, to act in a coordinated fashion. They do not discuss the analytical implications of the use of these concepts. The definition of organised action they employ in their empirical analyses is that it is action which participants have agreed to undertake. They thus tie it exclusively to articulated sharing.

### **3.4.2 Silence as an Indication of Repressed Sensemaking**

Morrison & Milliken (2000) studied how sensemaking mechanisms in an organisation can cause silence or non-sharing. Their angle is that in some organisations there is a

“...shared conception that speaking up is unwise.” (Morris & Milliken, 2000:706).

Their definition of a climate of silence is that it is characterised by two shared beliefs: one, it is not worth the effort to speak up, and two, Voicing concerns and opinions can be dangerous.

A climate of silence, they argue, leads to limited variance in information input, lack of ideas, employees who are not feeling valued, and employees who are experiencing a lack of control and cognitive dissonance between their actions and their beliefs. These downsides to organisational silence are all linked to a lack of pluralism within the organisation. Morrison & Milliken argue that creating a climate of speaking up and sharing would ameliorate this.

As the climate of silence is characterised by (two) shared beliefs the climate is likely to be the result of previous shared sensemaking process within the organisation. So although they analyse an organisation with little shared articulated interaction it is a different case to the one I am analysing since its foundation is shared meaning.

### 3.4.3 Leader and Stakeholder Sensegiving

Maitlis (2005) is one step closer to my contribution. She too uses real formal organisations as case material. Maitlis conducted an extensive empirical analysis. She observed social interaction in three symphony orchestras over a period of two years and 27 issues in order to identify social patterns of sensemaking. She chose to make case studies of organisational “issues”<sup>47</sup>. An alternative could have been to analyse the organisation as a whole as regards what characterised its sensemaking processes in general. By focussing on issues Maitlis perhaps unwittingly highlights an important point: that sensemaking processes may vary from issue to issue within one formal organisation.

Maitlis identifies four different types of sensemaking processes characterised by “*the degree to which leaders and stakeholders engage in “sensegiving” - attempts to influence others' understandings of an issue*” (Maitlis 2005:28). So whereas Donnellon et al focussed on communication mechanisms (producing persuasion or ambiguity) Maitlis focuses on who attempts to influence the sensemaking of others and through what kind of interaction. Inspired by Weick she defines sensegiving behaviour as

“...statements or activities that involved providing plausible descriptions and explanations of extracted cues and constructing sensible environments for others (Weick, 1995).” (Maitlis, 2005:29).

The typology of sensemaking processes suggested by Maitlis is based on:

- Whether leader versus stakeholder participation was high or low.
- Whether the interaction in relation to the issue was controlled by management or not.
- Whether interaction in relation to it was animated or not.

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<sup>47</sup> Maitlis defined organisational issues as: “...a topic of discussion that involved a question or concern connected in some way to the organization as a whole; rather than to a small subset of its members...” (Maitlis, 2005:27).

Maitlis not only formulates a typology of sensemaking processes but links them to outcomes. She suggests that various types of sensemaking process tend to affect the types of accounts and actions which are the product of these processes. I think that she places herself as part of a recent trend in organisation studies which focusses on the production of discourse (e.g. Grant et al, 2004; Gabriel, 1997; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2003) by discussing not just types of action but also types of accounts. Maitlis, however, does not explicitly make this connection in the article.

Maitlis analyses how sensemaking processes affect accounts and actions related to issues. I want to study the reproduction of organised action. I take sensemaking processes to be characterised by amongst other elements (how “shared they are”) how elaborate accounts they produce, how ambiguous. As well as the process through which they emerge. The outcome as it is identified by Maitlis; accounts and actions related to organisational issues, overlaps with the outcome I aim to study; the reproduction of organised action.

In the figure below, Maitlis presents her findings:

	High Stakeholder Sensegiving	Low Stakeholder Sensegiving
High Leader Sensegiving	<p><b><i>Guided Organizational Sensemaking</i></b></p> <p>Process Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High animation</li> <li>• high control</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unitary, rich account</li> <li>• Emergent series of consistent actions</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Restricted Organizational Sensemaking</i></b></p> <p>Process Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low animation</li> <li>• High control</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unitary, narrow account</li> <li>• One-time action or planned set of consistent actions</li> </ul>
Low Leader Sensegiving	<p><b><i>Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking</i></b></p> <p>Process Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High animation</li> <li>• Low control</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple, narrow accounts</li> <li>• Emergent series of inconsistent actions</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Minimal Organizational Sensemaking</i></b></p> <p>Process Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low animation</li> <li>• Low control</li> </ul> <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nominal accounts</li> <li>• One-time, compromise action</li> </ul>

**Figure 4:** The Four Forms of Organizational Sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005:32, figure 1).

In the figure she identifies four types of sensemaking processes: each listed with the typical outcome in terms of accounts and actions:

- *Guided Organizational Sensemaking*
- *Restricted Organizational Sensemaking*
- *Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking*
- *Minimal Organizational Sensemaking*

Maitlis links sensemaking and action in the following way:

“...sensemaking allows people to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts of the world that enable action.” (Maitlis, 2005:21).

She thus argues that sensemaking enables action to the extent that it produces rational and unambiguous accounts. This is contrary to the findings by Eisenberg which indicated that ambiguous accounts could be what enabled action. I will seek to illuminate the effect of ambiguous meaning on organised action further in the empirical analysis.

The typology of sensemaking processes offered by Maitlis varied as regards the level of ambiguity in meaning they produce. Maitlis conceptualised this as the difference between unitary or multiple accounts (of issues). She had found that multiple accounts (produced in fragmented sensemaking processes) were associated with inconsistent action, and nominal accounts (produced in minimal sensemaking processes) were associated with inaction. According to Maitlis both types of sensemaking processes undermine the reproduction of organised action, and this “negative” effect was associated with types of sensemaking which produced or did not resolve ambiguous meaning.

My contribution to Maitlis' work is to explore an organisation which I think is characterised predominantly by the last type of sensemaking processes: Minimal Organisational sensemaking. By just focussing on that type of organisational sensemaking I hope to contribute by unfolding a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms in play.

When sensemaking processes in the case organisation were neither animated nor controlled by leaders Maitlis characterised them as minimal:

“In these minimal sensemaking processes, each party tended to await others’

interpretations of an issue, which typically came in response to some external trigger. Animation was low, with few stakeholders discussing the issue or seeking to offer their constructions of it. At the same time, leaders made little attempt to organize ways of promoting their interpretations of it or to gather the views of their stakeholder groups in any systematic way.” (Maitlis, 2005:42).

So this lack of animation and lack of quest for control over the issue characterised both leaders and stakeholders until an external cue forced itself upon them. It is a sensemaking process characterised by limited production of talk. Maitlis characterises an example of minimal organisational sensemaking with the terms; they “avoided dealing with it” and “uncertainty and procrastination” (p. 42). She tends to assume that when sense is not articulated it is not made.

The resulting account associated with minimal sensemaking was nominal. By nominal Maitlis means:

“Nominal accounts – the ones that provided only token understanding or interpretation...” (Maitlis, 2005:42).

and

“..it neither synthesizes the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, as do the rich accounts described in the guided form of sensemaking, nor does it articulate a well-developed interpretation based on a single perspective, as was seen in the restricted form.” (Maitlis, 2005:42).

According to Maitlis – and here she refers to Weick (1993); nominal accounts offer weak foundations for action because they do not foster motivation, and they do not conjure a way forward:

“The nominal accounts produced in these processes provided very weak foundations for action.” (Maitlis, 2005:43).

From this point of view we should expect an organisation generally characterised by Minimal sensemaking to have difficulties motivating its members to pursue organised action, and we would expect the reproduction of organised action to be weak (to be undermined because of lack of motivation) because of the lack of imagined futures. My analysis will illuminate whether this is the case and further unravel the mechanisms behind.

Maitlis notes that Minimal sensemaking processes may have mitigating qualities:

“Nevertheless, the nominal accounts produced in minimal sensemaking processes, while lacking richness and failing to incorporate multiple perspectives, seemed to free leaders and stakeholders from their paralysis by allowing single compromise actions that provided temporary relief.”  
(Maitlis, 2005:43).

Here she states that minimal sensemaking processes can enable single compromise actions. I take it to mean that they are allowed to be dealt with out of context of conflicting overriding frames. This appears similar to the ambiguity sustaining mechanisms advanced by Eisenberg.

Maitlis tends to judge the proficiency of the sensemaking process related to the issues against whether the process contributes to the issue going away – becoming a non-issue. To anticipate the reasoning you can expect to meet in my empirical analysis I will propose another evaluation:

It is possible that there are issues which if unequivocally resolved by either leaders or stakeholders would compromise certain perhaps fundamental values or frames. For example Maitlis mentions an issue with certain members of the orchestras who are perceived to perform below expectations. I believe that if a clear solution to this problem had been formulated it would have had to favour one of two incompatible sides: either prioritising professional integrity, or prioritising a sense of family/solidarity amongst members of the orchestra. It is likely that it could compromise the reproduction of organised action in the orchestras if either frame or institutional logic (Friedland & Alford, 1991) was seriously compromised. From that perspective a once off compromise solution freed from

grander institutional frames or a non-resolution of the issue may actually have been conducive to the reproduction of organised action.

### **3.4.4 Shared Meaning versus Equal Meaning**

There is meaning which is equal. It happens to be the same – but by saying **equal meaning** we say nothing about the characteristics of the process leading to the equal meaning. The equal meaning may have been developed through an interactive process involving shared articulation and understanding, or it may be the result of a sensemaking process where the sensemaker does not engage in articulated interaction with the enacted significant others (Molin, 2004). On the other hand if we say **shared meaning** we indicate something about the sensemaking process – we indicate that sharing of meaning has taken place. Actors who hold shared meaning have not by chance made similar sense – they have developed that sense through an interactive process with each other – hence shared meaning. In the table below, I have illustrated two dimensions that distinguish different types of sensemaking processes:

One, whether the sensemaking process is characterised by shared articulated interaction or not. Two, whether the sensemaking process produced agreed-upon-meaning or diverse meaning.



	Articulated interaction in the organisation <b>(PROCESS)</b> <b>SHARED</b>	Minimal articulated interaction in the organisation <b>(PROCESS)</b> <b>NOT SHARED</b>
Similar meaning about organised action <b>(PRODUCT)</b> <b>SHARED</b>	Shared meaning	Equal meaning
Diverse meaning about organised action <b>(PRODUCT)</b> <b>NOT SHARED</b>	Conflicts, articulated disagreement or ambiguous talk/production of equifinal meaning	Unarticulated mutual adjustment

**Figure 5:** Typology of Sense and Sensemaking (Murphy).

This distinction identifies two types of sensemaking processes which are relevant to the analysis:

- **Shared Meaning** produced and reproduced through shared talk, discourse, and articulated interaction within the formal organisation.
- **Equal Meaning** not necessarily produced within the formal organisation: Scripts, schemata, and routines. They can have action implications for organised action like shared meaning, but they are not necessarily reproduced through articulated interaction within the formal organisation.

Shared Meaning will in this thesis indicate similar meaning developed through articulated interaction amongst actors.

Equal Meaning will indicate similar meaning held by actors undertaking organised action, but not necessarily developed through articulated interaction amongst these actors.

## 3.5 Elements for the Design of the Empirical Analysis

For design of the empirical analysis these are the points I will bring forward:

- I will investigate how the production of and sustaining ambiguity affects the reproduction of organised action in the case organisation.
- I am making an empirical contribution by conducting field studies over an extended period of a formal organisation rather than laboratory studies (Donnellon et al, 1986) or field studies of a formal organisation where only some processes are minimal (Maitlis, 2005).
- I will distinguish between whether meaning is drawn from arenas within or beyond the formal organisation.
- I will pay attention to the organising effects of processes of identity formation in terms of action implications.
- I will distinguish between shared and equal meaning.

I return to a discussion of the findings in relation to these points on page 326.

# 4 Methodology

The discussion of methodology is presented before the two empirical cases. This is to enable the reader to critically assess the status of the findings in the analysis.

The chapter starts with a discussion of the ontological position thesis in section 4.1. Following naturally from this 4.2 is about how to measure the validity of the thesis. Section 4.3 discusses the use of case studies and the choice of studying a voluntary organisation. In section 4.4 I argue for the design of the field work. Section 4.6 identifies some limitations to the analysis which are related to the data creation and section 4.7 examines the effect the use of the sensemaking perspective has on methodology. Finally, section 4.8 sums up the strengths and weakness of the applied method.

## 4.1 Ontological Position

Although the approach of this thesis is fundamentally social constructivist inspired by Berger & Luckmann (1967) it is not a purist project. I do as a researcher have a tendency to suggest realist interpretations. This is an approach to sensemaking studies I share with Weick:

“People who study sensemaking oscillate ontologically because that is what helps them understand the actions of people in everyday life who could care less about ontology.” (Weick, 1995:35).

An example of ontological oscillation is the definition of organised action as it is defined in this thesis. I wanted to avoid tautological definitions which makes sensemaking a quality of organised action, such as: This is organised action because it is socially constructed as organised action, and it is socially constructed as organised action because it is organised action. To avoid this I inserted a measure of realism in the definition.

Organised action is in this thesis defined as<sup>48</sup>:

The process of *stabilising patterned activities* which contribute to the *survival of the formal organisation* and to achieving its overall purpose in which *one actor's ability to undertake their part is dependent on the actions of other actors within the formal organisation.*

Identifying activities as patterned requires a measure of realism and so does gauging whether the action contributes to the survival of the organisation. It does not mean that I claim that there are true answers out there to be found. But I present my construction of them as a researcher.

The last requirement in my definition of organised action can be summarised as a type of mutual dependency. It is distinct from the definition of mutual equivalence structures which Weick drew on in his early writings (inspired by Wallace, 1961) which rested on that the actors perceived and reacted to that they felt dependent on other actors.

My definition is more inspired by Kutz (2000) who identifies counterfactual sensitivity between elements to identify dependency. Counterfactual sensitivity can be identified along the lines of “if A had not acted like this then B would have acted differently”. In the empirical analysis of this project the identification of mutual dependency between actors will run along the lines of “if A did not contribute to the organised action in this (patterned) manner then it would affect other actors”. By reasoning like this it is the researcher who suggests that one can truly identify whether A and B are related like this. I will not claim that there is a realist mutual dependency, but I will amass empirical indications supporting or challenging this and present them. In this way I will suggest new ways of understanding how sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action.

If I had applied a definition of organised action based on the social constructions of the actors I would have been blind to mechanisms, of which they are not aware, which contribute to ordering their actions.

I have made use of several types of data creation techniques. Individual interviews and participant observation, and analysis of written materials. I will go

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48 See page 80.

into a more detailed discussion of them in the sections below. But here I will discuss ontological aspect of them.

he interviews provide two kinds of data. They provide self narrations and enactments of contexts. The other type of data they provide is information about who interacts with whom, when, and about what. They give us a hint about which interactions may have affected the narratives produced in the interview. That information is of course socially constructed. Which status should I accord it in the analysis? Is it the truth? And if I have rejected the possibility of producing “truth” should I keep the ambition of describing interactions as accurately as possible? I would answer “yes”. By seeking to triangulate the information I get I can do this. Do other volunteers refer to the same interactions? Have I witnessed them? Are they documented in written material?

This is the concern Czarniawska addresses below:

“How to introduce another point to the story without questioning the one offered by my respondents” (Czarniawska: 2002:742).

The solution Czarniawska suggests here is to construct a third voice – an analyst’s voice. The voice is no more true than the volunteer’s, but different because it is informed by a special focus and a different access to social productions.

Czarniawska's point of view is inspired by a pragmatic approach:

“...there is no one thing that a researcher must, should, or can do with narratives as they relate to organizing. Every reading is an interpretation and every interpretation is an associated tying the text that is interpreted to other texts, other voices, other times, and other places. Much more important than a specific interpretive and analytic technique is the result – in interesting recontextualisation:” (Czarniawska 2002:747). (Pragmatist approach inspired by Rorty – “...recontextualize for the hell of it...” (Rorty 1991:110”).

In order to produce that analysis and voice in the text of this dissertation I am going to treat the interviews as sources of data about interactions which my Third Voice will co produce.

In doing so it also becomes possible to reflect on whether all have perceived these interactions in a similar manner. I have planted questions about concrete interactions in the interviews, and hence contribute to constructing them as significant. That is an inevitable effect of having the ambition of producing an analytical third voice.

## 4.2 Validity

The definition of validity applied in this thesis is drawn from Kristiansen & Krogstrup (1999) who are inspired by Schutz (1975):

“In a wider and more qualitatively oriented definition validity concerns the extent to which observations and interpretations of these are able to reflect the phenomena or variables the researcher is interested in and shed light on the chosen problem.”(Own translation of Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999:203-204).

Validity according to this definition is considered and discussed in connection with the design of both empirical cases.

Towards the very end of writing this thesis I have returned to a group of the actors I studied in 2001/2002 and presented my findings. This was both in order to “give something back” but also to examine how recognisable my observations and interpretations were to them. The response was highly favorable. There was an immediate recognition of key features and of the mechanisms I have identified. Even the ones they had not hitherto identified themselves “made sense”. This meets Schutz- demand for sufficiency:

“The requirement Schutz formulates here is that the actors in the field in which the observations take place can recognise themselves...” (Own translation of Kristiansen & Krogstrup 1999:211 paraphrasing Schutz 1975:56).

Which is also emphasised by Kvale, 1996 as communicative validity.

I have addressed Schutz' requirement for logic consistency. This according to Schutz requires clarity and precision in the use of concepts.

*“A precondition for that a conclusion can be evaluated critically is thus that the assumptions underpinning it are explicit.”* (Own translation from Danish of Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999:205).

By clearly defining the key concepts “the reproduction of organised action” and “sensemaking” and using them consistently I have strived for clarity and precision. The assumptions upon which the analysis and my reasoning is built are explicated on page 74.

### **4.3 Case Studies**

Flyvbjerg (2004) argues that there are four different kinds of information-oriented types of cases. One of those is the extreme/deviant case. The extreme case is used to contribute to theory development (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

It can be an advantage to pursue an extreme case if one seeks to get as much information as possible about a given problem. This would not to the same extent be possible to achieve with random sampling for example (Flyvbjerg, 2004). This is particularly pertinent to this case where I want to examine in the broadest sense possible how minimal sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action. This includes analysing whether there are hitherto ignored or invisible mechanisms which can stabilise organised action when shared sensemaking is minimal. There is thus a strong explorative element in the analysis.

*“It is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur.”* (Flyvbjerg, 2005:425)

I make no claims about the generalisability of the findings of this case. I only argue that it is likely that the case will be relevant in contemporary society, but I make no claim about it. It is not something this thesis claims to investigate.

### **4.3.1 A Voluntary Organisation**

The case I have chosen is a voluntary organisation. As it is a voluntary organisation an essential part of the reproduction of organised action is that actors remain members of the organisation or that others are ready to replace them. I think this is the case for for-profit organisations too especially in these times of low unemployment. Even though the exit costs (Hirshman, 1970) in a for-profit organisation are higher because they involve loss of wages. That the case organisation is voluntary organisation means that actors exiting the organisation are one of the major threats to the reproduction of organised action. As opposed to other ways of reacting when there is a felt dissonance between individual and organisation as explored by Hirshman in; “Exit, Voice, or Loyalty” (1970).

That it is a voluntary organisation makes it an extreme case in another sense. I assume that focussing on young people doing voluntary work offers a chance to understand one of their freest and most motivated (otherwise they would not be there) arenas for collective organising in the post modern era.

According to Weick (1995:90) by using the term “issue” about Noise I indicate that it is something which should be managed. This is in accordance with the expressions of those who bring up “the issue of Noise” at meetings. Several tutors identified Noise as an issue. I did not plan to ask the tutors about noise in connection with tuition. The questions I used with the tutors were aimed at getting them to talk about the issues in connection with tutoring which were most salient to them. And across the board they mentioned noise or something equivalent. However, they may have gone to the meetings for another reason (a crush on someone and an associated desire to join in the same “we”) and then find themselves raising the issue or voicing opinions about it because the situation hails them to do it. It is what you do at meetings. Since it is at meetings the tutors who-go-to-meetings see each other. They are perhaps primed to enact a situation where you seek to manage issues as a group. But when Noise is brought up as an issue I label it so.



### 4.3.2 Field Work Design

That it was an extreme case of minimal articulated interaction and limited production of shared narratives meant that I had be careful not to change this by providing arenas for shared articulated interaction or by feeding back narratives about the context which would then become shared.

It was vital for the analysis that my interaction with the organization did not constitute a catalyst around which the organization developed communication in order to deal with this interaction with the outside. It was also important that I did not stimulate the volunteers to form an increased amount of shared conceptions. Focus group interviews would have provided arenas where the amount of shared conceptions could have greatly increased.

In section 3.5 I concluded on the theoretical discussion that I wanted to pursue the following in the empirical analysis:

- Conduct field studies over an extended period of a real organisation.
- Identify and understand the production of and effect of ambiguity.
- Distinguish between meaning generated within or outside the formal organisation.
- Pay attention to the impact of identity formation processes.
- Distinguish between shared and equal meaning.

To be able to make an empirical contribution I followed the organisation closely over 6 months. I made regular observations of tutoring and I attended all meetings related to the Network Group both internal meetings and meetings between external stakeholders<sup>49</sup>.

The meeting with the children quickly drew me into participating in tutoring. They were such a persuasive force. They physically pulled me to the chair and table with their homework, and verbally explained what they wanted help with, and how. That experience later led me to see the interaction with the children and the physical layout of the room itself as an important organising factor, which contributed to why the organization could function in such a non-verbalised manner. I will return to a discussion of participant observation in the section below.

I wanted to avoid installing coherent views of the organised action where none had existed before. I therefore began by interviewing what I perceived as more

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49 See page 74 for a list of external stakeholders.

peripheral members of the group, volunteers who had little interaction outside the tutoring with other volunteers. Only then did I proceed to interview what I perceived as more central members who would sometimes show up at meetings. After I had concluded my period of observations I interviewed the contact person/coordinator.

To examine the impact of identity formation I conducted extensive life story-like interviews. They enabled me to see how each constructed their self and the organisational context. It also gave an insight into what a wide range of communities seemed important when they explained who they felt they were relating to through the activity. When they expressed sense they had made I pursued which arena they had made this sense in. Had they discussed the issue with others? Experienced similar issues before? This was in order to examine the extent to which they drew on shared sense or sense generated and negotiated outside the formal organisation.

To gauge the level of shared versus equal perceptions in the organization I also attended all meetings during and after the period of data collection to examine the extent to which tutor made sense in interaction with each other.

In the process of identifying an appropriate case study I conducted extensive interviews with the coordinators of volunteers in 10 larger national social work organisations which organise young people. I discovered that apart from narrations of the traditional association<sup>50</sup> there was a big variety in the way they conceptualised the organisation of their volunteers. I then identified the organisation where it seemed like the local groups had the most autonomy. This was to be found in an organisation which had no history as a traditional association; the Danish Refugee Council<sup>51</sup>.

During the initial process of identifying and creating a contact with a case organisation I made observations from two other organisations than the one picked (one of them also in the Danish Refugee Council). I also made observations of the Danish Refugee Council's introduction courses to new volunteers.

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50 The concept "the traditional association" is examined further on page 193.

51 The Danish Refugee Council (the DRC) will be analysed in more detail on page 174.

### 4.3.3. Individual Interviews

One of the aims of the empirical analysis is to pay attention to the organising effects of the identity formation process in terms of action implications. Since I focus on discursive identity formation (Davies & Harré, 1990) I wanted to allow the individual interviews to become arenas for negotiating a self in general and more specifically in relation to cases of organised action.

To achieve this I aimed to facilitate a semi life story interview. Most interviews lasted between an hour and two and a half hours. They were conducted at the business school, at the volunteers' home, on occasion in the Basement in Vestplanen after tuition and I went to a cafe on separate occasions with the tutors who were most inclined to seek to position themselves as fellow researchers. I did this to avoid sitting in a group room with them at the business school and thus trigger the student position even more. I briefly explained that I was interested in processes of organising in connection with their voluntary work and in what it meant for them.

That this is a project about sensemaking means that the starting point for any analysis and also for the generation of empirical data is that human experience is the product of an ongoing sensemaking process. This means that the empirical data I have generated has the status of glimpses of a sensemaking process about the themes I focus on rather than “truthful” facts. It also means that the meaning generated is as much a construction of a self as it is a construction of the theme.

I wanted the focus and order in which interviewees reflected on their involvement to structure the interviews as much as possible. I was aware that the salient points to each tutor could vary and I wanted to be able to capture this by letting the interviewee point out what to talk about.

So I encouraged the interviewee to talk about what seemed important to them. This is similar to the personal narrative as described by Kohler Riessman (2002):

”...relational modes of interviewing that reflect and respect participants’ ways of organizing meaning in their lives... efforts to give up communicative power and follow participants down their diverse trails.” (DeVault, 1999 paraphrased by Kohler Riessman, 2002:696).

Kohler Riessman reflects on the narrative turn in the humanities and social science to which she contributes.

“ The approach does not assume objectivity; rather, it privileges positionality and subjectivity.” (Kohler Riessman 2002:696).

Kohler Riessman has an ambition of empowering the interviewee. To give them the power to exercise control in the interview situation. I feel that there is such significant power exercised by the researcher in the analytical and the writing process that it is illusory to share power. Unless one changed the form of analysis in direction of more co-construction or maybe action research. That was not my intention. For the reasons stated above I was wary of sharing the meaning I made of the organisation with the tutors. But I did want to let the interviewee construct as freely as possible to get as close as possible to what they would have constructed had I not interfered. This is of course a vain ambition since I co-construct the phenomenon I analyse by the very act of pointing it out as worthy of analysis and creating an arena like the interview.

I conducted 16 individual interviews. All were recorded on tape (this being 2002) and subsequently transcribed verbatim. This generated some 250 pages densely written interview text. As a rule exclamations (written with capital letters), hesitations (indicated with a - ), breaks, giggles and laughter (noted in brackets as giggles or laughter) are indicated in the transcribed text.

I selected whom to interview based on these criteria:

- To interview a range of those who regularly came to meetings.
- To interview some tutors who did not go to meetings.
- To interview tutors from both locations; block D and block G.
- To interview tutors from a variety of days.
- To interview both new and experienced tutors.
- To interview a range of external stakeholders

The reasoning behind this selection was that I wanted to uncover sensemaking about the organised action from a wide range of those involved<sup>52</sup>.

All my interaction with tutors and parent groups in connection with the generation of empirical data was affected by that I sought to affect it as little as

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52 See page 153 for reflections on how well I achieved this aim.

possible. I tried as much as possible to avoid creating shared articulated meaning where none had existed before. So I refrained from using focus group interviews which would have provided arenas for shared articulated sensemaking.

I conducted as much of the observations of meetings and tuition as I could before I interviewed those who went to meetings. This was because the individual interviews would perhaps generate new meaning about them. So I interviewed those whom I perceived to be peripheral to any shared sensemaking which might exist first and then only at the end did I interview Sharmeen.

In order not to plant meaning about their activities I did not divulge much about the focus of my analysis. This meant that I did not invite them to join me in co-constructed narratives (Ellis & Berger, 2002) but I retained the power over the interview situation.

The questions were brief and open. I tried to let the interviewees spend time talking about what they felt like. I posed follow-up questions when there are things which were unclear. I asked for concrete examples.

To open the agenda further I always ended each interview with asking whether there was something they were surprised I did not bring up or something they would like to talk about. In most interviews this stimulated further talk about the issue they seemed most preoccupied with.

I expect discourse produced in interviews, just like discourse produced in any other context, to be highly affected by the context and of efforts to make oneself recognisable. If I had not provided the occasion/ arena – they might not have positioned themselves (like that).

Kohler Riessman argues that:

“Personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories rather than reproduce the past as it was... The truths of narrative accounts lie not in their faithful representation of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future” (Kohler Riessman 2002:705).

That interviews are interesting precisely they represent constructions of, rather than faithful representations of, the past is further explored by Smith (2002):

” In the context of narrative analysis, the “data” of interviews are first and foremost the ways in which a person has reconstructed the past to negotiate an ever-fluid process of identity construction.” (Smith 2002:724)

Apart from constructions of self in relation to constructions of the organised action I was also interested in the processes by which actors produced this sense – I wanted to uncover if possible the arenas of interaction where they might have shared sensemaking with others. This was to contribute by analysing whether they drew in meaning from within or beyond the formal organisation.

The structure of open interviews was loose and changed slightly from interview to interview but roughly covered the following questions:

- How long have you been involved in the activity<sup>53</sup>?
- What do you do?
- With whom, and when?
- How did you decide what to do/how to do it?
- How/why did you enter into the group?
- What do you do apart from this?
- Have you done voluntary work before (when they say “no” which is the normal answer I ask more specifically about student unions, party committees, sports clubs, housing coop boards etc.)
- Any difficult /confusing situations?
- How did you handle them? With whom? How did you experience it?

I tried to identify occasions for sensemaking - issues. What has acted as a trigger and how have they interacted in relation to it? Who did they talk to in which arena? – which response did they get?

#### **4.4.2. Observation and Participant Observation**

I have observed 9 meetings minutely. They were all arenas for sensemaking about the tuition activity, but not all took place within the formal organisation, and

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53 From my time as student councilor I had the experience that a concrete question about the time an act took place is an effective way to open up for the most salient thoughts about the act.

volunteers were not represented at all of them. The aim was to observe and record all interaction outside tuition during the period.

I have observed tuition over the 6 month period in all three locations (including the Youth Club). I made field notes immediately after leaving and sometimes during.

I conducted semi-structured field observations (Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999) since I came to the setting with an interest in shared sensemaking processes. But I tried to be open to and document through notes and sound recordings everything indicating various kinds of ordering mechanisms.

Kristiansen & Krogstrup (1999) identify four different roles for the researcher in connection with observations: The participant, the observing participant, the participating observer and the observer.

During tuition I took up the position as observing participant in tuition. This means that I as well as those observed (the other tutors and the parent groups) were aware that I was there primarily as a researcher. I did convey to some of the oldest children that I was there to look at and write a book about the tuition, but this did not make sense to them as it was a completely unfamiliar position I tried to occupy. My attempts to position myself differently to the tutors in relation to the children were mostly ignored by them and I was hailed into a role as a tutor.

At meetings I went out of my way not to participate but only observe. Since it was the shared sensemaking processes (as limited as they were) of the group I was interested in it was important that I did not interfere more than I had to by identifying certain arenas as significant such as meetings. I always explained my reason for being present and asked for permission to remain.

My policy of as little interference as possible was challenged on occasions particularly by external stakeholders. To gauge constructions of the group by external stakeholders I observed meetings amongst them on various occasions. It was common that the external stakeholders felt a lack of information about what went on in the Network Group and they asked me to give them information or to deliver messages. On each occasion I was a bit of a stickler and refused politely. I did not want to create connections since I was studying the effect of their non-existence.

I have participated in giving tuition to the children in all three locations. I subsequently wrote down what happened and how I felt. I used an extract of these

document as a third voice (Czarniawska, 2002) whose description of my own emotion and confusion helps pin point the ordering effect of the children.

“The fieldworker's emotional responses to events in the field may mirror those that naturally occur in the setting.” (Goffman, 1989 paraphrased by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001:353).

Because of the fragmented nature of the Network Group I made sure I sought permission for being there at each occasion for observation. It wasn't sufficient to ask permission from the consultant of the contact person – authority was re manifested at each assembly.

### **4.4.3 Written Texts**

I also analysed all the documents produced by the group over time which I could get hold of. Which was the same as what they had access to. Furthermore I was given access to Sharmeen's emails going back to the creation of the organisation.

## **4.5 Analytical Strategy**

Some of the appropriate tools unique to narrative analysis which are inspired by literary studies are plot analysis; identification of prominent characters, identification of genre. I will not be applying these rigorously to the analysis of the interviews. Therefore the analysis in this thesis is not narrative as such. However, I do take inspiration from Gergen (1997) when I find that the way the tutors make sense of the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings is structured in a manner similar to how they represent/ make sense of other developments over time in their life<sup>54</sup>.

### **4.5.1 Time Span and the Status of Texts**

For personal reasons I had an inkling at the time of data creation that the analysis of the data might take place over several years. This made me emphasise preserving as much as possible in either text or sound recordings. That the analysis

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<sup>54</sup> See page 263.



has been stretched out over 5 years from 2002 till today 2007 means that many nuances such as emotional outbursts and more intuitive hunches may have been forgotten. The data material has taken on a more textual quality. It complements well the theoretical approach I take. I am following a more discursive turn in sensemaking theory (Weick 2004) where the production and sharing of text is central.

I particularly emphasise the level or articulated interaction as an indicator of different types of sense making processes, because I think the production of discourse may be a factor in the reproduction of organised action (Grant et al. 2004). I have tracked the development of discourse in the empirical analysis. I have asked actors to articulate their thoughts, I have sat in on their meetings and heard what they said read what they have written. I have observed and recorded discourse in the observations of tuition and interaction with stakeholders. I will only to limited extent analyse sensemaking that takes place through unarticulated interactions. Where actors affect the sense they each make through body language, facial expressions etc. I do not have empirical data to conduct that type of analysis.

The primary ambition with the empirical research was never to follow the development of the organisation over time. It was more the ambition to understand the mechanisms which enabled it to be reproduced over this period of 6 months from late 2001 to early 2002. However, an added bonus of the protracted writing period has been that I can report that the Network Group is still running. They still tutor roughly the same amount of children and are a platform for the activities of approximately the same number of tutors. When I returned to the DRC to present my findings and ask for their response I found great recognition of my findings. There was a sense that the picture was still true of the situation in the Network Group. Those who go to meetings still find it problematic that there isn't more coherence in the group. But tutoring is reproduced and the process of Having Meetings also hobbles along.

#### **4.5.2 Positioning the Analytical Strategy in a Danish Research Context**

I will take a social constructivist approach to the reading of the empirical data. I touch on how actions are reproduced partly through the way tutors make sense of

their own participation, although it is not the main focus of my analysis. Some researchers would call this “motives for voluntary work”.

Other Danish researchers have used individual interviews to analyse young peoples motives to engage in voluntary, political or union work. I have been inspired by these works and will therefore spend some time to position the project in relation to them.

Jens Christian Nielsen published his Ph.D. Dissertation in 2002: “Ungdom, demokrati og fagbevægelse – ny (arbejder)ungdom og demokratiske læreprocesser”. He evaluated a concrete project<sup>55</sup> aimed at involving more youth in union work. He interviewed 12 politically active youths who were chosen to represent diversity along various dimensions. J.C. Nielsen worked with autobiographies inspired by Fritz Schütze spontaneous unthematized autobiographies.

However, he says that :

“Although I doubt whether an autobiographical narration can (re)create the authentic reproduction of a persons experiences I see it as a good interview method.” (Own translation of Nielsen 2002:162).

This indicates that he has a realist reading of the interviews where his focuses on the chains of events as told by the young people. He chose the autobiographical method because it

“...gives good opportunities to perform an in-depth analysis of connections between young peoples' involvement in various types of organisations and their upbringing, schooling, education, hobbies and career pattern.”(Own translation of Nielsen 2002:162).

The realist approach is also reflected in the analysis of the interviews for example:

“Mariannes narratives of the work in the regional board and the resistance against renewal coming from the young corresponds to the experiences Lotte made in the social democrat voters' organisation. This indicates that in the

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55 “Mindscope”

political parties on a local level it can be difficult for young people to get influence and break with traditions for political work.”(Own translation of Nielsen 2002:125).

The autobiographies thus become a source of facts about one person which are possibly general for larger populations.

My project shares the ambition to enquire about how young people perceive their participation in in this case voluntary work without applying preconceived categories and themes. However, my ontological approach to the interview material is less realist and more social constructivist. I will not be inferring that a prior membership of the student council makes it more or less likely that one would do voluntary work subsequently. I will analyse how the volunteers make prior activities perform at the interview. Do they use the prior involvement/non-involvement in student politics to position themselves into or out of a similar position today?

It tells us something about which narrative resources young people have at their disposal to perform being volunteers in this context. And about in which arenas they may be negotiated.

I have, however, as opposed to Nielsen given the interviews a direction. By being interested in organisational processes I have enquired about what kind of an organisational context the volunteers enact. As in who do they talk to, whom do they know of, what do they feel they are in relation to the activity. How do they feel about participating or not participating in concrete meetings?

Another recent contribution to the body of research of the Danish youth and their participation in the voluntary sector comes from (again) J.C. Nielsen, A. Højholdt, and B. Simonsen 2004: ”Ungdom og foreningsliv: Demokrati – fællesskab – læreprocesser”. They have investigated 10 associations 5 through in depth case studies and 5 through questionnaires. They also use individual narratives. These are presented as a number of portraits whose purpose and status is to:

“...illustrate both significant common characteristics in young people's participation in associations and the variation ...They have been selected because they can tell something exemplary...” (Own translation of Nielsen,

Højholdt and Simonsen, 2004:96).

The way the authors draw conclusions from the interviews is as follows:

“Her narrative indicates that for well functioning youths it can be motivating for their participation in an association that they can participate in activities without being committed to further participation in the social life of the association...” (Own translation of Nielsen, Højholdt and Simonsen, 2004:100).

Here there is more of an element of social construction. The emphasis is on how Maja perceives the world. But the authors still extend their findings to illustrate general occurrences. My thesis is different by not seeking to make general claims about Danish youth.

## **4.6 Limitations to the Analysis**

I will now discuss the limitations of the analysis of the empirical cases along three dimensions: gender, ethnicity, and age. In hindsight, these are the biases I feel are the strongest and which should most urgently be addressed in future research.

### **4.6.1 Gender Blindness**

I have not pursued the ordering effects of processes of gendering. I have touched upon how the interaction between the Father Group and the predominantly female volunteers was ordered by gendered positions. The talking (older) men and the listening (younger) women.

The parent groups were ordered along gender. The women had the Women's Club in the basement of Block D. The men had the Club in the basement of Block G which was not as much defined as a Mens club as just a Club. Several sources explained how the Women's Club had expressed to the tutors from the start that they did not want male tutors in Block D. The men welcomed both male and female tutors in Block G. They were, however, concerned about how I would represent the relationship between themselves and the female tutors in case it would – as they said – worry their wives. I did not see any indication of intimacies developing

between the two parties. But the interaction between the Father Group and the tutors was for the Father Group a gendered interaction.

When the occasion was defined by an overarching authority such as a local council project group the women from the Women's Club participated alongside the men in the coordinating meetings across groups in Vestplanen.

Half way through my period of field research a group of tutors initiated tuition in the local youth club for teenagers. They were encouraged to establish their own separate group affiliated with the Network Group. Initially they met several times to make sense of the up coming activity. They were seven to nine tutors who moved their activity from tutoring the children to this new autonomous group. They experienced a much higher level of shared sensemaking than the tutors in the Network Group. The tutors in this new activity enacted gender related differences between tutors. That the male tutors were better able to protect the female ones and stand up to boundary-testing teenagers. This impacted the ordering of their activities to the point where they sought to always have male tutors present during tuition. As they began to enact specific innate abilities in maths versus the humanities they had a tendency to enact that those differences too were gender-related. None of these phenomena occurred in connection with tuition of the younger children in Block D and Block G.

The contact person, Sharmeen, resisted many of these actualisations of gender specific roles. She did this by confronting others who actualised them and she avoided arenas where they were dominant such as interaction with the Father Group.

#### **4.6.2 Ethnocentricity**

One of my findings are that it was to a large extent the parent groups and the children who ordered the activities of the volunteers and in this manner supported the reproduction of organised action. Had I envisioned this from the beginning my focus on the parents and the children and on what ordered *their* activities would have been bigger.

However, I was blinkered by the way the tutors, the consultant, and the local council worker constructed cause chains about action in the Network Group. The ordering effects of the parents and the children and of their boundary objects

(school books) was one of the findings that was the biggest revelation to them. They expressed recognition of it. But had not identified it themselves.

As it is the analysis has a focus on processes amongst the “Danish” actors. Rather than a focus on processes amongst the groups of parents who had moved to Denmark and were raising their families here. I would hope this imbalance would be addressed in future research.

### **4.6.3 Ageism**

Although the children played a significant part – as mentioned above – in structuring the organised action of tutoring I did not interview the children. I chose not to because I do not know enough about how to do this ethically. I would have felt the need to have their parents present and I was worried that an intervention like that might disturb a perhaps fragile balance between parents and tuition. Many of the parents expressed reserve and wariness of what they perceived as “official” control.

Furthermore I did not have the technical knowledge of interviewing of analysing interviews with children. I chose not to qualify myself in that area. This means that the children have no direct voice in the analysis. The sense they make is not explicitly brought into the analysis. In that manner I mimic the organisation I studied. The children are not represented at meetings, and they were rarely quoted. Although in discussions of Noise at meetings some actors quote the children who are frustrated with the level of noise. The children who generated what was perceived as Noise have no direct voice in my narrative. I thereby contribute to marginalising them

At the other end of the age spectrum are the older tutors. I single them out as a separate entity in the analysis. Not a coherent entity but a number of actors who share some characteristics. I saw a pattern that was similar for them which I have described in the analysis of the empirical cases. I did not interview any of them. In hindsight this is a mistake since it could have contributed to illuminate even better the range of meaning associated with the organised action.

## 4.7 Retrospective sensemaking processes

That sensemaking is retrospective means that when I want to analyse the characteristics of sensemaking processes related to joint action I will never have access to how the actors thought about the action independently of having performed it – and neither will they themselves. I can only ask the actors afterwards how they make sense of their actions. Even when I ask them as they are acting about what they are doing, during tuition, they will step out of acting – step out of the flow of events - and retrospectively make sense. I then contribute to enacting interviews and observations as occasions for retrospective sensemaking.

The implication of the ongoing character of sensemaking for this analysis that I will have to abandon any ambitions of finding *the* sense which the actors made of their joint action – since this sense is an ongoing changing accomplishment.

I am studying a voluntary organisation. There have been many attempts made to analyse why actors choose to participate in joint action in voluntary organisations, and most of them rely on questionnaires typically asking “what is/was your motivation for joining organisation X?”.

Researchers and practitioners ask this question to identify characteristics of preferences that will make people more inclined to join voluntary organisations. This ignores the likelihood that people may join by chance and subsequently make sense of their joining in social interaction with others in the organisation (Habermann, 2001). And that this sense probably changes over time, and will change depending on the context in which actors are asked to articulate the sense they have made.

## 4.8 The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Applied Methodology

The weakness of the applied methodology are as mentioned the three tendencies: Gender blindness, ageism and ethnocentricity. I have tried to remedy at least the gender blindness by pointing out some of the omitted observations here. One of my key conclusions, of the role of the recipients' ordering effect, will hopefully inspire further exploration of this phenomenon by both researchers and actors in voluntary organisations and thereby remedy its absence in this thesis. Another

weakness may be the ontological oscillation. I have, however, sought to be explicit about it and make it clear in my reflections of my findings.

The strengths of the applied methodology is the extended field work. Others have made interviews or lab studies but I have combined the interviews with a comprehensive study of interaction on a real organisation over a longer period.



# 5 Having Meetings: A Case of Organised Action

## 5.1 Introduction to the Case.

As I argued in chapter two we only have little understanding of how minimal shared sensemaking relates to the reproduction of organised action – that will be the contribution of this thesis. Much more is known about how shared sensemaking processes facilitates organised action. In this chapter I have selected a case of reproduction of organised action which is reproduced by actors who only communicate very little with each other. By understanding through which processes they make sense of the organised action they participate in I hope to contribute to an understanding of how fragmented and dispersed sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action.

First, section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 will define the case and return to this thesis' definition of organised action. I will argue that I have actually chosen to analyse an empirical case of this phenomenon. In other words that the analysis is valid<sup>56</sup>.

Section 5.1.3 will briefly introduce newer writings by Weick and co-authors about how we should expect sensemaking and the reproduction of organised action to be related.

Finally, in section 5.1.4 I will develop the analytical model for the empirical analysis whilst bringing in inspiration from legal studies of joint action.

The organised action of Having Meetings is not the most obvious example of joint action I could have chosen. The second case in this thesis will be an

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56 “In a wider and more qualitatively oriented definition validity concerns the extent to which observations and interpretations of these are able to reflect the phenomena or variables the researcher is interested in and shed light on the chosen problem.”(Own translation of Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999:203-204).

investigation of the reproduction of the organised act of tutoring in spite of a perceived high level of Noise – a far more obvious choice of organised action. However, I start with Having Meetings because by analysing them and sensemaking processes underlying their reproduction the reader is straight away introduced to the patterns of communication within the organisation and we can draw on this in the second case.

