



UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

**CREATING AN AGILE ETHICS AND ETHICAL COMPLIANCE
CONSULTING PRACTICE IN ONTARIO'S AUTOMOTIVE
RETAIL INDUSTRY**

*A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the
University of Liverpool for the Degree of Doctor of Business
Administration*

BY

FEMI JEGEDE

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis is centered around an Action Research inquiry aimed at revamping the ethics advisory practice at Dealers R'Us Ltd., an automotive management consulting firm located in Ontario, Canada. The inquiry occurred in four phases and over two action cycles. In Phase I, a semi-structured questionnaire administered to eighty automotive dealers and salespeople at four client organizations suggested that the firm's ethics consulting practice was not adaptive to varied situational contexts and unpredictable changes in the regulatory domain. This resulted in abysmal ethical compliance rates, regulatory fines, and general client dissatisfaction. A thematic analysis of open-ended responses provided by respondents yielded five broad themes - knowledge gaps, organizational structure, interpersonal relationships, internal collaboration, and service design. The objective of this interventive research is to create an agile ethics advisory practice through the generation of actionable knowledge that addresses the aforementioned thematic angles.

By leveraging the emancipatory capacity of social constructivism in Phase II, an internal focus group comprising of fifteen stakeholders, utilized Soft System Methodology, an Action Research approach to elucidate the organizational problem. The structured inquiry culminated in the first cycle of remedial actions with implications for the firm's personnel, internal politics, corporate structure, and go-to-market strategy. In Phase III, organizational outcomes were validated internally and externally through the reflexive analysis of data collected with semi-structured questionnaires and focus group interviews in the post-intervention era. Open-ended responses were explored using thematic analysis. Due to the small size of the firm, a total population sampling strategy was adopted within the organization encompassing all twenty internal stakeholders. Critical case data sampling was carried out at a representative client site in a test case ethical compliance consulting project that involved twenty-eight external stakeholders.

In the post-intervention survey, 87% of the external respondents agreed that Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program became responsive to varied and evolving ethical compliance needs in Ontario's automotive retail industry. In contrast, only 16% of survey respondents agreed with the same statement in the pre-intervention phase. This outcome resulted from a reduction in consultant knowledge gaps; a transition from a hierarchical functional organizational structure to a matrix structure comprised of interdisciplinary teams; a deliberate focus on improving interpersonal relationships between consultants; the equalization of power within the firm and a service redesign effort that entailed the field collocation of interdisciplinary teams. In Phase IV, this outcome informed a second action cycle geared towards an entrenchment of the transformative research agenda. Based on agreements in management literature, I conceptualized agility using ideas from Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory including self-organization and spontaneous emergence. Other applied theories include Social Identity Theory and Contingency Theory.

The results obtained challenge the traditional approach to ethics consulting. They inspired the development and recommendation of a Conceptual Framework for Agile Ethics Consulting to the firm. This original contribution to ethics advisory practice and consulting literature codifies relevant agility drivers, enablers, capabilities and practices. Foundational recommendations border on data proximity, selective contingency, the establishment of active feedback loops, incremental solution execution; the attainment of a common internal identity and the incentivization of strong interpersonal bonds within the firm. For automotive dealerships, this inquiry provides accessibility

to custom-tailored ethical compliance programs, higher compliance rates and the mitigation of risks and liabilities resulting from non-compliance. In a reflective manner, I draw conclusions on the post-intervention status of the ethics practice under review based on CAS theory metrics. In addition to taking stock of my scholar-practitioner experience, I also discuss transitions in my leadership philosophy.

The small size of Dealers R'Us translates into a relatively small sample size. This is a research limitation that must be considered when interpreting the outcomes of this research. The collection of data from external sources at different intervals and the utilization of multiple dialectics afforded by Soft System Methodology helped to seek out disconfirming evidence and mitigate this limitation. The infancy of the proposed conceptual framework makes it an appropriate target for future research and validation.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Mr. Femi Jegede and Mrs. Eniola Jegede who nurtured the dream of doctoral scholarship in me. May your days be long, and your loins oiled enough to witness the blessings of accomplishments such as this.