There is another reason for choosing Having Meetings as a case. Having Meeting is a central activity in a voluntary organisation: The tutors themselves divide activities related to the formal organisation into two: The activity of tutoring, and the activity of Having Meetings/ “organising”<sup>57</sup>. It is common for practitioners and researchers alike in the Danish Voluntary Sector to divide the basic activities related to voluntary work like this (e.g. Nielsen, Højholdt & Simonsen, 2005).

In the professional sector (public and private) it is perhaps less common to regard the act of formally organising activities (Having Meetings) as an activity in its own right. However, in the voluntary sector it can not be taken for granted that this task of formally organising activities will be undertaken<sup>58</sup>. Voluntary organisations have closed down because of a lack of volunteers who would go-to-meetings. It therefore becomes more interesting to question how the organised action of “Having Meetings” is reproduced.

### **5.1.1. A Definition of Having Meetings**

The organised action that is unfolded in this case is the act of having formal meetings in the organisation. To indicate that it is a specifically defined phenomenon it is capitalised: Having Meetings.

I have tried to come up with a pared down common sense definition of the organised activity of Having Meetings<sup>59</sup>. What is it the actors say they are doing – and what is it they are afraid of stopping? I could have called it maintaining a

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<sup>57</sup> Source: The individual interviews.

<sup>58</sup> There is a general perception that it is difficult to recruit volunteers to undertake the “organisational work” in the voluntary sector (Andersen, 2000; Hermansen & Stavnsager, 2000).

<sup>59</sup> The requirement of sufficiency: “Every expression in a scientific model...that it is understandable to the actor as well as to his fellow beings in common sense thinking of every day life.”(Own translation of Schutz, 1975:56 quoted in Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 1999:211).

democratic structure – having a formal decision-making structure, being an organisation etc – but really Having Meetings can be made sense of from so many different perspectives – that labelling the activity: Having Meetings reflect how the actors refer to that kind of action. That their organisation is Having Meetings is something the tutors, the consultant, and the external stakeholders reproduce as important, as indispensable. Having Meetings is enacted as a core aspect of being a legitimate organisation by both tutors and external stakeholders. This does not mean that all tutors feel that they should go to meetings – far from it – very few do. But they take for granted that the organisation is Having Meetings in the sense of: There being a pattern of something defined as Meetings imbued with some authority on a regular basis.

### **5.1.2. Why Having Meetings Is a Case of Reproduced Organised Action**

The definition of organised action (in a formal organisation) which I suggested on page 80 is:

- that there is a stabilised pattern of action
- that the action contributes to the survival of the formal organisation
- that the action is undertaken by mutually dependent actors.

I will argue for why I think Having Meetings is a case of organised action.

Having Meetings forms a repeated pattern. As we shall see in the case the actors enact that some kind of meetings are held in the formal organisation on a regular basis.

Having Meetings in the formal organisation affects the survival of the organisation. As we shall see the sense that there are meetings lends legitimacy to the organisation as a social construction – members feel they have influence, and external stakeholders feel they have a legitimate partner to interact with. If the legitimacy of Having Meetings was challenged on any of the two accounts it would threaten the survival of the formal organisation.

There is a mutual dependency between actors as regards meetings – those who go to meetings are dependent on that others acknowledge their right to represent them (It doesn't mean objectively dependent but that the people who go to meetings need to enact plausibly that others find their participation legitimate in

order to make sense of their own participation). By emphasising that the mutual dependency is enacted I differ from Weick's early – 1969/79 – concept of a more objective mutual dependency (equivalence) as a basis for collective structures. But I am indebted to his writings about sensemaking in 1995 where he consistently emphasises the socially constructed nature of the social world in general. Those who-do-not-go-to-meetings are dependent on that a sufficient amount of work is done to render the meetings legitimate in spite of their own lack of participation. That means those who-do-not-go-to-meetings would eventually be affected if no-one showed up to meetings and the meetings could no longer be enacted as legitimate – or rather if the person or the people who-go-to-meetings found that the meetings weren't legitimate (because of lack of participation).

I have already indicated that there are not many volunteers who go to meetings. Out of 50-60 volunteers only 3-4 show up when a meeting is held, and yet some form of sufficient sense is made of these meagre meetings to ensure that the reproduction of the organised action of “Having Meetings” is not undermined.

The case you are about to read will be slightly counter-intuitive. In order to analyse minimal sharing between actors in the organisation I will unfold all sharing which has taken place at meetings. So, although only a few people participate and they change over time it might seem to you, the reader, that there is plenty of sharing and articulation taking place. This is not the case. But in order to gauge the extent of shared sensemaking one must examine what *does* take place – even if it gives the impression that they share lots because it is given so much space in the analysis.

### **5.1.3. Sensemaking Theory and the Case**

So on the one hand I now have access to a concrete empirical case of reproduced organised action which I will try to understand. On the other hand there is a school of thought within organisation theory which suggests how best to understand the very same phenomenon. I will join the two and subsequently see if this case generates new insights. In chapter two I presented how various sensemaking theorists think that sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action. Here I will briefly outline how Weick touches upon this issue at various places in his extensive authorship. These articles by Weick and co-authors are

discussed in more detail in connection with the cross-case analysis of empirical results on page 336.

#### **5.1.3.1 Organised Action: A Result of Mutual Dependency?**

In 1979, Weick proposed inspired by Allport (1962) and Wallace (1961) that the minimal building blocks in organised action is not shared goals but double interacts; mutual equivalence structures. They argued that as long as 1) each actor perceive that they need actions performed by the other actor(s) to reach their own goal and 2) they predict that by acting they can elicit the needed action from their co-actors and 3) they repeat their pattern of action then they will have established a mutual equivalence structure. In my words they continue to contribute to the reproduction of organised action even without shared articulated interaction if they perceive a mutual dependency with other actors in reaching their own defined and stable goals.

#### **5.1.3.2 Organised Action: A Result of Overlapping Salient Elements in Cause Maps?**

In 1986, Weick & Bougon proposed that it was overlapping salient elements in actors' cause maps that led the actors to reproduce organised action.

#### **5.1.3.3 Organised Action: A Result of Heed of Joint Action?**

Weick (1995) and Weick & Roberts (1993) argue that it is not necessarily shared interaction/communication in the sensemaking process, but the heed of joint action actors exhibit while make sense of their individual participation that is the basis for the reproduction of organised action.

#### **5.1.3.4 Organised Action: A Result of Shared Discourse?**

In 1995, Weick suggests that a key concern of sensemaking theorists is: “*How does action become coordinated in the world of multiple realities?*” (Weick, 1995:75). He suggest one answer to the question :

*“One answer to this question lies in a social form that generates vivid, unique, intersubjective understandings that can be picked up and enlarged by people who did not participate in the original construction.”* (Weick,

1995:75).

So Weick says that if we view action as being organised through a social form that bridges inter-subjectivity and generic subjectivity then we can understand how it is possible for action to become organised in a world of multiple realities – it happens through discursive (articulated) organisational sensemaking.

#### **5.1.3.5 Organised Action: A Result of Improvisation?**

Weick draws on the findings by Eisenberg (1990) about jazz musicians and the requirements they have before they can reproduce organised action without communicating during the process: skill, stable patterns, and heed.

#### **5.1.3.6 Murphy Inspired by Weick**

Inspired by recent development in sociology - of which I am most familiar with Beck (1986); Beck, Giddens, & Lash (1994); and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) - I would hypothesise that we need to pay more attention to actors' processes of identity formation as an inescapable requirement for being in late modernity – and hence also for being in organisational life. Weick mentions identity formation as an integral part of the sensemaking process.

### **5.1.4 The Analytical Model.**

Many of my readers will have experienced for themselves that social science research often takes place through processes of oscillation between analysis of empirical data and testing/generating theoretical models which can enhance our understanding of the empirical data. This too has been the case for this project. So although the analysis of empirical data is yet to be presented I will introduce part of the analytical results in the shape of an analytical model – not blindly lifted from theory and forced over empirical data – but generated through a circular movement through empirical data and the theory I have read. The analytical model gives language to the salient points I would like to capture in the empirical data.

#### **5.1.4.1 Further Development of the Concept “Organised Action”.**

I have identified “the reproduction of organised action” and “sensemaking processes” as the two variables I would like to examine. One of the dimensions which characterise “sensemaking processes” is the level of articulated interaction. I would like to define responsiveness or mutual dependency (which constitutes part of the reproduction of organised action) in a way that does not equal articulated interaction (which constitutes one type of sensemaking process). In that way I ensure that the reproduction of organised action is not defined in a manner which links it exclusively to one type of sensemaking process.

But how can I define mutual dependency so it hinges on more than the level of articulated interaction? I will use an example drawn from Kutz (2000) a contributor to legal philosophy. Without claiming knowledge of the legal field I gather that to the legal profession it is interesting to be able to ascertain whether actors have acted together (and thus share culpability). Hence some effort has been made to define “joint action”.

In the extract below, Kutz questions whether it is a requirement for joint action that actors respond to one and other dynamically during action. I take this to mean that he questions whether there has to be inter-personal communication during action for it to be defined as joint action. This, according to Kutz (Kutz, 2000:18), was emphasised by Gilbert (1992); Bratman (1992); and Tuomela & Miller (1988).

“The putative requirement that agents respond to one another dynamically in execution is equally implausible, for it is clear joint acts can be fully planned beforehand. You and I may agree to do our parts of watering Beth's plant while she is away: you on Mondays and I on Fridays. Once we have planned together, we simply stick to our individual schedules. At the end of the week, it would seem reasonable to say that we cooperated in tending to her plants, and not that we cooperated in planning, even though we may not have communicated at all during the week.” (Kutz, 2000:19).

Kutz uses the example to illustrate that actors can act together without mutual responsiveness. I, however, would say that even in the plant-watering example above there is responsiveness to the other actor during execution. There may not be direct communication – but the actors are responsive to one another. The

explanation of why I think this is so will illustrate how I intend to operationalise the analytical concept of mutual dependency and responsiveness in the subsequent case. I think the above is an example of reproduction of organised action. If person A perceives that person B does not for some reason fulfil their part by watering the plant – the indication could be that the plant is wilted – then person A will be responsive by altering their own actions – they will give more water; show up more days; or communicate with their joint actor person B. I would also consider them responsive if they did not alter their actions, but just felt uneasy because they realised that the joint action they set out to participate in might fail.

My point is that one actor can enact mutual dependency and therefore responsiveness with another actor by imbuing a cue - in this case in the form of an artefact - with meaning which they take to be indicative of the actions or thoughts of the actors they perceive they are acting collectively with. In the example above, the artefact which acts as a cue is the plant and its health. This enacted indication can be enough for actor A to be responsive to actor B, and hence we can maintain responsiveness or mutual dependency as a required indicator of joint action and still cover situations where actors are not directly communicating with each other.

So it is a joint act if I enact that my actions are coupled to the actions of others. If I enact cues indicating that others act differently to what I expected when I planned my actions, then I am responsive and change my line of action (to use a concept from symbolic interactionism) – or at least view it differently (now possibly as inappropriate).

I think that enacting ones own action as coupled to the actions of others *can be* related to having defined each other as part of the same unit in the outset, such as belonging to the same formal organisation. This need not necessarily be the case but one form of responsiveness is to have defined one self as part of a “we”.

In the example the actors agreed to water a friend's plant and they set out to do this “together”. They thus defined themselves as a unit. As regards the tutors in the case organisation they have all signed up as tutors for the organisation and have as such a stake in whether the organisation is enacted as legitimate or not.

The second empirical case, presented in chapter five, will include an analysis of the “we”s the tutors enact being a part of in connection with participating in the organised action.



### Analytical model:

In the analysis I will identify which cues about co-actors the tutors enact as being linked to Having Meetings. I will examine the Sensemaking Processes about these cues – who communicates in the sensemaking processes related to this issue – and what do they draw on to make sense of it?

## **5.1.5 Reproduction of Having Meetings**

It is possible that the reason why these young people can continue to act together is because there are “silent” mechanisms guiding the actions of all tutors; mechanisms which are not reproduced through ongoing shared talk. This could explain why they can act together while sharing so little communication. In order to examine this this section will analyse which mechanisms the group has established for coordinating their actions.

### **5.1.5.1 Mechanisms Established to Organise Having Meetings**

This section of the analysis has two intentions: One, to introduce the reader to a brief chronological overview over what happened when. The history is intended to function as an introduction of the organisation to the reader. Two, to bring forward some nuggets of discourse which order the organised action of Having Meetings.

#### Summer 2001

Suad, a mother from a Women's Club in Vestplanen initiates getting female volunteers for tuition of the women's children. Together with a local council worker, Mona, the mother places an advertisement in the local paper requesting help. 15-20 volunteers show up at an introductory meeting. But this is in May and the summer holidays are approaching so the group disbands and agrees to regroup in the autumn after the holidays.

#### Autumn 2001

An advertisement is placed in the local paper calling for volunteers who will come and tutor immigrant children at the local housing estate. Two locations for tuition have been identified. One hosted by the Women's Club and another hosted by a Father Group. This time they seek both female and male tutors.

On Thursday the 27/9/2001, 60 new volunteers show up to the introductory Information Meeting. People are sitting in the windowsills, the aisles and are spilling out into the hall. The big turn-out becomes a legend<sup>60</sup> in the organisation. It creates a lasting feeling amongst the volunteers that there is a vast reservoir of volunteers “out there” to recruit from.

The meeting is also enacted by several actors as the occasion where the Minimal model was decided upon. I will therefore analyse it more on page 177.

At the meeting on the 10/10/2001 a “New Ideas Group” is established. A member of the Father Group is included there, whereas all other meetings in the organisation are for tutors only.

### Winter 2002

A “Coordinators' Meeting” is called for 6/2/2002 in the local community centre. In the invitation a new organisational unit is introduced: “The Coordination Group”. The notice says:

“The meeting is intended to be a meeting for the Coordination Group which consists of the House Hosts, volunteers from the New Ideas Group, the person in charge of the Roster, the treasurer, and the contact person.”

...

“If you as a volunteer have ideas or comments for this meeting, and are unable to attend. You can contact your House Host or e-mail or call me (Sharmeen) directly. We will bring it to the meeting.” (Source: Invitation to meeting 6/2/2002).

This quote about what the tutors should do if they can not come to a meeting represents a script for those who-do-not-go-to-meetings. If they have ideas or comments (for the meetings) they should contact their House Host or Sharmeen. This is an institutionalised way to envision coordination between actors in a representative democracy. It states that if people have issues – problems or ideas – any situation where it would be legitimate for them to address “the organisation”. They will either come to a meeting or they will ask their House Host or the contact

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<sup>60</sup> This is one of the few narratives about the organisation which I heard reproduced across meetings. One reason for its spread would have been the shared experience – it was shared between 60 volunteers.

person to represent them. The implication of this for making sense of the actions of those who-do-not-go-to-meetings is that if they do not go it is because they do not have any issues, problems or ideas they would like to share with “the organisation”. We shall see that this interpretation of non-participation is not the only one and we shall see that it is not uniformly shared. But the interpretation is implicit in the model formulated above.

Sharmeen, three other volunteers, and the local volunteer consultant from the umbrella organisation (the Danish Refugee Council<sup>61</sup>) came to the meeting on the 6/2/2002.

Two weeks later Sharmeen sends an e-mail to those tutors who have mail and whose addresses are up to date in her notebook<sup>62</sup>. It contains minutes from the meeting on the 6/2/2002:

“1) It was decided that a list of the duties of the House Host is to be made. It should permanently hang on the noticeboards. This was decided because there is much uncertainty about the role of the House Hosts. It should furthermore improve the internal communication and structure. See the notice on the noticeboard.”

(Source: Minutes from the Coordination meeting 6/2/2002).

### **5.1.5.2 The Noticeboards and the Reproduction of Having Meetings**

The noticeboards can be used to communicate directly to each tutor without talking to each other.

It is the beginning of March, a month later, when I come to make my first field studies. On the noticeboards in Block D and Block G the papers with the Duties of the House Hosts are displayed:

“The House Hosts must

- Familiarise themselves with various materials (instructive games etc.).
- Initiate that various games and books are used.
- Welcome new volunteers.

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61 From here on: The DRC.

62 This is 2002 and many of the volunteers did not have regular access to mail accounts.

- Make Agreements of Corporation<sup>63</sup> with each individual volunteer, who has been active for more than a month.
- Ensure that the each shift runs. In case of problems, however, Sharmeen or Dorte can be involved.

So the House Hosts are

- Those you call in case of sudden cancellations otherwise the Lists of Absence should be used.
- Those you talk to about any problems, new ideas or questions.
- Intermediaries to the other members of the Coordination Group (the contact person, The treasurer, the Idea Group<sup>64</sup>, and the other House Hosts) and the DRC.” (Source: Copy of the notice which was e-mailed to the volunteers and hung on the noticeboards in Block D and Block G.)

### **5.1.5.3 The Duties of the House Host**

The duties which are relevant to Having Meetings are:

- Welcome new volunteers, and
- Those you talk to about any problems, new ideas or questions.
- Intermediaries to the other members of the Coordination Group (the contact person, The responsible for treasurer, the Idea Group, and the other House Hosts) and the DRC.”

I have included the task of welcoming new tutors as relevant to the reproduction of Having Meetings as it is mentioned both at a meeting and during two interviews by Louise and Sharmeen that it would be a good idea if the House Hosts instilled in

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63 The DRC does not require the Network Group to keep a register of members. But it does - for insurance purposes – require that each tutor signs a contract (an Agreement of Co-operation”) with the DRC.

64 The previously introduced “New Ideas Group” is here labelled “Idea Group”. Like the name of the monthly/bi-monthly meetings it changes. It indicates the absence of a shared language. It has no meetings during the 6 months period of observation.

new volunteers that they should share the burden of going-to-meetings. To explain that the organisation does not run by itself and that it is not administrated by professionals.

The next two lines install the House Hosts as intermediaries to those who are supposed to go-to-meetings (the contact person; Sharmeen, the treasurer; Signe, and the House Hosts). The two lines also indicate which issues the tutors are expected to communicate about: Problems, new ideas, and questions. Decision making is not mentioned. That is an indication of that having influence, making decisions, and as part of that formulating strategies for the organisation are not enacted as important. They are not really enacted as taking place. This is also the case in the way most tutors talk about Having Meetings – and even in the discourse produced at meetings. Strategy making and decision making are not enacted as the main features of Having Meetings. I think there are several reasons for this. One reason is the way Sharmeen acts as sensegiver in the organisation or rather deliberately does *not* act as sensegiver – the other is an enactment of boundary-less resources. I will return to this in more detail.

In the rules for being a House Host the envisioned type of communication is face to face communication between the House Host and each tutor. It does not imply – as could have been the case – that the tutors on each Day act as a unit and together decide what the House Host as their representative should bring forwards to the Coordinators' Meetings.

Routines coordinating the patterns of attendance to tuition are established and shared in advance and in writing. Departures from the routines are also shared in writing or as a last resort communicated by phone. The system has the ability to limit the need to share talk by replacing it with various kinds of standardisation. It is implicit in the formal system outlined in the Duties of the House Hosts that tuition is intended to run without ongoing oral communication or without what Mintzberg (1983) calls “mutual adjustment”.

Information on the noticeboard is intended to constitute sufficient information flow from meetings to tutors. If the tutors wanted to contribute to what was announced to be discussed at meetings they could either attend the meeting or tell their House Host or call the contact person directly. By enacting that these mechanisms are actually used non-participation in meetings can be taken to signal

that the non-participants have nothing new to add, and that they endorse what others do at their behalf at meetings.

The system is targeted at ensuring sufficient attendance to tuition - and to provide a legitimate system of communication and decision making within the formal organisation.

#### **5.1.5.4 Cues to the Structure: The DRC and the Information Meeting.**

The DRC is an umbrella organisation for several hundreds smaller units. Some of them are formal organisations; some of them are just a contact person. I chose to study a group associated with the DRC because the connection between it and the affiliated groups was looser than in most of the other national voluntary organisations. There is a decoupling between the national level and independent smaller local units. So I imagined that there was a good chance that a unit under this umbrella had a wide scope for organising itself, and thus reflecting any bottom-up movements amongst young volunteers.

“I asked the professional volunteer coordinator Dorthe Nielsen to help me make contact to a group with many young volunteers. She suggested the Network Group in Vestplanen. She said it was a new and rather chaotic group currently experimenting with how little formal organisation they could make do with. She explained that they had recently appointed some contact persons and then they have a Saturday Workshop a few times a year where they made flyers, took decisions and solved problems. “Excellent!” Said I, and the case was identified.” (Translation of notes from Phone conversation with Dorthe Nielsen the DRC, 27/2/2002:1).

The following analysis of the DRC and the way it enacts the relationship to the local groups is more an indication of potential influence than actual influence.

#### The Consultant Dorthe as a Source of Meaning

The main influence the DRC had on interaction and sensemaking in the Network Group was through the consultant Dorthe. Please bear this in mind when I spend some time analysing the DRC. This has very little bearing on the interaction in the

Network Group. But in order to ascertain that this is the case we must investigate that frame.

Dorthe is a skilled professional with several years of experience in facilitating youth organisation. She had a coherent model for Having Meetings in mind formulated as an alternative to the Traditional Association: The Minimal Model.

The Minimal model does become a frame which some tutors draw on when making sense of Having Meetings. The Minimal model is formulated in the DRC and reflects elements from the way the DRC itself is Having Meetings. One element is the employer-employee relationship which de-emphasises decision making and power distribution.

The way volunteers are organised in the DRC is different to the Traditional Associations which were typically founded before the turn of the last century<sup>65</sup>. The DRC was exclusively an DRC for other organisations up until 1999. Until then the only members were other organisations. In the late 90's Integration activities are devolved to the local councils from the state. So the institutional context for the DRC changes and new partners (the local councils) emerge. As a response the DRC decides to become a platform for volunteers who want to contribute to integration activities.

Dorthe: “In 1999, it was unique that you could sit down and say – now we want to create a large voluntary organisation and how would we like to structure it? Normally it is the other way around. You start small and then grow big and then you adapt along the way – or you have something which is a hundred years old and then things are as they always have been. But in this case you could consider how volunteers are today and how society is.”  
(Second interview with Dorthe:1).

Dorthe here mentions that the DRC was able to design an organisational platform for volunteers. Based on what the consultants in the DRC felt was appropriate. It is hard to discern based on the material I have generated where this image of “what would be appropriate” for a new generation of tutors came from. In some way this thesis is a test of whether they were right in their choice: is the kind of sensemaking processes which the organisational structure facilitates able to sustain

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65 Christensen & (Murphy) Isen, 2001 in Skov Henriksen & Ibsen (eds).

a reproduction of the activity when it relies on the participation of a new generation of volunteers? Were they able to create an organisational context that enabled the tutors to create enough meaning to motivate them to continue to be volunteers?

Dorthe refers to the head of the volunteer department in the DRC as the architect of this new organisational structure. I felt it was beyond the scope of this analysis to interview him since my intention was to keep the focus on the Network Group. I can see now that it would have been relevant to examine whether it was entrepreneurial institution making he engaged in or was it more of a translation process of a model institutionalised in another era as Dorthe hints at below.

The kind of structure which was felt to be most appropriate/contemporary is described by Dorthe in the following as inspired by grass root movements in the late 60's and early eighties. As we shall see the basic premisses echoes the organisational contexts Sharmeen has participated in during the 90's and 2000's; contemporary grass root activities:

Dorthe: “The DRC have built it without hierarchies and systems. It is an old '68 kind of way of doing things, but a way where it is all about getting the volunteers to make the best possible effort. We do that by providing the best possible framework and by ensuring that responsibility follows the volunteer. You don't have any levels. You can't go from local, to regional, to national level. That is not the kind of framework.... you only have a local organisation who enters into an agreement with the DRC: All cooperation takes place on equal terms, and you have the Contract of Cooperation for as long as you please. Nobody dictates what you should do. There are some basic minimum rules. But that is more like a value foundation that you agree on.”(Second interview with Dorthe:1).

The structure Dorthe outlines here is one where the local organisations are black boxed. The power distribution within them is not mentioned. But the relationship between the DRC and the local organisation is that of independent partners entering into a contract on an equal footing. That means that none of them have a formal claim on decision making in the other one. The local organisations are only to a limited extent encouraged to share sensemaking with other local units – they



are encouraged to focus on their own activities. There are few arenas for exchange of experiences, and at the time of data generation there were no regional or national decision making arenas for volunteers as such in the DRC.

Dorthe reflects on what she perceives to be a problem of democratic deficit. The model does not feel entirely legitimate to her.

Dorthe: “It is a pretty unusual way to cooperate. It gives some problems because the volunteers are not represented in the management of the organisation. So there is a democratic deficit there.”

Me: “Do they protest over this?”

Dorthe: “ No, not at all, not in any way!”

Dorthe: “ Yes, it is a problem if you see it from above that all the many volunteers do not have any say in the management of the DRC. But really it would be kind of sad if they changed it. Because I think it works so well that they are allowed to use all their energy on doing voluntary work and not on writing minutes and travel to weird meetings.” (Second interview with Dorthe:2).

### The DRC as a Frame for Having Meetings

The relationship between the DRC and the local units is replicated in the relationship between the local units and the volunteers. They too enter a contractual relationship as opposed to a membership in the Traditional Association – a kind of employment relationship.

Dorthe: “As a volunteer you sign an agreement. We call it a volunteer contract. It is actually a contract about voluntary work. ” (Second interview with Dorthe:4).

Since the formal relationship between the tutor and the organisation is more like an employment how does that affect the way they enact Having Meetings? Interestingly none of the tutors I spoke to actualised the professional employment frame which Dorthe suggests here when I asked them about Having Meetings. So I

have not included it in the list of frames and discourse which the tutors actualise on page 190.

Dorthe: “It is even the case that as a volunteer you are on a trial period of a month duration. So that when you start, you can figure out what kind of place it is and after a month you can choose to sign the contract. So both parties can see what it is and get rid of those who are not suitable (e.g.: would-be-volunteers who are mentally unstable or who fundamentally disagree with the aim of the DRC; better integration.)” (Second interview with Dorthe:4).

Here is an extract from the contract as it was worded during the period of data-generation early 2002 till late 2002:

The headline is: “Agreement about Voluntary Work”. This indicates that the contract is not about belonging to an organisation (as a member) it is about agreeing to do a job. The contract specifies and thereby delimits:

- The extent of the job in terms of hours and weeks
- The place of work
- A description of tasks.

There is no mention of agreeing to values in the contract although the consultant Dorthe mentions this as being part of the contract between volunteer and organisation. The contract contains a paragraph where the volunteer agrees to a professional secrecy (they refrain from divulging information about the recipients of their services). The contract also states that the volunteer is covered by the DRC's employee insurance during the hours of work specified in the contract.

In a Traditional Association the statutes normally outline that each member has a right to vote at the annual general assembly. Membership is clearly delimited and gives each member part ownership of and influence on the organisation. The contract between the DRC and each volunteer resembles an employment contract more so than a membership. The volunteers are not called “members” they are called “voluntary employees” and there is no mention of a right to influence.

The contract between the local unit and the DRC states that the activity must be governed in a “democratic fashion”. But the emphasis is on the activity of tutoring. The contract outlines that the local unit is committed to times, days, and tutoring.

As such the contract emphasises that the volunteer is anchored via the activity rather than via membership of an organisation.

The way the DRC affects the local units is ambiguous. The wording of the contracts rejects the Traditional Association as a model for organising voluntary work. On the other hand Dorthe tells me that the consultants are advised to start by introducing the Traditional Associations model to new start ups – and over time guide the organisations towards that model<sup>66</sup>.

The way this formal and historical framework for the relationship between the DRC and the Network Group affects sensemaking and reproduction of organised action in the Network Group is complex. The contracts between the tutor and the DRC could function as physical cultural artefacts (Hatch, 1993) but the contracts are not enacted as cues or resources for sensemaking by tutors. Nobody talks about them or refers to them during the interviews. So I am not sure if and to what extent they function as a carrier or cue for how to reproduce Having Meetings in this context. But it looks as if they are compatible with the Minimal Model for Having Meetings where meetings are enacted as marginal and the focus is on the activity of tutoring.

There was only one tutor who oriented herself towards the DRC as a frame for the activity. She was the only one who had gone to an introductory meeting for volunteers in the DRC. The DRC regularly arranges intro meetings for volunteers. The introductory meeting I observed cultivated a volunteer identity which was strongly influenced by the professional background of the speakers.

The tutors in the case organisation enacted that they were required to sign the contracts with the DRC for insurance purposes and did not actualise them when making sense of Having Meetings.

### Summary of the DRC as a frame for making sense of Having Meetings

I found that Dorthe – rather than the contracts - is the main carrier of sensemaking about Having Meetings from the DRC to the Network Group.

Later – in 2003 - a year after I stopped data creation the Network Group formed a Traditional Association. This is a pattern Dorthe sees as general – after a while they all form Traditional Associations – even when they start out as much looser informal structures. But at the time I am focussing on they are able to reproduce

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<sup>66</sup> This analysis is based on data collected five years ago in 2002 and so does not necessarily reflect the status in the DRC today.

various organised activities such as tutoring and Having Meetings in an organisational framework without being a Traditional Association.

Dorthe: “But it is typical that they start out as a loose coordination group and then they form a Traditional Association within two years. Because they discover that it is actually smart to have internal rules for how they do things.”(Second interview with Dorthe:6).

Dorthe and I discuss the DRC versus one of the Traditional Associations I know she has experience from. She emphasises that the relationship between the volunteers and the employed professionals is different in the DRC:

Dorthe: “It is not as focussed on power. They are more focussed on creating good activities and then they accept all the help they can get with administration and finances – so it is another type of volunteer. Well actually I am not sure. Loads of our members have also been members of (the other organisation). - they probably just have another role here.” (Second interview with Dorthe:8).

The alternative model for organising – the Minimal Model – promoted by the DRC implies certain elements: That the volunteers are not necessarily required to be member – they are required to sign a contract. That the local units are not required to keep up to date lists of volunteers, and the local units are not required to be organised as Traditional Associations.

### The Information Meeting as a Frame for Making Sense of Having Meetings

The tutors may not share talk on an ongoing basis but there was one occasion upon which they did meet and talk. That was the watershed Information Meeting with 60 volunteers present. For most tutors that was the beginning of their involvement with the organisation. For most it became the only meeting they went to. The meeting acts as an important cue for the ongoing social construction of Having Meetings. The tutors who-go-to-meetings bring up the meeting when I ask them. Then they talked about what the structure of the organisation should be. They feel

the Information Meeting was the occasion where the Minimal Structure was decided upon.

So in a system - where the majority of tutors come in to tutor and interact with the children and then go home without talking to their fellow tutors - this early meeting represents the only arena where they participated in extensive articulated interaction with other tutors.

This Information Meeting appears to have been an arena for talking into existence organisation:

“Organization is talked into existence when portions of smoke-like conversation are preserved in crystal-like texts that are then articulated by agents speaking on behalf of an emerging collectivity.” (Weick, 2005:404).

This quote again draws our attention to that organisation is a process. Organisation is a process of organising. It is the subsequent re- articulation of the crystal-like texts enacting a collectivity which on an ongoing basis constitutes organising. The quote is relevant because it provides a frame for analysing the connection between the Initial Meeting and subsequent sensemaking about Having Meetings. In the quote Weick outlines a connection between an earlier process or articulated crystallisation which provides the texts which can be reproduced subsequently by actors enacting a collectivity for whom the texts are relevant.

The Information Meeting is referred to as the arena where texts about the organisation as a collectivity were formulated. Actors who refer to the model for Having Meetings decided upon at this meeting speak on behalf of a collectivity. They refer to the meeting when they want to add legitimacy and authority to the Minimal way of Having Meetings.

In this way the Information Meeting is taken up as a frame for in the sensemaking processes related to the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings. So bear with me while I delve deeper into various constructions of the Information Meeting.

We shall see how the crystallised texts about how to be Having Meetings in this organisation are slightly vague. How they become re-framed within the past experiences of each actor, and I will analyse which elements seem to be re-articulated in a similar manner amongst the tutors.

The narratives of the Information Meeting are not reproduced collectively since they are not mentioned at subsequent meetings. But the Information Meeting functions as a point of reference for each tutor as they make sense of Having Meetings and their own role in it.

For one of those who-do-not-go-to-meetings the remnant of Having Meetings which has survived from this first meeting is:

Lone: "I am not interested in the organisation... I think it seemed like that one could just come here and make that effort (of tutoring) and then leave again." (Lone:4).

So Lone regards the way they decided to be Having Meetings as rendering it legitimate not to participate in meetings. That this should be the case is implied in the Minimal Model. I think Lones statement about that "*...it seemed like one could just...*" is a current reproduction of the articulated interaction at the Information Meeting.

Sharmeen and Dorthe have very similar versions of where the Minimal model came from:

Me: "What, how did you get the idea from of an alternative to the Traditional Association? And why did you discuss the Traditional Association at all? "

Sharmeen: "That was me and Dorthe who had talked a bit together, and as I said she was there a lot in the beginning and led those groups, or the meetings actually. It was her who suggested it. That on the contrary we could have someone from each Day." Me: "Why did you discuss the Traditional Association at all?"

Sharmeen: "Ehhh, well. We could see that it wont work out with so many people and Days...then it is most obvious with the traditional way of organising. It is simply to create a Traditional Association with a board."

Me: "Yes, and where did you know the Traditional Association model from?"

Sharmeen: "From Dorthe. Well, I know the Traditional Association model.

But it is not a model I would choose... It was actually Dorthe who said “I’ll bring some Statutes from other Traditional Associations... Well, I did not want that kind of organisation. I did not want that already before the meeting. But I would have – If people wanted to be organised in that way then lets be organised in that way. But there was quickly an atmosphere for – it was very fast – Laughter – that was one of the things that was decided the fastest! That: “No. No. Let's try another let's try something with coordination groups”, and like that.” (Interview with Sharmeen:15).

The last bits of the statement here is the closest we get to a definition of the formal organisational structure from Sharmeen.

Me: “Yes, yes. What was it for you before the meeting that made you think “Yuk! Not the Traditional Association!”?”

Sharmeen: “Not the Traditional Association?! ahemm – what is it actually? Now, its also because previously when I have done political work I have always worked in pretty flat structures – ehh – with plenary meetings and what can I say autono – small groups who cooperate.”

Me: “Small, autonomous groups?”

Sharmeen: “Yes, exactly! And that is the way I like to work...” (Interview with Sharmeen:15).

It is a slightly unclear model of organisation Sharmeen sketches here (“...*let's try another let's try something with coordination groups and like that.*”). We do not know the exact relationship between the autonomous groups and the plenary meetings, and we do not know if there is a leader in the system. This is probably because for Sharmeen it is more an experience she has rather than an abstract model for organising. Sharmeen has used her previous experience – and rejection of the abstract Traditional Association model to make sense of the new structure in the Network Group. The political work Sharmeen has done has been outside political parties. It has been contemporary grass root activities such as publishing an underground feminist youth magazine and taking part in running a child and youth House in the inner city. This activity seemed to be inspired by the way the

squatters movement have developed a way of running their premises, where authority formally rests with the ever changing participants at plenary meetings.

This interview extract gives Sharmeen's rendition of the kind of meeting the introductory Information Meeting was. A meeting characterised by shared sensemaking and debate. This is at odds with the way Dorthe the consultant remembered it. As we shall see further down Dorthe remembered it as a questions and answers session where the tutors asked and she provided the answers to a far greater extent than she wanted. She wanted them to find the answers as to how they should act together themselves, which is actually what Sharmeen is frustrated over that they did. She felt they were wasting time reinventing the wheel.

This extract also illuminates Sharmeen's way of regarding meetings – she de-emphasises the benefits of shared articulation and sensemaking. Instead she sees it as a drain on recourse time and energy which would be better spent elsewhere. She also does not see a great need for shared sensemaking. In her eyes tutoring is straight forward, and not something that the tutors need to make sense of together.

Sharmeen: “Unfortunately the meeting got a bit long. It was mostly all this information. But people also began coming with good suggestions: “Why does one not do like this and this?” and “couldn't you just do like this and that?”. So that was actually what took up the most time, and it wasn't supposed to be like that. It turned into a kind of debate of “How does one tutor?”.

Me: “How could you sense it was taking too long?”

Sharmeen: “ Well, personally I felt the meeting was too long... well of course those who initiated the debate wanted it. But it was intended to be an introductory meeting, where you were briefly informed: “What is tuition? what is the DRC? and what about insurance and confidentiality?”. Well an introductory meeting is not supposed to take longer then one or one and a half hours, and this went on for ever..” (Sharmeen:24).

Dorthe does share Sharmeen's view of that there was too much shared sensemaking at the meeting.

Dorthe: “At the first plenary meeting there was an ocean of new ideas – and



that is no good – there has to be someone to take charge and lead the way.”  
(Dorthe:3).

Dorthe: “Having 60 at the plenary meeting meant that it more got the character of questions-and-answers rather than round-table-negotiations.”

She adds: “I kind of ended up controlling it.” The problem is I provide answers but then I go away and there is no one to follow up in things... But Sharmeen did not want to speak to everybody straight away. She did not feel she would know what to say.” (Dorthe:4).

According to Dorthe this pattern of her acting as sensegiver continued when it came to deciding on the organisational structure:

Dorthe: “That start has meant that they have not themselves formulated the structure and taken responsibility for it. They are rather asking me than themselves - but now they have a stronger formulation of what they want – they do not have it but they have formulated it.”(Dorthe:4).

The low level of shared talk in the organisation seems to be due both to an intentional design – and due to that not even the modest amount of communication envisioned initially is upheld.

### Summary of the Information Meeting as a frame for making sense of Having Meetings

Part of the mechanism which enables this group of actors to reproduce organised activity is the Information Meeting where a shared meaning of the activity (Having Meetings) was articulated. It is however, important to remember that the reproduction of Having Meetings which I analyse is taking place one to one and a half years *after* this Information Meeting. There were no meetings attended by a comparable number of participants after the Information Meeting. The Information Meeting represents an intersubjective negotiation of what is actualised as subject positions in connection with Having Meetings. It generated a generic subjectivity – one can be someone who-goes-to-meetings or not. This organisation is special by

accepting – and embracing those who do-not-go-to-meetings, but that does not mean it is the only generic subjectivity actualised as actions are organised.

### **5.1.5.5 Conclusion**

The communication via the noticeboards combined with a model where those who have ideas or suggestions should ensure they communicated this to the House Hosts means that non action by the tutors in general can be taken to indication agreement and support for the way they are Having Meetings. The ideas coming from the DRC do not challenge this. They provide support by drawing on a model based on professional employment which does not emphasise participation in Having Meetings. The Information Meeting is used as a frame for making sense of Having Meetings.

## **5.1.6 Observed Patterns of Articulated Interaction**

### **5.1.6.1 Vestplanen and the Two Basements**

In this case study the physical surroundings – the buildings in which the activity takes place are not coincidental. The beneficiaries/users of the activity were originally defined as being children living on the housing estate. Tuition takes place at two separate locations; both basements in Vestplanen. The two locations are known by the letter on the entrance to the basement. There is a Block D and a Block G. The opening hours are from 5 pm to 7 pm. In Block D there is tuition every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Block G has tuition every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, but not Wednesday when the police use the room to host a youth activity.

Tuition takes place at two locations because both the Women's Club and the Father Group host tuition. At Block D where the Women's Club is based there are only female volunteers allowed. In Block G the volunteers are mixed with predominantly women. The children are of mixed gender in both locations.

An alternative and not incompatible explanation to the two locations is presented in draft information material about the tuition from the 30/8/2001. There it is indicated that the two locations cater to children of different ages. Block D is for children up fourth grade (approximately 10 years of age) and Block G for

children from fifth grade up to leaving cert level<sup>67</sup> (approximately 18 years of age). During observations I could not discern a difference in ages of the children in the two locations. The recruitment and distribution of children was a recurrent theme for discussion at meetings.

The articulated communication between tutors unfolds in various arenas. To give you an impression of tuition and the level of articulated communication in connection with it I have included extensive field notes below. The extract will be analysed in more detail in connection with case number two about the reproduction of tuition in spite of noise.

Extracts from field notes from the first visit to Block G on Thursday the 14/3/2002:

“More confident this time I walk into Vestplanen and find Block G. I find another unlabeled buzzer and somebody lets me in. I follow the sounds of voices to the rooms. Larger rooms and more adults than in Block D. As I arrive late (quarter past 6) there are very few children left. At a large table at the window at the opposite end of the room two young female tutors are absorbed in a discussion with three “foreign” men. The women are not distracted by my arrival.

There are also two female tutors seated separate from one another in the middle at a horseshoe shaped table. They are tutoring two children each. One of them is just finishing up and I initiate contact with her. She – her name is Marie - brings me down to the large table by the window so I can meet people. But they are not interested. Instead the volunteer Marie gives me tea and there is cake on the table. I am looked after. The discussion at the table is about religion. From what I can gather the men are all from the same Middle Eastern country, the female tutors are students at the university. It is my impression that the men feel they are performing a role of educating the women<sup>68</sup>, and the women are performing being open-minded and educating the men. This is a not entirely complimentary set of performances, and it feels a bit like a friendly battle over who are the

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67 The equivalent to the Danish ”studentereksamen”.

68 This is confirmed at a later interview with the men.

educators and the educatees.

I ask Marie if I can interview her about being a volunteer, and she agrees. I suggest that we sit in the middle of the room at the horseshoe table. Our move is unacknowledged by the women at the table.

Apart from the setup of tables and chairs there are shelves along the wall and a small kitchenette in the corner. There is also a lockable cupboard with sweets. The sweets are for sale and administered by the Father Group, Marie informs me. The men at the table are from the Father Group and Marie says “they create the framework for the tuition in Block G”.

Through a door that can be closed there is a larger room. It is a playroom with table tennis and lot’s of space for playing. Marie tells me this is where the children are sent when they have finished tuition.

There is a noticeboard on the wall. There is an outdated list of volunteers. There is a similarly outdated list of cancellations – who will be unable to come when. There is a list of who is the “House Host” on the four days of the week. There is a list of phone numbers for volunteers who come Monday. There is a notice about the use of materials.

The men at the table come and go. Other men with children come in and all the men use their mobile phones frequently. They speak Arabic so I can not get a gist of their phone conversations. The volunteers do not use their mobile phones.

One of the two women from the table by the window comes over to us on her way out to say goodbye to Marie. Marie tells me later that she is a “House Host” (the contact person for Thursdays in Block G). They talk about whether they can come on Saturday to the workshop.

When the last volunteer finishes tutoring, she too joins the large table by the window. She also engages in a long discussion with the Father Group. As she leaves she says goodbye to us.” (Extract of field notes from observation of tuition in Block G Thursday 14/3/2002.)

Here in Block G there is more articulated interaction amongst the adults in connection with tuition. However, there is no forum where the tutors interact with each other without also interacting with the Father Group. It is not an arena which is used for articulation of the formal organisation as a “we”; of how to be Having Meetings or extensive reflections on how to tutor.

So articulated interaction between the tutors mainly took place at the meetings:

### **5.1.6.2 Meetings**

Over the six months I followed the organisation there were four regular Coordinators' Meetings or House Host meetings (the meetings did not have a fixed name). All volunteers were welcome; House Hosts were expected to come (or so it said on the mail announcing the meetings).

List of participants at the meetings from March to August (compiled from field notes).

- 11/3/2002 (Planning Meeting) Sharmeen, Klaus, Louise
- 16/3/2002 (Activity Saturday/ Saturday Meeting) Sharmeen, Yasmeen, Klaus, Mathilde and Marlene
- 15/4/2002 (Coordinators' Meeting) Sharmeen, Line, Jane, Dorte and Signe
- 13/5/2002 (Coordinators' Meeting) Sharmeen, Signe, Morten, Anne, Else, and Linda
- 10/6/2002 (Coordinators' Meeting) Sharmeen, Yasmeen, Morten, Anne, Louise, Anette, Joan.

Sharmeen was present at all meetings. Sharmeen brought her sister Yasmeen to three meetings. Yasmeen did not act as a sensegiver. She did reinforce Sharmeens position as sensegiver by setting an example of not questioning Sharmeen. Yasmeen was mainly companionable and enacted that attendance at meetings was

important. A handful of tutors attended two meetings each (Klaus, Louise, Morten, Signe, and one of the older volunteers Anne).

16 different volunteers out of 60 participated in a meeting at some time during the 6 months. That means that the majority - almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  - of the volunteers did not participate in any interaction outside tutoring sessions.

Dorte, the professional volunteer coordinator, had regular contact with Yasmeen, Louise (contact person for the youth club tutoring), and Mathilde and Marlene (contact persons for the Arts-and- Crafts-Exchange for women). Dorte also had contact with Daoud and some of the other members of the Father Group and Suad from the Women's Club.

According to Sharmeen the children who receive tuition mostly come because one of their parents are in the Women's Club or in the Father Group – or are close friends with someone who is. That also means that they all come from the same Middle Eastern country. Two young Pakistani children attended for a couple of months and a few Somali children have attended but have since stopped. There is no registration of the Children – their names or ages. The perception is that the number of children is approximately up to 30 affiliated with each basement location. Plus a number of youths in the youth club up to around 15.

Vestplanen, its social arenas, and its connections to the local council are complex. Interaction was mainly structured along the lines of ethnic groups.

### **5.1.6.3 Conclusion**

It was my impression based on my observations and the interviews that there was only a limited amount of articulated interaction amongst the tutors in connection with tutoring. The meetings are the arena where articulated interaction takes place. However, less than a handful of tutors go to meetings regularly. Three quarters of the tutors do not attend meetings at all. Overall the organisation represents an extreme case in the sense of the tutors having only limited articulated interaction with each other.

As we shall see below, this was an impression which was shared by the tutors themselves:

### **5.1.7 Patterns of Articulated Interaction as Seen by the Tutors**

In this quote Sharmeen indicates the loose and somewhat chaotic situation in the organisation.

“Those 51 people who have come. There has been a lot of turn over. There are many who have disappeared, and then new ones have arrived and stuff. It's really happening fast, and then there are people whom I don't even know exist, like - “Hello I'm Susanna!” Did I know Susanna was a member? No! - Laughter – so she has been dragged in by someone, and and “Why am I never told about anything?” Well, I kind of have to know that you exist first! Before I can tell you anything! That would be a big help – laughs – must be the first step on the road. Laughs – “Why am I not on the mailing list?” Who exactly are you?? - More laughter.” (Individual interview with Sharmeen:39)

New tutors are not always recruited through Sharmeen and so it can happen that no communication is established between her/meetings and the new tutor. As is apparent there is no communication on the Day which substitutes direct communication with Sharmeen and acts as an arena where fellow tutors tell the new tutor about the administrative side of the organisation.

Louise also expresses several indications of that participation in meetings and the communication across the organisation is limited:

Me: ”How can you tell that the communication doesn't function so well?”

Louise: ”Very concretely there are the meetings. The meetings we have had in the Coordination Group and with the House Hosts. Where only one out of around 10 House Hosts show up.., and there was no cancellation or anything. Maybe they hadn't seen it – so it was very concrete that one does not – Then some of the tutors found out ”Oh, we have a Cooperation Agreement with the DRC, which one has to sign?!” It is something with insurance – very hands on stuff – which you have to sign. There are many who have not done that yet either. Well, maybe that is just a small thing which is OK. They did not know that and they hadn't seen the paper.

Another thing is that many of the minutes from meetings and stuff we have written – not a lot of people see them. ”Ohh God, was there a meeting?” Or you know they come afterwards – ”Oh, I did not know.” So our information has not been optimal.” (Interview with Louise:16)

Louise shares my impression that there are only few House Hosts at meetings – contracts are not signed, meetings are not attended and information does not get out to the tutors.

Although the tutors above, express a certain amount of frustration this thesis will not supply solutions as to how to increase articulated interaction amongst the tutors. I will explore what they are able to accomplish in terms of organised action with the present low level of shared talk.

#### **5.1.7.1 Conclusion**

There is only limited articulated interaction in connection with tuition. There is limited attendance to meetings. Overall limited articulated communication characterises the sensemaking processes in the organisation.

## **5.2 The Empirical Analysis of Having Meetings**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

The analysis of the sensemaking processes which unfold in this organisation around Having Meetings will be structured in the following way:

First I will outline a number of discourses which the actors draw on while making sense of Having Meetings. The discourses are generated from this case. Secondly I will explore the articulated sensemaking at meetings about Having Meetings. The third and fourth part of the analysis delves deeper into the analysis of sensemaking processes at meetings. The empirical data showed that Meetings are particularly enacted along three lines: A: Those who-go-to-meetings try to make sense of low-attendance meetings – why so few tutors go to meetings. B:



They enact that the House Host system is an important part of Having Meetings. C: It is widespread that the tutors enact that Meetings are an arena for interacting with the organisation. I analyse the effect the sense made along each of the lines has on the reproduction of the organised action Having Meetings in this organisation.

The fifth part explores the effect of the type of the sense made at meetings. I find that the meetings produce ambiguous meaning embedded in short cause chains. I also find that they reproduce the meaning that the organisation has access to plentiful resources. Both types of meaning have an effect on the reproduction of Having Meetings. I also explore how Having Meetings is stabilised because the organisation follows a pattern of structural fragmentation where new activities are given autonomy from the start.

Finally the sixth part contains an analysis of the Sensemaking processes about Having Meetings which take place outside of meetings and those sensemaking processes' effect on the reproduction of Having Meetings.

The common denominator for all the parts of the analysis in this case is that they explore the connection between sensemaking processes and the reproduction of Having Meetings. The structure of the analysis is not a result of a theoretical approach but the result of grounded work with the empirical data. These were the clusters of mechanisms I could identify in the data.

## **5.2.2 The Frames which Emerge in this Case**

In 1995, Weick argued that sensemaking consists of three elements: cues, contexts (frames) and connections between them.

“Frames and cues can be thought of as vocabularies in which words that are more abstract (frames) include and point to other less abstract words (cues) that become sensible in the context created by the more inclusive words.”  
(Weick, 1995:110).

In this manner the contexts are frames of reference drawn on to make sense of cues for Sensemaking. This way of describing sensemaking processes is similar to the way Weick suggests that processes of organising is a particular type of

sensemaking process where intersubjectivity (concrete negotiations between you and I about how to act) is bridged to generic subjectivity (institutionalised formulations of how generic actors should act). Processes of making the particular sensible through the reference to the general.

In 2005, Weick follows the discursive turn in organisation theory and further explores how what I would call the frames drawn on in an organisational context are embedded in discourse.

These frames or generic subjectivities are manifest in the discourses which actors actualise during sensemaking. The general frames they draw on to make sense of particular cues for sensemaking, I would see then as a kind of institutionalised discourse.

As mentioned at the end of chapter two the empirical analysis emphasises articulation; the words which are spoken and shared or not shared and the arenas where sense is articulated. The analysis also emphasises that the sensemaking processes about Having Meetings have identity formation as an integral part. In this case it is negotiation of a self in relation to Having Meetings.

The twin focus on discourse and identity formation is inspired by Søndergaard's study of discursive gendering amongst young people in academia in Denmark<sup>69</sup>. Søndergaard takes her inspiration from the analysis of the production of legitimate selves from Davies & Harré (1990). They argued that selves are produced in language, that identities are manifested and negotiated in discourse. Søndergaard analyses how a space for legitimate action is discursively negotiated, where actors draw on institutionalised discourses while negotiating concrete identity positions between them. It is the identification of these institutionalised discourses which one only finds to the extent that they are actualised in talk that I have taken inspiration to present in this case. The discourses I present are brought into play when the actors negotiated legitimate subject positions (discursively negotiated roles) as regards Having Meetings.

Friedland & Alford (1991) formulated a number of what they saw as fundamental institutional logics dominant in society. I mention them because they emphasised that these logics did not dictate actors' actions but rather they were often contradictory and could be used to negotiate what would be appropriate actions in various arenas.

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69 Søndergaard (2000).

The analysis of which frames are actualised is presented as a list of the generic subjectivities the actors invoked while making sense of and thereby organising Having Meetings. I would like to re-emphasise that these discourses do not represent deterministic macro structures but are dynamically reproduced by the actors.

I think the Having Meetings Case indicates that there are several different discourses about Having Meetings which the actors draw on when making sense. These discourses or logics which I will introduce now have sprung from the data material. They are evident in the individual interviews and they were used to structure debates at meetings. They all function as frames for how to make sense of Having Meetings, and thus how one can negotiate subject positions in connection with Having Meetings.

Although the discourses will probably be recognizable to the reader from other contexts they are generated from this particular case, and I don't think I can make any claims about their applicability in other contexts in other organisations. I have condensed the logic referred to by various actors under five headings. The presentation of them could have been the conclusion of the analysis since they are an outcome of analysis. However, I would like to give the reader a chance to recognise them along the way as we discuss other aspects of sensemaking and the reproduction of having meetings. So I will introduce them here at the beginning.

The quote below, sums up the two most referred to models for formally structuring voluntary organisations with accompanying logics for Having Meetings. I have called them the Traditional Association<sup>70</sup> and the Minimal Organisation. The quote below, will be analysed further on page 213.

#### Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:

Signe “ Should we give out to people for not coming? Dorte, do you have any experience with this stuff?

Dorte: “Yes, you can take two routes (Here she outlines the Minimal Organisation): You can say OK we are four that is fine, and then just make some decisions. Us who are here, everybody had the chance. Now we will decide over the 47.000 kr, and then it is interesting to see if others feel compelled to come the next time. Then we'll make the meetings SO

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70 My own translation of the specific Danish phenomenon the “Forening”.

interesting that the others will feel compelled to come. (She contrasts it with the Traditional Association: ) The other is the stricter road; to appeal to people's guilty conscience. The first is more positive. You could let it depend on how much is needed. You can also have a very tight structure where if you make a decision you have to clear it with..."

Sharmeen jumps in and emphasises her endorsement and version of the Minimal Organisation:

Sharmeen: The intention was that - I think you (Dorte) and I were in agreement on this. I would like a structure – but that the Days can very well run on their own. As long as they stick to their budget then it is fine. If people come tomorrow and say I would like to spend 5.000 kroner on going to the Zoo with the kids. That is OK!". "Well, yes then that is something YOU have decided. Cool. (Laughter). Then that was that person's decision." (Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:4).

In the quote above, the discourse about the Traditional Association affects sensemaking about Having Meetings by acting as a model they do not want. In the context of the meeting above, the Traditional Association is referred to as guilt-driven rather than being driven by enthusiasm – as the Minimal Organisation, where you come to meetings if you want to.

### **5.2.2.1 The Traditional Association**

I call this model a Traditional Association. The tutors and the consultant, however, just use the Danish word "Forening". A "Forening" is a specific legal entity with strong historic roots in Danish civil society<sup>71</sup>. I could have translated "Forening" as "Association". But I would like to underline that there is a specific set of expectations associated with the "Forening" which are related to its traditional roots. Therefore I have labelled this frame "the Traditional Association". The

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71 In Denmark there is a law outlining how the legal unit, the Traditional Association has to act and be structured in certain aspects. It is my experience from a life of participation in a wide range of Traditional Associations that the rules are designed to protect the influence of members (limit the possibilities of coups), and to ensure that certain actors can be held accountable for the acts of the entity.

concept is capitalised to underline that it does not refer to all traditional associations one might think of, but to a specific phenomenon found in this context.

Sharmeen has to a great extent acted as sensegiver as regards the way the organisation is Having Meetings. So to introduce the Traditional Associations discourse further I will use another quote from her: In the individual interview with Sharmeen I asked her to talk about why she came to the Information Meeting preferring not to create a Traditional Association. She said:

“... I think I have been a bit prejudiced, when one says Traditional Association. It reeks of a round table and – and glasses – laughs – I think it's a bit “All those in favour raise your hand!” And that is actually what I think, that it is like that. That is the image one has of a Traditional Association. It's a bit prejudiced, a bit dusty really... I think in a Traditional Association you have a board. Then there is an elected board, or they have volunteered. One comes to board meetings, and one has Statutes which mean that some things are possible and others not..., and it is kind of very fixed what the board has the power to do. The roles are much more...” (Interview with Sharmeen:12)

The dimensions the tutors use to guide sensemaking about Having Meetings when they draw on the Traditional Association model are as far as I could ascertain: a concern for influence. Were all tutors informed about the meeting? – Was there a system in place through which they could have influence should they want it? Are the meetings representative? – do they have authority and for what?

Within this frame it is important that those who have formally agreed to it to participate in meetings – fulfilling ones role is important. It is also important not to dictate from the top down. It is not legitimate for participants to make decisions just because they participate in a meeting. The connection to the members of the organisation who did not go to the meeting is emphasised. This connection is enacted as existing if the participants are there as representatives for the non-participants, or if the non-participants have had a chance to respond to, and give their input to the items on the agenda prior to the meeting.

When tutors do not participate in meetings and particularly when the representatives for each Day do not attend meetings, those who seek to make sense

of it have difficulties enacting that they are Having Meetings legitimately within the Traditional Association frame, and that threatens the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings.

How do they get around it? By drawing on another model:

#### **5.2.2.2. The Minimal Organisation**

The consultant Dorthé and Sharmeen have acted and continuously act as sensegivers about an alternative model of Having Meetings which they call “Minimal”.

Sharmeen says this at her interview when she contrasts the Minimal Organisation with the Traditional Association model:

“... the way we do it, there are neither head nor tails in who decides. Those who show up decide. That has then become the Coordination Group. You have been there.”

Me: “Yes”

Sharmeen: “...we just announce a meeting, and then those who show up, show up, and then it is those who decide – even if only two people show up. Then they decide – over what is on the agenda, right.” (Individual interview with Sharmeen p:15)

The ideal in the Minimal model is to limit the waste of energy and time. They try to do away with boring meetings. When they have to have a meeting it is OK that only few tutors show up – at least then they protect the rest of the tutors from getting bored and demotivated. Action is perceived to become easier because it is not restricted by rules and decisions. From this point of view too many participants at too many meetings can undermine the volunteers' commitment and energy.

When they are making sense of Having Meetings from the Minimal frame, the low attendance to meetings is not problematic and there is less enactment of a coherent organisation with ties between Days and Meetings.

### **5.2.2.3 Social Cohesion**

Occasionally somebody refers to Having Meetings as a way to create social cohesion. Then non-attendance to meetings is enacted as a problem because it is causally linked to demotivation because of lack of social cohesion. Meetings in this frame are enacted as occasions for “getting to know each other”. Non-attendance to meetings from this point of view threatens the reproduction of tutoring because when tutors do not get together and get to know one another, they become demotivated:

Mathilde: “... it is through a social network that you feel like returning there again and again. It is, that to create a nice atmosphere for the volunteers means incredibly much for whether there is a good climate down there, right.” (Marlene and Mathilde:12).

Marlene and Mathilde draw on the social discourse which is ironic since they are the most explicit about not wanting to invest in socialising with others in the Network Group. But they end up creating a separate close-knit homogeneous group with its own activities: An Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange for Women.

Me: “Why do you go to the meeting on Saturday?”

Marie: “To get to know the others better (giggles). Also a bit socially. I have moved here from Odense. For me it is also a way to get to know some other people – many female students my age – it a way to kind of establish a circle of acquaintances.”(Marie:3).

Marie giggles as if it is a bit naughty to go to meetings to make friends. I interpret that as she expresses that the social cohesion frame is not quite legitimate.

### **5.2.2.4 Sharing Meetings**

Sharing Meetings are characterised by that actors articulate shared experiences together for the sake of getting a feeling of sharing their experiences with other tutors, to feel less isolated. Lone who does-not-go-to-meetings reflects on this:

Lone: “Yes, it was kind of nice to talk to the others about how we did and stuff – but I don't think it is problem that we don't get to talk to each other.”

Me: ” Why not?”

Lone: “ It must be because I don't need it. Because I have not experienced anything I need to talk about recently. Otherwise I would probably have talked to somebody, have sought out the conversation – laughter.” (Interview with Lone:6)

Klaus used to go to meetings as a representative from his Day. But the meetings were in his words “sharing meetings” - not decision oriented. He evaluated them based on two criteria: did he personally get a need covered? - and did they produce any decisions? No, in both cases. So he stopped being someone who-goes-to-meetings:

Klaus: “ It was right at the beginning. Where I sat – I was the only one from Monday. Then there were four from Thursday and then one from Wednesday, and then we could sit and talk about our impressions of how different the various Days were. It wasn't something for me, and I was like: “What good is this doing me?!” Because, ahh, it is very likely that there is more pressure on Thursdays. Because if you tutor on Monday – it's just been weekend – and ehh... I couldn't use it for anything, and we did not make any decisions. After that I took a break. “Arghh, I can't be bothered with those meetings anymore.”. (Interview with Klaus:5).

### **5.2.2.5 Competent Management**

The last frame I will introduce is very rarely drawn on by the actors in this case. Actors who draw on the competent management logic talk about competences, making strategic choices, being in control, ensuring coordination, and monitoring.

”Exactly because there are so many competences which we can use for so incredibly many things and which I actually also think that the volunteers would like to be asked about. Would you like to – you are doing some



Internet – would you like to put this on a web-page? And so on. And then they can mull it over and create some product which would fit in here.”  
(Louise:7).

From this point of view the non-attendance to meetings by the House Hosts is a problem because it makes effective coordination of activities difficult.

It is between the above clusters of generic meaning and the enactment of self at meetings, that the tutors do Having Meetings - whether they participate or not. Those are the frames they actualise in the process.

### **5.2.3 Sensemaking Processes at Meetings about Having Meetings.**

When sensemaking theorists (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; and Smircich & Stubbart, 1985) emphasise how shared Sensemaking facilitates joint action they assume there is a connection between sensemaking and action. That shared understandings somehow travel to those who act – and affects them.

Shared sensemaking theorists argue that it is important to establish a shared reservoir of meaning/text. They argue that shared sensemaking facilitates organised action. That means both that meaning is agreed upon and negotiated locally – and that all have access to this reservoir – that it is communicated out to a wide range of co-acting individuals.

It is possible that even though the majority of tutors do not go to meetings they could still share sensemaking if narratives produced at meetings are communicated to them, and then the organisation would not be a case of minimal shared sensemaking. Having Meetings is reproduced by all tutors not just those who-go-to-meetings. Therefore I will first examine the sense made at meetings about Having Meetings. Secondly I will examine whether that sense affects the ability of those who-do-not-go-to-meetings' ability to reproduce that their organisation is Having Meetings legitimately.

### **5.2.3.1 An Enactment of Having Meetings at the Planning Meeting.**

For the past week the meeting has been announced on the following notice written by Sharmeen on the noticeboards at the two locations of tuition in Block D and Block G:

“Would you like to get to know the other volunteers better?

Is it too overwhelming to spend several days on practical things? But OK with one intensive day where we all get things done?

Then show up at a Communal Event Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> of March at 11.00 in the Local Volunteer Center at no 44 the High Street.

...(a Planning Meeting takes place Monday the 11<sup>th</sup> of March at 19.15 in the Local Community Centre).”<sup>72</sup> (Source: Extracts of the notice written by Sharmeen).

Quarter past seven on a dark, rainy winter evening. Two tutors Louise and Klaus and the contact person, Sharmeen have shown up for a Planning Meeting at the local community centre. The room at the Local Community Centre in which the Planning Meeting takes place is an open kitchen/diner at the top of a modern winding staircase. The wall are sloping and can not accommodate posters or notices from the other users of the facilities. Downstairs though, various notices and announcements are displayed. There is one from a father group – for daddies on leave with their babies, one advertising free counselling for recovering alcoholics and their families on Thursdays, and information from the local council. The reason why we can get into the building at such a late hour is because one of the three participants in the meeting is Sharmeen. Sharmeen has been given a key

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<sup>72</sup> Note that this event is labelled a “workday” and that emphasis is on getting things done and getting to know each other as opposed to making decisions. We shall see a pattern of under-emphasis on decision-making – and a non identification of decision-making opportunities. The impact of this phenomenon on the reproduction of Having Meetings is analysed on page 234.

by Mona, the council worker who facilitated the start up of the tutoring activity 10 months ago.

The three agree that no more are likely to show up and the meeting can begin. I am introduced. They give me permission to use my tape recorder and we all sit down around the table. Klaus explains that he has come because the House Host of his day could not make it. He later tells me that prior to the meeting he wanted to find an opportunity for tutoring older children. So when his House Host was not going to come to the planing meeting he jumped at the chance to go and explore the possibility for tutoring older children. This is the first of several examples of that tutors come to meetings in order to interact with “the organisation”. The influence this has on the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings will be analysed on page 227.

Sharmeen, Louise, and Klaus start by reflecting on that Klaus has come. They take it for granted that Sharmeen should be there since she is the contact person. I get the impression that Louise does what she can to support Sharmeen. It is clear that Sharmeen and Louise have met before, whereas Klaus seems new to them.

They let the matter of how to communicate with all the tutors through a system of House Hosts lie and start discussing the upcoming Saturday:

Sharmeen: “Is it crazy to do it for so few people? To have a day where we can meet and... we talked about creating some new leaflets... the text is there but it needs to be written on a PC, and to write a leaflet for new users – to get hold of new users, and to create an Activity Calendar?...” (Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:2).

Sharmeen's attempt to start making sense of the anticipated low number of participants on the Saturday: *Is it crazy to do it for so few people?* is not pursued. The issue is left hanging as are many other issues. It remains ambiguous. To settle the issue they would have had to unfold further what the purpose of the Saturday Meeting was and the implications this might have for participation. If it was to get some practical things done then it might have been good that only a few showed up – so there would be less coordination required - provided there was enough manpower. If the purpose was to provide an occasion for socialising – as it also was indicated in the notice – then an obvious reply would have been “Yes, it is

pointless to do it for so few people!” and the consequence could have been to cancel the event. To leave the question unanswered contributes to stabilising a pattern of Having Meetings since it means that the meeting is not cancelled. To plan an event for everybody to which it is anticipated that only few will turn up functions as a dissonant cue for sensemaking<sup>73</sup>. It jars. It doesn't really make sense. But they do not engage in shared articulated sensemaking about it. They avoid pursuing it to the potential conclusion that a pattern of Having Meetings can not credibly be reproduced.

So the Saturday Meeting is held without an unambiguous justification having been produced for it. They stopped short of contrasting diverging constructions of the planned meeting: On the one hand they defined it as a large plenary meeting<sup>74</sup>. On the other hand only a few were expected to turn up. It is one of many examples of how ambiguity seems to stabilise rather than undermine the reproduction of Having Meetings.

It is a recurrent challenge to make sense of meetings with few participants. The Saturday Meeting was envisioned to be a large plenary meeting”. At the Planning Meeting it was enacted both as being a means to bring tutors together for more social cohesion – and a means to “getting things done” practically sorting out “jobs” which needed doing. As it turned out there was plenty of manpower at the Saturday Meeting for the jobs to be undertaken yet the meeting was not seen as a success. So there must have been more at stake.

They continue to explore their joint action of Having Meetings:

Louise: “It is also easier to hold on to people if there are a few more anchor points, and it's a bit more social. Instead of everything being “messy/fluid”, and there are people who say this – it's not because we are selfish – I can sense that that is what is underlying the drop-out of tutors – that it is too loose.”

Klaus: “It is a difficult balance because on the one hand one cannot be bothered – it is limited how much time one wants to invest in sitting around a table and discussing.”

Sharmeen: “Exactly that is not what it is supposed to be.”

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73 Weick, (1995:49).

74 My translation of the concept “stormøde”.

Klaus: “On the other hand it might be fun if something meant that you knew the others. You feel like you don't know your Day.”(Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:3).

The dialogue above indicates that the tutors draw on several discourses when they try to make sense of Having Meetings. There is a discourse advocating the Minimal Organisation where it is OK not to be bothered and invest ones time in meetings. On the other hand they also actualise an understanding that meetings can increase social cohesion and thereby get tutors more involved in the organisation. Both discourses are actualised as legitimate in this context and the issue remains unresolved.

#### Summary of the first part of the analysis of the Planning Meeting

One conclusion to this analysis regards the discourses and the Sensemaking processes which constitutes Having Meetings is: The Minimal Organisation is mainly put forward by Sharmeen. However, all others challenge it - including herself - either by drawing on the institutionalised Traditional Association discourse or another competing frame. They keep reproducing the sense that the Minimal Organisation is legitimate while at the same time voicing the problems it creates. The sensemaking that takes place at the meetings is not enacted as decision making. That the organisational structure has been discussed and decided upon at one meeting does not travel to the next meeting in the sense of rendering a repeated discussion unnecessary. This is in part because of the high turn over of participants in meetings. Each meeting is new to the participants with a few exceptions, and it also indicates that narratives from each meeting are not diffused throughout the organisation – since those who have not been to meetings act as if they have no memory of previous meetings where they were not present.

It is also noticeable that Sharmeen who is present at all meetings does not enact the previous meeting as a decision occasion. If she refers to a decision as regards to the way the organisation has “decided” to be Having Meetings she refers to the first Information Meeting.

Another reason why the meetings are not enacted as legitimate decision-making arenas is the low number of participants.

Sharmeen is the only one who presents what “it was supposed to be”, and that was the Minimal Organisation.

### Further Analysis of The Planning Meeting.

Klaus start negotiating the script for those who-do-not-go-to-meetings: They can be passive until spoken to face to face by someone (the House Host).

Klaus: “What can you sign up for?”

Sharmeen.”For example for a day like this. There are two who have signed up apart from those who have already agreed to come.”

Klaus: “Perhaps I'm not the only one to doesn't look at the noticeboard...”

Sharmeen. “No, and that is exactly what is completely wrong. I do actually send out mails to 40 people.” (Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:4).

Here we see a negotiation of whether information seeking is an important part of the role of those who-do-not-go-to-meetings in order for the Minimal Organisation to be legitimate. If it is not plausible that those who-do-not-go-to-meetings get information about meetings then those who-go-to-meetings have difficulties in enacting that they are undertaking joint action when they are Having Meetings.

Klaus: “I know for a fact that ours (House Host) is not going to come.”

Sharmeen. “Then there will be four.”

Louise: “Won't you come Klaus?”

Klaus: “I am not a House Host and I don't want to take on the role. (Laughs) No, and I am going to leave this summer and move abroad.”(Transcript of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:5-6)

Here Klaus says that going to meetings - even the Saturday Meeting is a House Host task. He also indicates that going to meetings is a long-term commitment. This is contrary to what Marie enacts during the individual interview. She articulates that the organisation is Having Meetings in a way that means it is OK

not to go to all meetings – since going to meetings does not imply a board membership:

Me: - “Would you take on more responsibility if anything need to be arranged? Compared to what you do now?”

Marie: “Well I would. But it is also like this. For me what I really like is that it is so free. So that it doesn't get too much, and then I can say “yes” to do stuff – it is not something with being elected to a Traditional Association where you have to make an effort the next year or the next two years because you are on the board – It is very flexible, and it can always be adjusted according to how much energy I have, and this Saturday I actually have time to come. But not something with two nights a month the next two years – like. It is actually quite important for me. Then I feel I have more integrity. If I say yes to coming on Saturday then I don't have to come in six months time and say that I got a scholarship and I am going abroad – ehh and then they can't count on me as I had promised. Then they would have to call in a substitute or something. I would hold back more. Because I am not reliable enough for that.” (Interview med Marie:12)

They discuss fund-raising to get some more materials to use with the children during tuition. This leads to considerations of who is good at this sort of thing:

Here Klaus reproduces a management logic. He uses concepts like competences. From this point of view non-attendance at meetings is conceptualised as sub-optimal use of the resources available in the shape of competences.

Klaus: “There are people in the basement who can do this kind of thing. But they are not made aware that their talent is useful. I'm thinking maybe we should create a Provider Committee. The problem is that the talent which is there - <sup>75</sup> There are many who just come and who feel no responsibility

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<sup>75</sup> Conceptualising the tutors as a mass of potential talent is not activated in contexts where Klaus isn't there. He actualises it in the new activity of tutoring in the local youth club, and the possession of skills and talent becomes part of the discourse there. It also becomes embedded in their rosters where tutors' skills are listed along with their names.

beyond their responsibility towards the children – a here- and-now- responsibility.” (Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:7).

Sharmeen answers the Competent Management discourse with the Minimal Organisation discourse:

Sharmeen: “That should be legitimate too.”

Louise: ”But it is probably also important that you are made aware that you can participate in this.”(Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:7).

The next reply from Sharmeen is drawn from the Social Cohesion discourse:

Sharmeen: “Again it brings us back to interacting socially. That is the case if you come for three hours and just sit each on your own with your child. – We can see it tonight; we do not know peoples names.”

Klaus: “We have kind of a split group: Those who are part of the core and who stay behind and chat to the Father Group and stay for a cup of coffee – if they drink coffee - and then there are those who just come and then go home.” (Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:7).

The indication Klaus makes here of how interaction with the Father Group (a perceived recipient) generates social cohesion is ignored. Consistently, interaction with the parent groups is not enacted as an alternative to Having Meetings (in the sense of creating social cohesion, shared understandings, and coordination) or even as Having Meetings.

Sharmeen. “I have the feeling that those who talk together and stay and have a bit closer contact – it is also often those who feel a responsibility for that everything is running because they know the others.”(Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:7).



Above, Sharmeen unfolds the Social Cohesion logic and links it to encouraging a sense of responsibility.

Klaus: “One might consider getting those who just go home more attached. Again perhaps it is down to the House Host.”

Sharmeen: “Maybe we should have a knock-out party. Yes, yes – maybe we should just plan a party! I think that would help so people can see each other”. (Transcript of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:7)

Here Sharmeen detaches the Social Cohesion logic from Having Meetings and suggests an arena of parties more suited to fostering social cohesion. During the six months I follow the organisation there are two social gatherings and one by invitation of the Father Group. All attract a small number of tutors - 11 was the highest number at the Christmas Party. The other was a trip to the pub after a meeting. The effect of creating these arenas was as far as I could tell – by enquiring about what happened and observing interaction afterwards - that romantic attractions between a number of the tutors grew to the extent of stabilising their participation in Having Meetings. Coming to meetings became a way to share an arena of social interaction with the chosen one. Sharmeen later referred in an interview to that the one trip to the pub also became an arena for establishing a jargon shared amongst a limited number of those who-go-to-meetings.

At the beginning of the meeting they agreed jokingly to end today's meeting so they could each get home in time to watch Indiana Jones. Sharmeen recollects how it was the sitcom “Friends” that ended the previous meeting. Although it is talked about as a joke it is effective. We all make it home for half past nine in time for Harrison Ford and his whip.

### **Summary of Enactments of Having Meetings at the Planning Meeting**

To sum up the points of the analysis of events at this meeting: low attendance to meetings emerged as a salient issue during the meeting. The act of not attending meetings was singled out as a cue for sensemaking. Sense was then negotiated but the issue was not solved neither in terms of finding a solution nor in terms of agreeing on a legitimate discourse within which to make sense of it. So the issue

remained ambiguous. They did not enact an opportunity for deciding to cancel the upcoming event because of anticipated low attendance.

So legitimate ways of being a volunteer as regards to Having Meetings are negotiated by drawing on the discourses mentioned earlier in the analysis. The organisation is distinguished by conscious efforts at maintaining diversity in legitimate ways of being a tutor in the organisation.

They do, however, share an enactment of the House Hosts as those who could alleviate the low attendance. The House Host system seems to be a locally negotiated discourse. Which IS shared. It is mentioned even by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings. I don't think that is an indication that meaning is diffused from meetings – but rather that the first Information Meeting is drawn on along with the posters on the noticeboards. If meaning was diffused from meetings the tutors would have more difficulties reproducing that a House Hosts system functioned.

### **5.2.3.2 An Enactment of Having Meetings at the Saturday Meeting.**

I have included a lengthy extract of my notes and transcription of the Saturday Event on the 16/3/2002. This is because it brought to light a clash between the discourse about the Minimal Organisation and the more institutionalised approach to the organisation of voluntary work: The Traditional Association. It occurs when Mathilde and Marlene come to meet “the organisation” for the first time. They want to figure out the context they find themselves in. The whole meeting represents a process where “the organisation” and the way of Having Meetings emerges through interaction between the people who happen to be present at the meeting.

“It is two o'clock in the afternoon. I am buzzed into The Volunteer House. The Saturday Meeting as it is now referred to is held on the first floor. Sharmeen and her sister Yasmeen have bought fruit and are there busily making tea. They have obviously been there before. Although, handwritten signs indicating the basic ingredients for tea and coffee ensure that anyone can act as if they are at home there. The House or premises belong to the DRC. It is where the consultant has her office. However, she is not here today. Other voluntary activities take place there at other times. They are unconnected to the Network Group in Vestplanen.

I chat to Sharmeen and Yasmeen and they joke about the possibility of no-one else showing up:

Sharmeen: “If the others don't turn up – then we will just decide everything!” Laughter. (Transcript of the Saturday Meeting 16/3/2002:2).

But someone does turn up. Mathilde and Marlene. They come together, know each other. They are new, and they stay physically close to one another.

Mathilde and Marlene are very interested in me and try to strike up a conversation about research and report writing. They step into being in the situation as researchers rather than as volunteers (by discussing what one might find interesting to analyse in this context) before they slide on to participating in the meeting. I try to deflect the focus from me and this project by being a *very* boring conversation partner. The reason why I do this is because this is Mathilde and Marlene's first meeting with “the organisation” and I would prefer it to be minimally affected by how I frame the organisation as a research project.

Mathilde and Marlene move on to probe for sense about the meeting and the organisation. This provokes an air of defensiveness from Sharmeen and Yasmeen:

Mathilde and Marlene: “What is going to happen today?”

Sharmeen: “We planned that at the Planning Meeting.”

Mathilde and Marlene: “ Who took part in The Planning Meeting?”

Sharmeen: “The House Hosts and me.”(Transcript of the Saturday Meeting 16/3/2002:2)

As we have just seen in the analysis of the Planning Meeting this was not actually the case. Only Sharmeen and two other tutors showed up – none of them were House Hosts, although one (Klaus) came in lieu of one. But it is true that the House Hosts were invited, and it was defined as a meeting for House Hosts. This appears to give just enough legitimacy when faced with inquisitive actors like Mathilde and Marlene. Sharmeen does not draw on the Minimal Organisation

Model in her reply. According to that it would have been legitimate that the people who turned up at the meeting made the decisions. Instead she draws on a Traditional Association logic where a legitimate forum for decision making would be a forum of representatives (House Hosts).

Sharmeen: “But everyone was welcome to come.”

We see here two phenomena: One is the emergent enactment of an organisation in which 1) the House Hosts attend meetings, and 2) all tutors know what will be on the agenda at the meeting and will make their voices heard by coming to the meeting if they so desire. When faced with questions about legitimacy Sharmeen enacts being part of a far more sharing and communicating organisation than is actually the case. She decouples the ideal of the House Host system from the actual Planning Meeting and only mentions the ideal - about the House Hosts having participated in the Planning Meeting (as representatives for their Day).

From her response to Mathilde and Marlene we can see that as a sensegiver it is an ambiguous image of Having Meetings Sharmeen produces. We can see that the social construction of Having Meetings varies depending on the context. At this Saturday Meeting she is suddenly confronted with questions about legitimacy from participants enacting being outside the main Network Group. This is a different context than meetings where all present have come to a meeting and engage in a shared process of making retrospective sense of this<sup>76</sup>.

Another indication of the ambiguous status of the Minimal Organisation is the manner in which she said to Yasmeen and I before Mathilde and Marlene came that *“If the others don't turn up – then we will just decide everything!”* Laughter. The laughter indicated that she was saying two things. On one hand it had been reproduced at several meetings that they wanted to Have Meetings in a way that was different from the Traditional Association. They wanted a Minimal Organisation where those who turn up to pre announced meetings decide. On the other hand she actualised that this wasn't a legitimate way of making decisions when she laughs. She indicates that she still feels ambiguous about it – and expects that her audience – Yasmeen and I to share this ambiguity.

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76 See the analysis of sensemaking about low-attendance meetings on page 213.

Mathilde and Marlene pursue the question of who has the power in the organisation:

Mathilde and Marlene: “But who gives us money? The DRC?”(Transcript of the Saturday Meeting 16/3/2002:2)

Sharmeen now takes control of this apparently threatening conversation where the legitimacy and the power structure of the organisation are being tested. She steers the conversation away from questioning the power structure and legitimacy of the organisation and she changes the type of communication from two-way to one-way information giving. She takes on the role of communicating what was decided at The Planning Meeting in terms of agenda and practical tasks to be accomplished. Here is a link between the two meetings which is not normally there. But because one was a planning meeting for the other they enacted an expectation that what was planned at one meeting would have an impact on the next.

Just as at any meeting in the organisation, the Saturday Meeting has to be rendered sensible and legitimate in spite of the perceived low attendance. Sharmeen names those who have said they will be attending the Saturday Meeting.

Mathilde and Marlene “ We thought there would be many more here today..!” (They look as if they want to leave as fast as possible).

I think Mathilde and Marlene were dismayed by a plenary meeting with so few participants. This did not feel legitimate to them. They did not meet the authority they expected when they came to interact with the organisation. As many others they came to a meeting expecting to meet “the organisation” and then found that “the organisation” was not “out there”. “The organisation” was themselves – and would exist in the shape of their actions and sayings at this meeting. I will return to how enacting that you can interact with “the organisation” by coming to meetings affects the reproduction of Having Meetings in more detail on page 227. For now I will examine what emerges at this meeting.

Mathilde and Marlene got pulled into a far more involving situation than they expected. First, because there were so few participants they would have a direct impact on the jobs to be done. Secondly, the social implications of the meeting

became more intimate than they expected. They had to meet the others more as potential friends than as business partners exchanging stories about previous experiences and “who they were” over dinner. Since their intention was to not invest in the organisation but to start their own parallel activity they were keen to leave the situation - the meeting. So when Sharmeen is organising the purchase of sandwiches the response is this:

Sharmeen. “You are vegetarians aren't you?”

Mathilde and Marlene: “Yes, but we are not staying until tonight!”

Marlene did however end up staying. During dinner she did end up getting to know the other participants better – although reluctantly going through the motions of presenting her story of experiences felt to be relevant to the activities of organisation.

Mathilde and Marlene withdraw from the others when jobs are to be done to do tasks directly related to their start-up. I think that by letting them make this move – of setting up “their own” organisation the participants at the meeting (and particularly Sharmeen acting as sensegiver by being the first to respond to their question of possible affiliation) enact a very flexible context.

Sharmeen allows ambiguity about how to be Having Meetings grow by encouraging Mathilde and Marlene to be loosely coupled to the rest of the organisation. It facilitates a new organised action. Namely an Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange for Women. If they had not let ambiguity grow but had instead insisted on clarity and consistency – then Mathilde and Marlene would have been in conflict with the way the main organisation was Having Meetings. I think it was implied by their questions and demeanor that they did not find the Minimal Organisation legitimate. Instead they are encouraged by Sharmeen to take charge of their own initiative. By only loosely coupling Mathilde and Marlene to the rest of the organisation she can maintain their commitment and their contribution to the production and reproduction of organised action. Mathilde and Marlene do actually go on to run the new activity for a couple of years with a group of friends who have the same approach to meetings and integration as themselves, loosely coupled to the rest of the Network Group. I will analyse this phenomenon of

stabilising the reproduction of organised action through structural fragmentation on page 243.

They talk about whether Klaus, Signe and Louise will turn up.

Mathilde and Marlene: “So today is an experiment, and it doesn't seem to have been very popular.”

Yasmeen: “Call those who have not shown up – it is a bit much to have the meeting moved and then not turn up.”(Transcript of the Saturday Meeting 16/3/2002:5)

### Summary of enactments of Having Meetings at the Saturday Meeting

So we have three groups here. We have those who have shown up at the meeting. Then we have those “who-go-to-meetings” they are discussed at meetings – a reason for them not being there is expected, and finally the vast group of those “who-do-not-go-to-meetings”. Their names are often not known, and so they are not talked about specifically. These groups change over time. At this meeting Marie moves from the group of those “who-go-to-meetings” to those “who-do-not-go-to-meetings” because of serious illness in the family which will evidently tie her attention elsewhere. She is not enacted as a prospective participant at meetings in the future. Although Mathilde and Marlene show up they intimate that they only do so to interact with “the organisation” not become part of it. So they do not become those who-go-to-meetings in the Network Group. I will return to how coming to meetings to interact with the organisation affect the organised action of Having Meetings on page 227.

### **5.2.3.3. Conclusion**

During the Planning Meeting and the Saturday Meeting we see indications of several phenomena, which have an impact on the reproduction of Having Meetings. They will each be analysed separately in the next sections.

- A process of making sense of a Low-Attendance Meetings which affected the legitimacy of they way they were Having Meetings. (Analysed on page 213).

- Structural fragmentation – Marlene and Mathilde are encouraged to set up a relatively independent unit – with its own meetings. That also affects the reproduction of Having Meetings (Analysed on page 243).
- Coming to meetings to interact with the organisation: Mathilde and Marlene contributed to an enactment of the meeting as significant by coming there to interact with the organisation, and they bulked up the number of participants thereby also contributing to rendering the meeting legitimate – and thus subsequent meetings more likely to be reproduced. (Analysed on page 227).

## **5.2.4 Sensemaking Processes and the Reproduction of Having Meetings.**

I have grouped together the analysis of three following phenomena. They are all related to how meetings are made sense of:

- A: How sensemaking about low-attendance meetings is essential to the reproduction of Having Meetings.
- B: How an ideal House Host System is enacted at meetings.
- C: How Having Meetings is stabilised when tutors come to meetings to interact with the “organisation”.

### **5.2.4.1 Making Sense of Low-Attendance Meetings.**

In this case the organised action is Having Meetings. Whether that action is reproduced does seem to be affected by sensemaking processes in the way that: If the way they were Having Meetings was not enacted as being legitimate then “the organisation” would not be legitimate. Giving legitimacy to the meetings with few participants is therefore an important element in the reproduction of organised action in the organisation. But legitimacy may not need to be produced through articulated shared sensemaking. I will explore the sensemaking processes unfolding at low attendance meetings.

#### Sensemaking About Low-Attendance Meetings at a Coordinators' Meeting

The meeting is held at the Local Community Centre. Even though only 5 people show up (Sharmeen, Signe, and a House Host, another tutor, and the consultant



Dorte) they do not all know each other – and they introduce themselves with name, the Block and the day they tutor. It illustrates that they normally work isolated on the various Days and locations.

The following conversation at the beginning of this meeting illustrates the various logics drawn on when making sense of low- attendance meetings:

*Sharmeen and Signe, the treasurer, had both wanted to send out invitations to the meeting and a reminder...*

Sharmeen brings both the Traditional Association and the Minimal Organisation logic forward:

Sharmeen: “...to say “Please come!!” But you don’t want to invade people either”

Signe: “I was really hoping they would come”

“What is on the agenda?”

Sharmeen: ”House Hosts and structure”

Signe: “I have really thought about what I wanted to say...”

Sharmeen: “It is the same with structure – you almost can’t when you are sitting four people and...”

Signe: “It is almost impossible. There are no one to talk to.”

They talk about how much they had hoped many more people would have showed up:

Signe: “I really wanted to present the thoughts I have had at home about this, but we are so few... is there any point?”

Sharmeen: “Especially when it is about structure then it again becomes that we delegate from the top this is the way it is going to be, and then it doesn’t work because people have not taken part in making the decision.”

“There are nobody to delegate out to.”

Signe: “So the topic must, almost as an emergency, be changed to: What do we do to collect everybody again?”

Sharmeen: “Yes I think it is completely ridiculous to discuss structure again.

We have done that many times”. (Transcript of Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:2).

In the above exchange, we see a catch 22 unfolded: If only people would come to meetings then we could explain how important it is to come to meetings, and this would then continue to come to meetings. But they do not come to meetings. So how can we convince them to come to meetings? The participants at the meeting can not find a way to break the fix they are in. In the analysis on page 223 of the ongoing enactment of a future House Host Day we see the same catch 22.

They talk about that people do not come to meetings because it affects their free time:

Signe: ”Perhaps it is a question of prodding people’s guilty conscience. Not because I am a shining example. I really am not. But I really want to.”

...

Signe “Should we give out to people for not coming? Dorte do you have any experience with this stuff?”

Up until now the consultant from the DRC Dorte has been silent. But here she is directly being asked to act as sensegiver regarding low-attendance meetings. Dorte promotes the Minimal Organisation logic:

Dorte: “Yes. You can take two routes: You can say OK, we are four that is fine, and then just make some decisions. Us who are here, everybody had the offer. Now we will decide over the 47.000 kroner, and then it is interesting to see if others feel compelled to come the next time. Then we make the meetings SO interesting that others will feel compelled to come.”

Dorte narrates the Minimal Organisation by contrasting it with the Traditional Association:

Dorte: “The other is the stricter road: To appeal to people’s guilty conscience. The first is more positive. You could let it depend on how much

is needed. You can also have a very tight structure where if you make a decision you have to clear it with - ”

Sharmeen interrupts possibly because it is an enactment of a potential choice situation between the Traditional Association model and the Minimal Model. Sharmeen would prefer that the outcome was given:

Sharmeen: “The intention was that - I think you (Dorte) and I were in agreement on this. I would like a structure – but that the Days function independently on their own. As long as they stick to their budget then it is fine. If people come tomorrow and say I would like to spend 5.000 kroner on going to the Zoo with the kids. That is OK! Well, yes then that is something YOU have decided. Cool. (Laughter). Then that was that person’s decision.”