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I acknowledge the immense contribution of all the consultants and leaders at Dealers R'Us Ltd. Without the dedication and cooperation of these key stakeholders, it would have been impossible to contemplate change through the actions documented in this thesis. I salute their perseverance throughout this journey.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA – Automotive Protection Association

ARG – Action Research Group

AWS - Adaptive Work System

CAS – Complex Adaptive System

CATWOE – Customers, Actors, Transformation, Weltanschauung, Owner, Environmental Constraints

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CTV - Canadian Television

DBA -Doctor of Business Administration

DM – Digital Marketing

DMS – Dealership Management System

EA – Ethics Advisory

GM – General Manager

GST - General Systems Theory

IT – Information Technology

ITQ - Intention to Quit

LMX - Leader-Member eXchanges

MVDA – Motor Vehicle Dealers Act

NPD - New Product Development

OMVIC – Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council

PIS -Participant Information Sheet

POS - Perceived Organizational Support

R & L – Registration and Licensing

RQ – Research Question

SS – Software Solutions

SSM – Soft System Methodology

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1.0 Introduction

This introductory chapter describes the genesis of the organizational issue that this thesis is centered upon. The professional setting for the inquiry is at Dealers R’Us Ltd., a Canadian automotive management consulting firm located in Brampton, Ontario. The significance of the problem for the company, its employees and the automotive retail sector is also highlighted. The reader is introduced to the contextual setting of the insider Action Research (AR) endeavor that is directed at understanding and solving the identified organizational issues. In conclusion, a preliminary introduction to the research design and the general structure of this thesis is also made.

1.1 Background of the study

Ethics is the systematic approach to the definition of how human beings and human organizations should act and go about their lives in an organized society (Besong, 2018; Driver, 2013). It is mainly concerned with defining what is 'good' and 'bad', or 'right' and 'wrong' about human actions, character, and motivations (Wolff, 2018). The distinction between 'right' and 'wrong' is however pluralistic (Das & Sil, 2017; Pasztor, 2015; Wreen, 2018). Different ethical lens and cultural differences can also impact the salience of this distinction (Cowell et al., 2017; Robbins, Shepard, & Rochat, 2017).

Ethical compliance refers to conformance with the minimum moral standards set out in laws, codes of ethics and commonly agreed societal norms (Snezhko & Coskun, 2019). Ethical compliance is an important issue for most regulated professions and business sectors. They face ethical dilemmas and make decisions on these on a daily basis (Hoffman, Frederick, & Schwartz, 2014; Schwartz, 2017). In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis in which unethical practices were implicated, business ethics gained heightened prominence in business circles (Arjoon, 2010; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2016; Sonnerfeldt & Loft, 2018; Tyler, Dienhart, & Thomas, 2008; Walsh, 2019). Therefore, ethical compliance has become a top priority in corporate board rooms all over the world.

Moral norms and cultures are ever dynamic (Campbell, 2017; Inguaggiato, Metselaar, Porz, & Widdershoven, 2019; McGinley, 2018). As societies evolve, the emergence of different socio-political regimes often results in new ethical compliance regulations or a modification to the

existing codes of ethics that businesses must adhere to. Therefore, there is a need for businesses to adapt to these changes in an agile manner in order to be compliant from a regulatory perspective (McKendall, Beverly, & Jones-Ridders, 2002). Beyond compliance, an ethically compliant business enjoys the public perception of a socially responsive establishment and that has positive effects on patronage, customer loyalty, and profitability (Kashyap, Mir, & Iyer, 2006; McMahon, 1999; Painter-Morland, 2008).

Faced with the challenge of keeping up with unforeseeable changes in the regulatory domain, senior executives and business owners often rely on the expertise of ethics and ethical compliance consulting firms to maintain compliance, avoid regulatory fines and court public favor (Burdon & Harvey, 2016; Khalfani, 1996; Roberts, 2009). Therefore, ethics consultants must maintain agility at the core of their practice. This requirement calls for the perception of ethics and ethical compliance through an agile lens. Therefore, a juxtaposition of ‘agile’ with ‘ethics and ethical compliance consulting’ is needful.

At this junction, the definition of the adjective ‘agile’ or its noun, ‘agility’ is a prerequisite for an adequate conceptualization of agile ethics and ethical compliance consulting. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, the word, ‘Agile’ stems from the Latin word, ‘*agilis*’ which means to be nimble and quick. Harraf, Wanasika, Tate and Talbott (2015); Cummins (2017) and Tyszkiewicz and Pawlak-Wolanin (2017) conceptualize agility based on this understanding. They view it as a measure of responsiveness and anticipated responses to an external stimulus illustrating overall flexibility. Therefore, to be agile is to be expectant of change and to be adequately responsive to it. Going by Prince’s and Kay’s (2003) definition of the term, an agile ethics and ethical compliance consulting practice is one that is able to reconfigure itself in response to a sudden unforeseeable change in ways that are cost-effective, timely, robust and of broad scope.