Signe inserts that the donors of funds have charged her with imposing SOME restrictions on the way the money is spent:

Signe: “Now, the money has to be spent on what we have applied for funds for. They are broadly defined.. it will have to be on a first-come-first-serve basis with the money. Then we have to communicate it out, and if anybody responds then we'll do it, and if not a soul responds then I'll send the money back.”

The model for decision making regarding the allocation of funds which is implied in the Minimal Organisation is action-driven as Sharmeen and Signe present it. They de-emphasise decision making and priorities. Sharmeen suggests a strategy which allows them to avoid prioritising. She – and Signe - do this by suggesting they apply a first-come-first-serve mechanism rather than prioritise the allocation of funds. This is possible because they enact a context of ample resources *and* they enact that relevant activities only require limited monetary resources. When they enact that the allocation of funds is non controversial it make low-attendance

meetings more legitimate. I will analyse minimal decision making about the allocation of funds further on page 239.

They continue to emphasise that the legitimising basis for the Minimal Organisation is cross organisational communication which means that those who want to participate and exert influence can do so:

Jane: “But we need to draw attention to that the money is there which you can apply for. I don't think people realise this.”

Signe: “I must write a letter.”

Dorthe: “It should be on the noticeboard.”

At this meeting as all other the structure of the organisation is enacted. During the sensemaking process about the Low-attendance meeting an ideal of democratic legitimacy is enacted. They agree it is an ideal that all the House Hosts would turn up to the meeting. The participants at the meeting also enact a context of reluctant and inconsiderate volunteers who do not come to meetings and who do not call to say that they can not come. The lack of cancellations was an issue that got singled out as a cue for sensemaking by the participants. It is taken to indicate that those who do not come feel no obligation to show up.

They are then met by Dorthes arguments for the Minimal Organisation and they act and leave the meeting with a construction of the ideal organisation that is minimalist.

Signe, Sharmeen and Dorte are in interaction with the other participants about which subject positions as regards Having Meetings are legitimate. Boundaries are drawn – Signe voluntarily places herself outside the boundaries of a recognisable volunteer, and at the same time performs essential organisational tasks. Takes responsibility for administration, and practical issues (getting a door). Although the participants at the meeting do not share a long history of interaction they agree in rejecting Signes attempt to position herself ambiguously vis a vis being someone who goes or doesn't go to meetings.

Dorte guides them to a model which enables them to make sense of meetings where only few tutors participate. As long as those who-do-not-go-to-meetings have been informed through the noticeboards. Then they have the theoretical

opportunity to come to meetings. That gives legitimacy to the meetings where two or three volunteers beyond Sharmeen shows up.

As Sharmeen suggests – it is then “by doing” that decisions are made. Doing in the sense that the activities do not need to be coordinated – and related to one another. Any tutor can get funds on a first-come-first-served-basis. Similarly with the conception of that there are plenty of tutors to be recruited at minimal effort “out there” allows relatively decoupled initiation of various activities since the activities do not need to be prioritised in relation to each other. Which renders low-attendance meetings legitimate. This is because they do not focus on decision making and power distribution.

### Sensemaking About Low-Attendance Meetings at the Planning Meeting

To give an example of the second reason why sense made at one meeting does not travel to the next: At the Planning Meeting ahead of the Activity Saturday there are three participants: Sharmeen, Klaus, and Louise. The three of them are making sense of the anticipated low number of participants at the upcoming Saturday. They talk about who is coming. This is a difficult conversation because they do not share knowledge of the names of the other tutors.

One thing is that they do not know the names of the other tutors – but they do have a sense of that not many will show up on the Saturday. This seems based on experiences from previous meetings and activities outside the tuition itself. The attempt to make sense of the anticipated low attendance to the event unveils two competing discourses about the organised action of “Having Meetings”:

Sharmeen: “But it's also – if you have a day like this then you have to accept whatever is done, or say No and get somebody else to take over...”

(Transcript of The Planning Meeting on the 11/3/2002:2).

Sharmeen here presents a slightly defensive version of the Minimal Organisation discourse: It is desirable that only a few tutors should use their energy on going to meetings- the others should preserve theirs for tutoring. It implies a division of labour where those who have something to say come to meetings and the others are spared the experience. In the Minimal Model decision making is decoupled from ideals of representation implicit in the Traditional Association Discourse

where those who-go-to-meetings act informed by conversations they have had with those who-do-not-go-to-meetings. According to the Minimal Model low-attendance meetings do not represent an obstacle to reproduce Having Meetings.

Klaus: “I don't think we will meet any resistance. I think there are many who just feel like I do that things are going OK.”(Transcript of The Planning Meeting on the 11/3/2002:2).

Klaus suggests an enactment of low attendance as an indication that tutors feel things are OK and that they do not need to go to meetings to try and change them – non-attendance in meetings is then an act of maintaining a satisfactory status quo. This makes it perfectly sensible to continue the pattern of low-attendance meetings. This way of reasoning is compatible with the Minimal Model.

Louise: “At the beginning it was all very idealistic and burning and Whauw! Now we'll impress the whole World. Now we'll do something, and that is all very well. But I still think that for many.. there are also those who have dropped out.. the commitment has waned a bit. I think it was quite messy/fluid before Christmas.”

Sharmeen: “Yes, it was.”(Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:4).

Here Sharmeen and Louise enact that low attendance to meetings is an indication that things are too messy or fluid – a result of too low levels of communication – and they express a sense that this can demotivate and frustrate the tutors. So the tutors loose commitment to the activity and undermine any reproduction of organised activity.

In this interaction Sharmeen and Louise draw on the social Cohesion Discourse. The Low- attendance is not an indication of that the Minimal Organisation is working as intended. Low attendance meetings are suggested to be an indication of lack of commitment brought on by lack of communication and sharing. This point is the same made by Smircich & Morgan (1982) and Smircich & Stubbart (1985) when they emphasise that sharing meaning through interaction is essential for motivation of actors. However, in this organisation it is the case that

even though tutors do not go to meetings they *do* as a rule show up to tutor. So there must be other mechanisms which stabilises the reproduction of organised action of tutoring besides articulated shared sensemaking.

The sense which could undermine the continued pattern of meetings would be: That others do not come because they do not think what is being done at meetings is important or even relevant. That they do not acknowledge meetings. If this were the case then there would be no reciprocity. The people who-go-to-meetings would no longer feel they were undertaking acts for a community and Having Meetings would probably cease to feel legitimate. Nobody likes to be seen to waste their time on something insignificant.

To invite everybody to meetings is an important part of the Minimal Organisation logic. When everybody have been invited then their non-attendance can be enacted as signal of acceptance and trust in the division of labour. This is what Sharmeen expresses when she says:

Sharmeen: “But it's also – if you have a day like this then you have to accept whatever is done, or say No and get somebody else to take over...”

(Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:2)

If sense was made that communication across the organisation was so poor that others did not know about the meetings – then the enactment of silent consent would suffer and having low attendance meetings would be tainted by suspicions of dictatorship, coups and manipulation. This would be the case both for the Traditional Associations Model and the Minimal Organisation Model. In order to decide whether you have something to say and thus need to go to a meeting you need access to what will be spoken about; you need access to the agenda.

So low-attendance meetings – or anticipated low attendance to meetings acts as a cue for sensemaking. They stand out – create cognitive dissonance - it feels not quite right. Meetings are called “meetings” because a number of people meet. If nobody shows up could it still be considered a “meeting”?

This is why they spend the beginning of each meeting – and why it is a recurrent discussion during meetings – making sense of the actions of “the others”. The action of the others is in this case inaction – not coming to meetings. They have to make sense of this because the legitimacy of Having Meetings rests on that

Having Meetings is joint action undertaken by the whole organisation – whether they show up or not. Having Meetings is an occasion where “the organisation” acts. In order to continue to act together they have to make sense of the cues they get about the actions of others in a way which renders their own continued participation sensible.

I will return to this in the analysis of the two roles related to Having Meetings on page 250.

Making sense of meetings with only the contact person and two or three other participants is a key type of sensemaking process. It is essential to the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings. Having Meetings threatens to collapse as a credible and legitimate activity at the start of every meeting because the meetings are only attended by what is perceived to a low number of participants.

For example at the Coordinators' Meeting on the 15/4/2002 we saw how the discussions about making sense of Having Meetings with only a few participants took place at the beginning of the meeting. This is a common pattern across meetings. The sensemaking process was requisite for framing the meeting – is the meeting legitimate or should we focus on planning another more legitimate meeting?

The theoretical chapter (two) introduced a number of sensemaking theorists who analysed a link between patterns of interaction facilitating shared communication / shared sensemaking and the reproduction of joint action (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Here I am interested in analysing the reproduction of Having Meetings as joint action. From the vantage point of those sensemaking theorists the puzzling thing in this case is that actors seem to be able to reproduce Having Meetings without investing in shared sensemaking.

I think we can see from the empirical case that Smircich & Morgan and Smircich & Stubbart are right to argue that whether the actors can make sense of the joint action or not affects whether the action is reproduced or not. But my empirical case does not indicate that it has to be *shared*<sup>77</sup> sense.

The actualisation of the Minimal Organisation enables those who-go-to-meetings to make sense of meetings with very few participants. This stabilises the

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<sup>77</sup> Shared in the sense of constructed through a shared articulated interactive sensemaking process.



action of Having Meetings because if they can not make sense of Having Meetings they might stop coming, and if those who-go-to-meetings stop going then the organisation would probably fall apart – which is what happens in many organisations when they can not recruit board members and other organisers

An image of how tedious meetings can be and how to protect tutors from them is being enacted by the contact person Sharmeen and the consultant Dorthe across several meetings. I will argue that the Minimal discourse is essential for the reproduction of organised action - because it removes the threat of dissolving the organisation because it is not democratic enough – or that there is not enough support for “the people who go to meetings”. Sharmeen guided by the consultant Dorthe has to reproduce the Minimal Organisation discourse at every meeting in connection with making sense of low-attendance. She does this while also ambiguously drawing on competing discourses such as the Traditional Association discourse.

Sensemaking from one low-attendance meeting does not survive till the next meeting. Every low attendance meeting threatens to render the way they are Having Meetings illegitimate. The reason why sense is not just reproduced from one meeting to the next is twofold: 1) Because the participants in meetings change over time with only few overlaps. 2) Because the Minimal Organisation discourse does not seem institutionalised to the same extent as the Traditional Association discourse – hence the constant challenges of it.

### Summary

Meaning is re-negotiated at each meeting. This indicates that no shared reservoir is reproduced – or rather that ambiguity is reproduced. Meaning is not communicated beyond the meetings. Yet the actors are able to reproduce Having Meetings. Having Meetings does not depend on shared meaning – but that the arena of meetings is reproduced.

One of the main things produced at meetings is the next meeting. One meeting produces the next. More so than it produces shared meaning. There are just about enough participants at each meeting to enable those present to enact a legitimate meeting and – with help from the Minimal discourse – to enable that the next meeting can be planned.

When actors enact that the organisation has access to unlimited resources it keeps the level of confrontation low and thereby facilitates the reproduction of Having Meetings. This will be analysed in depth on page 239.

The participants at meetings enact a future House Host Day where all House Hosts will attend the same meeting. The effect this fatamorgana has on the reproduction of Having Meetings will be analysed in on page 223.

Above I analysed how the participants in meetings draw on various discourses about Having Meetings to make sense of and thus reproduce low-attendance meetings. Another of the mechanisms through which legitimacy is produced for low attendance meetings is through the reenactment of an unattainable House Host System:

#### **5.2.4.2. Reproduction of the Unattainable Ideal of the House Host Day**

At several meetings the elusive House Host Day<sup>78</sup> is enacted. A day or a meeting where all the House Hosts come together with the contact person and others who-go-to-meetings. The House Host Day is widely enacted as the solution to the communication and anchoring problems of the group.

However, not all Days have a House Host, and not all the tutors who have a House Host are aware of it. The quote below, is an example of one of the indications on this:

Me: “How do you get an impression of how prominent the House Host is?”

Sharmeen: “--- Ahem, I get that in various ways. Well, both if, when we have meetings and whether they show up there. You can see the commitment there. How much they are into it. But also because I have several times met people who have said: “God, do we have a House Host? Who is that?” And it's like – (laughs) – OK! Then it is kind of obvious that here we have a House Host who is a bit invisible, right.” (Interview with Sharmeen:7).

But the House Host system is none the less enacted as the way the organisation is structured. It is not enacted as an ideal one could replace with another ideal. It is

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78 One out of several labels the actors applied.

enacted as a real feature of their organisation. This is illustrated in this dialogue between Louise and Klaus at the Planning Meeting before the Activity Saturday:

Sharmeen: “I still send mails out to those I have. I only send out to those I have mail addresses for. No letters are posted out instead. Because that is what the noticeboards are for. But on some days the House Host functions well and on other days people barely know who the House Host is.”

Louise: “Perhaps some day we could grab hold of all the House Hosts and almost say that they were obliged to come and then talk to them – so we can say: These are your duties.” (Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:1).

They return to the issue of the House Hosts in connection with the Activity Saturday. As in a Garbage Can Process<sup>79</sup> the upcoming Activity Saturday is linked with the enacted need for a House Host Day:

Sharmeen: “This day is intended to tie down loose ends in a few hours – the information – how do we do that thing with the House Hosts? It just has to work – otherwise it will become too messy/fluid very soon.”

Klaus: “If it is not the House Hosts who show up – it'll be quite cumbersome.”

Sharmeen: “Yes!”

Klaus: “How many are coming on Saturday?” (Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:3-4).

They all enact that if only all the House Hosts showed up at a meeting then “things” wouldn't be messy any longer. As far as I can interpret the causal logic behind this is that if the House Hosts all came to a meeting they could be told/convinced that they have to come to meetings. Thereby a pattern of coming to meetings would be reproduced by House Hosts and a more permanent communication link between the Coordination Group / the contact person (Sharmeen) and the tutors on various Days would be established.

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<sup>79</sup> Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972.

Louise: “You can discuss this further on Saturday. How to get these House Hosts more.. because it is those who should..”

Klaus: “But that requires that they are actually there. It is pointless to sit and discuss..”

Faced with the catch 22 of getting the House Hosts to come to a meeting where they can be informed that they are obliged to come to meetings Sharmeen, Klaus, and Louise falter. They debate who is going to show up for the Activity Saturday. In order to estimate whether the House Hosts are going to show up they have to discuss who the House Hosts are. This is a bit uncertain. That is another indication that the House Host System does not function as a communication link between meetings and Days as intended.

After half an hours discussion of other issues they return to how to get the House Hosts together. “We should have a House Host Day”.

Klaus: “ But those who are not House Hosts should also have a say in how it should work. Communication is the biggest problem. Nobody knows what is going on – and then you just come and then you go home. You are actually not aware that there is an underlying system.”

Louise: “We talked a lot about that at the last meeting too.”

Sharmeen: “And that was one of the reasons why we came up with this Day – now it's become a lot of practical stuff. But we were hoping to get the communication to work.”

Louise: “We have also tried to make this ting about the role of the House Host. But that has probably become just another piece of paper. “(Transcript of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:8)

This narration of a catch 22 is reproduced every time the way they are actually Having Meetings is enacted as potentially illegitimate a meetings.

Sharmeen: “Especially when it is about structure then it again becomes that

we delegate from the top this is the way it is going to be, and then it doesn't work because people have not taken part in making the decision.”  
(Transcript of Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:2).

From the point of view of an outside “observer” - it seems that that by insisting on that the House Host system can only really be brought to function if all House Hosts participate in a meeting together – those who-go-to-meetings are able to push an image before them of an ideal, albeit unattainable House Hosts System. Unattainable because the system is not functioning (which is only to be expected since it has not been inaugurated by the House Hosts in unison) so the House Hosts are not reproducing a pattern of coming to meetings. It is a catch 22. If only they would come to a meeting they would continue – but they will not come because they have not begun to go to meetings, etc...

The reproduction of this unattainable ideal of a House Hosts System enables participants at low-attendance meetings to generate a feeling of legitimacy for the way they are formally Having Meetings. The problem is not the formal system but the actions of the participants.

This takes place through sensemaking processes which are shared at the meetings – but with discontinuance in participants – although there is sufficient overlap to carry forward cues about the House Host System from previous meetings. The mirage of the House Host system and the House Host Day is also reproduced during interviews – so it is shared in that sense.

Sensemaking work is constantly required to recreate the meaning that “in this formal organisation we have meetings in a legitimate way”. Part of that sensemaking work is the reenactment of the system of House Hosts and the ongoing reconstruction of the House Host Day (although it never takes place because most of the House Hosts do not attend meetings). The enactment of a functioning House Host system in spite of observable action that speaks against its existence recreates the legitimacy needed to reproduce the way they are Having Meetings.

### Summary

The House Host system is enacted as being sufficiently real that no alternative system of communication and decision-making is sought. The House Host

Structure legitimises status quo with very low investment of time and only limited attention to communication and decision-making across the organisation. The enactment of the House Host Day as a potential reality allows participants at low-attendance meetings to “do” something. By discussing and planning the elusive House Host Day they can enact that they address the problem.

#### **5.2.4.3 Coming to Meetings to Interact with the “Organisation”.**

Coming to meetings to interact with or communicate with “the organisation” is an often cited reason for coming to meetings. It is cited by a range of actors who have not communicated with each other (they are tutors who-do-not-go-to-meetings) None of the actors draw on previously formulated texts from the organisation about this. This indicates that it is an institutionalised phenomenon originating outside the formal organisation. It is an alternative reason for coming to meetings to positioning oneself as someone who-goes-to-meetings.

At the Saturday Meeting Mathilde and Marlene meet “the organisation” at a meeting for the first time. They were still trying to make sense of who in terms of position in the organisation they are talking to. After a while it transpires that the reason why they had come to the Saturday Meeting was to negotiate that they wanted to start up a separate activity a Arts-and Crafts-Exchange for Women. Mathilde and Marlene came to the meeting to enter into dialogue with “the organisation” with themselves as leaders.

The institutionalised script of coming to a meeting to interact with “the organisation” is challenged and renegotiated when they are faced with a meeting where “the organisation” dissolves into sensemaking where they themselves are hailed into recreating it.

Mathilde and Marlene wanted to make sense of the existing organisational context, and negotiate how and if they could be affiliated with it. To go to a meeting was the thing to do if you wanted to ask “the organisation” something. The case referred to here is when Mathilde and Marlene show up at the Saturday Activity Day to negotiate the start up of a separate activity (a Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange for Women).

Me: “When you came did you have an idea of that someone would have to approve what you were doing? Did you have an idea of that there would be

some authority within the group who should say: “Well, that is fine. We will start that up?”

Mathilde: “No, but in some way yes. We had imagined to show up and ask if it would be possible. At some level we did imagine that we would have to ask anyway – even if we did not imagine an authority as such.”

Marlene: “Yes, but I did not imagine that we would ask. I imagined that they could be helpful with information about how everything was structured. Well, because at that time we had no idea. We did not even know about the connection to the DRC. But we could have experienced it differently between us.”

...

Mathilde: “ But I don't think “authority” would be the right - “

Marlene: “ But they know a lot more about things, right? So in that way we did seek – I expected that we could seek support from them right. That was how I felt.”

Mathilde: “ I still think I imagined that there would be someone at the Meeting who had something to do with this and whom we would have to put the proposal to. That we would like to do like this. I don't know if I would call it an authority. I don't think so. But something anyway.” (Double interview with Marlene and Mathilde:5)

So although they are reluctant to label Meetings an authority as such, they enact it as a place to put something to the organisation - a place to get information and support.

For Klaus this too was the situation at the preceding Planning Meeting. He sought to get involved in the startup of tutoring older children. A third example is

when the treasurer, Signe, showed up to a later meeting to negotiate some details about the organisation's bank account:

“The treasurer, Signe, tells me she is at the meeting because she has some questions to the accounts and she reckons there will be someone there she can talk to. She wants to make it clear – to “the organisation” - that she does not want to take initiatives to spend the money they have been allocated. Somebody else from “the organisation” will have to take those initiatives and see them through. But she will be happy to do the dull paperwork”.

(Notes from the Meeting on Monday the 4/4/2002 about the establishment of tuition in the youth club:1)

To go to a meeting is enacted as necessary to communicate with “the organisation” and get “official” answers. In other organisations I have followed volunteers have to a larger extent enacted that one could contact a leader directly for that type of interaction.

The meetings become “the organisation” during the hours they last. “The organisation” is then made up by and enacted by the people who have shown up at the particular meeting. A pattern has emerged of that the people who show up at meetings varies. Sharmeen is consistently there but apart from that there is a big turn-over.

### Summary

This case indicates that when Leadership is attributed<sup>80</sup> to meetings rather than persons, and when meetings are constituted by a variety of participants then sensemaking and decision making at meetings becomes fragmented. In this organisation there is a high turnover of participants. The majority of participants are new from meeting to meeting. Meaning articulated at one meeting is as a rule not quoted or referred to at the next meeting. However, Sharmeen the contact person is always there, and acts if not as a sensegiver then as a consistent sense limiter<sup>81</sup>.

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80 Meindl (1993).

81 The role as sense limiter will be analysed on page 234.



Being able to imagine Having Meetings as an outlet where one can interact with “the organisation” also had a stabilising effect on some in terms of participation in tutoring. Even if sensemaking and leadership performed at meetings is fragmented.

Marie: “...when you are sitting down there (in the basement) and you are thinking about integration efforts and so on. You also get ideas about how you yourself are helping, and what should be done and what we can do better, and then you want to be part of making that difference instead of just getting frustrated and think – what’s the point? – then you want to do something.”(Interview with Marie:3).

So Marie tells us that going to meetings, and knowing that she is going to go to meetings gives her a feeling of being able to act if something could be better: “... *you want to be part of making that difference instead of just getting frustrated*”. So by narrating herself as someone who goes to meetings she always has that element in her sensemaking about any problems she identifies – she can make a difference, she can try to solve them. By narrating herself as someone who goes to meetings Marie creates another context for giving tuition to the children, that context is meetings, and a “we” of people who go to meetings. So when she makes sense during interaction with the children part of the relevant context includes meetings with other volunteers. In a way she links arenas of interaction which are separated by time and space, making sense of herself in one arena of interaction is aided and affected by making sense of herself in another arena.

External stakeholders are putting pressure on “the organisation” through Sharmeen. They are hailing<sup>82</sup> the organisation into interacting with them, to respond as a consistent coherent unit to them.

Sharmeen: “...there is something new all the time just getting things up and running... but mostly because the Father Group and Suad they are standing outside and they get new ideas constantly, right – which they would like

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82 I use the term “to hail” in the same way as Stuart Hall, 1996. He refers to personal identity. External actors are hailing “the organisation” to act like a unit a person and I think this makes Hall's concept appropriate for an organisation. It is being encouraged to create a suture of “it self” with a position of being a unit which can interact coherently and consistently with external stakeholders.

somebody to – me or us to have an opinion about. But really, right now we are trying to get the organisation to run, get communication going...”  
(Interview Sharmeen:20).

But Sharmeen acts as a buffer between them and the meetings. She does not always relay at meetings the ideas that the external stakeholders would like “the organisation” to have an opinion about. If she enacts at a meeting that a response from “the organisation” is needed she helps negotiate that it is OK that the response only has limited implications both for interaction with external stakeholders and in terms of articulating shared discourse for the whole organisation. This is analysed further in the following section about limited and ambiguous sensemaking at meetings.

Louise mentions the problems she perceives as a result of that the organisation does not interact as expected with external stakeholders:

Me: “I believe, I asked a bit about whether anyone have expressed that it was a problem for them that – is there any concrete communication which should have been out and which wasn't?”

Louise: (Emphatically) “Yes, there has been! It was about an otherwise fantastic event which the Father Group and the parents on initiative from the parents had arranged because they wanted to do something nice for us. They think we are doing an amazing job, and well, then they had invited us to a meal on a Friday afternoon/evening where they would cook for us.... there was a list you could put your name on, and the House Hosts were supposed to communicate it.., and then only 17 to 18 volunteers showed up, and there was food enough for 100. It was such a shame there weren't more volunteers.... It is a very unfortunate signal we send. It is not consciously... lot's of people said afterwards: “No, why did I not know about this?” “Oh, no I would really have liked that.”” (Interview with Louise:15).

What Louise pinpoints here is not so much the meetings but a functioning House Host system – which could draw volunteers in and get them to participate in the event. In this case the external stakeholders are not inviting “the organisation” to

have an opinion (shared articulated sense) about something, but to come to a party. However, it is an example of the disenchantment external stakeholders may experience because of lack of coherent response from “the organisation”.

### Summary

Going to meetings to interact with “the organisation” has the following effects on the reproduction of Having Meetings:

- By going to meetings to interact with the “organisation” the participants attribute leadership (Meindl, 1993) to the meetings. That gives legitimacy to the way they are Having Meetings. Which stabilises status quo.
- When tutors go to meetings to interact with the “organisation” it bulks up the number of participants at meetings. That in it self stabilises Having Meetings.
- External stakeholders are not able to engage “the organisation” as a unit in interaction. Sharmeen acts as buffer who hinders this.

### **5.2.4.4. Conclusion**

In the case data I have so far identified three mechanisms manifested in sense making processes at meetings which enable the reproduction of the organised action of Having Meetings:

- Rendering low-attendance to meetings sensible locally at each meeting. This is a fragmented process undertaken by few participants where sense produced at one meeting only to a limited extent travel to the next. But it is none the less sufficient to reproduce Having Meetings.
- The reproduction of the ideal of a House Host Day as a future event similarly legitimises and thereby reproduced the way they are Having Meetings.
- When tutors come to meetings to interact with “the organisation” which seem to be an script institutionalised outside the formal organisation too they also contribute to the reproduction of Having Meetings.

Apart from the positive effects on the reproduction of Having Meetings which are outlined above I can identify a number of aspects of the type of meaning produced at meetings which underline the reproduction of Having Meetings:

- The fact that they have to regenerate sense about low-attendance to meetings at the beginning of each meeting drains energy. The negative experience challenges the participants at the meetings at may contribute to the big turn-over of participants at meetings. A stronger and more widely shared image of the Minimal Model would probably ameliorate this.
- When they reproduce an unattainable ideal of a House Host Day they also increase frustration – since they construct it a simultaneously ideal and unattainable. It is only when they relinquish that ideal they are able to generate pride and confidence in the way they are Having Meetings amongst participants at meetings.
- That tutors seem to invest leadership in meetings rather than in for instance the contact person means that they are frequently disillusioned when they find it hard to identify unequivocal leadership and authority separate from themselves at meetings.

Whereas section 5.2.4 focussed on aspects of the sensemaking processes at meetings section 5.2.5 below will focus on certain characteristics of the sense made.

### **5.2.5 The Effect of the Type of Sense Made at Meetings**

This section contains two parts. They are both analysis of how two aspects of the type of sense which is made at meetings affect the reproduction of Having Meetings, and although meaning does not to a great extent travel from meeting to meeting there are two qualities of the sense made which seems to be stable:

- The meetings tend to produce ambiguous sense rather than unequivocal sense.
- The tutors tend to enact that the organisation has access to sufficient resources.

As we shall see both qualities of the sense made at meetings contribute to stabilise the reproduction of the way they are Having Meetings.

### **5.2.5.1 A Reproduction of Having Meetings Based on Ambiguous Sense.**

Weick suggests that one can analyse Sensemaking as a production of cause maps. Cause maps suggesting the links between various cues (Weick, 1985 reprinted in 2005). In this process managers have an important role to play:

“... managers need to reduce ambiguity to tolerable levels. As Athos states, “good managers make meanings for people, as well as money” (Peters & Waterman, 1982:29.)”(Weick, 1985 reprinted in 2005:48)

I will examine the sensemaking process and cause maps produced at meetings. Does the contact person Sharmeen act as a manager providing cause maps for the others? Does she act as sensegiver? Does she reduce ambiguity?

I have chosen to analyse the Coordinators' Meeting on the 10/6/2002 to examine the type of meaning created at meetings and the role of various participants in the process. I have chosen this meeting because there are far more participants (8) than usual. There are also two older volunteers who have taken up tutoring as part of their retirement from the workplace. They seem to provoke Sharmeen to become a more explicit sensegiver and sense-limiter than at meetings where they are not there. There are three or four tutors from an older generation in the organisation.

The interaction between the younger and older participants brings to the fore the dynamics of the sensemaking processes at meetings. The meeting takes place in June after a period which both Sharmeen, Signe, and Louise describe as having entailed the establishment of social bonds between a small group of tutors. They have gone a pub together and a jargon of mutual slagging is emerging.

At the Coordinators' Meeting the 10/6/2002 Sharmeen, her sister Yasmeen, and Morten who all are part of this emerging group participate. Signe, the treasurer, who does not feel that she is part of that group, is there too.

A pattern of interaction unfolds at the meeting. The older participants identify a wide range of cues to question, to attempt to make sense of, and to control in the environment of the organisation. Whereas Sharmeen and Morten work to reduce the range of cues for sensemaking and reduce the length of cause chains.

Example: Signe suggests that Sharmeen gets a sponsored phone from the Network Group.

They agree that Sharmeen will have to complete accounts as regards the use of the phone to the DRC and the local council annually.

One of the older participants: “Could one imagine that the DRC would pay the tax that Sharmeen is obliged to pay on the sponsorship?”

Sharmeen: “That is too fiddly, and we move on!!”

Signe: “I have spoken to the tax office about how to account for phone compensation, and they agree to internet compensation too.”

The other older participant: “Is there internet connection on that phone?”

Sharmeen: “That is that then.”

The other older participant: “ I don't understand how the e-mail works on the phone?”

Sharmeen: “OK, let's move on.” Weiter gehen!” (Extracts from recording of the Coordinators' Meeting 10/6/2002).

It is a general pattern at the meetings in this organisation that the older participants compared to the younger ones question more issues. They seek to initiate more shared sensemaking. They do this along with claiming a position of being people who check up on things. They enact a high level of complexity in the environment as part of establishing themselves as competent. Sharmeen consistently intervenes and enacts that shared sensemaking of most of these issues are not appropriate. Morten backs her up and initiates similar moves to curb shared articulated sensemaking.

They also discuss how to respond to the bank's demands in connection with the establishment of a bank account for the organisation. The discussion illustrates both moves to generate complex and long cause chains (many cues with connection between them) shared meaning, and moves to limit and simplify shared meaning.

The example is also an indication of the way they make sense of Having Meetings. The discussion illustrates institutional pressures – from the bank – towards creating a Traditional Association run by an elected board, and we see how

Morten and Signe suggest that they take a pragmatic approach and only generate the bare minimum of formal organisation required by the situation.

Signe: “I have an issue which kind of overlaps our discussion of our organisational structure. I need some signatures on some letters of transfer. It's because I have changed our account so that it is an Association Account<sup>83</sup>, and in order for me to be allowed to sit and distribute the money I need signatures from what we call our board, and the million dollar question is: Who is our board?”

Murmurs of assent.

Signe continues: “In olden times it was kind of Sharmeen, Hanne and myself. But it kind of isn't any more.”

Sharmeen: “Yeah, Hanne is not active in the same way anymore.”

Signe: “So one could suggest that it is the House Hosts for instance. But one could also say that it is the people who are here tonight, or something like that.” (Extracts from recording of the Coordinators' Meeting 10/6/2002).

Here the suggestion of enacting the House Hosts as the board of the organisation will soon appear to be impractical. For one thing they are absent from this meeting in spite of being invited. It is enacted that it would be very difficult to get in touch with them all and get them physically to sign papers.

Signe: “I just need some kind of note to show the bank to prove that there are some people whom we consider to be the ones who decides something. Who have given me permission to have access to the accounts.”

One of the older participants: “Isn't there a board law? Aren't there some formalities which have to be in place before one can call it a board?”

Signe: “I have tried to figure them out in the bank – I really don't think that they – demand that we have a Traditional Association as such. What they have asked me for – and I trust that that is OK – I have given them some of our summaries from meetings and our list of addresses, and meeting

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<sup>83</sup> Translation of the Danish word: “foreningskonto”. It is a type of bank account specifically tailored to voluntary associations.

summaries where it says that we have decided that I am the treasurer and that we do like this and this with the money, and that has been enough documentation for them so far.”

One of the older participants: “Your name is Signe? And you are the treasurer?”

Signe: “Yes”

Pause.

Signe: ”So, we need a fast decision on that. We can do it ad hoc and say that we are the board, or we can make it a more overall structural decision.”

Morten: ”Isn't it the easiest for you that you get the signatures as fast as possible?”

(Extracts from recording of the Coordinators' Meeting 10/6/2002).

And this becomes the end of the discussion. They agree to act as a board and sign the papers. They enact it as an occasion for dealing with an administrative challenge posed by the bank rather than an occasion for (re-)creating formal structures in the organisation. Brunsson described this kind of situation in an article from 1986. He argues that the task of “the manager” is to shelter the “action layer of the organisation” from external institutional pressures. So the management should protect the action logic from conflicting external institutional pressures. Here the formal structure of the case organisation is left ambiguous. They just narrate that things have changed a bit from what they were in terms of who is “active”. But we never find out who is “active” today – or whether they are felt to function as a board. They can keep this ambiguity afloat<sup>84</sup> precisely because they decouple the interaction with external stakeholders from internal sensemaking processes (action logic) as suggested by Brunsson.

The sensemaking process at this meeting (which is typical of all the meetings I participated in) is unlike the sensemaking process I observed at meetings in another organisation also affiliated with the DRC and engaged in tutoring. I mention this as an indication of that it is not the nature of the activities (tutoring) - alone - which determines the degree or complexity of shared sensemaking.

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<sup>84</sup> I draw on Eisenberg (1984) in terms of developing a view for processes of preserving ambiguity (to enable action) rather than efforts to eliminate ambiguity.



In the “sister organisation” a wide range of cues provoking sensemaking were provided by local council workers (with whom the organisation shared premises). These cues were picked up and made articulated shared sense of by the participants at many a long meeting. The organisation had many plenary meetings and a range of committee meetings. The “sister organisation” established internal structures to mirror the local council with whom they interacted a lot. So we could say in the words of Brunsson that “the management layer” in the sister organisation did not decouple the two logics. On the contrary institutionalised pressures infused sensemaking about tuition in the every day activities of the organisation, and they had extensive discussions and worries about the – relatively limited amount of – tutoring they performed.

Although I have not fully analysed the sister organisation I mention it because the comparison illustrates that it is possible to make tutoring and organising very complex or very simple. It is a matter of processes of social construction.

The above analysis of the meeting on the 10/6/2002, focussed on the work done to control and limit the amount of shared articulated narration at meetings. Particularly Sharmeen and Morten were constantly undermining attempts to make the meeting an occasion for shared narration. They employed various techniques to achieve this. They pressed on to limit the amount of time spent discussing each issue. They pressed on to limit the number of cues linked together. For instance refusing to link sensemaking about the demands of the Bank to the formal structure of the organisation. They worked to keep narrations simple, and they acted to limit the amount and range of cues admitted as relevant for sensemaking at the meeting.

At some point during the meeting on the 10/6/2002 somebody brought forward an issue of whether the younger children should be kept separate from the older during tuition. (I will return to discussions of this issue in the Noise case). The sense given by Sharmeen was that this was not something the volunteers could control or decide – that was in the hands of the children and the parents. Again enacting that meetings only to a limited extent are appropriate arenas for decision making. Whatever might be desirous or not is left unclear and ambiguous – because it was out of their hands. So again Sharmeen does not provide a full narrative for the other tutors – but she acts to limit the articulated shared sense created at meetings.

In this extract from the individual interview Sharmeen is quite explicit about avoiding to act as a sensegiver:

Sharmeen: “I have spoken to people who said – it sounds a bit nonsensical in my ears – they want somebody to be in charge to make decisions and that. Then they can sign up. That would be fine if we were employees – but we are not. That's why we have to function in another way.”(Interview with Sharmeen:39).

She implies that she consciously tries to avoid being a sensegiver – people have to make their own sense and make their own decisions – take their own responsibility.

The beauty of this is that Sharmeen may think that she will not make decisions – but as long as there are meetings held – then those who-do-not-go-to-meetings will enact that someone else is making decisions for them – and they will be content. Which indications do they have to the contrary? Sharmeen can participate in meetings and maintain ambiguity. She can continue to work towards keeping organisational discourse minimal, ambiguous, and flexible.

### **Summary**

Sharmeen, avoids acting as a sensegiver in many aspects. She does not provide long narratives. She does not provide complex narratives. She does not provide narratives to a large audience. But she does act as a sensegiver in another way. She seems to initiate and encourage the production of ambiguity. Along with others she stops extensive shared sensemaking at meetings. She explicitly encourages multiple/open-ended viewing points particularly in connection with articulated sensemaking at meetings about “integration” and “integration strategies”. So primarily Sharmeen turns meetings into a limited occasion for Sensemaking and that makes meetings easier to reproduce. Because they are associated less with conflicts and struggle.

#### **5.2.5.2 The Enactment of Plentiful Resources De-emphasises Decision Making**

Apart from the type of articulated sensemaking at meetings – keeping it short and ambiguous admitting only few cues – the content of the sense made can also affect how Having Meetings is reproduced. Several actors suggest that enacting that the

group has access to plentiful resources had a direct effect on the way Having Meetings is reproduced as something marginal – something to be kept to a minimum.

The enactment of unlimited resources limits the enactment of decision making opportunities. The enacted under emphasis on decision making in the organisation gives legitimacy to the low attendance meetings which would otherwise threaten the legitimacy of the organised action of Having Meetings. If there are no contentious decision to be made then it is perfectly legitimate that only few partake in the administrative tasks undertaken at meetings.

When meetings are not enacted as fora for significant strategic choices then the number of participants is less significant from a distributed influence (Traditional Association) point of view.

The enactment of plentiful resources is illustrated by returning to this extract from a meeting in April:

Sharmeen: “The intention was that - I think you (Dorte) and I were in agreement on this. I would like a structure - but that the Days functioned independently. As long as they stick to their budget then it is fine. If people come tomorrow and say I would like to spend 5.000 kroner on going to the Zoo with the kids. That is OK!”. Well, then that is YOUR decision. So if anyone does something, then it is decided. All right! (Laughter.) Then that was that person’s decision.” (Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:4).

Sharmeen's vision in the quote above is a situation where decision making about the allocation of funds is minimal.

In connection with the allocation of money to the organisation the sponsoring environment enacts the organisation as a coherent and democratic whole. They are enacted as decision makers and planners who can budget.

Having been allocated money is institutionalised as an occasion for sensemaking about activities and procedures in the formal organisation. But in this organisation they avoid following this script. They follow an alternative script promoted by Dorte and Sharmeen which according to Dorte is institutionalised in the DRC saying the resources is not something we need to fight over<sup>85</sup>.

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85 I think this script is of course highly susceptible to cues of the contrary such as refused requests for

Weber and Glynn (2006) suggest that institutions may shape sensemaking processes through providing social cues guiding the identification of the sensemaking situation – and thereby the norms appropriate rather than just providing the content of sensemaking.

“Priming differs from internalized cognitive constraint because the situational context that supplies the cues plays a greater role in action formation. The reason is that, in concrete situations, several possible roles and action scripts may be plausible, each one institutionalised. The immediate situation then primes – acts as a guide to identify – the appropriate institutional norm to follow.” (Weber & Glynn, 2006:1648).

Weber and Glynn point out that institutions may affect sensemaking process not only by that the scripts activated is primed by the actual context. But also that the actual context can be produced or identified by institutions. When this organisation is allocated money there is an institutionalised identification of that sense should be made of how to use it. So that the institutional pressure is not just present through the content of sensemaking but by indicating an occasion for sensemaking.

Dealing with money forces some of the volunteers to enact being a community. The volunteers are called upon to act as a group sharing decisions and responsibilities; also they have to enact that they are a unit in interaction with e.g. the parent groups. I observed that the allocation of funds were accompanied by an increased level of interaction because of the perceived increased opportunities and need for decisions and coordination/communication.

The following represents an example of the enactment of plentiful resources acts to limit the length of causal chains produced in shared sensemaking. An evaluation of how many active tutors there are is rejected as a relevant element in a narrative about why they should start a new activity.

Klaus: “Before we start considering this expansion we should also consider whether we can follow up on it. If we get twice as many children, then we need to have the tutors too.”

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funding.

Louise: "I don't think it will be a problem to get new tutors." (Transcript of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:5).

We can see that the story of the unlimited supply of potential tutors "out there" enables them to limit the enactment of strategic choices of how to prioritise resources in connection with the new activity. They limit shared sensemaking about which activity is more important, tutoring the young versus the older children. They also give up making sense of how many tutors are actually active at that moment. Since "*it will not be a problem to get more tutors*". They enact a similar situation as regards funds. It also means that they can enact that it is less necessary to hold on to the existing tutors by various means such as sharing more talk.

Another factor which affects the production of limited shared accounts is that the activities they undertake are not enacted as requiring resources nor development nor quality control nor knowledge sharing. This is relatively unrelated to the nature of the activity and seem more related to social construction locally. As mentioned earlier in a decoupled "sister organisation" with similar activities in another part of town which shares offices with local council workers there is lots of shared discourse.

Dorthe explains how sufficient finances enable the volunteers to focus on the integration activities (tutoring) rather than meetings:

Dorthe: "Money is not really an issue. It is a bit strange."

Me: "Does that make a difference from your previous organisation?"

Dorthe: "It gives another calm so that you can – it is also because they are older. But they use far more energy on the activities and there are more people who are interested in spending time with refugees rather than conspiring in the corners or outlining great budgets. You apply for the funds you need and if you have too many you return them. It is not..."

Me: "Strategic?"

Dorthe: "No, exactly – finances are not an issue." (Individual interview with Dorthe number 2:4)

So Dorthe feels that the fact that the volunteers can easily raise funds for their activities means that they do not have to invest time and energy on internal negotiations of the allocation of funds. I will not be able to estimate the amount of resources actually needed for tutoring. It is not only outside the scope of this thesis but I also think that the need for funds is to some extent a matter of social construction. The need for funds seems related to whether they enact a need for certain activities or not. For example is it necessary or even desirable to send tutors on courses to learn about tutoring from professionals? What standard of facilities is required for tutoring? These are all questions which could be enacted as important and requiring clear elaborate answers. But in order for this to happen the tutors would need foras for articulated shared sensemaking, such as well-attended meetings.

What Dorthe above calls “*to be conspiring in the corners or outlining great budgets*” is what I would term a kind of articulated shared sensemaking. I think it is an example of enacting that decisions made at meetings are important and deserve to have people interacting over them and to be sharing elaborations of it. People get together with – some – others and articulate and negotiate sense related to the reproduction of an activity, whether it is the activity of tutoring or the activity of Having Meetings.

### Summary

We can see that Dorthe and Sharmeen do what they can to enact plentiful resources and this sense is reproduced by those who participate in meetings. They enact that there is an abundance of both finances and potential volunteers. That means that tutors are not invited to argue over which activities would be prioritized over others at meetings. The consequence of it is the Having Meetings in the way they do now with low attendance and high level of ambiguity is facilitated.

### **5.2.5.3 The Effect of Structural Fragmentation**

In the extract of the Saturday Meeting below, we get insight into how Mathilde and Marlene are allowed to set up their own organisation rather than being integrated into the existing Network Group.

Mathilde and Marlene: “We thought maybe we could talk to Suad and try to

start this up. because it sounds like you have lot's of other plans. So perhaps we could say that we will try to start this up with her. So you do not have to be contact person for all the projects.”

Sharmeen: “Exactly!”

Mathilde and Marlene: “You understand what we mean?”

Sharmeen: “Yes!”

Yasmeen: “That's what we have been looking for!”

Sharmeen: “Yeah, people who would – very very welcome because we will be very happy with you.”(Transcript of the Saturday Meeting 16/3/2002:4)

Half past two Klaus arrives at the Saturday Meeting. He joins the table at the end where Sharmeen and Yasmeen – and I - are sitting. At the other end Mathilde and Marlene are seated. There is a tense sense of separation of the two groups. Initially Sharmeen attempted to include Mathilde and Marlene in an organisational “we”. But after they made clear that they wanted to start up something of their own they consistently contradicted her with a “we” that included just the two of them. Klaus' arrival and sitting at Sharmeen and Yasmeen's end of the table reinforced the enacted separation. Making a distance from Mathilde and Marlene seems to stabilise Klaus' belonging to the original group further. The interaction became a negotiation between two organisational units of their relationship to one another.

I interviewed Klaus three months later and he indicated that the units remained decoupled:

Klaus: “Now, I haven't heard how this women's activity was followed up on – Mathilde and Marlene had run it by themselves. So you don't hear much about it. So that must mean that things are going well – when you don't hear much from them.” (Interview with Klaus:3)

This is a bit curious since there was the establishment of another separate activity in progress too: Tuition for older children at the local youth center. I think the difference was that the activity at the youth center was initiated and initially explored by Sharmeen as a response to a wish from other volunteers to tutor older

children. Sharmeen then sought to engage other volunteers in heading the activity always envisioning the two as cooperating and drawing initially on the existing group of tutors. But at this point they have not enacted a clear occasion for taking responsibility for the tuition of older children.

The occasion for enacting leadership in connection with tuition of older children comes at a subsequent inaugural meeting with the professional leader of the local youth club. At the Saturday Meeting they discuss who would come to the meeting. Louise and Klaus step forward as leaders of the new activity, and it too operates as a formally independent unit but in reality with much closer ties to the Network Group through close communication between Louise, Klaus and Sharmeen.

Mona, the local council worker, who took part in starting the Network Group in 2001 still follows it from a distance. They borrow facilities at the local community centre for meetings and photocopying. Here she reflects on the structural fragmentation and how it seems to be a durable structure:

Me: “What do you mean by different factions<sup>86</sup>?”

Mona: “ Well, some want a lot, some just want to come on Tuesdays. Some – get wildly involved, and some keep a lot of distance, but come and help out and leave. Right? Well, and some have probably joined together and think it would be exiting to do something together us three, right? That would be cool. That we do something together just the three of us. Because we get along well, and let's see if we can get some residents to join us in something. Whatever that might be. So in that way factions emerge, right? Internally. Someone who thinks it is fun to work – together with the Father Group over in Block G, and others who definitely can't be bothered. But when that is said. Well, I get the impression that, seen from the outside, as I say, the organisation seems broad enough to survive, that that is the way it is. But of course, obviously, there could be under the surface discontent and grumbling over one thing or another. It will always be like that in such a group. It can't be avoided. But apparently the organisation has a shape where they live with it. I don't know what it is they do – why it is like that. Maybe

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86 “Faction” may not be the right term here. The word used in Danish is “Fraktion” which also means a smaller group within a larger group, but does not have negative connotations.



it is just that attitude that there is plenty for all of us, so we don't have to---”  
(Interview with Mona:6)

During interviews and conversation with members of the group I avoided putting forward my own interpretations of how the organisation functioned. I did this because the group itself had so far formulated so little about who they were and how they were that I did not want to run the risk of them adopting my version as generic articulated text, and thus ceasing to be case of a group working together in spite of the lack of such a text. I will return to this in detail in the chapter about methodology chapter , page .

However, because I considered Mona to stand outside the group, and because actors from the organisation never referred to recent conversations with her, I sought to engage her in a co-construction of how the organisational structure is stabilised:

Me: “I think that they simply don't see each other that much.”

Mona: “Ahh, no that is right they don't see each other much.”

Me: “Physically, I mean, they are separate. It is really clever!”

Mona: “Yes, you are right. I have never thought about that that is it.!”

Me: “I actually think that that is really good. It is all right.”

Mona: “They don't have to sit at plenary meetings and agree about things. That is really true!”

Me: “Well, that was mine--” (Interview with Mona:6-7)

So here I aired my hypothesis that it is the lack of articulated interaction, which was further cemented by the structural fragmentation which contributes to stabilise the organisation. Mona agrees that this could be that case, whereas she initially primarily identified the plentiful resources as the reason.

The degree of structural fragmentation became a matter of interest for external stakeholders. There was an ongoing negotiation of ownership amongst the parent groups. Here Louise identifies the structural fragmentation to be the root of a

conflict between the Network Group and the Father Group. The conflict unfolded in connection with the establishment of tuition for youth in the local youth club:

Phone-interview with Louise:

Me: “How did you feel like? I could see that the chairman of the tenant's board in Vestplanen came over to you in the youth club in connection with the meeting. What was it he wanted to talk to you about?”

Louise: “What he said was that – not much – he is difficult to understand. He praised us a lot. On behalf of the whole Network Group. That we have really helped a lot over there, and that it is a really important project. That was cool to be told. Really cool. He talked about a contract, that we should – yes, I think that that was what they were upset about in the Father Group. because the question about whether we (the tutors in the youth club) should be independent or not. It would mean that they have no influence on it, and they don't like that. Yes, I think that is how it is.”

“And the chairman of the tenant's board would like us to form an independent group. Why, I have no idea. But I don't know how much of this I just read into it. But he said that we (the tutors in the youth club) should have a contract with the DRC. Just like we have it in the Network Group. Whether he understands – whether he means that we should be independent. Because I have not talked to him about that at all. I think the Father Group have the impression that he wants it to be his project. But I can't really make sense of it.”

Me: “No. I can understand that” (Phone interview with Louise about the process of starting up tuition in the youth club:2)

The conflict was diffused mainly by the consultant Dorthe. She nursed and reaffirmed the relationship between the Network Group and the Father Group by creating an occasion for that they mutually signed a contract about co-operation, and a contract was signed between the Father Group and the splinter group in the youth club.

The structural fragmentation is not just taking place between different activities. Each Day of tutoring also functions in a loosely coupled manner. It takes

a long time for events on one Day to affect events on another. Information travels slowly if at all. This has the same effect as the structural fragmentation between various activities has; it frees up the participants from agreeing on what they do and how they do it.

When the sub units are not forced to coordinate their sensemaking and actions with other sub units it also lowers the level of shared sensemaking within the subunit since they do not have to act in a unified manner towards other sub units. This is what Sharmeen protects the Network Group against when she acts as a buffer against the Father Group and their attempts to enact the network Group as a coherent unit by asking them to initiate new activities for the children together with them or inviting them to a party for instance.

Since strategic action requires coordination between the parties involved the structural fragmentation has the overall effect of reducing the organisation's ability to act strategically. The structural fragmentation is also manifested through that the level of communication across the formal organisation is low. This means that innovations would only be diffused slowly. Control with subunits is also low. Sharmeen expresses that she does not know what happens on each Day. This means that there is a low level of central control with all aspects their activities. The areas where this has proved problematic for other voluntary organisations has been with misuse of funds, clumsy communication with external stakeholders or incompetent interaction with recipients<sup>87</sup>. In this organisation the reliance on funds is very low and as is the risk of abuse. Although the tutors do not share much talk during tuition they do share physical space. This along with the presences of the parent groups reduced the risk of incompetent interaction with the recipients; the children.

So both the ability to innovate, to control and to act strategically is limited as a result of structural fragmentation.

### Summary

Overall they seem to be able to stabilise the reproduction of organised action by increasing the level of ambiguity. One of the ways in which they do this is through structural fragmentation. By creating many decoupled or loosely coupled arenas of interactive sensemaking they can limit conflict. But they also create a high level of

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87 Isen, 1999.

confusion, isolation, and limited knowledge transfer etc. It is not a model suitable for all types of organisations. The contract model prevalent on the DRC as opposed to the membership model facilitates it. The contract model does not imply ambitions to distribute influence amongst a broad number of people. The contract enacts tutors as single individuals.

#### **5.2.5.4 Conclusion**

The type of sense created at meetings affects the reproduction of Having Meetings the way they are in this way. On the one hand the type of sense underpins the reproduction of a Minimal Model for Having Meetings:

- The production of ambiguous meaning enables decoupling of sense and navigation between conflicting institutional pressures. The generation of short cause chains also seems to preserve energy by shortening discussions.
- The enactment of plentiful resources limits the perceived need to engage in shared sensemaking.
- The structural fragmentation limits conflicts and generates more arenas for taking ownership for activities.

On the other hand:

- The high level of ambiguity undermines their ability to act strategically as a group. As they do not share an unequivocal story of how they are Having Meetings they are less able to act uniformly to ameliorate the short comings they might identify. So they are able to reproduce stability but hard pressed to produce changes or improvements which are based on changed behaviour from a number of tutors.
- The enactment of plentiful resources may of course some day be challenged. This would be the case if the number of ideas for activities increased along with actors who were willing to see them through. Then the allocated monetary resources could run out. That would probably have a significant effect on the level of shared sensemaking in the organisation. Since it could spur on articulated attempts to secure funds for one's own idea.

- The structural fragmentation and resulting lack of central control with events in each sub section could create problems for the way they are Having Meetings.

The sensemaking processes about Having Meetings which generate the type of meaning identified above is ordered by an enactment of two complimentary roles.

## 5.2.6 The Enactment of Two Complementary Roles.

So far the analysis has primarily focussed on the effects of sensemaking at meetings. This section will to a larger extent draw on sensemaking processes which take place outside meetings. However, sensemaking about roles in connection with going or not going to meetings does of course unfold at meetings too and is negotiated there too. It is an ongoing process.

I use the concept “roles” as Weick does when he equates it with generic subjectivity where there is no concrete individualised self just a “...filler of roles...” (1995:71). It is also central to his approach – and mine that this generic subjectivity is not necessarily stable but is reproduced and renegotiated on an ongoing basis. As mentioned on page 96 this thesis aims to apply an explicit focus on the discursive quality of these renegotiated generic subjectivities. To achieve this I treat “role” as negotiated subject positions manifest in discourse.

There are two roles which are enacted by the tutors as constituting recognisable patterns of action related to Having Meetings. I have already used them in the text and they will come as no surprise to anyone who have ever sat on a committee or partaken in the activities of a non-profit organisation:

- To be someone who-goes-to-meetings, or:
- To be someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings.

The tutors engage in sensemaking processes which render their own continued pattern of action as regards Having Meetings sensible. Part of making sense of their own role is to make sense of assumptions about the roles of others whom they feel take part in Having Meetings.

That the tutors enact a mutual dependency is an indication of that Having Meetings is *organised* action<sup>88</sup> and not just individual action. Those who-do-not-

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88 See the definition of organised action on page 80.

go-to-meetings rely on enacting that others go to meetings to render the organisation legitimate in their own eyes.

The roles complement each other in reproducing Having Meetings: Those who-go-to-meetings (on behalf of those who do not go), and those who-do-not-go-to-meetings (trusting in those who do go). If those who-go-to-meetings enacted that their perceived co-actors (those who-do-not-go-to-meetings) did not acknowledge their contribution to the organisation at meetings – if they felt that the others did not feel represented and part of what happens at meetings – then it would undermine the participation in the reproduction of organised action - even for those who subscribe to the Minimal Organisation.

I suggest grouping the sense made about roles in relation to Having Meetings into this matrix:

Types of roles in Having Meetings:	<i>Roles enacted by those who-go-to-meetings</i>	<i>Roles enacted by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings</i>
<b>Construction of “We”</b>	<b>We</b> who-go-to-meetings...	<b>We</b> who-do-not-go-to-meetings...
<b>Construction of “They”</b>	<b>They</b> who-do-not-go-to-meetings...	<b>They</b> who-go-to-meetings...

**Figure 6:** A Matrix of the Discursively Constituted Roles in Having Meetings (Murphy).

The four squares in the matrix represent the four categories within which sensemaking around Having Meetings falls. These four categories of roles are constructed and negotiated by drawing on the discourses about Having Meetings introduced on page 190.

The four types of discursively constituted roles are produced in different types of sensemaking processes characterised by more or less interaction and sharing amongst the perceived co-actors. The complimentary roles (“we who-go-to-meetings...” and “they who-don't-go-to-meetings...”) enacted by those who-go-to-meetings are at least partly negotiated with others at meetings. Whereas the roles enacted by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings do typically not have that arena of interaction. However, as we shall see the tutors change in and out of identification or actualisation of these roles. So there can be tutors who at some point enact being someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings and who have in part negotiated this at a meeting which they have participated in.

One might be tempted to use the label “individual” about the sensemaking processes which don't unfold in articulated interaction with others. But I think it would be a contradiction in terms to use the concept “individual sensemaking”. Since I agree with Weick (1995) inspired by Mead (1934) that one of the strengths

of the concept is that sensemaking is *always* social – even when it does not take place in physical interaction with others. The significant other is always there as part of the enacted context. It is an ambition of this thesis to examine whether togetherness can be just as real in action implications even if it is not based on articulated interaction.

A conclusion of the analysis is that even those who-do-not-go-to-meetings enact co-actors – and enact themselves as part of someone acting together in Having Meetings in a legitimate fashion.

It is by generating and positioning themselves in relation to these four discursively constituted roles that actors stabilise or challenge the reproduction of Having Meetings.

As mentioned, other sensemaking theorists have a tendency to argue that actors need to share articulated interaction in order to be able to act together (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Blumer (1969) who provided inspiration for Weick's formulation of the social aspect of sensemaking argues that actors need to mutually adjust their lines of action. He thereby implies that they need to attach the same meaning to their lines of action.

I aim to examine the extent to which the actors share the meaning they attach to the complementary roles in Having Meetings. Building on the matrix I introduced about shared meaning on page 133. I will analyse the sensemaking process through which these possibly overlapping meanings are made.

### **5.2.6.1 Interactive Sensemaking about Roles**

My starting point is that Having Meetings is a socially negotiated, emergent phenomenon. Having Meetings is constructed both during articulated interaction (at meetings) and outside meetings, by actors who may not share articulated communication with each other.

That an organisation ought to be Having Meetings is sufficiently institutionalised that even those who-do-not-go-to-meetings feel the need to create this sense.

Me: “Have you while you were at school or studied sat on a student council?”

Lone: “No”



Me: "A Party Committee?"

Lone: " No, In general I have stayed away from it. Because I can't be bothered. Giggle giggle. If I did bother I would probably have joined some kind of political youth organisation. I am not the organisational type. I can't be bothered. To sit at meetings and talk and waffle and bicker. It is too tiring. It requires a certain type of temper, and I don't have that. I don't think it is fun, and if you don't think it is fun. Then you should stay away from it. Because then you won't be very good at it. I have for several years felt guilty about it that I couldn't be bothered, and I always hid when there was an election of student representatives. Until I realised one day that I would suck at it. - We are all raised with that one ought to participate in the democracy. That you should get involved in all of that – sit on committees and boards and care about politics, and for many years I have really felt guilty about it..." (Interview with Lone:8-9)

We can see that Lone actualises and needs to make sense of that she does not go to meetings even though she does not participate in them. So even those who enact that they do-not-go-to-meetings need to make sense of their roles in Having Meetings. By saying "we are all raised with.." and tracing the meaning she attaches to Having Meetings across time and arenas she indicates that the meaning is institutionalised. She makes this sense even if she did not generate it in articulated interaction with those she enacts that she is acting with now.

I will return to a more in-depth analysis of the sensemaking processes which constitute the role of not going to meetings later. However, in order to illustrate the mutually dependent character of sensemaking processes in the organisation I first will bring in the analysis of the bottom part of the matrix. The sense made outside meetings by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings about about those who take up the complementary role; those who go-to-meetings.

Lone renders not only her own actions sensible but also at the same time the actions of those who act differently. Those who take up what she enacts as a complementary role. I will focus on the statements from Lone because she is quite detailed in her description of her sensemaking about "the organisation" and those who-go-to-meetings.

Lone”...There are people who are passionate about it and who run election campaigns to be elected. They should just be allowed to do it. Because they are good at it. I am not. I do something else instead. Laughter. This for example (referring to tutoring).”

Me: “Can you explain a bit about the organisation?”

Lone: ” I am not interested in the organisation. I got the impression that it is a large organisation, and if you are interested you can get involved in all sorts and participate in meetings and networks and stuff.”

...

Lone: “So there is a kind of system. But not something I know in detail. Because it wasn't something which mattered for my daily work down here, and it isn't something I intend to get involved in – so I just let it slide past – OK there is someone who is dealing with that – then I will deal with what I have signed up for, right.”

Me: “Is there otherwise some kind of coordination?”

Lone: “Yes, there it probably plenty of coordination. But it is not something I participate in. I just check the noticeboard when I get here. That noticeboard is quite new. So that is quite nice. There are also meeting summaries on it. ”

Me: “What did you do before you got that?”

Lone: “ Laughs. We new f..k all about what was going on. Laughter. Well sometimes we get a mail. For example a letter about that you were coming because you were doing a project. So that is why I knew when you came and said hello that that was probably you. If I hadn't had e-mail then I would probably not have known anything until the noticeboard came.”(Interview with Lone:7-8)

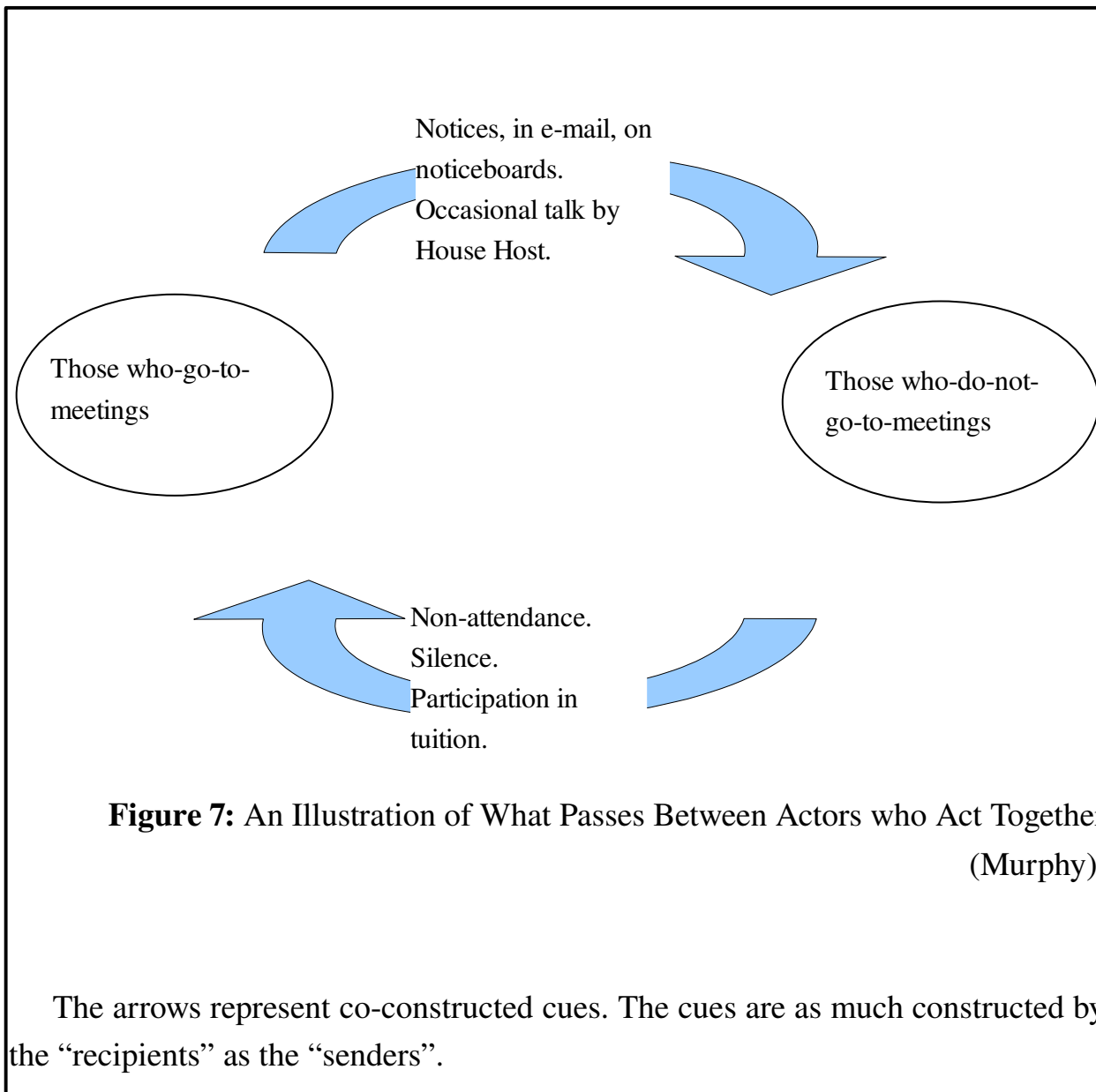
The cues Lone enacts in her efforts to generate a legitimate, self enhancing identity<sup>89</sup> in connection with making sense of the organised action of Having Meetings are that she sometimes receives e-mails with short summaries of or

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89 Identity formation is always part of part of sensemaking processes which tends to generate self enhancing meaning (Weick, 1995).

agenda for meetings. Sometimes she looks at the noticeboard. These cues enable her to continue to recreate the meaning that others are going to meetings instead of her, and that the joint action of Having Meetings can go on even if she maintains her present pattern of (in)action.

An illustration of the interaction between tutors who actualise the two complementary roles:



So Lone takes up a role as being someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings which is partly constituted and justified through the construction of a complementary role: Those who-go-to-meetings. She picks up various cues about “the others” which she uses in her sensemaking about Having Meetings and her own role in it. Those cues are notices on the noticeboards and e-mails and elements of what her House Host might mention to her.

### **5.2.6.2 Cues for Sensemaking**

Those who-go-to-meetings experience cues as to the actions and sense-makings of those who-do-not-go-to-meetings in various ways: At meetings these cues are enacted and shared sensemaking is initiated – sensemaking often ends up open-ended and ambiguous. As we saw in the previous section at meetings the cues enacted about the actions of those who-do-not-go-to-meetings is whether they participate in meetings or not.

Another cue which is enacted as having relevance for sensemaking about Having Meetings is whether tutors leave the organisation or not. In some contexts and by some tutors Having Meetings is enacted as having a socially cohesive function. So that when they get a cue which is taken to indicate that tutors are leaving the organisation or fails to turn up for tutoring they enact a connection to the way they are Having Meetings. That they have failed to persuade people to come to meetings and therefore people have not become personally involved with each other and therefore they leave.

But the act of leaving or not is not entirely clear. Tutors don't always tell anybody that they leave – some just stop coming. Some will tell their House Host – some will call Sharmeen and tell her. However, Sharmeen does not have an accurate up to date overview over who is still a tutor and who has left the organisation. It is also unclear sometimes when someone has left the organisation. Since they are not members, but are tutors via the act of tutoring, or rather via whether they themselves consider it an option that they may go and tutor on their assigned day or not.

For those who-do-not-go-to-meetings the cues as to the actions of those who-go-to-meetings are that agendas (plus the occasional minutes) keep appearing for meetings, and that they meet tutors who enact being someone who-goes-to-meetings, or enact having a role as contact person or treasurer. If those who do not go to meetings began to enact cues and meaning indicating that other tutors weren't going to meetings and that meetings were not being held in the organisation it is likely that it would make the frame for tutoring illegitimate. If they began to enact that nobody maintained administration and relations to external stakeholders or that decisions were made by just one or a few people without any restraint from others – it would not feel legitimate within the framework of a voluntary

organisation. From the perspective of the researcher who travels across arenas in the organisation it is certainly possible to claim that this is the state of affairs in the organisation at the moment. But it is not an obstacle to the reproduction of organised action because communication across the organisation is so poor that those who-do-not-go-to-meetings never find out.

The two groups are mutually dependent on each other in the sense that they are dependent on being able to feel that: “Yes, we are acting on behalf of you” – and: “Yes, you are acting on behalf of us.” The “on behalf of” means that they reproduce the sense that they are acting as part of a unit. That they belong to one community – one group. If those who-do-not-go-to-meetings stood back and voiced – in some forum – you (who-go-to-meetings) do not act on behalf of me it would render Having Meetings meaningless.

The remainder of the analysis of the case of Having Meetings will focus on sensemaking processes which take place outside of meetings. That is sensemaking which is not shared in the sense of being articulated together but which may happen to overlap more or less for reasons I shall attempt to identify along with identifying the implications for the reproduction of organisation action of the sensemaking processes.

I have divided the subsequent analysis into first a focus on processes which reproduce not going to meetings and next those sensemaking processes which take place outside of meetings which reproduce going to meetings.

### **5.2.6.3 Reproduction of the Act of Not Going to Meetings**

The arena for sensemaking for those who-do-not-go-to-meetings is different to those who-go-to-meetings – they have to varying degrees no access to communication across the organisation – they may interact with tutors on their own day – but a large proportion of them do not even do that. This means that their co-actors in Having Meetings are imagined. When I interviewed them a space for articulated sensemaking was created that would not exist otherwise. I dealt with this in more detail in the discussion of methodology in chapter .

Sensemaking process outside of meetings are the kind undertaken by the majority of tutors. Since only a few out of the 50-60 tutors go to meetings, and since the majority of tutors do not talk to each other during tuition. They engage in a more unarticulated sensemaking process. Although this part of the analysis of

sensemaking outside of meetings is somewhat shorter than the previous analysis it is representative of the *majority* of sensemaking processes about Having Meetings.

Sensemaking about Having Meetings which take place outside of meetings takes various forms:

I will return to the example of Lone:

**Lone** makes sense of being someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings by talking about limited time.

Lone: “At the same time I am not inclined to spend a lot of extra time on being a volunteer. I have decided that I can use Wednesday afternoon every week. But that's ll the time I have.” (Interview with Lone:3).

When Lone talks about herself – and her life in general during the interview she frequently draws on a narrative about time. She narrates her life as being divided into a limited amount of time slots. This is not as prevalent with the other tutors. But it seems general for the interviews I have made that the sensemaking about their role in Having Meetings is in part communicated through what orders the narrative about other activities in their life. As we shall see this can be that they in general justify their choice of action by referring to that it it was the rational thing to do, it gave them pleasure, society needed it etc. Lone generally argued for why she undertook various actions based on whether she could allocate time for them, whether it was socialising with friends, tutoring or working.

Lone: “But I am interested in this and only this<sup>90</sup>. Because that is what I can find time for on a weekly basis- and I think it seemed like one could just come and make an effort and go home again.” (Interview with Lone:4).

Here it seems that Lone reproduces a shared narrative about Having Meetings – it is legitimate not to participate. Lone reproduces the discourse of the Minimal Organisation.

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90 Tutoring as opposed to meetings.

Even when Lone does not go to the meetings she still co-produces Having Meetings by envisioning a system/structure and seeing it as legitimate (in this context it is OK not to go). She attributes authority and legitimacy to the meetings.

Although she may not talk to anyone during the sensemaking process it would be wrong to call it an individual or not-social sensemaking process. She enacts significant others who-go-to-meetings and thereby have an effect on the sense she makes. That she is justified in not going.

In order to make sense the tutors need to enact significant others in a certain way. Lone's explanations about why she does not go to meetings does have an air of justification about them. She can't be bothered going to meetings – and she knows that this may be a problem for the collectivity. So in order to uphold a legitimate self-image she needs to create the sense that others are unlike her and are happy to go to meetings.

She enacts that she is part of a group acting in an organised manner as regards Having Meetings. In the sense that they all have a stake in it. She perceives herself to be affected by whether the organisation – to which they belong – is Having Meetings in a legitimate fashion.

**Marlene and Mathilde:** also recount how they perceived the organisation.

Marlene: “Another way you could see that the volunteers were not organised – or now I don't know if “organised” is the right word. But that was in connection with that workday<sup>91</sup>. Which was actually Mathilde and I had to ask some of the others about whether they intended to go. But there was a completely anonymous note on the noticeboard which wasn't really communicated out, and it did turn out that out of the 60 volunteers there are in Vestplanen then only three others than Sharmeen showed up.”

Mathilde: “But it wasn't really introduced. There was just a notice where you could sign on. It didn't really say what you were going to do there.”

(Interview with Marlene and Mathilde:12)

Although they do not talk explicitly of Having Meetings they did enact that the organisation was not Having Meetings in a legitimate manner. They felt the

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91 The Saturday Meeting.



organisation was chaotic and without communication. Their response was to exit<sup>92</sup> to leave – they opted for separating themselves from a way of Having Meetings they felt was inappropriate and created their own organisation. They also did this because it afforded them opportunities to take on desirable roles.

**Frida:** I interviewed a tutor after her first evening tutoring. Having Meetings had not (yet) emerged as a feature of tutoring. I think she represents a boundary case of someone about whom we can not say she is participating in the organised action of Having Meetings. Her focus is entirely on tuition and she has not begun to make sense of herself in relation to Having Meetings in this context. So her silence and non-attendance to meetings can not be said to be part of the organised action of Having Meetings.

She doesn't even consider going to meetings in this context – she feels she is already making a difference through the interaction with the children.

**Klaus** about his pre-going-to-meetings period:

Me: “How did you experience it? You had a period where you mainly came to tutor and did not go to meetings?”

Klaus: “That was it. You came and then you went, and that was that. There was nothing beyond that. It is a bit strange. But in a way I felt. Well, we are here to tutor and I think we did that well. So, I don't need to sit on various committees and stuff to tutor. I just need someone to tutor. I can bring my own pen, so I don't need a finance committee and – the key function that was to help them and we did that just fine.” (Interview with Klaus:3).

What Klaus expresses here is I don't go to meetings because technically it is not necessary – the interaction with the children is sufficient.

**Signe:** “Sometimes I don't t go because of a whim – life sweeps me away and I happen not to go – I don't feel like it. ” (Interview with Signe:8).

It is a general feature of Signes self narration that she is driven by desire and fancies. This is the predominant way she explains why she has done things.

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<sup>92</sup> As one of the three suggested by Hirshman (1970): “Exit, Voice, Loyalty”.

## Summary

Those who-do-not-go-to-meetings do make sense of not going. They feel they have to justify not going. It is important to them. This indicates that it is institutionalised that one ought to participate. So they share this sense, not based on articulated interaction within the Network Group but because it has been institutionalised in other arenas. Their accounts of not going vary from person to person, and they seem to be influenced by their identity formation process: The shape their self-narration produced at the individual interview takes. Lone drew on a narration of time, Signe drew on a narration of her desire, Klaus drew on a rational narration of what was useful.

The combined effect on organised action of the sense created at meetings and the sense created by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings is that the organised action of Having Meetings is reproduced. Those who-do-not-go-to-meetings draw on an institutionalised script about Having Meetings which says that others will go to meetings and make sense and decisions for them, and those who-go-to-meetings can unbeknownst to the majority keep decision making and shared sensemaking to a minimum. By being only loosely coupled the actors can continue to make action reinforcing sense unencumbered with the impressions others have made of their joint action.

Some form of image of a Minimal Organisation particular for this organisation had spread to some of them. But it was still felt to be challenged by them ore institutionalised discourse of the one ought to feel guilt about not going.

### **5.2.6.4 Reproduction of the Act of Going to Meetings**

I will now move on to sensemaking outside meetings about being someone who goes to meetings.

At the individual interview Sharmeen describes the very first meeting in the organisation:

Sharmeen: "...and who should be the contact person? It was embarrassingly quiet when that position needed to be filled – and then I volunteered, ahem."  
(Interview with Sharmeen: 6).

Sharmeen's explanation of the role she has assumed indicates that she was hailed (Hall, 1996) into fill a perceived empty slot - a role she had enacted before.

The way she fills this role is not just negotiated in interaction with others in the organisation. Her past seems to play important part too. From what she tells me Sharmeen is not schooled from student councils. Rather she is schooled in counter movements where the Traditional Association was the thing one did not want:

Sharmeen: “I really think. I think it<sup>93</sup> seems a bit too narrow. But that is of course a prejudice. Because I have never been in to hear. “What is this. What does one actually do in a student council?” I associate it with contemplating your own belly button for three years. (Laughs.) It is a bit like that one thinks: “Oh, no! Does one do something? Does one change anything? (Laughs again.)”(Interview with Sharmeen: 6).

Klaus explains why he starts going to meetings:

Klaus: “I thought. It is probably best that someone shows up from all the Days. So I go, and then it is just Sharmeen, Louise, and myself who show up. So, ehh, somehow we clicked.., and before I knew it I was involved in that thing with the youth club together with Louise, and then we were in charge of that. That was cool too.” (Interview with Klaus:3)

Klaus enacts that he originally went to a meeting because the House Host system required him to do it. Then he gets drawn in and assumes responsibility for a new activity with Louise – another role opens up for him.

There seem to be retrospective element of his sensemaking about his role of going-to-meetings. I am in charge of this new activity – so I come to meetings because that is where I can “do” being in charge of it.

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93 The Student Council.

**Marie:** She enacts that the organisation is Having Meetings – which she could potentially participate in. This facilitates and thereby stabilises her continued participation in tuition.

She makes the sense that she *could* go to meetings. It affects the way she handles challenges during tuition. She regards herself as someone who-goes-to-meetings although in the six months I followed the organisation she did not participate in any. Enacting that she can take part in Having Meetings means that she feels both that that she has a potential way of dealing with any problems and that she is not alone in dealing with the problem.

Marie: “...when you are sitting down there (in the basement) and you are thinking about integration efforts and so on. You also get ideas about how you yourself are helping, and what should be done and what we can do better, and then you want to be part of making that difference instead of just getting frustrated and think – what’s the point? – Then you want to do something.”(Interview with Marie:3)

So Marie tells us that going to meetings, and knowing that she is going to go to meetings gives her a feeling of being able to act if something could be better: “... *you want to be part of making that difference instead of just getting frustrated*”. So by narrating herself as someone who goes to meetings she always has that element in her sensemaking about any problems she identifies – she can make a difference, she can try to solve them. By narrating herself as someone who-goes-to-meetings Marie creates another context for giving tuition to the children, that context is meetings, and a “we” of people who go to meetings.

Marie feels empowered in everyday situations in tuition by the narration of herself as someone who-goes-to-meetings. When something frustrates her she frames it as being within her reach to remedy because she sees herself as participating in an arena where these things and issues can be improved and solved.

Marie frames her participation in tutoring against layers of arenas: The tuition, the meetings (which constitute the organisation), national politics, national party politics and resistance to the present Government, the local community. She narrates herself firmly into these contexts when she explains why and how she

participates in tutoring. Across the contexts she narrates herself as someone who obviously should sit in meetings and committees to have her voice heard and influence things, or to write letters to newspapers to protests about cut backs in the DRC. She is one of the only volunteers who mention the DRC at all. She was also the only one I spoke to who had participated in the introductory course held by the DRC. So cutting across her stories of the present activity is a description of herself as someone who is not satisfied with not being heard, or not taking part when decisions are made. She wants to get in there in the formal decision making system.

The enactment of going to meetings is similar to Marie's way of enacting membership of a national community. She sees herself as having natural access to various fora where national politics are formulated. She enacts potential participation in political parties and writing readers letters to the media as responses to challenges on a national community level.

### Summary

The tutors who-go-to-meetings each narrate different stories about why they go to meetings. The stories draw on the five discourses but they are also told along the lines of the tutors more general self-narrations. Which they unfolded when I asked them more broadly about their lives. That is similar to the sensemaking processes about their role in Having meetings by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings. The tutors who-go-to-meetings also referred to negotiations of going to meetings which they had experienced in other contexts. So there are indications that not only interactively shared sense within an organisation can stabilise the reproduction of organised action in the organisation but also sense negotiated in other arenas.

#### **5.2.5.5 Processes of Sliding into or out of the Two Roles**

Narrating one self as having a particular role in connection with Having meetings is not stable. I found that several tutors resented firmly associating themselves with one or another role. They put a lot of effort into producing subject positions where they could straddle the two roles.

Louise makes sense of how to identify those who-go-to-meetings

Me: "and you judge who goes-to-meetings based on -?"

Louise: "The meetings we have had."

Me: "Based on who comes or who says something-?"

Louise: "Yes, who comes and who takes on some jobs."

Me: "Between meetings?"

Louise: "Yes, between meetings – like writing the summary. OK when we have made a decision about that we need to do something about this. Then it will primarily be between – of course Dorthe too – as when she was there. But now of course she does not have so much time. It's been a bit divided between – yes and then the House Host on Thursdays – she has been to a meeting – and there she took on part of it. I think that is it." (Interview with Louise: 16).

Louise indicates here - possibly with a bit too much help from me - that those who have the role of going-to-meetings can be identified based on attendance to meetings *and* on whether they take on tasks between meetings.

To add nuances to this I observed that it is not just the attendance – but also whether the actor makes it an articulated issue whether they are going or not – it is possible to enact one self as someone who-goes-to-meetings without actually going. We see this done in the case of Marie who used to go to meetings – but is unable to attend for various reasons – but she is still considered as one-who-goes-to-meetings. Vice versa some actors go to a meeting but define themselves as someone who-does-not-go-to-meetings. They enact that them going was a once off. Klaus sets out to do this – but as it happens Klaus does actually show up for the Saturday Meeting. At the Planning Meeting they plan that some work will be done in relation to the youth activity on the Saturday – this is probably what prompts Klaus to show up anyway. By attending again and beginning to form a romantic attachment to Louise he has become part of the group who-go-to-meetings during this meeting. He is then enacted as someone who-goes-to-meetings. Signe refuses to be defined and works hard to stay sitting on the fence. Once they enact themselves as having one or another role they start to create sense about this – sense that creates compatibility between their own actions and a legitimate system of "Having Meetings".

But even within the narrations during the individual interviews each person

holds ambiguous views on how to Having Meetings and their own part in that activity. Marie explains about the Minimal Organisation:

“We are here to get some things done fast. Either it is that we prioritise our work with the children, or else there is just a freedom in that you can run it more ad hoc.” (Interview with Marie: 5).

The way Marie talks about it here is more in the manner of suggesting two reasonable justifications for the Minimal Organisation (one type of post action sensemaking as suggested by Weick in 1995) rather than buying into one of them: “either it is...or else...”. Subsequently, however, she expands much more on the second reason – the being free to act quickly which comes with ad hoc organising. The two justifications for the Minimal Organisation are at odds – Marie does not use the Minimal Organisation to spend more time and energy with the children. She uses it to act quicker and more independently while engaged in facilitating and administrating the framework around tutoring.

This ambiguity between on the one hand applauding a low number of meetings and little emphasis of shared decision making and on the other investing oneself in those meetings and those decisions making is evident in the interview with Marie. She handles it by separating them. She does not talk about the two in connection with each other. When talking about taking part in Having Meetings she draws on the Traditional Association logic which discredits those who-do-not-go-to-meetings. Whereas when she talks about the virtues of the Minimal Organisation she highlights the work with the children performed by those who-do-not-go-to-meetings.

So the ambiguity unfolded in various arenas of the organisation are also evident in at least some tutors' self narrations in connection with Having Meetings. Maybe a flexible way of organising which provides decoupled opportunities for performing selves within various logics facilitates the participation of post modern youth who juggle several narrations of self at the one time.

### How to Actualise a Role

“During the interview Susan comes over to Marie to say goodbye. They talk

about whether they are coming to the Saturday Meeting – Susan is not coming, but Marie is. Marie tells me she is part of the New Ideas Group with Louise”.(Field notes from tuition in Block D Thursday the 14/3/2002).

In this example Marie and Susan enact being people who-go-to-meetings. By discussing whether they are going they enact that as a default they would go and that it requires a reason not to go. You don't have to go to meetings to enact being someone-who-goes-to-meetings you just have to enact that it is a possibility that you would participate in a meeting. Here is an example of that interaction between tutors on their Day affords an opportunity of enacting being someone who-goes-to-meetings. Similar arenas can be enacted by the tutor at any other point inside or outside the organisation where they actualise themselves as actors in the organised action of Having Meetings in this organisation.

The people who-do-not-go-to-meetings also need to make sense of not going that is compatible with being a “good person” when they are actualised in that role by themselves or others. I actualised it during the interviews when I asked them to tell me about whether they participated or not and how they felt about that. Weick (1995) claims that part of sensemaking processes is always identity formation. Another way of putting this is that we humans need to recreate a self enhancing self-image in the context we “find ourselves in”<sup>94</sup>. Davies and Harré (1990) have theorised this process as a discursive process where selves are positioned in language. They argue that identities are discursive phenomena and are produced by negotiating recognisable positions of self in interaction with others. Davies and Harré reject the notion of “roles” which reify the notion of a stable self and instead use the concept subject positions. I have tried to merge the two by using the word role but seeing roles as something which is renegotiated and reproduced on an ongoing basis. More or less influenced by institutionalised scripts.

Viewing identity formation as a discursive process is a good tool for analysing how tutors change in and out of these roles – they are renegotiated –, and new ways are sought. It happens that some tutors work hard to generate positions between these roles. They seek to position themselves so they are not defined and confined by either being someone who-goes-to-meetings or not.

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94 The context being enacted and negotiated with our perceived co-actors.



An example is at a meeting where Signe offers an explanation for why people do not cancel when they do not show up for meetings. Signe suggests that you can think you are going to come (thereby being someone who-goes-to-meetings) and as per chance or coincidence not go and hence not cancel. The silence that follows this statement indicates that this is not an OK point of view.

“Why do people not call in to say they are not coming?”

General opinion: “We don’t understand that.”

Signe (offers an answer): “Personally I am extremely credulous – I believe until the last minute that I am going to come.”

Silence.

Another House Host – “It gets me down when people do not bother to cancel.” (Transcript of Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:4)

Here Signe brings in her self narration as someone who intends to “do good”. She intends to play by the rules (being someone who-goes-to-meetings) but yet she feels she has to listen to her spontaneous playful side and not shoulder the responsibility she is expected to. She enacts a similar role in a similar narrative about how she ends up playing with the children rather than tutoring them – as opposed to the other tutors.

The reason why I think her narrative of spontaneously not going to meetings is a manoeuvre of positioning a self as someone who does-not-go-to-meetings is that she offers no explanation for why she does not go – it lies between the lines that she just can't be bothered. I think that is the reason for the reaction from the rest of the participants at the meeting: Her explanation is ignored. It is not a recognisable narration. That people’s reason for not cancelling meetings should be that they up until the last minute think they are going to participate and then spontaneously can't be bothered is simply not recognisable and legitimate to the rest of the people at the meeting. Why is that? Does it indicate that it is not legitimate to position oneself in one or the other role based on the whim? Maybe this is true of all roles which are enacted as being opposites (e.g. being male/female). There has to be

more at stake than a spontaneous fancy in the identification if the classification is going to be credible and thus reproduced.

### Summary

So what passes between actors is not just the act of going or not going to meetings. It is also enacting being or enacting not being someone who-goes-to-meetings. This can be communicated in various arenas; on the days, at meetings, by phone etc. Being someone who-goes-to-meetings is enacted as important when they talk about getting people to feel responsible – it is not just a matter of getting a higher level of attendance at meetings.

#### **5.2.5.6 Conclusion**

I found indications that actors can have defined themselves as a unit and be responsive to one another without engaging in articulated communication, and that the connection between them can exist in the shape of that they attribute meaning to cues indicating each others' actions. This suggests that in some organisational contexts rather than emphasising shared sensemaking processes based on interpersonal communication it may be useful to also pay attention to the stabilising effects of sensemaking processes where actors only have access to a few of each others' actions as opposed to sharing articulated words.

## **5.3 Overall Conclusion about Having Meetings**

This chapter has identified a number of mechanisms which affect the reproduction of Having Meetings in this organisation. They point to a more complex picture of how organised action can be reproduced than just through shared sensemaking.

1) However, the first stabilising factor in the reproduction of Having Meetings was an example of shared sensemaking. The Initial Introductory Meeting remains a source of shared cues about how to be Having Meetings. Whereas the influence from the DRC seems to come through the consultant at meetings rather than directly to each tutor.

2) The way Meetings are enacted affects the pattern of Having Meetings. Whoever turns up at meetings constantly work to reproduce meetings as meaningful in spite of the low number of participants in meetings. They do this by drawing on their local model for Having Meetings: The Minimal Organisation which is challenged by the institutionalised model: The Traditional Association. Rendering the actions of their (inactive) co-actors sensible is an essential part of the process which takes place at meetings.

The enactment of a House Hosts System that implies that all House Hosts should attend Meetings clashes with the low-attendance meetings thereby undermining the legitimacy of the present pattern of action. However, by continuing to actualise the elusive House Host Day participants at Meetings are able to reproduce a feeling of being able to address the problem. This enables them not to challenge the way they are Having Meetings. Finally, when actors seek out meetings as the relevant arena for interacting to the "organisation" they also contributes to stabilising the way they are Having Meetings.

3) The type of sense made at meetings contributes to stabilising the organised action of Having Meetings as minimal and decoupled from tuition. That sensemaking at meetings is open-ended and ambiguous is one of the reasons why meaning doesn't travel in the organisation and conflicting views are rarely confrontationally contrasted. This lack of confrontation and deemphasis on meetings as a significant arena for decision making about tuition is further strengthened by the enactment of plentiful resources. Dorte and Sharmeen act as sensegivers at meetings. Sharmeen frequently acts as a sense-limiter maintaining ambiguity and limiting articulated sharing at meetings.

4) Structural fragmentation similarly enhances the possibilities for reducing confrontations between divergent views and demands.