Dealers R’Us was founded in 2013 to provide automotive dealerships in Ontario, Canada with business and ethics advisory services. The company’s core competencies include ethics and ethical compliance advisory services; registration and licensing of automotive dealerships; digital marketing services as well as productivity-related software solutions tailored to needs in the automotive retail sector. There are four departments within the company, namely:

- (a) Registration and Licensing (R&L)
- (b) Ethics Advisory (EA)
- (c) Digital Marketing (DM)
- (d) Software Solutions (SS)

The company provides niche management consulting services to automotive dealerships of varying sizes from large franchised multi-location operations to small/mid-size used car dealerships. A basic company organogram is presented in Figure 1. It details a functional structure segmented by disciplines/specializations. Each Department is led by a Director with administrative reporting lines to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

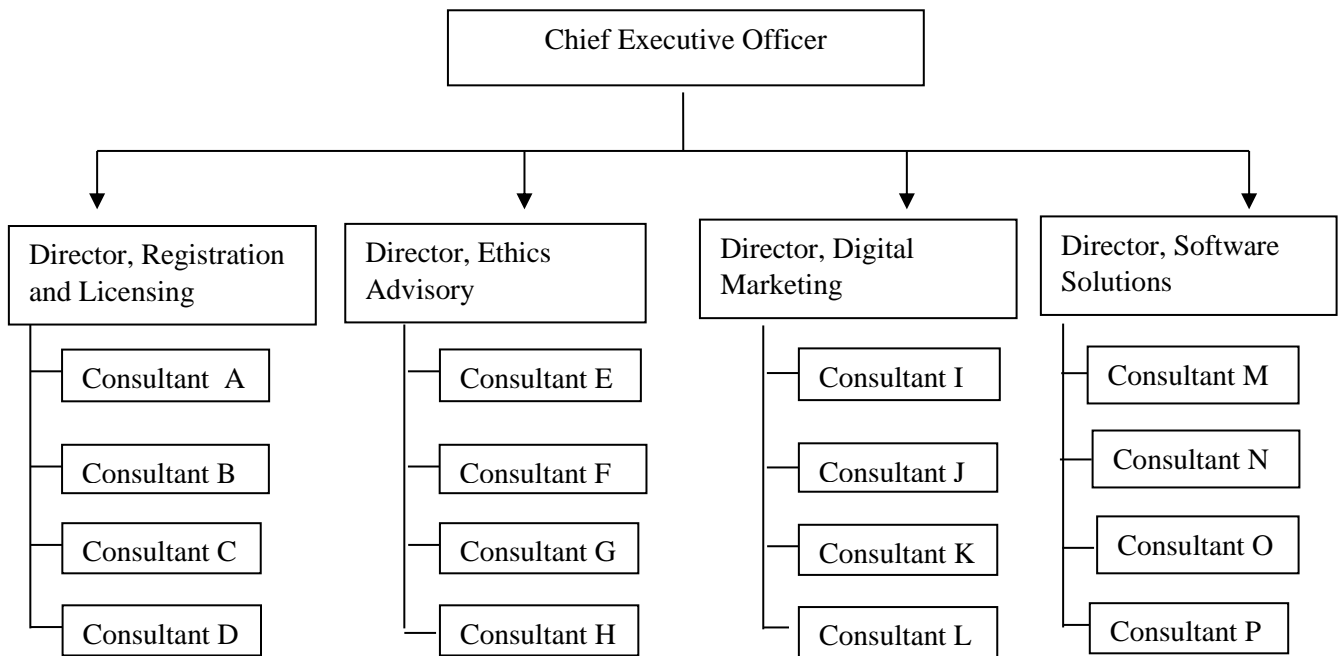


Figure 1. Company Organogram in the Pre-Intervention Era. Reprinted from an internal document saved on Dealers R’Us’ Server

Dealers R'Us operates in an unpredictable marketplace. By this, I am referring to the dynamism of the Ontario automotive retail industry and its ever-evolving regulatory/compliance environment. Therefore, the firm's Ethics Advisory practice must expect and embrace unforeseeable situational, environmental and contextual variations in its consulting engagements. In that sense, agility is non-negotiable because the absence of it would make ethics consulting ill-equipped to deal with the realities of business in the automotive retail market. The requirement for agility is even more so when the challenge of keeping up with uncertainty and unforeseeable change is double fold. Changes in the form of new regulations instigated by governmental agencies often occur in the regulatory environment. Ethics and Compliance consultants also face situational and contextual changes as they move from one client brief to another. Since no two clients are the same, agility demands taking a context-specific and customized approach to the identified ethical compliance issues at each client site.

Ethics consulting is a niche branch of Management Consulting. Therefore, it derives its means and methods from its parent discipline. However, 'agile' is not the norm in Management Consulting. The billion-dollar knowledge industry relies on a template-driven approach that entails engaging clients in a non-adaptive, rigid problem-solving process (Vitaud, 2016). Uwe Seebacher's book, 'Template-Driven Consulting', is highly indicative of the prevalent thought process in the consulting industry (Seebacher, 2003). Lai and Taylor (2011) also allude to the widespread use of standardized methodologies.

Pre-canned solutions and generic toolboxes cause consultants to be inflexible and ill-prepared to respond appropriately to uncertainty, unforeseen complexity, and unpredictable change. Sturdy, Clark, Fincham, and Handley (2004) suggest that traditional management consulting minimizes politics, silence, and marginalization in client organizations. Sherif and Xing (2006, p. 539) decry the utilization of preconceived templates stating that these result in non-agile consulting scenarios where *new client encounters are framed as old experiences*. According to Sturdy (2011), one may then extend the discourse to the argument that the absence of agility leads to practice commodification with an adverse effect on consulting quality and organizational outcomes.

Furthermore, taking a non-agile approach in ever-evolving compliance and regulatory environments attracts many perils. It makes it difficult for ethics consultants and their clients to

keep up with changes in compliance requirements, customer requirements, and technology. In a 2016 Ethics and Compliance survey of over 1000 senior executives conducted by NAVEX Global, 87% of the respondents submitted that keeping internal policies up to date with changing ethics regulations and training employees on these changes is a top concern and priority (NAVEX Global, 2016). A non-agile ethics consulting practice will undoubtedly fail to proactively prepare these leaders and the companies they lead for unpredictable regulatory changes, leaving them exposed to non-compliance related risks and liabilities.

Moreover, diversity in the automotive retail industry makes the non-agile methodological mindset of traditional management consulting redundant. There are franchised and non-franchised automotive dealerships with different economic motivations as well as small, medium and large dealerships with varying ethical climates. Demographic variety also adds increased complexity to the picture. Matsuo and Kusumi (2002) found that sales experience has a moderating effect on the procedural knowledge possessed by a salesperson. In Ontario, there are dealership salespeople with decades of experience and there are new college graduates who have just cut their teeth in the industry. Therefore, agile thinking demands that these nuances surrounding people and their moral decision motivators be fully deconstructed and applied contextually to every ethics consulting engagement.

Cultural influences and ethnic backgrounds have also been said to influence ethical disposition and moral decision making (Mu'adi & Sofwani, 2018). Canada has encouraged and experienced an increase in workforce migration over the last few decades with thousands of new immigrants settling in Ontario every year (Appelbaum, Kryvenko, Parada, Soochan, & Shapiro, 2015). Therefore, automotive dealerships in the province have access to a more diverse mix of human talent. These employees often come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds which translates into a variety of moral persuasions.

In adopting the conventional management consulting approach, a non-agile ethics advisory practice views every client scenario through a standardized, 'one size fits all' problem-solving lens. Its pre-canned solutions and metrics are oblivious of power, politics, legitimacy, and social identity - common features of the different ethical climate types set up in automotive dealerships (Grobler, 2017; Pagliaro, Lo Presti, Barattucci, Giannella, & Barreto, 2018; Sturdy et al., 2004). This indifference causes consultants to be less adaptive when faced with organizational scenarios

that do not fit preconceived molds. By failing to account for the intrinsic features unique to each client, a misalignment between the client scenario and the proposed ethical compliance plan can occur. This results in a poor ethical compliance culture in automotive dealerships accompanied by the risk of penalties and fines from regulators. For this reason, an examination of the factors necessary to create an agile ethics and ethical compliance practice is most needed.

Breaking from the old tradition of merely receiving pre-conceived recommendations from consultants and solely shouldering the implementation of solutions in a regime of constant and complex change, clients are beginning to demand increased consultant involvement marked by their desire for measurable outcomes (Aygul, Valentina, & Klychova, 2018). They are also beginning to benchmark compensation on results (Srinivasan, 2014). Through this study on creating an agile ethics and ethical compliance practice, I demonstrate that meeting this need in addition to keeping up with the varied and evolving ethics and ethical compliance needs of the automotive retail industry in Ontario requires the embrace of agility. More importantly, empirical evidence suggests that a non-agile ethics and ethical compliance practice results in lower ethical compliance rates, regulatory fines, and disenchanted clients. To buttress this position, the reader is introduced to a personal historical perspective in the following section.