5) The tutors enact two complementary roles in connection with Having Meetings. They do not share articulated sensemaking about this but rather engage in sensemaking processes drawing on institutionalised scripts and their ongoing identity formation whilst making sense of cues they take to indicate the intent of their co-actors. The lack of articulated face to face interaction seem to facilitate this process.

## 5.4 Discussion of Having Meetings

In the Having-Meetings-case above we saw that decoupling between actors can facilitate organised action. This can be the case when the decoupling allows each to continue to presume that the other is continuing to perform their part of the joint action. Whereas sharing and articulated interaction might have revealed on the one hand that the performance of going-to-meetings was much weaker than assumed by those who-did-not-go-to-meetings, and that those who-did-not-go-to-meetings felt a lot less involved in what happened at meetings than those who-go-to-meetings think. The whole process was driven by a tendency to make reinforcing sense supporting status quo.

We saw how decouplings between organisational units reduced conflict and in that way facilitated continued action. How decoupling between meetings and tutoring simplified the possibility for continued action and left it open to each actor to make multiple reinforcing sense of themselves and the joint act drawing on institutionalised expectations and self narrations. However, the decoupling also increased the sense of chaos and frustrations thus most likely leading to a higher turn over of tutors. Mechanisms for recruiting new tutors thus became important for the reproduction of organised action under these circumstances.

By insisting on the existence of a legitimate House Host System actors were able to reproduce what they felt was a legitimate way of Having Meetings in spite of that the actual pattern of interaction seeming illegitimate to them (very few tutors actually attended meetings). By continuing to actualise the fatamorgana of the House Host System they could identify with a future ideal rather than feel identified on a more permanent basis with an illegitimate way of organising.

I found that a significant source of sensemaking about Having Meetings came from processes of the tutors taking themselves up in various roles in connection with Having Meetings. That identity formation was an important mechanism underlying the reproduction of organised action of Having Meetings, and that these roles were not only the result of local negotiations, but rather a mixture of institutionalised elements and past experiences fused in ongoing self narrations. Some of which had a more robust form than others – thus having a larger influence on Sensemaking about action than others. The sense actors need to make is more

related to their self construction than it is related to an instrumental goal achievement.

I argued that the type of meaning produced at meetings had an effect on the reproduction of action, but not by being shared meaning – but having certain characteristics: Being ambiguous, enacting the way the were Having Meetings as legitimate, and enacting a House Host System.

Actors ability to continue to enact a meaningful self and context (the external “we's” they anchor themselves in) for joint action is crucial rather than that they feel they are in a mutually dependent exchange relationship with co-actors.

### **5.4.1 Cues of Acts as What Passes Between Co-actors**

My conclusion is that in this case of reproducing “Having Meetings” the act of going versus not-going to meetings is the key act which “passes between” actors. This is the cue which is being enacted as something to be made sense of in order to render continued participation sensible. This is both the case for the people who-do-not-go-to-meetings and those who do.

I suggest that what passes between actors undertaking joint action can just be “the acts”. It does not have to be articulated communication. It can just be that one actor makes sense of cues which they take to indicate the actions of their (enacted) co-actors by drawing on a range of discourses – the cues do not have to be negotiated or discursively produced in interaction with their co-actors. In this empirical case the people who-do-not-go-to-meetings are practically incommunicado from those who-go-to-meetings. Yet both groups act jointly in the sense that they each do sensemaking work to reproduce the organised action of “Having Meetings”.

Now, I want to get closer to the more specific contribution to sensemaking theory I lined up in the theory chapter. What is it that “passes between” actors who do not exactly *share* sensemaking processes, but who none the less manage to reproduce organised action together?

Blumer (1969) said – and Weick (1995) did too by quoting him – that it is the alignment of lines-of-action. But Blumer thought that to align lines-of-action actors had to share the meaning associated with these lines-of-action. Thus implying that they need to share articulated sensemaking. Donnellon et al (1986) argued that actors just need to share equifinal meaning about the joint action – that

is they had to agree on the words describing a joint action (which was incidentally how she defined joint action – as some words the actors had agreed upon). Smircich & Stubbart (1985) and Smircich & Morgan (1982) emphasised the importance of inclusive shared sensemaking *processes* – not just shared sense for the reproduction of organised action.

I conclude that what is required to reproduce organised action in this case is that the actors continue to make reinforcing (in the sense of rendering it sensible for themselves to continue to participate in the joint action) sense of the cues they extract about the acts of their enacted co-actors.

# 6 The Noise Case

The above was an analysis of how the meetings do *not* produce shared articulated meaning. How does this then affect the reproduction of - not just being an organisation which has meetings – but the reproduction of tutoring when participants enact that the formal organisation is challenged by a problem?

## 6.1 The Definition of Noise

I use the label Noise about this perceived problem because the tutors use it. I capitalise it to indicate that the meaning of Noise is constructed and negotiated locally in this organisation. So I have no desire to reify my own or the readers construction of noise as a general phenomenon.

There are variations but Noise is used by the tutor to label inappropriate sounds with respect to tutoring. In general if you say what is noise and what is in contrast appropriate sounds. You judge whether it is utterances of a particular group of people that should be considered noise. When you call something Noise you make it not appropriate. So who and what are being made inappropriate here? In this case most of the volunteers say that the Noise comes from the children who are not sitting down with a volunteer. So legitimate behaviour from the children is to be quiet while waiting for their turn to be tutored, and to leave the rooms when they have finished tuition.

The level of Noise in connection with tuition is a recurrent theme in talk amongst volunteers. Particularly at meetings. I suggest to unfold sensemaking processes in relation to the issue, and to unfold how organised action in relation to the issue takes place – to discover the relation between the two.

To look at “an issue” is to look at sensemaking triggered by dissonance – something deviates from the expected and it is enacted as a cue for sensemaking. This focus on an issue is used by Maitlis (2005) and Donnellon et al (1986) too. Several tutors define Noise as the main challenge to the reproduction of tuition.

Action Implications are ways of acting which are made legitimate in one or another frame. It is my translation of the Danish word “handlerum” as it is used by Søndergaard inspired by Davies & Harré. It means discursively constituted legitimate scope for action.

The various constructions of Noise which I will unfold in the analysis are linked to a range of action implications:

- The parents /parent groups should control the children to a larger extent.
- The tutors should individually exercise more control over the children.
- The tutors should individually accept and ignore the Noise.
- The children should be taught to behave differently
- The physical lay-out should reduce Noise: sound barriers and child barriers.
- The formal organisation should solve the problem through talk (with the parents).

The analysis of the case will be structured in this manner:

First, at theoretically motivated introduction to the case.

In section 6.3 I shall analyse the frames or contexts the tutors draw on when they attempt to make sense of Noise. I found that not only did the tutors differ but each tutor may draw on several frames. To be able to show this I will first present the frames so the reader can recognise them along with me in the subsequent analysis. I have included the action implications constituted in the frames too to highlight the diversity of actions they make legitimate.

Afterwards in section 6.4 I analyse a case (delimited by two people) of interactive negotiations of Noise across arenas; during tuition, meetings and at individual interview. This gives us a chance to see the variety of frames actualised when the tutors (albeit a small minority of them) engage in articulated sensemaking.

Then in section 6.5 I analyse how each tutor makes sense of self, meetings, and Noise in the individual interviews. This is a prelude to an analysis of sensemaking about Noise at meetings.

In section 6.6 I will analyse articulated interaction at meetings about Noise.

Finally, in section 6.7 I will analyse how each tutor reproduces tuition on a day to day basis in spite of being exposed to Noise. This will allow us to track the



effect of shared articulated sensemaking versus alternative forces supporting the reproduction of organised action.

## **6.2 Theoretical Introduction to the Case**

In this case I will examine how does an organisation which is Having Meetings like that – characterised by those sensemaking processes we saw in the previous case of Having Meetings - react when some members enact that the organisation has a problem?

In several articles about the relation between sensemaking processes and organised action researchers have focussed on the quality of the response from the organisation or from management to challenges – and linked it to outcome as regards organised action. Maitlis (2005) identifies a connection between the type of sensemaking process and they types of outcomes in terms of type of action and type of meaning created. She is inspired by (Smircich & Morgan, 1982) who argue that leaders should act as sense-givers, and that organisational sensemaking will be more effective if all employees have had influence on sensemaking (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Maitlis predicts that lack of leader driven sensemaking, and fragmented sensemaking would lead to discontinuous ad hoc action. Donnellon et al (1986) would argue that in order to act together when faced with Noise the tutors would need to have reached equifinal meaning. So that they agreed on words describing the desired joint action. Meaning that the tutors may interpret the words describing the joint action differently and thus not share meaning – but as long as they feel they have agreed – action can go ahead. This is opposed to Blumer (1969) who argued that actors actually need to share understandings of their aligned lines-of-action. Kutz (2000) argued that joint action requires joint intentions – intentions to act together. The notion of intentions however, is highly problematic in sensemaking theory which strives to emphasise the often retrospective quality of sensemaking as regards joint action.

Institutional theorists would not find it strange that actors could share enough meaning to act together without having shared talk. They would look for the organising effect of meaning institutionalised in arenas outside the formal organisation.

I will analyse what happens to organised action when actors perceive that they are faced with a challenge to the main activity of the formal organisation which they consider themselves part of. Is their ability to reproduce organised action in spite of this perceived challenge dependent on whether they share talk about it or not? And if it isn't which mechanisms - other than shared articulated sensemaking - affect the reproduction of organised action?

## 6.3 The Frames Fuelling the Sensemaking

When the tutors make sense of an issue they also enact the context for the issue. I characterise the enacted context by the logic governing it and the generic subjectivities (roles) related to it. The following frames have been identified through analysis of transcripts from the meetings and all the individual interviews.

**School:** The teacher ( the tutor) facilitates, helps, motivates and persuades the pupils to do their school work. The generic subjectivities (roles) available are that of either teacher or pupil.

**Integration:** The integrator (the tutor) helps the integratee to assimilate into Danish society. The children are helped to be able to do and understand the things the tutors believe Danish children can. Available roles: “them” and “us” (Danes). The distinction between generic subjectivities runs along ethnic lines.

**Family:** An image of belonging to one unit with two types of members; children and adults. The shared belonging engenders an amount of forbearance with the children. Roles of parent/older sibling (the tutor) and their children. Children will be children. Noise is natural and it is OK to babysit the children.

**Self development:** Focus is on the construction of the adult (the tutor). A self-aware adult who grows while interacting with the children. *“I'm getting more experience being around children”.* *I'm experimenting with being an adult”.* *“These children remind me of the children I can't wait to have myself.”* *“I can give these children some understanding I did not get when I was a child”.* The role constructed in connection with self development is that of an adult reflecting on their interaction with generic children.

**Volunteering:** An exchange between volunteers (the tutor) and recipients. The volunteers are giving and the recipients receiving.

### 6.3.1 School

When the enacted context is that of the **school** two generic subjectivities are actualised – that of the pupil and the teacher.

The school context is for instance actualised when a House Host expresses concern over the level of Noise because it undermines the children's ability to concentrate on their homework:

Jane (a House Host from Block D): “.., and we have gotten a role now where we are shouting all the time: “Could you please tell the little ones not to come in here because the big ones cannot concentrate”. They are saying the small ones are annoying, and I feel sorry for them because they have come down there to do their homework. And they need to sit in peace and we have to be able to help them.“. (Extract from recorded Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002).

Jane actualises a role as a disciplining teacher. A teacher who simultaneously acts to get the children to be quiet and to get them to do/help them to do their homework. However, she distances herself from the disciplinarian part of her role. “...*We have gotten a role...*” She says. So we understand that it is not a role she has chosen – and not one she desires to keep. It is an exhausting and frustrating role. It is not what she wants to do.

I shall return to this extract from a meeting in longer context in connection with the analysis of interaction at meetings over Noise. But here it sums up the way Noise is made sense of when framed by the school. The children's ability to focus on their homework is - not surprisingly - foregrounded.

Articulated sensemaking drawing on the school frame is infused with drawing a boundary for what is tutoring (legitimate volunteering) and what is controlling/disciplining the children (undesirable volunteering). The volunteers express that they do not think it is appropriate – or desirable – for them to take up a role as controlling the children. On the other hand they also produce explanations of how keeping discipline would protect the weakest and give all the children better conditions for focussing on their homework. Many tutors across the

organisation have a view that the parent groups should perform that role of disciplining the children.

This is expressed by Louise:.

“The Father Group... their function is to make sure its quiet, and then they have the overall responsibility. So we really don't have to – if the kids – we just have to concentrate on tutoring and not on hushing them – sometimes they can be terribly noisy. But they make sure its quiet.” (Interview with Louise:1).

Here the task of reducing Noise is described as a task that does not belong to the volunteers. It belongs to the Father Group. But it is also described as a task that continuously needs to be undertaken. The volunteers are supposed to be free of that task. They do not enact themselves as someone who are there to teach the children to behave in a certain way in relation to “teachers” or in connection with doing school work. Their position is not controlling but *helping*. However, the children hail you into that position when they take up other positions than the one of the obedient pupil.

Noise is seen as a barrier to entering into the position of teacher. Noise distracts the children so they do not take up their role in the teacher / pupil relationship.

Noise was also perceived to affect the volunteers so they felt it was difficult to tutor. Noise made it difficult for the volunteers to focus.

#### **6.3.1.1. Action Implication**

When school is enacted as the context for tutoring the tutors express a dilemma between whether to take on disciplining the children or not as part of tutoring them.

### **6.3.2 Integration**

When the tutors refer to this frame they foreground differences and similarities between “them” and “us” along ethnic lines.

When the context is considered to be that of **integration** then Noise ceases to be noise and becomes the sound of interaction. The generic subjectivities are then integrator and integratee (the person being integrated).

To frame Noise as an indication of cultural differences is associated with the application of a logic of integration.

” ... So it really isn't really problematic children we are working with. You can tell with these children. They are a bit boisterous, but really, if you chuck 30 kids into a room on their own then - they all act up regardless of whether they are yellow or blue.” (Interview with Sharmeen:22).

In the quote above, from the individual interview Sharmeen argues against framing the issue of Noise as an integration issue where the children are “them” and different to Danish children. She argues that the Noise is not related to the children being underprivileged in general or being ethnically different: ”... *they all act up regardless of whether they are yellow or blue*”- they are just being kids. Some of them are underprivileged. But even the parents in the well functioning families are unable to help them sufficiently with their homework.

However, Sharmeen does use a distinction between “them” and “us” along ethnic lines in connection with Noise. But it is herself and her sister she makes different to the other tutors.

Sharmeen & Yasmeen: *“During a chat about how to “handle” the children Yasmeen and Sharmeen told me they themselves were tolerant. Since they have a part Afghan background they are used to having many children around them...”* (Extract from field notes from Saturday Workshop 18/3/2002:2).

Underlying this is an assumption that most volunteers' own culture does not require adults to be tolerant of the Noise children make.

As Sharmeen makes her point she indirectly formulates what then becomes the illegitimate position: To think that the children are noisy because they have a different culture – or are underprivileged.

So Sharmeen makes it illegitimate to think that the Noise of the children is linked to their culture being different to that of the volunteers. That actually makes what other volunteers construct as tolerance intolerant: Some volunteers create a

position where that very identification of the children as culturally different allows the volunteer to display tolerance by accepting the Noise.

Marlene and Mathilde undergo a transformation which we shall return to on page 290. Here is an extract of a conversation between them in front of me and my microphone two weeks after they have been introduced to the integration and tolerance frame by Sharmeen and Yasmeen at the Saturday Workshop. By making “them” the children and the parents culturally different Marlene and Mathilde position themselves as tolerant.

Marlene and Mathilde: “... I sensed this the first time I came down to tutor, right? Where there is loads of stuff going on at the same time.”

”- But that is their culture!”

”- Yes, that is the thing.”

”- You do not sit in a room quietly. But they chatter across.”(Interview med Marlene and Mathilde:4).

Marlene and Mathilde frame themselves as tolerant of “them” and “their culture” ”- *But that is their culture!*”. Thereby enacting themselves as contributing to integration.

Considering the fundamental contradictions between the framing by Sharmeen and Yasmeen on one hand and Marlene and Mathilde on the other it is perhaps not surprising that references to ”integration” are among the most ambiguous in the fragmented organisational discourse. This will be analysed further on page 300.

### **6.3.2.1 Action Implications**

When actualising the integration frame accepting Noise is constructed as a virtue the tutor ought to possess. Whether you emphasise ethnic differences between tutors or between the children who receive tuition and Danish children. From both points of view control should be exercised by the parent groups.

### 6.3.3 Family

Klaus is an example of someone who accepts the sounds which the children make when they are not studying. He too uses the label “Noise” – but he does not portray himself as someone who wants to reduce Noise. He suggests that there is virtue in acceptance of the children and their Noise.

Klaus: ”- Well, my threshold in relation to noise and stuff it is different to others’. I don’t mind that they run around and play in the background. Whereas others they want them to be completely quiet. I’ve always been like that...” (Interview with Klaus:6).

Klaus indicates that the children do not have to change the way they are for his sake. Klaus more explicitly frames his reactions to the children (particularly the older ones in the youth club) within a relationship between a protective big brother and younger siblings.

Klaus explains how he himself had problems when he was younger. Understanding the children is something he can give them. He can give something back. He acts as the understanding big-brother and the role model he never had himself.

In this manner he makes sense of how to act in response to perceived Noise by drawing meaning from his life story – the narration of his own childhood and youth – in which he was the child who lacked the tolerant and understanding parent/older sibling.

Karin, a new tutor in Block D (one of the few volunteers who has a child herself) relates the Noise to the children’s social interactions: The boys standing around the “group leader’s” table:

”... a large group of boys had clustered around her table. They had disturbed the tuition of the boy who actually was trying to do his homework... she wonders if he used as rude words in front of his own mother as he did in front of her, and decides that probably not. He was a good boy, really.”  
(Field notes about conversation with Karin, page 2).

She then explained how it was good that she had been there to keep him focussed in spite of his friends. Karin's reference to the school/teaching aspect of tuition is mixed with speaking from the position of being a mother caring for her child. She works within the premises given by an existing pattern of interaction between the children. The pattern justifies her presence because she can stem the tide a bit and shield one child at the time from distractions which are beyond her influence.

Sharmeen and Yasmeen:

“During a chat about how to “handle” the children Yasmeen and Sharmeen told me they themselves were tolerant. Because they have a part Afghan background they are used to having many children around them. They recounted how they even as small children themselves had the responsibility for two year olds on New Years Eve where they tried to keep them away from the fireworks while the adults were having a good time. So they were used to lot's of children hanging on you. The trick, they said, is to keep more of them occupied at the same time.” (Field notes from Saturday activity day 18/3/2002:2).

Yasmeen along with her sister makes sense of Noise by drawing on the integration frame. She emphasises tolerance at the same time as drawing on a family logic. Yasmeen and Sharmeen explain that the ability to handle many noisy children is something they have from their Afghan background and that tolerance of and experience with minding children is the real solution to the Noise problem. The sounds the children make are not the problem, but the volunteer's attitude might be.

### **6.3.3.1 Action Implications**

The kind of explanations the volunteers produce when they put themselves in a position of trying to understand *why* the children act as they do, does not seem compatible with positioning themselves as someone who can fundamentally bring about change.

This could be related to that the relationship between volunteer and children is at odds in the two interpretations. When the volunteer constructs Noise as a result of legitimate interaction between the children, the volunteer enters a position of



acceptance. They work within the Noise sheltering each child on an ad hoc basis. The Noise becomes a symptom of other phenomena, which it is not legitimate for the volunteers to try and change fundamentally.

The actions implications of this frame are to accept a certain level of Noise and tutor within it. When the dominant logic is that of “family” then Noise is part of what the parent or older sibling must understand and accept to be a recognizable, embracing, loving family member.

### 6.3.4 My Self Development

**My self development:** The focus point in this frame is the tutor. It is the self development of her or him which is the outcome of the interaction with the children. They are the self-aware adults who grow from the interaction with the child.

Signe: To be a Child or an Adult with the Children?

Here is a tutor, Signe, who feels she is different to the other tutors. It seems to be part of the way she constructs being a tutor. It is repeatedly used to frame the way she presents herself as tutor; she does it in her own special way.

”... I think there are really many challenges in – having to be an adult and maintain some kind of overview and to figure out how to do it. How to set boundaries for them. How you can, ahhh well, maintain – some kind of kontrol over it. Which I feel, which I feel a responsibility for. Which I feel it my responsibility. That I HAVE to - well I can't just leave go. It is important that I, even if I – maybe talk to them on their terms. That I am an adult. It is just so exiting!” (Interview with Signe:12).

Being a volunteer working with children is here a way to explore being an adult. The Noise of the children calls forth an adult-like response of controlling. But it does battle with being a child, a friend. Enacting Noise inhibits feeling on the same side as the children.

The root for Signe's positioning in relation to Noise seems to come from a more general framing of herself. Just as we saw in the Having Meetings case she is interweaving the explanation of how she deals with the Noise with the general tale she tells of herself as someone who likes to play, and not conform. That challenges

how to understand oneself as someone who acts as an adult in controlling Noise. The solution she creates during the discursive interaction in the interview is that interacting with the children lets her not only play with them but also play-act being an adult when she controls them to reduce Noise.

Signe does not discuss this with other volunteers. So it seems that this way of positioning herself originates not from a social interaction within the organisation but elsewhere. Her overarching self-narration and self-exploration frame the positioning.

There is a difference between entering a position as an adult and entering a position as a teacher. The relationship to the children is constructed differently. When you act as a teacher you construct the children as pupils. Your aim becomes to help them to focus on and do their homework, maybe beyond that to help them to learn school relevant skills not necessarily indicated in the homework. Noise then becomes the sounds they make when they stop being pupils – and revert to being children.

Lone: Expresses, when I interview her away from the others, that in general she is “not very good with children” and learns from the interaction with the children she meets through tuition.

Line: Away from the other tutors, on our way across town on bike, Line tells me as a kind of secret that she derives tremendous pleasure from just being with the children. She is longing to have her own children, and tuition provides a cherished glimpse of this. This is not a way of framing tuition which she feels is legitimate.

Klaus: As mentioned above, under the presentation of the Family Frame, Klaus seems to be in a process of reconciling his present with the image he has of his past through acting out solidarity and understanding with the children during tuition. Klaus constructs a volunteer subject position where he is different to “the *others*”. They have a sameness with him, they are volunteers, but they are not as tolerant of the sound of playing children. He has a special tolerance because of his past.

These constructions of unique individual selves in connection with tuition enable the tutors to accept and derive confirmation of their uniqueness from indications of that the others feel differently. Signe performs her uniqueness at meetings. She thrives on knowing her approach is different. Whereas most of the tutors do not wish to actualise a self development frame in articulated interaction

with other tutors. They do not feel self development is legitimate since it is at odds with the volunteer frame where they feel they ought to give selflessly (see below).

#### **6.3.4.1 Action Implications**

All the above expressions of self development in connection with interaction with the children, provide roles of acceptance and solidarity with the children. When these are actualised as a frame for making sense of Noise the action implication is to roll with it to accept the Noise. The subjects who need to change and grow are not the children it is themselves.

#### **6.3.5 To Volunteer, to Give**

**Frivillig:** In the constructions of tutoring framed as volunteering it is foregrounded that tutoring is a voluntary activity. It is undertaken by people who go out of their way selflessly to provide a service for others. For some this means that they should be given the best possible service and working conditions. They should be treated with respect. Noise is disrespect.

There is perhaps a fundamental mismatch here. The Good Samaritan comes and gives to the grateful recipient. – But what is the Good Samaritan to think when the recipient would rather run around and play making it impossible for the Good Samaritan to “deliver the goods”?

Some tutors feel disrespected or unappreciated by the children when they play instead of studying. The tutors also feel abused when they get the feeling that the parents expect them to mind the children rather than tutor them. They feel disrespected.

Something along these lines is expressed by Mathilde and Marlene when they talk about the interaction over the start- up of the Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange with the women:

“This was meant to fun. It wasn't meant to be frustrating. We were not supposed to please her...we are the volunteers. Then we feel we are entitled to demand something. Just a little.” (Interview with Mathilde and Marlene:6).

At the meeting on the 15/4/2002 the consultant Dorte too expresses horror at the amount of Noise the tutors are exposed to and suggests that they should be protected from it because they are volunteers.

Dorte: “... you should have good conditions for tutoring. The intention was this fantastic idea of giving tuition, and it is important that it does not just become that it is a playroom in there.” (Recording of the Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002).

From this point of view the sound of play is an indication of that the volunteers are being disrespected and their work wasted.

### 6.3.5.1 Action Implications

“Things” should be organised so as to reduce Noise without the tutors having to do anything. That would be the action implication when Noise is framed within a logic of protecting and revering volunteers. It implies “an organisation” which acts as a unit to facilitate the negotiations with the parent groups.

This matrix gives an overview of the frames and their action implications regarding Noise.

<i>Frame\Action Implication</i>	<i>Live with Noise</i>	<i>Do something/ Get others to do something</i>
Teaching		X
Integrating	X	
Family	X	(X)
Self Development	X	X
Volunteer		X

**Figure 8:** The Frames Regarding Noise and Their Action Implications (Murphy).

The analysis of the frames actualised indicates that there are conflicting action implications associated with the different frames. That means that as long as all the frames are actualised the tutors will not have overlapping action implications, as Donnellon et al call it.

The question for the next part of the analysis then becomes: Does the diversity of action implication create conflicts? Are they contrasted in talk? How do the sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action?

Sensemaking processes and the reproduction of organised action have not been analysed in the above. We have yet to discover how the frames come into play in sensemaking. That is the object of the next analysis.

## **6.4 Disgruntled Tutors' Interaction with the Organisation**

Although a lot of dealing with and making sense of Noise takes place during tuition itself there are also tutors who seek interaction outside tuition. The type of sensemaking I will analyse first is sensemaking which results from tutors seeking interaction with “the organisation” over Noise.

The example I am about to present is Marlene and Mathilde. They start out as tutors in Block D. They get frustrated. Here I will follow where they formulate their criticism, who do they communicate it to?

They first share their frustrations with each other. It is clear from the way they talk about it at the Saturday Meeting and at the interview that they have discussed this with each other. They have not shared their views with others from their Day. This conforms with the general pattern I observed with limited communication between tutors on each Day.

Marlene and Mathildes relationship and shared past means that they can activate a strong shared frame of reference. They have both studied Integration as part of their studies. Out of all the tutors I interview they have the clearest formulated distinctions between “them” and “us”. The distinction runs along ethnic lines. I am tempted to assume that ironically they have practiced this view of the world through Integration Studies. This means that when they need to make sense of Noise they partly do so drawing on the integration frame where “the others” are noisy because it is part of “their culture”. This focus obscures the

effects of the physical layout, the age of the children etc. Making this sense makes them feel they ought to accept the level of Noise.

Secondly, both Mathilde and Marlene have been employed in a voluntary organisation. They have worked as paid canvassers for another humanitarian organisation. This is the other frame they draw on – the Volunteer frame. That volunteers are a valuable resource and that volunteers should be serviced and looked after – by professionals. In this case it leads them to feel that “the organisation” performs short of expectations. They express that “the organisation” should solve the Noise problem and protect the volunteers better. This view is also expressed by the consultant Dorthe at one of the meetings. She indicates that the parent groups have agreed to perform this task.

So what do Mathilde and Marlene do when they have shared the frustration with each other? They opt out while still staying involved. They initiate a new activity: an Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange between Danish Women and the non Danish Women living in Vestplanen. They come to the Saturday Activity day on the 18/3/2002 to negotiate with “the organisation” how to go about it. As analysed on page 243, their move is welcomed by Sharmeen, and they set up an independent organisational unit. As regards the level of Noise they experienced during tuition they do not voice their frustrations at the meeting. While discussing the setup of the new activity Sharmeen and Yasmeen seem to act as sensegivers in relation to the way Marlene and Mathilde talk about Noise.

At the meeting Mathilde and Marlene start out with a School and a Volunteer frame for their proposed activity. The Integration frame is not brought into play. Their concern is: How could they ensure sufficient peace and quiet for their activity?

Sharmeen: ”You will probably be working closely with the Women's Club down there.”

Mathilde /Marlene: ”I don't think we intend to do it down there. That is not my intention. Not yours either is it? (Laughter) Because there is too much noise – it wouldn't be profitable for either party.”

Sharmeen”Then it should be on one of the other Days. But I think in general if you want to avoid too much noise then you should do it in the mornings when the children are at school. Because as soon as it is after school there

will be children. Also because they have a very different attitude. You can easily have 30 children and do Arts and Crafts Exchange. It is no problem for them. It is natural that there are children.”

Sharmeen brings the integration frame into play here. Sharmeen has rejected this frame on other occasions where *she* is being made different. But here she narrates herself into the Danish group while still asserting privileged knowledge of “the others”. Sharmeen and Yasmeen argue to make it illegitimate to enter into a position from where one does not tolerate Noise. Marlene and Mathilde react by ending the conversation:

Mathilde & Marlene: ”We (Mathilde and Marlene) will have to figure that out.” (Recording of Saturday Workshop 18/3/2002:13)

After the meeting and this exchange Mathilde and Marlene pursued negotiations directly with the Women’s Club about where and when the Arts and Crafts Exchange Activity might take place.

The following Wednesday when I come to make more participant observations of tutoring I talk to Yasmeen. As there is no danger of confrontation with Mathilde and Marlene Yasmeen fumes about the lack of cultural tolerance displayed by them. Extract of field notes:

“Yasmeen explained that when they (the Women's Club) started they were offered to use the local community hall... with chairs, kitchen and windows. But they did not want that. They preferred the basement. Yasmeen feels it is an expression of lack of respect to insist on moving them. ( I don't think she went this far in her arguments with Marlene and Mathilde on Saturday). Yasmeen said: “We are here for their sake and not for our own. Then it is no good to move them just because we cannot handle that there is noise and that they have their children with them. They can't just leave them at home.” (Field notes Block D Wednesday, 20/3/2002:2).

Interestingly when I interview Mathilde and Marlene two weeks after the Saturday Workshop (30/3/2002) this is the conversation. It seems that the negotiation with Yasmeen and Sharmeen on the Saturday Workshop has had an effect:

Marlene and Mathilde: "... I sensed this the first time I came down to tutor right? Where there is loads of stuff going on at the same time."

"- But that is their culture!"

"- Yes, that is the thing."

"- You do not sit in a room quietly. But they chatter across."(Interview med Marlene and Mathilde:4).

Here it seems that they have learnt their lesson: Accepting Noise is a virtue a volunteer should possess. Trying to influence the level of Noise is contemplated and rejected. They create an explicit division between volunteers and their culture and the foreigners and their (uniform) culture.

This sensemaking process does not effect tuition and the level of "Noise". It remains unaffected, and their places are taken by others and the criticism does not spread around the organisation: So it does not challenge the legitimacy of the organisation.

Sharmeen changes her stance on the integration and Noise reduction link at the individual interview – where she produces a self-narration obliterating ethnic differences – She argues that Noise is not linked to culture or ethnic difference but the age of the children. At the meeting with Mathilde and Marlene, however, she argues that it is "their culture" to have young children with them – when they are doing – adult things - and hence there will be Noise. So the ethnic difference is placed in the actions of the parents not the children. The children are just being children.

Mathilde and Marlene transform the way they express themselves about the Noise; from describing it as annoying and counterproductive, as lack of respect for them as volunteers, as a symptom of bad organisation, to expressing that you have to put up with the Noise because it is part of "their" culture. This transformation takes place after discussions at a meeting with Yasmeen and her sister Sharmeen.



Marlene and Mathilde have difficulties talking about Noise. They draw on a Volunteer frame implying that they should be treated with respect by the children – and that the organisation should protect them from Noise. They also at other points draw on the integration frame where Noise is to be accepted, and they activate the school logic where Noise is a problem that needs to be confronted in order to optimise learning. Their special solution to these dilemmas is to remove themselves from arenas where they are confronted with the version of the Integration frame which Sharmeen and Yasmeen formulate. They do this by withdrawing from the interaction with the children. Since the integration frame actualised by Sharmeen and Yasmeen requires them to tolerate Noise. Mathilde and Marlene also remove themselves from the arenas of sensemaking provided by the meetings in the Network Group. They do this by setting up an independent but affiliated unit. This means that the Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange holds its own meetings. They go on to recruit volunteers from their own circle of friends who partly hold the same educational background thus achieving a larger homogeneity the discourse produced. This is a process of structural fragmentation (analysed in the Having Meetings case on page 243). It generates loose rather than tight couplings between the Arts-and-Crafts-Exchange and the rest of the Network Group.

This strategy of creating a loosely coupled system is conducive to reproducing action associated with conflicting frames without increasing the level of conflict in the organisation.

### **6.4.1 Conclusion.**

The variety of frames actualised about tuition undertaken by Mathilde and Marlene on the one hand and Sharmeen and Yasmeen on the other is handled through a number of mechanisms:

- There are initial negotiations where Sharmeen (and Yasmeen) act as sensegiver. Within the integration frame they are unchallengeable as they sometimes enact representing the righteous minority to be integrated.
- The meaning negotiated at meetings with confrontations is ambiguous. Disagreements are left unsettled. Multiple meanings are reproduced.

- Processes of loose coupling ensue: Mathilde and Marlene withdraw from tuition of the children and start another activity. That means they create a new arena for both the integration activity and for Having Meetings. They loosely couple themselves to the rest of the group and are encouraged to do so. The loose coupling means that conflicting meanings attached to tuition do not have to be confronted.

## 6.5 Self, Meetings, and Noise

If we expected “the organisation” to engage in rational decision making processes (as introduced on page 84) and we expected the decisions related to problems of “the organisation” to take place at meetings then we would expect this scenario as regards Noise:

- That Noise would be identified as an objective problem.
- That a range of alternative solutions would be identified and considered at a meeting.
- That a solution would be selected.
- That the solution would be implemented in “the organisation”.

But in this case the scenario is different. Before I analyse interaction at meetings regarding Noise I will analyse how the problem of Noise and how to find a solution for it is constructed at the individual interviews. Do the tutors expect Noise to be solved at meetings? Are those who consider Noise to be a problem solely concerned with improving the level of Noise or are they also trying to enhance their self image?

### 6.5.1 Klaus, Meetings, and Noise

Klaus outlines two ways in which Noise can be treated at meetings:

- as subject to sharing or
- decision making

Klaus, a volunteer in Block G, sees Noise as something that could legitimately be identified as a problem and solved by the organisation. But he feels no need to do so.

Klaus enacts a division of the volunteers and the activity based on Days when it comes to the relevance of sharing. He does this by emphasising that they operate in

a different environment; because the children are more or less tired/hyperactive after the weekend. So there is no point in sharing experiences with Noise across the whole organisation.

That division of the volunteers into Days and the division of the challenges they meet means to Klaus that there is no point in sharing – they will not be able to recognise their own experiences in the experiences of others. He expands the argument by saying that he even experiences the level of Noise as different to volunteers who come on the same Day as him, so there is no point at all in going to meetings to “share”.

There is another reason why Klaus feels that articulated sharing (at meetings) is unimportant: He explains that for a while it seemed pointless to go to meetings where people just talked about how they experienced tuition, but didn't make any decisions. “Chat meetings” he calls them. Although he enacts that tuition across Days is sufficiently alike to have decision made across Days.

I have just asked Klaus about meetings:

”- Well, my threshold in relation to noise and stuff it is different to others'. I don't mind that they run around and play in the background. Whereas others they want them to be completely quiet. I've always been like that – what about – It was no use to me, and we didn't reach any decisions. After that I took a break, where “Arh, I can't be bothered with these meeting any longer”.”(Interview with Klaus:6).

The distinction between “sharing meetings” and “decision meetings” allows Klaus to justify why he chose to stop going to meetings at a point in time (when they were just “sharing meetings”) and to justify why he resumed going to meetings when Sharmeen became the contact person (he says the meetings became “decision meetings”).

### Summary

By treating meetings as an irrelevant context for “sharing” sensemaking about Noise Klaus negotiates an action implication which contributes to the reproduction of organised action in relation to Noise which is that he himself deals with it on a day-to-day basis in tuition.

## 6.5.2 Signe, Meetings, and Noise

We saw above, how one of the volunteers Signe preferred to play with the children but felt that Noise pushed her in direction of playing-at-being an adult. What we could call the narrative of “who I am” framed and shaped the position she took regards Noise. That seems to be a more general phenomenon. We also saw how Yasmeen and Sharmeen and Klaus made certain features of their background the context in which they made sense about their own position in relation to Noise.

In the case of Signe it is very obvious. One reason for this is that she takes a slightly unique position in relation to the children compared to that of other volunteers. It is a position of consciously playing with the children, rather than tutoring them. She also emphasises that she is *acting* the adult –thereby she distances herself from an adult identity, which she equates with being responsible and reliable rather than pursuing pleasure. It is the children who through their interaction with her call forth this adult behaviour.

The fact that the position is different to that of the other volunteers makes it stand out. The way that she acts differently with the children can also be identified in her account of “who I am”:

Signe not only stands out because her story of “who I am” is different to the other volunteers, but also because it is so coherent. It seems to be a well rehearsed story. It flows as it has been told many times. There is a basic figure of Signe being a person that does not conform – is different to others. Through out the interview she portrays herself as someone who wants to play who is always motivated by her own desire but also someone who tends to be a “loner”, as a basic premise in her life. Right from when she talks about Signe in primary school till a Signe in the future.

She loves to draw, and play music and make pictures. That is how she makes her living. As she says it allows her to stay true to what gives her pleasure. She will not commit to a profession. But she is firmly committed to staying a person who pursues her desire, her pleasure.

The other volunteers do not create such a consistent leading subjects in their narratives of “who I am”. They occupy a larger variety of subject positions along various dimensions in the stories they tell during individual interviews.

What happens when Signe goes to meetings? We have an example of it from the Coordinators' Meeting 15/4/2002:

Signe.: "... I am very active when I am there on Fridays. But not with homework."

Silence...

No...

The others initiate changing the subject by talking about that the holidays are quiet too.. (Recording of Coordinator meeting 15/4/2002).

Signe asserts something she does which is unconventional "*I am very active when I am there on Fridays. But not with homework.*" It is ignored. It is not recognisable to the extent of being addressed or considered in a wider context by the other participants in the meeting. She is not confronted, but left hanging. The participants in the meeting produce ambiguity. There is no affirmation of "how we do things in this organisation". Just hinting at that we do not do like this. But we do not confront it either.

### Summary

Signe negotiates an acknowledgement of her being different but not to the point of being excluded. This gives her an action implication of continuing to play rather than tutor. as regards Noise. She like Klaus embraces the action implication that tutors should deal with it on an individual basis. In her case by playing-at-being-an-adult.

## **6.5.3 Sharmeen, Meetings, and Noise**

Sharmeen: "*They ended up discussing things like noise – everyday life for the tutors – rather than the items on the agenda*". (Interview with Sharmeen:14).

This indicates two things. First Sharmeen like Klaus perceives that many tutors who come to meetings see meetings as an appropriate arena for sharing talk about a problem they encounter – Noise during tuition.

The other indication of Sharmeens statement about meetings is that she does not regard Noise as an issue which belongs on the agenda. She tends to regard Noise as a given a condition the tutors will have to live with, because the causes of it can not be changed (the family frame indicating that children will be children).

Sharmeen rejects using meetings as an arena for articulating and ironing out the Noise problem. I think part of her reason for this is that she does not wish to participate in the shared articulation of “integration strategies”. She acts to produce a largely unspoken and ambiguous integration discourse.

Extracts from the individual interview with Sharmeen:

Me: “Yes, how DO you feel about integration?”

Sharmeen: “Ah – I am a bit tired of the talk of it – VERY fed up with it really. I have heard the talk of it since I was born with black hair...since my childhood I have experienced it like this: “OK; you are dark. Could you please defend and explain all the idiots who are born dark here in Denmark?” Right?...People kind of demand that I have an opinion about - when the boys on Nørrebro have been throwing stones...I feel the same about it as I do about Brian who has robbed a bank. I don't demand that – it is a strange situation to put people in – that they have to defend some people they have never met.” (Interview with Sharmeen:21).

Sharmeen is thoroughly fed up with the process of marginalisation and being made different which is hard to avoid in formulations about integration. In the quote above she resists being grouped with stone throwers on Nørrebro much as she reckons the rest of Denmark would resist being grouped with Danish criminals.

### Summary

Through this sensemaking Sharmeen creates the action implication regarding Noise that she does not have to take it on as leader of the organisation. She can facilitate that the other tutors learn to live with it.

## **6.5.4 Conclusion**

Klaus and Sharmeen represent two examples of personal reasoning around Noise which goes against discussing it at meetings. Signe uses the self actualisation as being different which interaction at meetings offers at the same time as joining in in the discussion of Noise as a problem with other other tutors.

Noise is rarely enacted as an issue for decision making at meetings – more an occasion for mutual support and voicing, or rather there is a negotiation – some tutors – may come to meetings to raise the issue – and have it dealt with – by coming to a collective decision about what to do and then setting organisational action into motion.

It is foiled by Sharmeen because she does not take it on as a leader – also she argues that it is not possible nor appropriate to change the underlying causes of Noise. She acts as a sensegiver as regards Noise by contributing to diffusing and fragmenting the discussions of it.

By not sharing sense about Noise at meetings and across the organisation in general it is possible for the tutors to make sense of Noise drawing on a wide range of frames. Sensemaking about Noise is as much sensemaking about themselves which seems to tie in with the way they tell the story-of-me in general.

## **6.6 Articulated Interaction at Meetings over Noise**

We have seen three examples of the sensemaking about self, meetings and Noise and their action implications. Now I will focus on interaction at meetings to look in more detail at the sensemaking processes about Noise unfolding there.

### **6.6.1 A Physical Artefact as the Solution to Noise**

Although tuition began in 2001 Noise does not appear on the agenda until in 2003. It is, however, mentioned in the minutes from the Coordinators' Meeting on the 15/4/2002:

From my field notes from the 15/4/2002 meeting: Jane presents the problem of Noise<sup>95</sup>. It is something she feel she has to “kick in”. Since it is not on the agenda.

Jane: “I would like to kick in another item.”

Jane: “Now, there are lots of small kiddies with us over in Block D and is very nice with the Women’s Club and all, but the small ones keep running into us, and we have gotten a role now where we are shouting all the time: “Could you please tell the little ones not to come in here because the big ones cannot concentrate”. They (the older children) sit and say the small ones are annoying, and I feel sorry for them because they have come down there to do their homework. And they need to sit in peace and we have to be able to help them. But you are completely squashed in the head after an hour because the little ones whip around the place and we have to sit and say “Hey Stop!” That is no fun.”

Jane identifies Noise as coming from the smaller children. Not the older ones.

Jane says that “*it is very nice with the Women's Club.. but...*”. This indicates that she knows that she is challenging the legitimacy of the Women's Club and that that is not quite OK. She indicates that the fact that the Women are there next door – with their small children – means that the small children run into tuition. This is a different explanation than the one reproduced in several interviews: That it is the bigger children who mind the smaller children and therefore there is Noise. The two cause chains are not contrasted.

Jane also says that it is too hard and unpleasant as a tutor to do the ongoing work of keeping the smaller children out or quiet. She suggests that “the organisation” finds another solution and enacts the meeting as the venue for this.

Enacting that the Noise comes from the smaller children who have been brought to the basement by their mothers in the Women's Club means that it becomes possible to find a solution in limiting access from one room to the next – since the mothers are assumed to be next door - well able to mind the smaller children.

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<sup>95</sup> This quote was used to identify the school frame on page 280.



The consultant Dorthe jumps in referring to the contracts drawn up between the parent groups and the DRC. :

Dorte: “You are not the ones who are supposed to do that!”(to tell the younger children to be quiet).

Jane: “No, we have said it so many times, and Suad tries to say it, but it is really the mothers. But I think if all we tutors consistently say :”There are to be no small ones here, homework is being done – end of story. They can be next door and come in afterwards.”

Jane does not question “how it is supposed to be” so she seems to share the meaning attributed to the formal agreement with the parent groups. However, she says, Suad who has signed on behalf of the Women's Club can not control the behaviour of the other women. By highlighting that the Women's Club is not a coherent unit, it becomes less meaningful as a course of action that the Network Group should act as a coherent unit and negotiate with the Women's Club.

Sharmeen: “Put up a notice all kids under this height are not allowed in.”

Line: “We had the same problem in Block G, and we made a rule of no small children, and that worked and the Father Group helped us, and then you stick to it. Then it is really annoying the first week when you have to be angry, but then it helps.”

Jane: “Because I know that people have become fed up with it down in Block D on Tuesdays.”

Dorte: “Make sure Suad is in on it. Because we have taken the good agreement from Block G over in the agreement with Suad that you should have the good conditions for tutoring. The intention was this fantastic idea of giving tuition, and it is important that it does not just become that it is a playroom in there.”