1.2 Genesis of Organizational Inquiry

The Ethics and Ethical Compliance practice at Dealers R'Us typically accounts for 45% of the company's annual revenue. At the end of 2015 the fiscal calendar, the firm recorded a 15% decrease in revenue, largely attributable to a decrease in the number of engagements that its Ethics Advisory department took on. By the summer of 2016, the year to date revenue was lower by 27% compared to the previous year. As company CEO, this is a disconcerting trend considering the relative market boom in the years under review. Therefore, I sought industry insight in my quest to unearth the direct and remote cause(s) of the revenue decline.

In June 2016, I met the General Managers of two client organizations at the Georgian College Automotive Show, a popular industry event attended by key stakeholders of the automotive industry in Ontario, Canada. We held an informal roundtable discussion on ethics and ethical

compliance programs. This was a great opportunity to seek general feedback on our ethics advisory services. The gentlemen submitted that Dealers R'Us' ethics consulting approach was becoming ineffectual because it was not keeping up with industry changes and trends. One client had implemented a recent version of our ethical compliance program which was provided to them just before modifications were made to sections of the governing legislation, the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act (MVDA) by the industry regulator. Dealers R'Us' Ethics Advisory consultants failed to update the compliance program and inform the client of changes to the compliance requirements. This caused the dealership to fail a routine inspection when they were visited by auditors from the industry regulator. They were found to be in gross violation of regulations concerning vehicle history disclosures in online adverts and were fined \$10,000 by the industry regulator. Although, consultants in our Digital Marketing department were notified of this change. They did not relay it to their colleagues in the Ethics Advisory Department who had direct responsibility for the client.

At the second dealership, three salespeople resigned after the General Manager rolled out the generic ethical compliance program proposed by our firm. In their exit interviews, they alluded to the impracticality of some of the recommendations made in a small dealership like theirs. Our general compliance program was said to be indifferent to the realities of their business. More importantly, there was a culture of fear that became prevalent at the dealership as a result of the changes made. It took three weeks to fill the vacant positions and the General Manager at the dealership estimated the cost of lost sales and recruitment as adding up to \$125,000. The General Manager opined retrospectively that the compliance program we provided would have been better suited for a large franchised dealership with dozens of salespeople and hierarchical organizational structure. On the implementation side, he also struggled to roll out the program and could have used help from our consultants.

During a management sensemaking meeting convened to discuss my findings, one Director interpreted the market insight to mean that our Ethics Advisory consultants are *out of touch* with client needs and expectations. Another opined that we must focus on factors that influence the ethical perception of automotive dealers *to improve the fit of our compliance programs*. These arguments are not supported by any concrete evidence and there is no clear consensus on the appropriate path forward. All leaders, however, conceded that the organizational issue emanant

from the client feedbacks necessitates an organizational inquiry. The motivation for this is not far fetched. According to the firm's accountants, it will have to lay off 30% of its current personnel in the absence of an urgent intervention to address its lingering revenue decline. Therefore, the call to action is immediate because this is a major challenge that places the firm's viability in jeopardy.

Despite the absence of specificity or consensus on causality, I draw a broad initial problem statement that captures salient features of the rudimentary information at my disposal. As seen in Section 1.2.1, the statement is directed at the environmental, situational and contextual adaptiveness of the ethics advisory practice at Dealers R'Us.

1.2.1 Initial Problem Statement

The results of the client feedbacks led to the development of the initial problem statement given below.

The ethics advisory practice at Dealers R'Us may be non-adaptive to site-specific, situational and evolutionary contexts in the Ontario automotive retail industry. Preliminary data suggests that this may be causing it to provide generic ill-suited solutions to its clients, the result of which is poor ethical compliance rates and increased regulatory liability.

The intent is to convert the market intelligence gained so far into a form that can be further explored in a future data gathering exercise which will also serve to confirm or disconfirm the claims made.

1.2.2 Initial Research Aim & Objective

Based on the initial problem statement defined in sub-section 1.2.1, my initial research aim is to better understand and validate the client feedbacks provided in Section 1.2 as well as the initial problem statement stated in Section 1.2.1. As a result, it is my objective to unearth the factors responsible for the current state of our ethics advisory practice and to exploit that knowledge for the betterment of our practice in this AR inquiry.

1.3 Significance of Organizational Issue

The initial problem statement developed in Section 1.2.1 has significant business and societal ramifications. From an organizational perspective, the incentive for action within my organization cannot be glossed over. The Ethics and Ethical Compliance Practice at Dealers R'Us typically accounts for 45% of the company's annual revenue. Declining revenues and negative client feedbacks have put the ethics advisory practice at Dealers R'Us in dire need of an examination. Therefore, there is a strong incentive to verify the connection between the preliminary feedbacks obtained and the observed financial woes faced by the practice. It is hoped that this will incentivize the acquisition of actionable knowledge directed at change.

In Canada, 5 out of 6 households own an automobile. This makes household expenditures on motor vehicles at automotive dealerships third on the priority spending list after housing and taxes (Kenyon, 2010). It can be inferred that the public has an ever-increasing interaction with automotive dealerships. Therefore, my research is of utmost relevance to the public who is usually at the receiving end of unethical practices in the automotive retail industry.

Automotive dealerships are generally perceived to be unethical (Bernstein, 2003; Brown, 2002; Clinard, & Yeager, 1980; Honeycutt, Glassman, Zugelder, & Karande, 2001; Honeycutt & Ford, 1993; OMVIC, 2008). As far back as 1940, the Chicago Law Review reported litigious scenarios involving automotive dealers being sued for third party damages resulting from a negligent omission/commission (Leonard & Weber, 1970). Instances of unethical practices reported include the disguise of used cars as new, lack of disclosures on engine replacements made, excessive finance charges, warranty defaults, odometer rollbacks, sneaky pricing, high-pressure sales tactics, etc.

Gallup Polls conducts an annual public opinion survey on the honesty and ethics of several professions. Car salespeople have been adjudged to be one of the least trusted professionals, according to the results of these polls (Brenan, 2018). As a result, automotive retail businesses are highly regulated. Ontario dealers are expected to abide by a Code of Ethics specified in the Motor Vehicles Dealers Act (MVDA, 2002). This legislation is an example of additional consumer protection laws enacted to complement existing contract laws (Zupanec, 1979). The MVDA is enforced by the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC). The regulator's main goal is to ensure a fair marketplace and to protect the interest of car buyers in the province.

From 2010 to 2016, OMVIC responded to over 7000 ethics-related complaints against automotive dealers in Ontario. Because of its investigations, more than \$5,000,000 was paid in regulatory fines and customer refunds by dealers during the specified timeframe (OMVIC, 2018). The Automotive Protection Association (APA) in Ontario, Canada conducts mystery shopping exercises to determine the level of ethical compliance in the retail automotive market. In 2014, they shopped at twenty-one automotive dealerships and found only two were ethically compliant (APA, 2014; CTV, 2014). The report of their findings raised the specter on ethics and compliance-related issues in the Ontario automotive retail sector.

Therefore, a cloud of distrust hovers around automotive dealerships in the public domain. As such, principal dealers and owners seek the assistance of management consultants like Dealers R'Us to keep up with the ethical compliance and regulatory requirements of their trade. For this reason, the significance of operating an adaptive ethics practice that is geared towards sustained compliance rates in a dynamic regulatory sector cannot be overemphasized. Based on the preliminary information obtained, a non-agile and a non-adaptive approach to ethics and ethical compliance consulting appear to be failing our clients. In the absence of action and change, our clients may continue to grapple with low ethical compliance rates and unintended financial consequences.

1.4 Research Methodology & Theoretical Foundations: A Preamble

The organizational problem introduced in Section 1.2 is ill-defined and amorphous. It also involves several internal and external stakeholders who likely hold divergent objectives. As a result, Action Research (AR) in the form of Soft System Methodology (SSM) has been chosen as the methodological approach fit for this organizational inquiry. This is done within a social constructivist paradigm. AR refers to an exploratory and investigative inquiry into an organizational challenge using a recursive cycle of intention, action, and reflection with the aim of instigating change and learning (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

SSM adopts system thinking in the modeling of real-life complexities leading to the resolution of knotty organizational challenges (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). SSM is apt for the identified organizational issue because of its proven amenability to the kind of complexity and dynamism described in Sections 1.2 and 1.3. A detailed justification for the choices made is presented in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, the ecosystem consisting of Dealers R'Us, its internal stakeholders, external clients, industry regulators, and competing consulting firms represents a tremendous web of complexity that is ever-evolving. Therefore, I leverage Complex Adaptive System (CAS) Theory in the exploration and remediation of the organizational issue within an AR framework. The theory acknowledges the continuous interaction of the sub-components of a complex system. It also elucidates the concept of self-organization and how low order interactions lead to macro-level emergent characteristics (Oughton, Usher, Tyler, & Hall, 2018). General Systems Theory and Chaos Theory were not given particular attention because their foundational tenets relevant to this inquiry are subsumed in CAS theory.