The consultant Dorthe again suggests that the formal contracts or referring to them should solve the problem through talks between two coherent groups. Dorthe also

communicates that what is supposed to take place is tuition not play. A negotiation which as far as I could see has to be taken on an ongoing basis with the children who to varying degrees challenge this.

General assent: “Yes”

Sharmeen: “You can almost make the sign now”

Jane: “I’ll just make it when I come home.”

“Have you seen those they have in Mac Donalds where it says the height you have to be”

Sharmeen: “Like in Tivoli.” Giggle giggle.

“Then one can go over and measure whether one is too small.” (Transcript of recording of meeting 15/4/2002).

Sharmeen brings forward the suggestion of the sign again. The giggles indicate that she doesn't quite see it as legitimate. Maybe she feels that it shouldn't be necessary. That Sharmeen suggests the erection of a physical indicator of appropriate behaviour means that she does not suggest that someone (herself) should tackle the problem by negotiating with the parent groups centrally – or by telling other tutors collectively how to tackle it as suggested initially by Jane.

Sharmeen suggests a solution which neither requires the Women's Club nor the Network Group to act as coherent units. This would be possible if the behaviour of the children could be ordered through a physical artefact.

Line indicates that the situation is different in Block G. Line enacts that there is a “we” who negotiated with a Father Group which then acted coherently in accordance with the agreement. Jane ignores this. It does not seem viable to her based on her experience of the situation in Block D.

That they settle on a wooden sign to solve the problem may also have been inspired by that they have just agreed to invest in a door. An element of garbage can process where things in wood are presented a type of solution.

Jane says she will take on the task of talking to Suad about putting up a sign and get it done. To my knowledge, however, the sign was never put up.

In the analysis of the constructions of Noise in the individual interviews on page 298 we saw that Sharmeen has made the sense that it is unavoidable and something to be accepted that the smaller children follow the bigger ones into tuition. But she does not bring this forward here. Sharmeen does not challenge the desire expressed by Jane of being less tolerant of Noise. In this way she does not initiate using meetings to contrast or to iron out differences in opinion. Conflicting views are allowed to stay decoupled and render the issue ambiguous. It also means that the cause chains illuminating which elements are related around Noise remain short. When cause chains are not contrasted actors are not encouraged to expand on their views and relate them to other issues.

The issue of Noise is not elaborated in longer cause chains. Here they stick to that the small children come in to disturb the bigger ones because they are next door with their mothers. So a simple mechanism to restrict the movement of children between the two room will solve the problem. Respect for “their” customs meaning that the bigger ones mind the smaller ones is not invoked as we have seen it in other contexts.

Sharmeen acts as sensegiver. She is the first to present the idea of the sign – which is agreed on. Dorthé does not act as sensegiver – her suggestion of insisting Suad solve the problem is not agreed on, neither is Lines model from Block G, nor Janes request for a response from “the organisation”.

But Sharmeen also acts as a sense-limiter by not putting forward the arguments she has voiced elsewhere.

### Summary

At this meeting we see they agree on the sense suggested by Jane that if the smaller children stayed with their mothers then there would be less Noise. Sharmeen suggests the creation of a physical artefact. Dorthé suggests negotiations based on the contracts. The participants at this meeting settle on the physical artefact – which is subsequently not put up. In this process they are led by Sharmeen. They enact “the organisation” as something which does not act as a negotiator towards the Women's Club to affect a change in behaviour. Nor is “the organisation” enacted as a unit in which “the management” can strategically change the attitudes and behaviour of members throughout the organisation.

The effect of the meeting on subsequent organised action: In the minutes from the meeting it says:

“It was decided that children under 1 metre do not have access to Block D while there is tuition to prevent smaller children in disturbing the older children. Who need to do their homework. A measuring device will be erected.”

Tutors who were not at the meeting - almost everyone since only 4 participated – got a cue about that Noise was seen as a problem from the minutes from the meeting. Provided they read them. But the sign was not put up and the level of Noise was unaffected.

## **6.6.2 Sensemaking over Time**

I will analyse one more meeting one month later on the 13/5/2002 to follow the sensemaking processes over time.

At the meeting those present happen to discuss whether the younger and older children should receive tuition at separate locations – this was the plan when the activity started to reduce the level of Noise.

Morten has some comments to a draft for a brochure made by Linda who also participates in the meeting. Linda is relatively new. Morten, Sharmeen, and Signe agree that there is no distinction between what age the children have in Block D and Block G. This is news to Linda.

Morten: “They (the leaflets) are very good. But it says that in Block D it is from grade 1 to 3 and in Block G it is from grade 4 and upwards. But there (in Block G) it is also from grade 1 to 10.”

Sharmeen: “That is false advertising!”

Morten: “Yes!”

Linda: “Well, I thought it was like that.”

Morten: “Well, it is in reality also from 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade isn't it?”

Sharmeen: “Yes.”

General murmur of consent around the table.

Signe: “Technically it is from 1<sup>st</sup> grade till Leaving Cert – only there are no leaving cert students who use it.”

One of the older women: “I thought the point was that there should be a...”

Sharmeen interrupts:” Well, the problem is that we have consistently gone in and said now we will separate it.” (Transcript of recorded meeting 13/5/2002).

Again murmurs of consent. In general the participants at this meeting enact that as an organisation they have for a while said one thing and done another as regards the distribution of children. The place where they “say” something has been in written material. Which has indicated that younger and older children were separated.

Sharmeen justifies a pragmatic approach where they give up changing the pattern of behaviour of the children. She again acts as sensegiver – along with Morten – in the face of the questions the older tutor is raising. The older tutor starts to suggest that they should try to change things so that they stick to their principles. That implies that they have stable shared principles and it implies that they are a sufficiently coherent group that it is worth it to agree on a course of action also to be implemented by those who did not participate in the meeting. Sharmeen interrupts the older tutor to explain why they should live with status quo.

Sharmeen: “Because first of all we could have a lot of bother with the Father Group.”

The Father Group is expected to be against splitting the children up based on age.

A general: “Yes”.

Sharmeen continues: “...and secondly we could have a lot of bother sticking to it, and that is why I think we may as well be honest towards those children

who come down there, and say it is those who ARE there. Rather than say it is only from 4<sup>th</sup> grade so you are not allowed in.”

Linda: “I didn't know. I have just started.” (Transcript of recorded meeting 13/5/2002).

Linda has only been working based on information she was given at the previous meeting. So interaction during tuition has not made it clear to her how the children were distributed.

Morten: ” That is OK.”

The older tutor reiterates her point of trying to stick to their initial principles:

Older tutor: “Should one not try and reinforce it from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade?”

Sharmeen slightly loses her temper: “They don't want that! You can't do that! You can't make them do that!”

Morten is supporting Sharmeen by making protesting sounds: “I think it would be a very bad idea because some of the younger siblings come along, and they would like to join in, and if some are excluded then they feel...”

Sharmeen: “We have had this discussion for a year almost!”

Signe: “It is often that the older siblings have been asked to mind the younger ones -”

Sharmeen and Morten: “Exactly!” (Transcript of recorded meeting 13/5/2002).

There is no mention of the sign which was discussed at the previous meeting. It indicates that there is limited actualisation of a continuity between meetings. Few people participate at every meeting.

In this exchange we see several things: The older tutor suggests that they enforce a changed pattern of behaviour on the children (and their parents). There seems to be a pattern whereby the older tutors are less afraid of complicating issues by giving more prominence to principles and general discussions. Whereas

Sharmeen supported by Morten does work to limit articulated sensemaking at meetings which contrasts conflicting logics in order to choose one over the other.

Sharmeen and Morten also try to avoid discussions which imply subsequent “difficult” action. Difficult in the way that it would require the context to be more straight forward – it would require that the tutors acted as a coherent communicating and sharing unit, and similarly for the parents.

Sharmeen, Morten, and Signe unfold a shared narrative (they have participated in a good few meetings together) about that the parents (the Father Group) do not want a change in the distribution of children. Signe also actualises the Integration framing by arguing that the tutors need to accept that the older children are expected to mind their younger siblings. It seems to me that if they went all the way in accepting this framing of the situation then a possibility to reach their goal of helping the older children do their homework would be to allocate some resources to babysit their younger siblings. However, we saw above, that tutors drawing on the School frame regarded that kind of activity as inappropriate. They reject allowing the organisation of the children's families (which presumably means that the older children mind the younger ones) structure their work. But instead insist that the children act as independent agents during tuition – as in school.

The analysis of this meeting (13/5/2002) illustrates how the production of ambiguity underpins reproduction of tuition. By continuing to both voice frustrations over Noise and by continuing to protect the children and parent groups from being asked to change behaviour organised action is reproduced. However, tutors may become so frustrated that they leave, but new tutors are easy to recruit. “The organisation” avoids antagonising the parents and children by demanding that they act differently, and so they too continue to participate and the requirements for the reproduction of organised action survive. There is, however, the danger that the older children will get too little out of tuition due to the level of Noise.

The reproduction of ambiguity is challenged when they have to formulate a written artefact and commit as a group to words. They continuously do work to limit the length of cause chains and the formulation of general principles in connection with it.

The analysis also shows that there is limited memory from meeting to meeting. No one mentions the wooden sign.

### **6.6.3 Conclusion**

To conclude the analysis of interaction across meetings: At the meetings Sharmeen acts as a sensegiver in the sense that she actively limits the shared meaning which is articulated. She acts to keep the cause chains regarding Noise short, and to leave conflicting views open and thus leave the shared sense negotiated ambiguous.

The inherently contradictory Integration discourse<sup>96</sup> is kept unspoken as much as possible.

When they do agree on action related to Noise it is not action which requires “the organisation” to act as one – it is a once of ad hoc action of creating a physical artefact (a wooden sign) which could contribute to controlling Noise. Meaning produced at one meeting is not reproduced at the next so shared sensemaking is limited not just in terms of its spread between a number of people but also over time.

So the meetings do not produce shared meaning about Noise. The meetings produce ambiguous meaning. Multiple frames for making sense of Noise co-exist. According to Smircich & Morgan (1982) and Smircich & Stubbart (1985) this should undermine the possibility for sustaining organised action. This does not seem to be the case. So which mechanisms support the reproduction of organised action? How do the tutors act and make sense on a day-to-day basis when they feel they are challenged by Noise when they only have limited shared sense to draw on?

## **6.7 Dealing with Noise on a Day-to-Day Basis**

I went out and made observations like the ones below on many occasions over the 6 months I generated the empirical data. This first day turned out to be typical of subsequent days but it has the added benefit of sharp first impressions. So that is the one I have included. Although I had not intended to I ended up acting as a

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<sup>96</sup> The integration discourse as it is produced in this case: “I will help you to become the same as me, but in articulating this I reproduce you as different.”



*participating* observer<sup>97</sup> and give tuition. As you will see the children were very persuasive.

“Tuition takes place down in the basement of the housing estate Vestplanen. The estate is pulled back from the road; it turns its back to the street and faces inwards towards the court yards in the middle. The housing estate is modern and quite cheerful looking. It houses several hundred tenants. A very large percentage of the tenants are immigrants or so I have heard in the media – from which countries I am not yet sure. I pass through the front gate and walk through the first yard with my bike to get to the entrance at Block D. The contact person, Sharmeen has given me detailed directions. Most of the women in the yard wear head scarves I feel aware that it must be very obvious that I do not live there. I park my bike and find a line of buzzers. The door is locked. The bottom buzzer is unlabeled – I press it and garble something about “tuition”. I am buzzed in, by whom I am not sure.

The walls of the room are bare and greyish/green. There are no windows in this part of the basement. Lot’s of well used tables and chairs are stuffed into the room. There are 15 seats. There is a cupboard in the corner which can be locked.

Adjacent there is a small kitchen which is shared with the Women’s Club based in the next room. The doors are open. There is a woman – Suad – who is the Middle Eastern chairman of the Women’s Club. Suad pops in a couple of times. She offers Arabic coffee, sweet and strong, to the volunteers. She brings in children or comes in to hush them. She is calm and tired, but firm.

When I arrive the room is empty apart from the volunteer Yasmeen and three children – she is helping them. She greets me. She has heard from her sister, Sharmeen, that I was coming.

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97 More reflections about this in chapter three about methodology.

A boy asks me if I am a teacher. I am confused, and say “no” initially thinking that is not my profession. But he insists. He keeps asking “are you a teacher” and I realise I gave the wrong answer. I ask Sharmeen if it is OK that I help out – she says yes. Then I turn to the boy and say “yes, I am a teacher”, and he pulls me over to a chair by an empty table and points to his book. It is a Danish reading book, and he tells me he needs to read out chapter four. Spelling is difficult for him, and understanding what the sentences mean is also difficult. He hides it as well as he can.”

Through this interaction the children organise the tutors. The children point out who to be – a teacher – what to do – sit down and work with the book – and what to read. The organising effect of the children was never mentioned by the tutors, and it was not articulated at meetings. So it remained invisible that the children – in spite of generating what was felt to be disruptive Noise – also stabilised and facilitated tutoring by acting as pupils and guiding the tutors. There are several factors which mean that I had no doubt about how to act. The little boy, his book, the table, and chair indicate to me: sit here, read this. I also drew on my institutionalised experiences with schools to make sense of which actions might be required of me as a teacher.

“Then Lone another volunteer arrives. She doesn’t greet anybody but sits down immediately and the children come to her. After half an hour a third female volunteer arrives. She sits down at the same table as Yasmeen and they speak briefly. Yasmeen exchanges a few words with Suad from the Women’s Club. Otherwise all attention is on the children. The children who are not getting tuition form small informal queues or squabble over whose turn it is to get help.”

There is limited articulated sharing between the tutors. The children draw the tutors attention – and they create sound barriers for talk between tutors. Tutors seem to have gotten used to not talking to each other. This is echoed in the individual interviews too. On most Days there is limited shared articulated interaction amongst tutors.

Why do the tutors not speak to each other? It might reveal for the children that they were in doubt about what to do – this is instinctively not a position you want to put yourself in when you are trying to control another being. Also as explained before the Noise makes it difficult to hear each other.

“At the busiest time there are around 14 children almost more than there are chairs. It is difficult to count the children as they drift in and out. They come in all ages up to around 10 years – the youngest are toddlers wandering around sucking their dummies. Also children without books hang out and chat with the volunteers and the children who are trying to do their homework. I feel there is a lot of noise.

I am unsure of how to deal with the children who have finished their homework. They are very disruptive with the other children. Chatting with them, teasing them and telling them to hurry up. I glance over at Yasmeen and take a cue from her. She asks the children to leave once they have finished their homework. So I feel justified in doing the same.”

As you can see the co-tutors but not really talk to them during tuition mimicking is a way of making sense of how to act.

“As the children leave there is more time for the volunteers to exchange a few words. The tutors speak briefly about the children and technical things to do with tuition. They tell me the story about the little boy who seemed such a good reader until it became apparent that he had memorised the first 10 pages of the book, and the story about the little girl who appeared to be catastrophically behind with her homework until it materialised that she was still in kindergarten and the rumour is that her father tells her to do her older brother’s homework.”

So there is some sharing between the tutors and they do have some shared stories which are repeated across Days in one location. They make sense of the interaction with the children seen from the point of view of an individual tutor – not the

organisation. Since there is no talk of agency exercised by “the organisation”. There is no talk of centralised registration of the children – or a joint response to any challenges.

“A few more children drift in and are helped. The volunteers do not say goodbye to one another as they leave. Suad from the Women’s Club comes and locks the doors. The children who continue to play in the hall in the basement helps me to find the way through the maze of basement doors back up to the court yard.”

The lack of goodbyes is likely to be related to the limited articulated sharing between the tutors. Some of them do not actualise each other as co-workers.

The limited amount of sharing between tutors and the perceived level of Noise formed a sufficiently strong downside to tuition to make one tutor leave the organisation after only two sessions. She described the first day of tutoring at Block D like this:

“I felt it was very unstructured. Yasmeen collected me (at the station) and then we walked down there, and then I could just start and there were screaming kids all over the place – running around and playing. Again there was no... there was no peace and quiet around the children who were trying to do their homework... I wasn’t introduced to any of the other volunteers. I didn’t get any printed welcome material. It was more like – OK, you can start today.

And then it was up to me to find someone to tutor, and it was a bit difficult to find someone to tutor because they would rather run around and play... It was my impression that the other volunteers didn’t know each other either. But that you just showed up, sat down at a table and if you were lucky someone would come over and do their homework with you. But much of the time you just sat there without helping anybody because... well, there was this atmosphere of play – then they don’t want to do their homework – it became a bit chaotic” (Translated quote from interview with Lise:9).”

The quote sums up some general frustrations expressed by various tutors. However, there is one aspect of this representation which is unusual. That is that there was an unusually high number of tutors to children on this particular evening because they introduced new tutors. That meant that there were not enough children to go around and the two new tutors felt that their participation was pointless. The general impression from other tutors who have participated several times is that there are always children looking for help.

The pattern of not greeting and saying goodbye to other tutors reflects that they feel more anchored in the interaction with the children and in the interaction it represents for them with society in general. The individual interviews indicate that they perform being part of society in a grander effort of “Integration” more so than they perform being part of a group of co-tutors<sup>98</sup>. Some of them narrate tuition as a way for them to perform being part of - the local community (where they often live in apartments with time limited leases and expect to leave when they finish studying), a country, a world which faces a challenge in integration. None of them actualise the DRC as a frame for their activities and only a few feel anchored in the Network Group. This is both a result of and a contributing factor to that sensemaking generated in the organisation does not to a great extent organise their actions.

They do not enact each other (tutors on the same Day) as their main anchor-point. They do not know each others names. This means that /reflects that they do not actualise each other as co-actors when confronted with an issue like Noise. The actualisation of each other as co-actors when forming intentions for how to act would be regarded as essential by Kutz (2000) when he emphasises shared intentions as prerequisite for joint action. But according to this thesis' definition of organised action<sup>99</sup> both tuition in the face of Noise and Having Meetings are organised action since they are performed regularly, the tutors are dependent on each other and they aim to contribute to the survival of the same formal organisation.

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98 This is based on a longer analysis of the social arenas that the tutors feel anchored in in relation to the activity. Inspired by the analysis made by Bellah et al (1985). The analysis is not included here since this case is focussed specifically on sensemaking in relation to the issue of Noise.

99 See the definition of the reproduction of organised action on page 80.

This means that many tutors (who-do-not-go-to-meetings) handle the Noise issue drawing on institutionalised expectations generated across time and space, their own identity work, initially formulated ideas within the organisation (the roles of the parents in reducing Noise) the interaction with the children, the physical artefacts, and mimicking other tutors.

### **6.7.1 Conclusion**

The interaction with the children both provides one of the main stabilising force and the biggest challenges to the reproduction of tuition. The children both guide the tutors through a stable pattern of interaction, and they challenge the expected pattern when they make what the tutors label as Noise.

The tutors make sense of how to act by mimicking each other. They have visual contact. In some cases they choose not to mimic but to differentiate.

Most tutors do not share talk with the other tutors. This means that when making sense of tuition they draw on a variety of frames without confronting each other. The tutors can thus make sense of participating by enacting a variety of anchoring points; the local community, the country, a specific neighborhood etc.

Because of the limited amount of shared talk some tutors experience a lack of meaning. This creates frustrations, a relatively high turn over of tutors, but also flexibility and a sense of freedom.

The tutors' actions are stabilised as they draw on institutionalised meaning generated in arenas outside of the formal organisation. Their own school, the media etc.

The tutors share some stories. However, those are stories about single children and tutors, not groups – such as “the organisation”.

## **6.8 When the Tutors Do not Share Words**

### **What Do They Share?**

What passes between the tutors is not words it is cues about the actions of their co-actors. They can see what the others do and the other can see them but not necessarily hear each other. Action is reproduced because they tend to interpret the

actions of others as confirming their own actions, and they do not exchange enough words to have this perception challenged. However, many of them are also confused and frustrated, and feel that they are not providing the best tuition they could in terms of the school frame.

### **6.8.1 The Degree of Mutual Dependency**

The tutors are mutually dependent on each other to the extent that their way of interacting with the children affects the level of Noise which may or may not disturb co-tutors. To some extent the actions of one tutor in the interaction with the children affects the interaction between other children and tutors through mimicry. However, Signe does change interaction from tuition towards play – and thereby potentially the expectations the children hold of interaction. But this does not seem to affect the interaction the same children expect with other tutors. The children can differentiate between what they expect from each tutor. This reduces the mutual dependency between tutors, since the action of one does not necessarily affect the type of interaction the children expect from other tutors. The children are also stabilised in their school and in the interaction with their friends and siblings.

### **6.8.2 The Effect on Organised Action**

So, although most tutors have not sat down and made a strategy together – and agreed on how to make sense of the Noise of the children – or even whether there *is* Noise – they are each able to make enough sense of tuition in spite of perceived Noise to continue tutoring, or rather the organisation as a whole is able to continue to provide enough new tutors to replace the ones who *do* leave – often because of Noise. Each tutor engages in a sensemaking process which affects their participation in organised work in a manner which is social – but mostly unarticulated.

## **6.9 Overall Conclusion about Noise**

The organisation is loosely coupled. Tuition is only loosely coupled to meetings since there is little communication from meetings to the Days. Meetings are loosely coupled to each other – since there is rarely an actualisation of what has been discussed at previous meetings. The tutors are loosely coupled to each other being both mutually dependent but also not sharing talk with each other. These loose couplings both undermine and help reproduce the organised action of tuition.

### **6.9.1 Limitations to the Case**

The mechanisms in this case will not be constructive in all organisations. The activities of this organisation can reasonably be considered pretty simple and legitimate even if they are not innovated and developed. Helping children in primary school with their homework is something which takes place in a million homes across the country without the parents feeling faced with requirements for innovating their skills. However, it is entirely possible to construct a narrative of how important it is to develop sophisticated tools for tutoring, and that may be the case in other organisations tutoring immigrant children. If that were felt to be the case then the lack of shared sensemaking would undermine the reproduction of organised action.

One of the effects of that the tutors do not share talk about their organised activity is that they are not innovative – changes and developments which occur in one place are not communicated to the rest of the tutors. The tutors do not develop and upgrade their skills at tutoring by drawing on each other. Because they do not communicate much they can not act pro actively in a coordinated manner. Sharmeen mentions how she would like to target the children with many difficulties and who are difficult to reach, but that she does not have the ability to do so because of lack of communication between Days and tutors. The core activity, tutoring, of the organisation is also special because there are widely institutionalised frames related to it (integration and school work). These are produced in the media and through past institutionalised experiences in school amongst the tutors.



The formulation of these limitations to the case are based on insights about which other mechanisms come into play when shared talk is minimal. To discover these alternative mechanisms have been the aim of the thesis. That has the side effect that I have not highlighted all the failings of the way things work in this organisation. Many tutors are demotivated and frustrated. The quality of tutoring lies outside the scope of this analysis. The organisation does not act strategically as one unit. In terms of having control over the organisation – i.e. being able to prevail on it to do something differently it would not be possible with the present<sup>100</sup> level of talk. However, individuals may act strategically and enact that they are doing it on behalf of “the organisation” in their dealings internally and with external stakeholders. Should any actors feel the desire to do so they could probably dictate a great deal before anyone else discovered it or felt called upon to react to it.

So a Minimal Organisation is not a recipe for success regardless of circumstances. But the analysis of it is an attempt to give a fuller picture of the relation between shared sensemaking and organised action covering the hitherto blind angle of what happens when articulated shared sensemaking is limited.

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<sup>100</sup>At the time of data-creation in 2002.

# 7 Cross-Case Analysis

Chapter two introduced a range of theoretical models of how sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action. I have analysed a case of sensemaking processes related to the organised action of Having Meetings in chapter four. Lastly, in chapter five, I have analysed how the organised act of tutoring is reproduced in the face of a challenge like Noise with only minimal shared sensemaking. I have thus examined an extreme case<sup>101</sup> of limited shared sensemaking in order to shed more light on existing theory. It is that last move I intend to undertake now; to use the two cases to inform both a cross-case discussion and a review of sensemaking theories in the light of my findings.

## 7.1 Revisiting the Research Question

So far sensemaking theory has emphasised shared sensemaking processes and their relation to organised action. Understandings of how sensemaking processes, with only limited sharing, can, in some cases, underpin the reproduction of organised action have not existed until now. Cases of limited shared sensemaking have been under-explored with the result that we have little insight into which mechanisms might enable the reproduction of organised action even when – or perhaps because – articulated interaction is sparse.

This research question is pertinent because it addresses a grey area of sensemaking theory. The research question is, however, even more central because there are indications that late modernity will be characterised by frequent changes of employment and social relations, accompanied by a quest for identity formation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). My interpretation is that it could mean that the way individuals and formal organisations are bound together changes character. It could mean shorter spans of participation and higher emphasis on making sense of one's self along with the organised activity one is contributing to.

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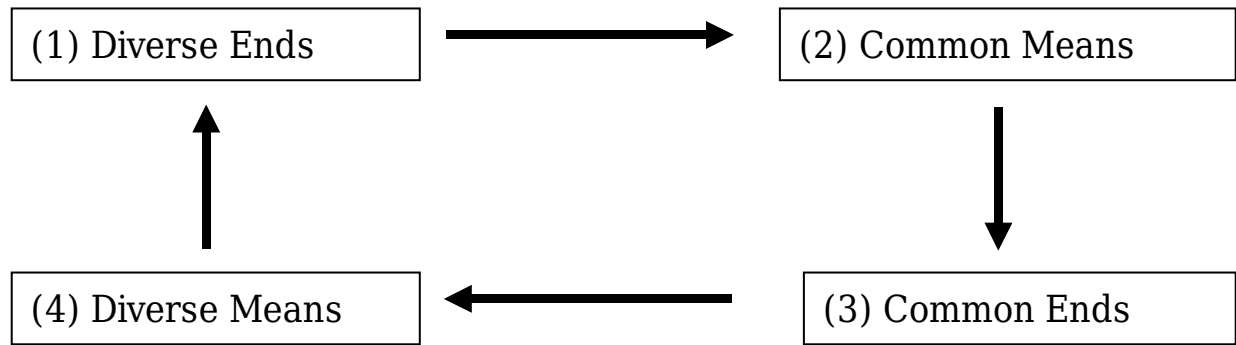
<sup>101</sup>Extreme case as defined by Flyvbjerg, 2004.

In the voluntary sector in Denmark this tendency to a new approach to organisational life meets a long tradition for emphasising a sharing democratic process of decision making and for joint ownership, within voluntary organisations. In the analysis I used the term Traditional Association to represent this model of relations between individual and formal organisation. There have for several years been concerns voiced across the country about how to fill the seats of the boards of the associations, how to get more members, and how to get these members to come to meetings (Goul Andersen et al, 2000; Hermansen & Stavnsager, 2000; Stavnsager & Jantzen, 2000; Christensen & Isen, 2001; Børch & Israelsen 2001; Wollebæk & Selle 2002; Nielsen et al 2004;). Similar concerns are expressed about the USA most notably Putnam (1990) by in “Bowling Alone”. At the same time Danish surveys have shown that more and more people – including the younger generations – partake in voluntary work (Haberman, 2000; Goul Andersen, 2004).

The question then becomes: Whether it is possible to harness this flood of voluntary hands in organised action without requiring their many owners to invest in shared sensemaking processes. Are there mechanisms which can supplant articulated interaction within the formal organisation? I went out and found an organisation in which this was already taking place – there was limited articulated sharing and yet organised action was reproduced. How was this possible? When this curiosity is shaped within sensemaking theory it becomes:

*How do the sensemaking processes involving limited articulated interaction relate to the reproduction of organised action in this organisation?*

Before I sum up and analyse the answers generated in the two cases I will return to an earlier way of conceptualising sensemaking and organised action. This was most influentially presented in the initial writings by Weick in 1979. Figure 9 below is an illustration of the model for group development which Weick, inspired by Allport (1962), proposed in 1979. He claimed that groups develop through cycles of Divergence and Convergence:



**Figure 9:** The Divergence-Convergence Model (Weick, 1969/79:91).

Weick argued that (1) actors have diverse ends initially: They have a multitude of goals. As they meet around partaking in (2) common means: Whichever instrumental action they are required to undertake as members of the organisation. Then they (possibly) develop (3) collective ends: Shared organisational goals. Before as a final twist developing (4) diverse means as specialisation and division of labour within the group develops which then can lead to a diversification of ends (1) as loyalties shift to specialised sub units.

Later, in 1995, Weick develops his conceptualisation of processes of organising by drawing on Wiley's (1988) classification of subjectivities. Weick then argues that a process of organising takes place when actors bridge inter-subjectivity to generic subjectivity, but the underlying premise or expectation to group development remains the same: That the process is likely to start with being driven by shared actions (participants meet over shared means) guided by generic subjectivity whereupon organising takes place through interactive communication where actors bridge intersubjectivity with regenerated generic subjectivity and there is a convergence on shared ends.

So even though Weick states it is possible that actors acting together will not develop shared meaning, he does not explore this further. He argues that most organisations *will* develop shared meaning when actors act together. However, in my case organisation this does not seem to be the case.

My two cases indicate that the actors in this formal organisation are staying statically in the Divergence- Convergence circle, they are not moving towards common ends.

- They continue to act informed by diverse meaning
- Only a handful of them move towards shared meaning.

If we compare this way of conceptualising processes of organising with the two cases we can see that due to lack of articulated interaction and because each actor did not seek out shared talk (Minimal Organisational structure is both a cause and a result of limited articulated interaction) there is not a basis for renegotiating local generic subjectivity. So ends remain diverse within the formal organisation: For example paraphrasing Marie: I act here to become part of an otherwise inaccessible local community; or paraphrasing Sharmeen: I am here because I want to make a better future (through helping the children).

In this organisation the lack of communication and the pattern of ambiguous communication means that there is a weak generation of generic subjectivity – or weak organising sensemaking within the formal organisation.

The two key concepts were defined at the start of the thesis and have guided both the discussions of theory and the empirical analysis all the way through. But I will restate them here so that it becomes clearer what the conclusions indicate.

“Sensemaking processes” are ongoing, retrospective, enactive, social, cue-driven, plausibility-generating processes of creating meaning which are grounded in identity-formation. Shared sensemaking processes are processes where actors have generated this meaning through articulated interaction (talking or writing) with each other.

“Organised action” are stabilising patterned activities which contribute to the survival of the formal organisation in which the organised action takes place, and in which the actors are mutually dependent on each other.

## 7.2 Conclusions from Chapter 5: The Having Meetings Case

The first case identified a number of mechanisms which affect the reproduction of Having Meetings in this organisation. They point to a more complex picture of how organised action can be reproduced than just through shared sensemaking.

The first stabilising factor, however, in the reproduction of Having Meetings was an example of shared sensemaking. The Initial Introductory Meeting remains a source of shared meaning which some actors draw on when they contribute to the reproduction of Having Meetings.

The reproduction of the organised activity of Having Meetings is dependent on that the actors feel that the way they are Having Meetings is legitimate (otherwise they would start acting differently). So the way Meetings are enacted affects the reproduction of Having Meetings. Whoever turns up at meetings are hailed to do sensemaking work to reproduce meetings as meaningful and legitimate in spite of the low number of participants. The participants at meetings do this by drawing on their local model for Having Meetings; the Minimal Organisation which is challenged by the institutionalised model; The Traditional Association. Rendering the actions of their (inactive) co-actors sensible is an essential part of this sensemaking process.

The enactment of a House Hosts System that implies that all House Hosts should attend meetings clashes with the actual pattern of low-attendance meetings thereby challenging the legitimacy of the present pattern of action. However, by continuing to actualise the elusive House Host Day participants at meetings are able to reproduce a feeling of being able to address the problem. This enables them to avoid challenging the way they are Having Meetings.

That actors seek out meetings as the relevant arena for interacting with the "organisation". This contributes to stabilise the way they are Having Meetings by increasing the number of participants at each meeting.

Sensemaking at meetings is open-ended and ambiguous. This is one of the reasons why meaning doesn't travel in the organisation. The type of sense made at meetings thus contribute to reproducing the organised action of Having Meetings as minimal and decoupled from tuition. It means that conflicting views are rarely

confrontationally contrasted. The low level of confrontation preserves motivation and it limits energy drain.

This lack of confrontation and deemphasis on meetings as an arena significant for decision making about tuition is further strengthened by the enactment of plentiful resources.

Structural fragmentation where new activities create loosely coupled organisational units similarly enhances the possibilities for reducing confrontations between divergent views and demands.

I argued that a significant source of sensemaking about Having Meetings came from processes of the tutors taking themselves up in various roles in connection with Having Meetings. That identity formation was an important mechanism underlying the reproduction of organised action of Having Meetings. The tutors enact two complementary roles in connection with Having Meetings. They do not share articulated sensemaking about this but rather engage in sensemaking processes drawing on institutionalised scripts and their own ongoing identity formation whilst making sense of cues they take to indicate the intent of their co-actors. The lack of articulated face to face interaction seem to facilitate this process.

## **7.3 Conclusions from Chapter 6: The Noise Case**

Interaction with the children both provides one of the main stabilising forces and the biggest challenge to the reproduction of tuition. The children both guide the tutors through a stable pattern of interaction and they challenge the expected pattern when they make what the tutors label Noise.

The tutors make sense of how to act by mimicking each other. They have visual contact. In some cases they choose not to mimic but to differentiate.

Similarly to the Having Meetings case most tutors do not share talk during tuition. This means that when making sense of how to deal with Noise in tuition they draw on a variety of frames without confronting each other. Because of this the tutors can make sense of participating by enacting a variety of anchoring points; the local community, the country, a specific neighborhood etc. However,

because of the limited amount of shared talk some tutors experience a lack of meaning. This creates frustrations, a relatively high turn over of tutors, but also diversity and a sense of freedom.

As was the case in the Having Meetings case the tutors' actions are stabilised as they draw on institutionalised meaning generated in arenas outside of the formal organisation. Their own school, the media etc. Their sensemaking is stabilised by their ability to enter a wide range of “we's” across the boundaries of the formal organisation. This seems to facilitate their sensemaking process.

## **7.4 Comparing the Findings from the Two Cases**

In general the two cases point to that a pattern of limited articulated interaction can under some conditions facilitate the reproduction of organised action. This can be the case if actors are stabilised by drawing on frames and anchor points outside the formal organisation.

In both cases ambiguous sensemaking seemed to support rather than undermine the reproduction of organised action.

In both cases sensemaking processes had an element of identity formation which led to that the actors had different slants on the meaning they associated with the organised action.

In both cases they relied on forces exercised by external stakeholders. The external stakeholders tended to identify time and place and label for the organised activity and in some cases provided boundary objects such as school books which also contributed to stabilising the reproduction of the organised action.

In both the Having Meetings case and the Noise case the tutors identify cues about the actions of their co-actors and make sense of these cues. For example attendance or non-attendance of meetings. They attach meaning to them as they would any other cultural artefact (Hatch, 1993). - Why do they not come to the meetings? (Because they are happy -> so they must feel OK about me being here). - Why do they go to meetings? (Because they are good at it -> so it is OK that I don't go). - They other tutors seem to accept the level of Noise too -> So it must be OK.



As long as they are able to trust that their enacted co-actors take up the subject positions they themselves allocate them when they create their own position, they can continue their own contribution to the organised action. This is facilitated and not hindered by limited articulated interaction. This is an alternative to a process where a group develops shared meaning through an extended process of articulated interaction. If this pattern is kept up then an organisation can stay put in the Divergence-Convergence circle (Weick, 1996/79) where they continue to act together but do not develop shared goals.

## **7.5 Cross-Case Discussion:**

In order not to muddle the cross-case analysis it will be structured along five sub-questions which have emerged as central both across the empirical cases and the theories.

Questions 1 to 3 were formulated in connection with the initial discussion of contributions from other sensemaking theorists on page 135. I hypothesised that my case study could shed new light on them. Question 4 is my attempt to sum up the curiosity which is expressed when authors seek to examine what actors need to share to act together and question 5 is a further exploration of this question. The last two questions represent elements which I had not anticipated would be important based on the theory I introduced, but which none the less emerged from the empirical data as factors in the reproduction of organised action in in a situation with minimal shared sensemaking.

- What Can Replace Shared Sensemaking in the Reproduction of Organised Action?
- How does ambiguous meaning affect the reproduction of organised action?
- What are the organising effects of identity formation?
- What “passes between” actors who act together?
- What is required for actors to make action-reinforcing sense of the organised action?

## 7.5.1 Other Mechanisms than Shared Sensemaking?

In the publications by Smircich & Morgan (1982) and Smircich & Stubbart (1985), and Maitlis (2005) lack of shared organisational sensemaking is detrimental to the reproduction of organised action. Lack of shared meaning within the formal organisation is found to lead to lack of direction, lack of motivation, and lack of coordination. All these, it is argued, will undermine organised action.

However, in this organisation we have seen examples of various mechanisms which seem to replace the role allocated to shared sensemaking in the reproduction of organised action:

One thing is that the organisation is dependent on continuous recruitment of new tutors. This is accomplished without a large concerted effort through sporadic advertising and one person who distributes the new tutors on Days.

A significant force in reproducing the organised action in the absence of shared sensemaking amongst tutors is interaction with the children, the boundary objects such as books, tables, chairs, and the parent groups. The Parents ensure the presence of the children. The children indicate what should take place between the tutor and themselves – and sometimes challenge it.

The actualisation of the model of the Minimal Organisation legitimised not participating in meetings and social gatherings, both for those who-go-to-meetings and for those who-do-not-go-meetings. In that way it supported the reproduction of organised action. In a sense it freed the tutors to try and create meaning drawing on other frames and contexts.

Enacting the the organisation had access to plentiful resources also facilitated the reproduction of Having Meetings in spite of the low attendance. It de-emphasised decision making in general and decision about allocation of resources specifically thus legitimising the pattern of little communication and low attendance to meetings.

The re actualisation of the elusive House Host Day was also a mechanism which did not involve extensive shared sensemaking but which none-the-less contributed to stabilise the organised action of Having Meetings. It enabled actors present at low-attendance meetings to reproduce that their formal organisational structure was good, it was just not implemented properly – yet.

The volunteers tended to go to meetings to interact with “the organisation. This increased the number of participants at meetings stabilising their reproduction.

because communication from meetings to tutors not present was to slim tutors could continue to enact that the meetings constituted an legitimate arena for interaction with “the organisation”.

That the sensemaking concept involves enactment means that the context actors in an organisation make sense of and react to are partly of their own construction. The context in terms of the “we's” which their actions make them feel part of and anchored in (Bellah et al, 1985) or the social systems they contribute and subordinate their actions to (Asch, 1952).

In the analysis I phrased this as that the tutors make sense of their organised action by drawing on frames for the action. In the case organisation these frames tend to be generated and negotiated outside the formal organisation. I have divided these frames into two types: Institutionalised expectations and their ongoing process of identity formation. By actualising the frames the tutors are able to render the activity and themselves in relation to it meaningful. This I hypothesise makes them more inclined to continue participating and reproduced organised action.

Institutional expectations about, for example, school and integration (see page 280 for the full list) helps the tutors negotiate meaningful subject positions in relation to the activity. The negotiation of subject positions is distributed, it is sometimes articulated in the interaction with the children, sometimes with other tutors and I provoke a negotiation when I ask them to make sense of it at interviews. Similarly in the case of Having Meetings. They actualise a role in connection with Having Meetings in various arenas – sometime within and sometimes outside the formal organisation.

The institutionalised frames are not homogeneous, there are several with varying degrees of conflicting action implications.

The ongoing identity formation involves that the tutors actualise a number of “we”s that they enact being part of in connection with the reproduction of organised action. This alerts us to that the formal organisation - or groups within it – are far from the only arenas for identity formation. That the tutors feel they are acting as part of for instance the local community is enough to stabilise their action – which happens to take place under the auspices of a voluntary organisation. But they get their identity as being part of the local community. In this case the local community comprises several ethnic groups. The tutors who actualise this frame

mention how they meet “the others” in the local shops, they read about youths in the local paper and when a platform for interacting with and helping these “others” appear they take up the position they feel is offered. But this position as tutor derives much of its meaning from the context of the activity which the tutors themselves produce and a little from the meaning which is associated with it internally in the organisation.

It is an important point from the analysis that only some of tutors actualise for instance the local community as the meaningful context for their participation, for others it is a national project, or related to their career, or for others it is specifically related to the formal organisation.

The action implications for the tutors have as much an effect in stabilising their participation as organisational sensemaking would have had.

In the above I argued that because the actors are able to draw on meaning generated outside the formal organisation they can reproduce an organisational structure which is minimal. However, the relationship between patterns of sensemaking and organisational structure probably works the other way around too: Because of the low levels of shared meaning in this organisation actors have to draw on meaning generated outside the organisation:



**Figure 10:** Drawing on Outside Sense and the Minimal Organisation (Murphy).

The two phenomena are mutually reinforcing.

The empirical analysis indicated that multiple versions of the seemingly same context can coexist especially if actors do not verbalise the sense they have made of the context. Then they simply tend to reconfirm already formed impressions

without letting themselves be challenged by the sense others have made of similar circumstances.

One might be tempted to accuse me of doing what Weick cautions against in the beginning of his book from 1995: To treat sensemaking as an individual process. However, my intention is the reverse. Inspired by the suggestion by Mead (1934) that our sense of self is fundamentally social to examine how even in circumstances where meaning is created in seemingly socially isolated circumstances it is still social – just in a different manner. I conclude that actors mostly draw on interaction with significant others (“we's” and “they's”) who are dispersed over time and space to make sense of their part of an organisational context. This interaction is part of the sensemaking process which enables actors to make retrospective sense of participation in what can constitute stabilised organised action.

#### **7.5.1.1. Conclusion**

This type of organisation where the actors make sense primarily drawing on frames (re)produced outside the formal organisation and where they feel anchored in “we's” spanning its boundaries may thrive with a pattern of internal communication that is minimal. It keeps motivation up by reducing the occasions for challenging and confronting the sense of others. The tutors enact that they are part of a local community etc. while they were constructing subject positions in relation to the organised activities. The multiple anchoring points for the activity are part of what ties the tutors to the activity and this mooring might unravel if they were explicitly contrasted in attempts to create shared meaning.

So drawing on meaning generated and reproduced outside the formal organisation can stabilise the reproduction of organised action within the organisation.

For the conclusions of the thesis in general I would like to emphasise that the results do not indicate that other sensemaking theorists were wrong and that shared sensemaking can not facilitate the reproduction of organised action. The conclusions of this thesis just indicate that in *some cases* the relation between sensemaking and organisation action can be different to what has hitherto been expected. So I am not proposing the organised action will *always* be reproduced in the absence of shared sensemaking only that in cases like this it *can* be.

## **7.5.2 Ambiguous Meaning and the Reproduction of Organised Action**

The question of how ambiguous meaning affects the reproduction of organised action is interesting because in sensemaking theory ambiguous meaning (with the exception of Eisenberg) is expected to undermine organised action.

Smircich & Stubbart (1985), Smircich & Morgan (1982), Maitlis (2005), Morrison & Milliken (2000), and Weick to some extent all equate sharing and formulating unambiguous common views with a stronger basis for organised action. Maitlis points to that shared sensemaking gives shared directions for action, it outlines visions for future actions. Others emphasise that actors who agree to pull in the same direction will be more effective. All this is probably true in many cases.

Maitlis links sensemaking and action in the following way (and I re-quote from this thesis page 94:

“...sensemaking allows people to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity by creating rational accounts of the world that enable action.” (Maitlis, 2005:21).

She thus argues that sensemaking enables action to the extent that it produces rational and unambiguous accounts. Maitlis expected that an organisation which is generally characterised by minimal shared sensemaking will have difficulties motivating its members to pursue organised action. She expected the reproduction of organised action to be weak (to be undermined because of lack of Motivation) because of the lack of imagined futures. My analysis goes some way to examine whether this is the case and further unravel the mechanisms behind.

The two empirical cases showed that ambiguity rather than undermining action can in some instances facilitate it. This can be the case when action is rendered sensible through the actualisation of contradicting frames. Such as when dealing with an activity like voluntary integration where legitimate subject positions are

multiple and contradictory – somewhere between a professional helper and a friend.

The cases seem to confirm that an inverse causality between sharing and acting can sometimes exist where more sharing leads to less acting. I found this was because the lack of sharing set the actors free to some extent to actualise a wider range of frames for making sense of their organised action and because other factors than the formal organisation – e.g. the DRC, the children and parents provide a stabilising framework.