CAS theory offers the opportunity to come to grasps with the ensuing complexity that surrounds Dealers R'Us' Ethics Advisory practice allowing the firm to exploit the knowledge of these interactions to make its practice adaptive to changes in the marketplace. The human relations and organizational structure dimensions of the organizational issue are explored using Social Identity Theory and Contingency Theory respectively.

1.5 The Action Research Group

The Action Research Group (ARG) is an internal focus group constituted to explore the identified organizational challenge and provide a responsive solution to it. It is comprised of fifteen members including the Chief Executive Officer (myself), four Departmental Directors, four consultants from the Ethics Advisory (EA) department as well as two consultants each from the Registration and Licensing (R & L), Software Solutions (SS) and Digital Marketing (DM) departments. Its mandate is to gain more insight into the client feedbacks reported in Section 1.2, deliberate on the organizational challenge that Dealers R'Us faces and find applicable solution(s) while drawing lessons from the inquiry. Members were charged with ensuring that the firm's ethics advisory practice becomes agile and responsive to the situational, context-driven and evolutionary trends in Ontario's automotive retail sector.

SSM is an inquiry and transformation tool that draws on multiple perspectives (Bergvall-Kareborn, Mirijamdotter, & Basden, 2004). As such, the composition of the ARG is representative of the entire organization and not just the EA department. This is logical when one considers the cross-linkages that exist between each department and how that impacts customer interactions. It was particularly necessary to get all the major political actors on board to give the process a chance to succeed. A recurring ARG meeting schedule is set, with the inaugural meeting set for January 5, 2018.

1.6 The Scholar-Practitioner

I am the student investigator and Action Research Group (ARG) facilitator at Dealers' R'Us. I also serve as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Principal Consultant of the firm with responsibilities for growing the business and providing a strategic direction for Directors and Consultants. Wearing multiple hats in this manner in this inquiry is an oddly new experience. MacIntosh and Coghlan (2007) identified this challenge of role duality and admonish student practitioners to be wary of associated pitfalls. At different times, I operate simultaneously in different insider research modes including active participation in our AR discourse, the facilitation

of critical debates, ethical compliance guardianship, dialectic review of management literature and the collation and reportage of actions and outcomes.

Nugus, Greenfield, Travaglia, and Braithwaite (2012) posit that AR environments are filled with political landmines. Despite my vantage position in the company, gaining organizational buy-in involves significant politicking. A word or two on my ontological and epistemological leanings is apt at this junction. I hold two physical science university degrees. Therefore, my education instilled a positivist mindset in me. However, I enrolled in multiple taught management courses prior to the start of this inquiry. That experience exposed me to pragmatism and social constructivism, with the latter being the adopted paradigm for this inquiry. The influence of the ensuing epistemological tension on my choice of methods is reported in Chapter Two.

1.7 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. The intent behind its general structure is in alignment with the general motive of Action Research projects as reported in Fisher and Phelps (2006) - to capture and report context, change, and lessons in an inquiry process. As shown in Table 1, this thesis consists of four AR chapters documenting four research phases that mirror Coghlan and Brannick's (2001) AR activities (diagnosis, planning, taking action and evaluating action) over two action cycles.

In Chapter One, I present an introduction to my organizational issue. I paint a picture of the dire need for action within my firm's ethics practice as well as the relevance of the identified issue to the automotive industry in Ontario and the public in general. In Chapter Two, I delve into the details of the research methodology chosen for this inquiry. Justifications for my choices are drawn from the peculiar nature of the organizational milieu and confirmatory precedents in management literature.

Chapter Three documents Phase I of the AR inquiry - a diagnostic market survey administered to better understand the client feedbacks reported in Chapter One. Thematic angles obtained from

the market survey instruct the empirical, conceptual and theoretical literature review presented in Chapter Four.