The diversity and fragmentation of sensemaking seems to enable actors in this organisation to reproduce organised action. Some of them are demotivated by the lack of clarity and by the lack of sharing (the social cohesion frame drawn on in connections with making sense of Having Meetings.) They have a feeling that this contributes to a higher turn over of tutors. But on the other hand it also attracts new tutors that their involvement can be limited – as we saw with Marie.

Eisenberg (1984) claims that ambiguity can promote organised action. However, he limits himself to a discussion of divergent goals when he identifies conditions under which this is likely to be the case. I think that with inspiration from Friedland & Allport (1991) we can extend his arguments to be relevant for how to handle the existence of divergent generic subjectivities or (extra-subjectivity) institutional logics/frames. My conclusions point to that limited communication can in some cases promote the reproduction of organised action by limiting the demobilising effect of open conflict. Eisenberg (1990) points out that actors can preserve energy not just through being sheltered from confrontation but also by engaging less in self disclosure.

This reasoning is similar to the reasoning by Sharmeen the contact person of the case organisation: “*We prioritise action over sharing to preserve energy*”. She seems highly aware of the advantages of minimal sensemaking. On the other hand some like Marie seek the social interaction, the self-disclosure and find it in the meetings along with other tutors. That she comes to meetings helps ensure the reproduction of the framework (a legitimate way of Having Meetings) facilitating the fragmented participation of the others.

Many tutors seem to withdraw from interaction – investing in the community going to meetings - because they already have “the friends they need” they do not desire to become part of yet another context. They seem to seek out arenas of

action which could set them free in this manner. Minimal self disclosure – which we saw Mathilde and Marlene seek at the Saturday Meeting

Apart from ambiguity arising from the actualisation of diverse discourses which are not confronted due to little articulated interaction, there was another way in which ambiguity was maintained. Even when conflicting frames were confronted amongst a small group of tutors at a meeting there was a pattern whereby ambiguous meaning was embraced. Sharmeen acted on a couple of occasions as a sense-limiter by stopping the discussion and thereby left issues ambiguous.

There was a tendency to that low attendance to meetings emerged as a salient issue during each meeting. The act of not attending meetings was singled out as a cue for sensemaking. Sense was then negotiated but the issue was not solved either in terms of finding a solution or in terms of agreeing on a legitimate discourse within which to make sense of it. So the issue remained ambiguous. They did not enact an opportunity for deciding to cancel the upcoming event because of anticipated low attendance.

My proof reader alerted me to the there was a curious lack of attempts to evaluate the effect of tutoring. That lack of articulation also meant that there was no basis for generating a unified and exclusive/excluding vision for tuition. So there was no basis for shared innovation. Instead there was scope for multiple approaches and high flexibility in self-narration. This was the case even to the extent of hindering them in dealing pro-actively with Noise as a unit. They did not even agree on a unified unequivocal goal of peace and quiet during tuition. Some wanted to respect what they perceived to be cultural differences; some felt the children are unavoidably noisy; some felt it was a task that should fall to the parents; and others did not feel there was Noise.

### **7.5.2.1 Conclusion**

So in contrast to the sensemaking theorists who all (apart from Eisenberg) expect ambiguity to undermine organised action my findings show that in circumstances where there the organisation can enact that there isn't a need for strategic external communication (as e.g. in organisations aiming to affect public discourse, or maximise innovation, precision, or optimisation) ambiguity can sustain organised



action. This will particularly be the case when the organisation operates in conflicting institutional fields.

### **7.5.3 The Organising Effects of Identity Formation**

The third sub-question is: What are the organising effects of identity formation? That identity formation is an essential part of the sensemaking which underpins the reproduction of organised action may not be a new point to make. Identity formation is one of the elements Weick outlines as part of Sensemaking in 1995 and it has proved a fruitful angle to understand the mechanisms in this case. However, this case contributes by suggesting drawing on discursive identity analysis as formulated by Davies and Harré (1990) to empirically unfold the implications of the ongoing identity formation for organised action.

#### **7.5.3.1 Identity Formation and Organised Action**

How does identity formation as a property of sensemaking relate to whether actors can act in a patterned manner without having interacted verbally? I assume that participating in organised action and sensemaking are interlinked. I assume that if we can not make sense of a situation and of ourselves acting in the situation we will remove our selves from the situation and stop participating in that context if at all possible. Maybe not immediately but after a spell of disillusionment. This is what we saw with Marlene and Mathilde.

If sensemaking is grounded in identity construction then the sense that needs to be made to enable us to continue contentedly acting in an organisational context is both sense of the context *and* sense of ourselves in that context. So if we want to understand how organised action can take place without articulated interaction we need to investigate what characterises the sensemaking processes through which the actors make sense of themselves in relation to the action – if not by articulating this in interaction with each other. Analysis of identity-formation in relation to participation in the organised action has been a central part of the empirical analysis. The analysis is based both on in-depth individual interviews and observations.

I found that the reproduction of organised action was affected by whether actors were able to meaningfully discursively constitute/narrate themselves in the

organisational context. That whether they continue to undertake organised action or not depends partly on whether they can continue to narrate themselves in that context and narrate the context in a manner that is compatible with their self narration. We saw examples of that if this process is challenged or blocked it is likely the actors will leave the organisation and the reproduction of organised action is threatened.

### **7.5.3.1. Discursive Identity Formation**

To add inspiration from other authors is necessary because – although Weick develops both the ideas of the impact of post modern fragmented selves on sensemaking (1995) – and elsewhere he develops ideas of organising as discourse (2004) he does not merge the two. So he does not investigate how the discursive production of selves may be an essential element in discoursing in organisations. Davies & Harré emphasise identity formation as a discursive process. Identity is manifest in discourse. That further justifies my emphasis on articulated sensemaking.

Although Maitlis (2005) indirectly refers to the production of discourse by analysing the types of accounts which are generated in different types of sensemaking processes, she never fully develops a discourse analysis. Maitlis differentiates between whether accounts of issues are unitary or multiple, whether they are rich or narrow. She argues that unitary rich accounts produce the strongest organisational action. She does not take into account whether the accounts challenge the actors' processes of identity formation and thereby challenge the reproduction of organised action. Hence my criticism of that unitary accounts are required to sustain organised action. In the empirical case which she analyses there is an issue with sub performance in an orchestra with strong family values. My claim is that it is possible that a unitary account could have undermined the reproduction of organised action in that case because it would have been at odds with the family values.

### **7.5.3.2 Conclusion**

My research has aimed at bringing sensemaking analysis further into the age of late modernity where self construction is as crucial as it is ongoing. And I argue

that we must consider discursive identity formation when seeking to understand the reproduction of organised action.

I found that participation in organised action seems less driven by mutual dependency (underpinned by a desire to reach ones goals) but rather that participation is meaningful, that it can be woven together with self identity and the other frames tutors draw on. I found that in this case the sense actors need to make is more related to their self construction than it is related to an instrumental goal achievement. Identity-formation and self-narration are important aspects of the sensemaking process which underpin the reproduction of organised action.

## **7.5.4 What Passes between Actors Who Act Together?**

By examining the fourth sub-question I want to get closer to the more specific contribution to sensemaking theory I briefly introduced in the theory chapter. What is it that passes between actors who do not exactly *share* sensemaking processes, but who none the less manage to reproduce organised action together? In the following I will outline and discuss the findings of other theorists.

### **7.5.4.1 Overlapping Salient Actions.**

There is a branch of theory with roots in legal studies attempting to sharpen the concept of Joint Action (Tuomela & Miller (1988), Gilbert (1990, 1992), Bratman (1992), Searle (1995), Kutz (2000)). They emphasise ongoing communication between actors as prerequisite for the definition of joint action. However, one of them (Kutz, 2000) identifies that the elements of the joint action which are salient to each actor and the elements' relationship to one and another are key elements in joint action. Whether elements are salient to actors is, I think, from a sensemaking perspective equivalent to which cues are extracted and fuel sensemaking processes about the organised action. Kutz argues that it is perhaps an overlapping perception of salient elements in their intentions to act that best captures what constitutes joint action.

I found that multiple meanings drawing on multiple frames and roles – but with overlapping cues – was enough in this organisation to sustain organised action. Attendance to Meetings and to tuition are a salient cue to all tutors. regardless of their own actions; Whether they go to meeting or do not go to meetings. My

findings suggest that what passes between co-actors is more so cues about each others' acts – than words.

#### **7.5.4.2 Alignment of Lines of Action**

Blumer argues that it is alignment of lines of action based on mutual understanding which underpins organised action. That, in my view, requires a higher degree of sharing in the sensemaking process than I have found: The actors in the two cases were well able to reproduce sufficient meaning about the perceived joint action to continue to act. Since they did not share talk they were mostly unaware of the diversity of understandings attached to their “lines of action”.

However, even though actors do not need to engage in articulated interaction to act together, they none the less – according to Blumer – have to share an understanding of the implications of the gesture, in terms of: What am I going to do? What do I expect you to do? and what are we doing together? When it comes to understanding the connection between sensemaking processes and organised action in the case organisation we find that actors need not have the same understandings of the gestures that pass between them – they just need to make reinforcing interpretations of them – which enables each of them to continue to act in the context of the organisation. My conclusion is that this can be the case even if actors' understandings of their joint actions are diverse – as long as they reinforce the continuance of the action.

I have found in the case of Meetings that the gestures of going or not going to a meeting are made sensible drawing on a range of frames. Yet the very act of going or not going is what passes between the actors – and helps reproduce Having Meetings. It does not mean that the actors are institutionalised drones – they navigate between a number of contradicting and alternative frames of understanding. Actors actualised competing and conflicting institutionalised frames of reference during sensemaking processes. So although I can not agree that Blumer's “alignment of lines of action” captures what goes on in this organisation – It does not mean that those he argued against – the structuralists (who thought macro structures dictated micro action) were right either in this case.

### **7.5.4.3 Mutual Equivalence Structures of Instrumental and Consummatory Acts**

Wallace (1961) had a more restricted view than Blumer of what passes between actors who act together. He argued that the reproduction of organised action needed to be based on mutual dependency.

Wallace argues, and Weick with him in 1979, that to understand how a mutual equivalence system can be stabilised we should assume that actors are driven by a desire to engage in consummatory acts and therefore they engage in instrumental acts. Co-actors do not need to share goals or (in my words shared articulated meaning) they just have to predict that if they act in a certain way then that will elicit a desired response (act) from their co-actor. And they have to do this repeatedly. So the central definer here is prediction of a benefit. In the case of altruistic activities such as tutoring I regard the consummatory act as the gratifying perception that others can engage in a consummatory act because of your behavior.

However, combining sensemaking with a distinction between instrumental versus consummatory acts is problematic. My angle on sensemaking emphasises ongoing identity formation. Then self gratification in the shape of finding meaning in “one's life” or at least finding meaning in a cluster of one's actions are consummatory. But interwoven with doing. This means acts are simultaneously consummatory and instrumental. Belonging to a community a “we” is both instrumental and in itself consummatory. Therefore I do not think the division of consummatory versus instrumental acts are applicable in this case.

While I agree with Wallace that mutual dependency is an element of organised action (it is part of my very definition of “organised action”) I argue that mutual dependency should be seen as counterfactual phenomenon. In the manner that actors are mutually dependent if it would affect the other actors if he or she acted differently.

### **7.5.4.4. Meaning Passes between Co-actors**

Weick identifies a spectrum amongst organisation theorists who accommodate the analysis of sensemaking and coordination. At one end of the spectrum Smircich and Morgan (1985) argue that the reproduction of organised action is driven by a “quality of interaction” between actors who share meaning through communication. Weick sees that as being a contribution which works from the

inter-subjective towards the generic subjective. At the other end of the spectrum Westley (1990) finds the reproduction of organised action to be a result of interwoven patterns of taken for granted routine actions – which do not necessarily rely on communication (my addition). In that analysis the generic subjective precedes the intersubjective. Weick places himself between the two by arguing that people who meet repetitively around routine actions will develop shared meaning over time. He says:

“Only by virtue of continuous communication are the exchanges and interpretations of intersubjectivity, and the shared understandings of generic subjectivity developed and maintained.” (Weick 1995:75).

Weick adds further that “*If the communication activity stops, the organization disappears.*” (Weick 1995:75). The empirical case I have contributed by unfolding is interesting because it seems that organised action continues without much shared communication and articulated sharing of sense. By seeing these qualities in my case material I have a perspective similar to Westley. I am exploring to which extent reliance on generic subjectivity created in arenas outside the formal organisation is sufficient to support the reproduction of organised action in the case organisation.

Donnellon et al (1986) found that actors just need to share equifinal meaning about the joint action, that is, they had to agree on the words describing a joint action (which was incidentally how they defined joint action – as some words the actors had agreed upon). Smircich & Stubbart (1985) and Smircich & Morgan (1982) emphasised the importance of inclusive shared sensemaking *processes* – not just shared sense for the reproduction of organised action.

I find that when articulated interaction is minimal then actors can rely on a range of institutionalised scripts without contradiction in their reproduction of organised action.

Morris & Milliken (2000) found that the absence of shared articulated talk indicated a climate of silence. In a climate of silence actors are afraid of speaking out. They argued that actors in such organisations would experience amongst other things lack of self esteem and lack of control and high levels of cognitive dissonance. These would undermine the quality and durability of organised action.

Morris & Milliken assume that silence is locally produced and negotiated. This would require preceding interaction generating this situation. In the case organisation, however, the anticipated shared sensemaking producing silence has not taken place. They have not interacted sufficiently for us to equate the lack of articulated interaction with a climate of silence. Silence under these circumstances seems to open up for plurality rather than exclude it. Actors can draw on multiple meaning about their joint actions without being confronted by others. Seen from that light the absence of shared articulation need not undermine the reproduction of organised action.

However, the tutors do experience a level of cognitive dissonance and frustration and a sense of lack of control. But they feel they have arenas for expressing themselves should they wish to do so. The case organisation is special because the actors are only active in its context for a limited number of hours each week perhaps enabling them to cope with more frustration.

Louise: “At the beginning it was all very idealistic and burning and Whauw! Now we'll impress the whole World. Now we'll do something, and that is all very well. But I still think that for many.. there are also those who have dropped out.. the commitment has waned a bit. I think it was quite messy/fluid before Christmas.”

Sharmeen: “Yes it was.”(Transcript of recording of Planning Meeting 11/3/2002:4).

#### **7.5.4.5 Double Interacts and Cause Maps**

Weick also explores the connection between a particular type of sensemaking and organisation in an article written with Bougon from 1986 “Organizations as cognitive maps: Charting ways to success and failure” Weick discusses the relationship between collective action and cause maps.

Here Weick and Bougon argue that double interacts are required for organised action to be reproduced. I think we can phrase their view in this manner: Cause maps which implicate others' actions in our quest for self gratification leads to the reproduction of organised action.

“Cause maps can be coordinated with relatively little shared understanding (Weick 1979:91), a characteristic that is important to emphasize given the current emphasis on shared beliefs in organizational culture. Concerted action is possible where there is common relevance of two concepts in two cause maps and a double interact (Weick 1979) to link the maps.” (Weick & Bougon, 1986 reprinted in 2005:313).

Weick and Bougon argue that cause maps are central because they underpin double interacts which are the basis for organised action.

“The core of the double interact is the cause map, since concepts and relationships are what are being negotiated. A double interact forms when we discover that I can be a cause of your X, you can be a cause of my Y...” (Weick & Bougon, 1986 reprinted in 2005:314).

We can see how Weick and Bougon are inspired by Wallace's (1961) conceptualisation of “Mutual equivalence structures”.

I agree with that cause maps can be coordinated (and organised action reproduced) with relatively little shared understanding. But I don't share their claim that conceptualising it as double interacts is the most useful. I think it gives exchange relationships too central a position. In Weick and Bougon's model the actor is driven by self-interest. A basic drive for the volunteers in my case organisation seems to be self actualisation – to become good people. However, we could stretch the concept of self-interest to include that. That way, what they get out of the “exchange” is a better self image.

The cases indicated that what is required is action reinforcing sense of overlapping behavioural implications (like going or not going to meetings) which is more likely to be driven by trust in one's perceived co-actors. By action reinforcing I mean behavioural implications which allow actors to continue to make sense of themselves in the enacted organisational context.



#### 7.5.4.6 Heed as the Basis for Organised Action

When we analyse shared meaning in an organisation as a basis for joint action we tend to focus on communication that flows between actors. However, when Weick and Robert separate group development (related to communication and interaction) and collective mind development (related to the enactment of “the imagined requirements of joint action”) they outline a way to separate the two.

In an article from 1993 Weick & Roberts explore bridging between actions – individual action and enacted collective action. By doing so they provide an plausible explanation for why organisations might exist which are not well developed as groups but who none the less generate organised action in a reliable manner. The reason for this according to Weick and Roberts is that actors act with heed<sup>102</sup>.

Weick and Roberts explore how organised action which is highly reliable is reproduced. That is a more restricted case than mine as I study *reproduction* and not maximisation of reliability. Weick and Roberts find that an imagery of organisations as collective minds can explain why some systems are reliable and others not.

The concept collective minds is distinguished from the discussion of cause maps above in that it actually conceptualises collective minds as interrelations between activities rather than cognitive processes residing in individuals – as we focussed on in the analysis of cognitive maps.

Weick & Roberts draw on Asch (1952) who identified four properties of group performance:

“The first defining property of group performance is that individuals create the social forces of group life when they act as if there were such forces.”

(Weick & Roberts (1993) reprinted in 2005:264).

So we are already firmly set on seeing group performance as a product of social construction and enactment. So far so good for a sensemaking analysis.

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102According to Weick & Roberts “heed” is a quality of the style with which activities are tied together.

“People act heedfully when they act more or less carefully, critically, consistently, purposefully, attentively, studiously, vigilantly, conscientiously, pertinaciously.” (Ryle 1949:151 quoted by Weick & Roberts, 1993).

“The second defining property of group performance is that when people act as if there are social forces, they construct their actions (contribute), while envisaging a social system of joint actions (represent), and interrelate that constructed action with the system that is envisaged (subordinate).” (Weick & Roberts 1993 reprinted in 2005:264 drawing on Asch 1952).

Weick & Roberts pick up three concepts from Asch which I think I can apply in the discussion of the relationship between individual and collective action:

Contributing: To see one's own action as a contribution towards a collective action.

Representing: Seeing a representation of a social system of joint actions in one's own action

Subordinating: That one's own action mainly derives its meaning from that it is a contribution to a collective action.

Both contributing, representing, and subordinating one's own action to joint action are processes which do not require shared articulated interaction with one's perceived co-actors.

Asch, Weick & Roberts, like Kutz 2000, offer a conceptualisation of the relation between individual action and collective action.

“The third defining property of group performance is that contributing, representing, and subordinating create a joint situation of interrelations among activities, which Asch referred to as a system... present in the interrelations between the activities of individuals.” (Weick and Roberts 1993 Reprinted in 2005:265 paraphrasing and quoting Asch 1952:252).

Kutz argues in the article “Acting Together” from 2000 that the perceived relationship between individual and group action can be of three different kinds: The individual act can be perceived as *instrumental* for, or *expressive* of participation in a collective act, or an individual act can be *normative* if a norm internal to a collective requires the act. Kutz thus mixes in the expression of group membership and of group values whereas Weick inspired by Asch focus purely of the interrelating of activities. Kutz thus emphasises belonging to a “we” as a

mechanism that links individual action to collective. I do this because I belong to a “we” rather than because I have a goal. This corresponds to the mechanism I identified through which identity formation processes affect the reproduction of organised action.

Finally Asch introduces the concept of heed as a defining property of group performance:

“The fourth and final defining property of group performance suggested by Asch is that the effects produced by a pattern of interrelated activities vary as a function of the style (e.g. heedful versus heedless) as well as the strength (e.g. loose-tight) with which the activities are tied together.” (Weick & Roberts 1993 reprinted in 2005:265)... “individuals would not be capable of these particular actions unless they were responding to (or envisaging the possibility of) the system.” (Asch 1952:252).

Weick & Robert's contribution to Asch is to treat the type and form of interrelating as a variable instead of as a constant. They explore how the interrelating of activities vary along a scale going from heedful to heedless. So Weick & Roberts are asking to which extent, with which force, are actors interrelating their actions with a socially constructed and enacted system of collective action? Their conclusion is that the more heed, and the more mindful, the more reliable will the organised action be in the face of the unexpected.

In the case organisation actors contribute, represent and subordinate their actions to a variety of organised systems (or “we's”) while acting in the same formal organisation. They are heedful, but not necessarily of each other. For example:

“I continue to tutor in spite of Noise because tutoring helps the integration of immigrants into Danish society. This is an effort I undertake along with many others across the country.” Or:

“By tutoring even though there is Noise I become part of the ethnically diverse neighbourhood where I live.”

In the two short paraphrased examples above the “we's” envisioned differ but the action implications are the same.

Distinguishing between group development and collective mind development can explain why you can have young groups which are reliable in spite of their age – this can be the case if mind development is well developed or very heedful as is the case when actors apply themselves and pay attention to their co-actors. In the case organisation the actors were heedful of a variety of communities and this did provide them with the drive to continue.

#### **7.5.4.7 Conclusion: Cues of the Acts of Co-actors Is what Passes between Actors**

My conclusion is that in this case of reproducing “Having Meetings” the act of going versus not-going to meetings is the key act which “passes between” actors. This is the cue which is being enacted as something to be made sense of in order to render continued participation sensible. This is both the case for those who-do-not-go-to-meetings and those who-do-go-to-meetings.

I suggest that what passes between actors undertaking joint action can just be cues about “the acts”. It does not have to be articulated communication. It can just be that one actor makes sense of cues which they take to indicate the actions of their (enacted) co-actors by drawing on a range of discourses – the cues do not have to be negotiated or discursively produced in interaction with their co-actors. In this empirical case the people who-do-not-go-to-meetings are practically incommunicado from those who-go-to-meetings. Yet both groups act jointly in the sense that they each do sensemaking work to reproduce the organised action of “Having Meetings”.

### **7.5.5. Trust as a Factor in the Reproduction of Organised Action**

The fifth and last sub question is: What is required for actors to make action-reinforcing sense of the organised action?

It was a conclusion to both cases that action is reproduced because the actors have a tendency to make action reinforcing sense of the cues they get about the actions of their perceived co-actors.

e.g.:

- My co-actors are probably dealing with Noise in a manner that is OK.
- They probably have good reasons for going/not going to meetings.

This is reminiscent of trust. Trust manifested as action reinforcing sensemaking. I trust that my co-actors act appropriately so I need not try to alter their actions through communication and coordination.

The “OK” and “good” indicating that I don't create any change in action implications for myself based on sensemaking about co-actors – I can live-and-let-live. I don't have to change my present pattern of action because of the cues I get about their actions.

In 1995, Weick argues that it is typical of sensemaking processes that they level out when actors have made plausible sense rather than accurate they will tend to seek to reconfirm existing sense. This could go some way to explain how multiple versions of the seemingly same context can coexist especially if actors do not verbalise the sense they have made of the context. Actors simply tend to reconfirm already formed impressions without letting themselves be challenged by the sense others have made of similar circumstances.

#### **7.5.5.1 Loose Couplings and the Reproduction of Organised Action**

In the Having-Meetings-case we saw that decoupling between actors can facilitate organised action. This can be the case when the decoupling allows each to continue to presume that the other is continuing to perform their part of the joint action. Whereas sharing and articulated interaction might have revealed on the one hand that the performance of going-to-meetings was much weaker than assumed by those who-did-not-go-to-meetings, and that those who-did-not-go-to-meetings felt a lot less involved in what happened at meetings than those who-go-to-meetings think. The whole process was driven by a tendency to make reinforcing sense supporting status quo.

We saw how decouplings between organisational units reduced conflict and in that way facilitated continued action. How decoupling between meetings and tutoring simplified the possibility for continued action and left it open for each actor to make multiple reinforcing sense of themselves and the joint act drawing on institutionalised expectations and self narrations. However, the decoupling also increased the sense of chaos and frustrations thus most likely leading to a higher

turnover of tutors. Mechanisms for recruiting new tutors thus became important for the reproduction of organised action under these circumstances.

### **7.5.5.2 Conclusion**

I found that in both cases attendance to either meetings or tutoring were seen as salient elements of co-actors' (and own) behaviour. To attend a meeting or not was the cultural artefact – to become a cue for sensemaking by one self and others. And as long as they could continue to make retrospective sense of this artefact – as it flowed to them in various ways (namely indications about the actions of others) then they could continue to participate in the organised action themselves.

I found that participation in organised action is not driven by mutual dependency – a desire to reach one's goal. But rather that participation is meaningful, that it can be woven together with self identity and the other frames they draw on.

# 8 Main Conclusion

I posed the following sub-questions to how sensemaking processes relate to the reproduction of organised action:

- What can replace shared sensemaking in the reproduction of organised action?
- How does ambiguous meaning affect the reproduction of organised action?
- What are the organising effects of identity formation?
- What “passes between” actors who act together?
- What is required for actors to make action-reinforcing sense of the organised action?

The conclusions I made are:

- A range of mechanisms, the most important being: Drawing on meaning generated and reproduced outside the formal organisation can stabilise the reproduction of organised action within the organisation.
- Ambiguous meaning can in some cases support the reproduction of organised action.
- Identity-formation and self-narration are important aspects of the sensemaking processes which underpin the reproduction of organised action.
- Actors who do not share meaning but only artefacts indicating each others' actions can be stabilised in their organised action patterns if they trust their co-actors.

I found that actors can have defined themselves as a unit and be responsive to one and another without engaging in articulated communication. And that the connection between them can exist in the shape of that they attribute meaning to cues indicating each others' actions. So that rather than emphasising shared sensemaking processes based on inter-personal communication researchers should also pay attention to the stabilising effects of sensemaking processes where actors

only have access to cues about each others' actions (as opposed to sharing articulated words).

This type of organisation where the actors make sense primarily drawing on frames (re)produced outside the formal organisation and where they feel anchored in “we's” spanning its boundaries may thrive with a pattern of internal communication that is minimal. It keeps motivation up by reducing the occasions for challenging/confronting the sense of others. It facilitates diversity.

An added side effect of this state of affairs is being able to maintain ambiguity. This can be constructive when dealing with an activity like voluntary integration where legitimate positions are multiple and contradictory – somewhere between a professional helper and a friend.



# 9 Summary

The dissertation examines an unexplored area of the branch of organisation theory called sensemaking theory. The theme for the thesis is to examine the relation between sensemaking and the reproduction of organised action. Existing sensemaking theory focusses on how shared organisational sensemaking processes support the reproduction of organised action.

The contribution of the dissertation lies in examining the relationship between sensemaking processes which do *not* spring from shared articulation within the formal organisation and these processes' relation to the reproduction of organised action.

The dissertation finds an extreme case of this phenomenon in a younger voluntary organisation. The goal of the organisation is to help children of other ethnic origin than Danish with their homework. The organisation survives and fulfils its purpose. This, however, happens almost without that the tutors talk with each other to create shared sense of their shared action. This falls outside the expectations produced in existing sensemaking theory. The dissertation seeks to illuminate the problem formulation by answering the question: “How is organised action reproduced in this organisation with minimal shared articulation?”

Apart from the analysis' relevance for organisation theory the interest in the phenomenon – organised action without shared sensemaking and shared articulation – springs from the hypothesis the actors in late modernity will be less inclined to invest in shared sensemaking because they “zap” between organisational contexts. This is a phenomenon which has been highlighted by the Danish voluntary sector within the last 10 years. A symptom of this has been perceived difficulties in recruiting younger board members.

The dissertation supplements sensemaking theory with theory about discursive identity formation (Davies & Harré, 1990 and Søndergaard, 2000). This inclusion originates in a hypothesis that identity formation processes in connection with sensemaking about the joint action affects the reproduction of this action. When actors cannot occupy recognisable subject positions there is a significant risk that

they cease to participate in the reproduction of organised action. This hypothesis was not challenged by any of the results of the empirical analysis.

The empirical data upon which the dissertation is built is participant observation of tuition and observation of all meetings in the formal organisation – the Network Group – over six months, a study of all printed texts and of 16 life-story-like individual interviews. The dissertation presents a contribution by providing an extensive empirical study of sensemaking processes in an organisation which as a whole is characterised by limited shared articulation.

The dissertation builds on two empirical cases of organised action within the same formal organisation. The first case is the reproduction of “Having Meetings” within the formal organisation. The other case is the reproduction of tuition in spite of problems with “Noise”.

The dissertation identifies mechanisms which support the reproduction of Having Meetings. The Network Group is organised under the umbrella organisation The Danish Refugee Council. As a consequence of this they have an affiliated consultant who actualises Minimal Organisation as a model for Having Meetings which can legitimise a low turn-out to meetings.

The negotiation of individual subject positions in connection with going to or not going is a sensemaking process which significantly affects the reproduction of Having Meetings. The dissertation identifies the frames of understanding which the actors draw on in connection with this sensemaking process about the activity and their “self” in relation to it. The frames identified are: The Traditional Organisation, the Minimal Organisation, Social Cohesion, My Self Development, and Competent Management.

There upon the dissertation analyses the actualisation of these frames across meetings. Where ambiguous meaning about Having Meetings is produced and contradictive frames are actualised and given room. The Contact Person who is ascribed the role of leader does not resolve this ambiguity but actively contributes to maintaining it. The already minimal shared sensemaking is minimised further because the meetings are decoupled from each other and from the actors who do not go to meetings.

Sensemaking about meetings with low participation is crucial to the reproduction of Having Meetings. Loosely coupled actors reproduce an ideal of a

House Host Day as the answer to low turnout for meetings. By re-narrating this ideal at meetings they are capable of legitimising and thereby reproducing the way they are Having Meetings.

Going to meetings as a way to interact with “the organisation” is identified as an institutionalised script the actors bring with them from sensemaking outside the formal organisation. The participation in meetings which this stimulates contributes to maintain the reproduction of having Meetings in the current manner.

The enactment of the the organisation has access to ample resources is crucial to the reproduction of this way of Having Meetings. It means that actors are not mobilised to interact with each other in a struggle for resources. The tendency to structural fragmentation which allows new initiatives to form autonomous units loosely coupled to the Network Group has the same effect.

Going to meetings or not is identified as an element in sensemaking about ones own position in relation to Having Meetings. This is the case independently of whether one goes to meetings or not.

Two subject positions are constructed in relation to Having Meetings. One is to be someone who goes to meetings. The other is to be someone who does not go to meetings.

In the sensemaking process about occupying the position as someone who does not go to meetings actors enact co-actors who go to meetings. The enactment of these co-actors legitimises their own non-participation and renders it recognisable. Since communication across the formal organisation is so limited this enactment is not challenged by the actual low and fragmented turn-out for meetings. sensemaking about the position as someone who does not go to meetings has a tendency to be driven by the dominant narrative plot in their self-narration in the context of the individual interviews. These plots vary from person to person.

Those who go to meetings likewise have a tendency to follow the general plot from their self-narration when they take up a subject position as someone who goes to meetings. They also draw on the aforementioned frames of understanding. The actualisation of frames is often linked to previous experiences and negotiations of similar subject positions from other arenas of interaction than the formal organisation.

The actualisation of the position of going versus not going to meetings is not permanent but is activated and negotiated on an ongoing basis.

A contribution of the dissertation is to find that what passes between actors who act together does not have to be conversation. It can be behavioural indications. Both in the reproduction of Having Meetings and in the reproduction of tuition in spite of Noise the dissertation finds that it is sufficient that each actor interprets indications of the actions of their enacted co-actors in a manner so that it makes sense for them to continue their own pattern of action. This process can take place even when the sense the co-acting actors make differ widely from each other.

Actors in this formal organisation have a tendency to trust that their co-actors act in manner which justifies their own actions. As long as the actors create this meaning without articulating it with each other they are not confronted with these differences. This further contributes to stabilise their continued participation in the joint action.

The dissertation links the discussion of identity formation as part of sensemaking closer to patterns of action by introducing the concept of behavioural implications. Behavioural implications are those acts which are legitimised and made sensible in sensemaking.

The dissertation identifies the following frames of understanding which actors draw on when they have to make sense of giving tuition in spite of Noise: School, Integration, Family, Self Development, and Volunteering. Each frame of understanding indicates recognisable subject positions with associated spaces of action in relation to Noise. Just as in the Having Meetings case the frames of understanding which are actualised are diverse.

This diversity results in some confrontations at meetings in connection with sensemaking about Noise. The Contact Person acts as sensegiver in a manner which renders Noise and the associated space of action ambiguous. Part of maintaining this ambiguity is that she ensures that cause chains about Noise formulated at meetings remain short.

When there is so little communication across the formal organisation the actors are not challenged by contradictive sensemaking about Noise. They can continue to draw on diverse and multiple frames of understanding.

How do these actors manage to continue tutoring in spite of Noise? When they do not have a shared articulation of Noise and how one ought to behave in relation to it – which other sensemaking theorists would think essential for the reproduction of organised action.

An answer to this question which is identified in the dissertation is that even though the children on occasion challenge this stability the tutor's actions are to a high degree organised by the children. The children indicate, helped by physical artefacts; tables, chairs and school books where the tutors should sit, what should be read and which role to take up.

Even though the tutors do not articulate together they can often see each other and imitate – or consciously choose to differ from what other tutors do in relation to Noise.

The sensemaking of the co-acting actors in connection with Noise constructs themselves as well as the problem - similarly to in the having Meetings case. A part from drawing on the mentioned frames of understanding in connection with this process actors narrate themselves into various “we's”. This also contributes to giving sense and stabilising them.

The “we's” which are mentioned apart from the Day they tutor and the formal organisation - the Network Group – are: The local neighbourhood, an exotic “barrio” , Denmark and an abstract movement in opposition to the present right-wing liberal Government. All these “we's” function as enacted arenas for giving tuition and making sense of Noise. because of the absence of shared articulated sensemaking the actors can continue to meet in the act of tutoring while they negotiate and take up diverse subject positions by actualising multiple arenas.

The dissertation concludes the subject positions which give sense to each tutors' participation in the shared act is not produced individually or in isolation. They are, however, negotiated in arenas which, in the main, are not identical with the formal organisation. There is a mutually reproductive relationship between on the one hand this fragmented sensemaking process and on the other hand the minimal organisational structure which does not facilitate shared articulation.

# 10 Dansk resumé (Danish

## Summary)

Afhandlingen undersøger et uudforsket område af den gren af organisationsteori, som hedder sensemakingteori. Temaet for afhandlingen er at undersøge relationen mellem meningsskabelse og reproduktion af organiseret handling. Eksisterende sensemaking teori fokuserer på hvorledes fælles organisatoriske sensemaking processer understøtter reproduktionen af organiseret handling.

Afhandlingens bidrag ligger i at undersøge relationen meningsskabelsesprocesser, som *ikke* udspringer af fælles italesættelse indenfor den formelle organisation, og disse processers relation til reproduktionen af organiseret handling.

Afhandlingen finder en ekstrem case af dette fænomen i en yngre frivillig organisation, hvis formål det er at give lektiehjælp til børn med anden etnisk baggrund end dansk. Organisationen overlever og varetager sit formål, men stort set uden at de frivillige lektiehjælpere taler sammen for at skabe mening om deres fælles handling. Dette falder udenfor de forventninger der produceres i eksisterende sensemaking teori. Afhandlingen søger at belyse problemformuleringen ved at besvare spørgsmålet hvordan reproduceres organiseret handling i denne organisation med minimal fælles italesættelse?

Ud over den organisationsteoretiske relevans af undersøgelsen udspringer den erkendelsesmæssige interesse for fænomenet - organiseret handling uden fælles meningsskabelse og fælles italesættelse - af en hypotese om at senmoderne aktører vil være mindre tilbøjelige til at investere i fælles meningsskabelse, fordi de zapper mellem organisatoriske kontekster. Dette er et fænomen man specielt indenfor den danske frivillige sektor har været opmærksom på de seneste 10 år, hvor det blandt andet indikeres af at man flere steder finder det svært at få besat bestyrelsesposter med yngre frivillige.

Afhandlingen supplerer den sensemakingteoretiske tilgang med teori om diskursiv identitetsdannelse (Davies & Harré, 1990 og Søndergaard, 2000). Denne inddragelse bygger på en hypotese om at identitetsdannelsesprocesser i forbindelse med meningsskabelse om den fælles handling påvirker reproduktionen af organiseret handling. Når aktørerne ikke kan indtage for dem genkendelige subjektpositioner er der stor risiko for at de standser med at deltage i reproduktionen af organiseret handling. Hypotesen blev ikke udfordret af resultaterne af de empiriske analyser.

Den empiriske materiale som ligger til grund for afhandlingen er deltagende observation af lektiehjælp og observation af alle møder i en formel organisation, Netværksgruppen, over et halvt år, studie af alle producerede tekster og 16 livshistorie-agtige individuelle interviews. Afhandlingen udgør et bidrag ved at udgøre et omfattende empirisk studie af sensemaking processer i en organisation, der som helhed er præget af lav fælles italesættelse.

Afhandlingen bygger på to empiriske case studier af organiseret handling indenfor den samme formelle organisation. Den første case er reproduktionen af “det at have møder” i den formelle organisation. Den anden case er reproduktionen af lektiehjælp på trods af problemer med “støj”.

Afhandlingen identificerer mekanismer som understøtter reproduktionen af “det at have møder”. Netværksgruppen er organiseret under paraplyorganisationen Dansk Flygtningehjælp. Derved har de en konsulent tilknyttet som aktualiserer Minimal Organisering som en model for “det at have møder”, der kan legitimere møder med lavt fremmøde.

En væsentlig sensemaking proces som påvirker det at have møder er forhandlingen af den enkeltes subjekt positioner i forbindelse med at deltage eller ikke deltage i møder. Jeg identificerer de forståelsesrammer som aktørerne trækker på i forbindelse med denne meningsskabelsesproces om aktiviteten og selvet i forhold til den: Den Traditionelle forening, Minimal organiseringen, Socialt sammenhold, Erfaringsudveksling, og Kompetent ledelse.

Derefter analyserer jeg aktualiseringen af disse rammer på tværs af møder. Der produceres dobbelttydige mening omkring “det at have møder” modstridende forståelsesrammer aktualiseres og gives plads. Kontaktpersonen, som tilskrives en lederrolle, forløser ikke denne ambiguitet men bidrager aktivt til at opretholde den.

Den i forvejen begrænsede fælles meningsskabelse minimeres yderligere af at møderne er dekoblede fra hinanden og fra de aktører som ikke kommer til møder.

Meningsskabelse om møder med lav deltagelse er afgørende for reproduktionen af “det at have møder”. Løst koblede aktører reproducerer et ideal om en husværtsdag som svaret på lav mødedeltagelse. Ved at genfortælle dette ideal ved møder er de i stand til at legitimere og dermed opretholde den måde “de holder møder” på.

At gå til møder for at interagere med “organisationen” identificeres som en institutionaliseret forestilling som aktørerne har med sig fra meningsproduktion udenfor den formelle organisation. Den mødedeltagelse, som det afføder, er med til at opretholde reproduktionen af “den måde de har møder”.

Afgørende for reproduktionen af denne måde “at have møder på” er enactment af at organisationen har adgang til rigelige ressourcer. Det betyder at aktørerne ikke bliver mobiliseret til interagere med hinanden i kampen for ressourcer. Den samme effekt har tendensen til strukturel fragmentering, som tillader nye initiativer at danne løst koblede autonome enheder i forhold til Netværksgruppen.

Det at komme til møder eller ej identificeres som et element til meningsskabelse om egen position i forhold til “det at have møder” uafhængigt af om man deltager i møder eller ej.

Der konstrueres to subjekt-positioner i forbindelse med “det at have møder”. Den ene er at være en som går til møder, den anden er at være en som ikke går til møder. I meningsskabelses-processen omkring at indtage positionen som en der ikke og til møder enacter aktørerne med-aktører som går til møder. Det legitimerer og genkendelig gør deres egen ikke-deltagelse. På grund af den stærkt begrænsede kommunikation på tværs i organisationen bliver denne forestilling ikke udfordret af det lave og fragmenterede fremmøde ved møderne. Meningsskabelsen om positionen som en der ikke gør til møder har tendens til at drives af det samme narrative greb som deres selv-fortælling generelt. Det varierer fra person til person.

De som går til møder danner ligeledes mening om subjekt positionen at være en som går til møder efter samme læst som deres generelle selv-fortælling. De trækker også på de nævnte forståelsesrammer for at skabe multiple forståelser. Aktualiseringen af rammer kobles ofte til tidligere erfaring og forhandlinger af lignende subjekt positioner fra andre interaktions-arenaer end den formelle organisation.



Aktualiseringen af en position som en der går til møder eller ej er ikke permanent, men aktiveres og genforhandles løbende.

Afhandlingens bidrag er at finde at det som passerer mellem aktører som udfører fælles handling ikke behøver være samtale. Det kan bare være indikationer af handlinger. I både reproduktionen af møder og reproduktionen af lektiehjælp på trods af støj konstaterer afhandlingen at det er tilstrækkeligt at hver aktør fortolker indikationer af deres med-aktørers handlinger på en måde så det giver mening for dem at fortsætte deres egen handle-mønster. Denne process kan forløbe selvom den mening de sam-handlende aktører skaber er vidt forskellig.

Aktørerne har tendens til at have tillid til at deres med-aktører handler på en måde som retfærdiggør deres egne handlinger. Så længe aktørerne skaber denne mening uden at italesætte det med hinanden konfronteres de ikke med disse forskelle, hvilket yderligere bidrager til at stabilisere deres fortsatte deltagelse i den fælles handling.

Jeg kobler diskussionen af identitets-dannelse som en del af menings-skabelse yderligere sammen med handle-mønstre ved at introducere begrebet handlerum. Handlerum er de handlinger som legitimeres og gøres meningsfulde i sensemakingen.

Jeg identificerer følgende forståelsesrammer som aktørerne trækker på når de skal skabe mening omkring det at give lektiehjælp på trods af "støj": Skole, integration, familie, selvudvikling og frivillighed. Hver forståelses-ramme indikerer genkendelige subjekt-positioner med associerede handlerum i forhold til "støj". Ligesom i "det at have møder"-casen er forståelsesrammerne som aktualiseres mangfoldige.

Denne mangfoldighed resulterer i nogen konfrontationer ved møder omkring menings-skabelse om "støj". Kontaktpersonen agerer menings-giver på en måde så også "støj" og handlerum i forhold til det forbliver dobbelttydigt. Hun sørger også for at længden af betydnings-kæderne om "støj" bliver kort.

Når der er så lidt kommunikation på tværs af organisationen bliver aktørerne ikke udfordret af modstridende menings-skabelse om "støj" og de kan fortsætte med at trække på mangfoldige forståelsesrammer.

Når aktørerne således ikke har fælles italesættelse af "støj" og hvordan man bør handle i forhold til det at støtte sig op ad – som andre sensemakingteori vil mene var essentielt for reproduktionen af organiseret handling, hvordan klare disse

aktører at forsætte på trods af “støj”? Selvom børnene også udfordrer denne stabilisering så bliver lektiehjælpernes handlinger i høj grad organiseret af børnene. Børnene udpeger, hjulpet af fysiske artefakter, borde, stole og skolebøger, hvor lektiehjælperne skal sidde, hvad der skal læses og hvilken rolle de skal indtage.

Selvom lektiehjælperne ikke italesætter sammen kan de ofte se hinanden og efterligne eller bevidst adskille sig fra det de andre gør i forhold til “støj”.

De samhandlende aktørers menings-skabelse i forbindelse med “støj” konstruerer dem selv såvel som problemet - ligesom i “det at have møder” casen. Ud over at trække på de nævnte forståelsesrammer i forbindelse med denne proces fortæller aktørerne sig ind i diverse “vi'er” i denne proces. og de er også med til at give mening til og stabilisere dem. De “vi'er” der nævnes ud over den dag de møder på og den formelle organisation netværksgruppen i forbindelse med det at give lektiehjælp er: Nærmiljøet, et eksotisk “barrio”, Danmark og oppositionen til regeringen. DRC aktualiseres ikke som et “vi” af disse lektiehjælpere. Alle disse “vi'er” fungerer som enactede arenaer for det at give lektiehjælp og skabe mening omkring “støj”. På grund af den fraværende fælles italesættelse kan aktørerne fortsætte med at mødes i handlingen at give lektiehjælp mens de skaber mangfoldige meningsfyldte subjektpositioner ved at aktualisere mangfoldige arenaer.

Afhandlingen konkluderer at subjekt-positionerne som giver mening til den enkeltes deltagelse i den fælles handling ikke er produceret individuelt eller i isolation de er bare forhandlet i arenaer som hovedsageligt ikke er identiske med den formelle organisation. Der er en gensidigt reproducerende påvirkning mellem denne fragmenterede meningsdannelsesproces og minimal organisations strukturen som ikke tilskynder fælles italesættelse.

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