Thesis Chapter	Main Focus	Action Research Phase	Action Research Activity
Chapter Three	Market Survey	Phase I	Diagnosis
Chapter Five	Implementation of Soft System Methodology (First Cycle AR)	Phase II	Diagnosis, Planning Actions, Taking Actions
Chapter Six	Observation & Reflection	Phase III	Evaluating Actions, Reflection
Chapter Seven	Implementation of Soft System Methodology (Second Cycle AR)	Phase IV	Taking Further Actions

Table 1. Thesis Action Research Chapters, Phases and Activities

Note. Action Research Activities adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p.8)

Chapter Five provides a detailed account of the SSM inquiry conducted within my organization. This is Phase II of the AR inquiry. I discuss the workings of the ARG and the peculiar nature of the research setting. In Phase III, I report on the reflective assessments of organizational outcomes emanating from the actions taken. These are discussed in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, I demonstrate the iterative nature of AR by reporting the implementation of further actions based on input from the reflection phase (Phase IV). This chapter is followed by a discussion of my research findings and organizational recommendations in Chapters Eight. Chapter Nine lays out my reflections and musings on lessons learned during this inquiry.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the reader with an introduction to an identified organizational issue that emanated from two client feedbacks and a downward economic turn in Dealers R’Us’ Ethics Advisory practice. The issue is brought into the appropriate context using a historical account of the general ethics and compliance landscape in the automotive retail market. Rudimentary sensemaking by management team members at Dealers R’Us led to the definition of an initial problem statement that is expected to be scrutinized, refined or rewritten in subsequent chapters of this work.

I make a justification for immediate action and responsiveness in the form of an AR intervention. The general structure of the thesis is laid out in tandem with the iterative cycles of AR, setting the stage for a detailed discussion of the research methodology adopted for this organizational inquiry in Chapter Two.

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methodology utilized in this doctoral research work is presented. The reader is furnished with the thought processes and the epistemological transition that I went through in arriving at the final choice of Soft System Methodology (SSM). The research design is also outlined in addition to a justification for the choice of research methodology. Other topics covered include the ethical tensions that result from conducting insider Action Research projects and how those influenced me.

2.1 The Choice of a Research Methodology

The research methodology for this doctoral research emerged through a process that called my epistemological and ontological foundations into question. In the 19th century, French philosopher, Augustus Comte pioneered the concept of positivism. His goal was for sociological commentary and research to be guided by a scientific process and not by mere assumptions (Hasan, 2016). Comte and his comrades believed that one can study social problems using the same methods used by physical scientists. Under a reductionist framework, positivists seek to uncover generalizations, trends, patterns, causal relationships, inferences and correlations and to make a specific statement about the nature of the world (Persson, 2009).

In stark contrast, constructivism is based on the premise that we all experience reality through varying lens. Therefore, the notion of one single objective truth does not exist. It is also believed that the human mind is complex and the motives behind human actions can be intricate and different from one individual to another (Malcolm, 2000). Therefore, a scientific approach that leads to generalizations about the world will not suffice. There is also an emphasis on the role of empathy in social inquiry (Balsvik, 2017). This is essentially a call to view a phenomenon through the lens of the subjects that are immersed in it. In my case, I desired to engage in joint organizational *sense-making* through the lens of colleagues and clients due to the diversity of Dealers R'Us' ecosystem.

Prior education made me an ardent follower of the reductionist approach of positivism. Through my career and professional experience, I have come across organizational problems that were neither 'black nor white' - challenges that had no predictable patterns and for which a functional relationship could not be defined easily through a reductionist approach. These kinds of problems are ill-structured and are often referred to as 'wicked problems' in management literature (Crowley & Head, 2017; Daviter, 2017). 'Wicked' problems are organizational challenges that lack a precise and easily identifiable solution (Morrell, Sorensen, & Howarth, 2015). Lönngren (2017) posits that they are complex and ill-structured problems that involve different stakeholders, value conflicts and uncertainty. Denning (2013) calls them a 'messy social tangle' that defies conventional solutions and change over time.

The organizational issue encountered in Chapter One is complex, ill-defined, fuzzy and therefore 'wicked'. Pedler and Trehan (2008) posit that Action Research (AR) is a good fit for this kind of organizational issues. Moreover, the inability of scientific methods to discern the nuances of power, powerlessness, identity, and politics within human organizations became ever more evident to me as I progressed in this doctoral program. Working through the knotty issue identified will necessitate an inward look at our people, processes, power relations and biases. Quantitative methods are ill-fit for this purpose. This led me to the choice of AR, a qualitative method that discerns the human and social dimensions of organizational problems¹. In Section 2.2, I provide the reader with details on how my AR research is structured.

¹ A detailed justification of the choice of research methodology is presented in Section 2.3.

2.2 Research Design

The design of this inquiry is borne out of a desire to satisfy the initial research aim and objective set out in Section 1.2.2 and the need to revive an ailing ethics practice. The inquiry proceeded in four phases – Phases I, II, III and IV. As shown in Figure 2, the participatory AR inquiry starts with a diagnostic market survey designed to gain more insight into the client feedbacks reported in Chapter One. Throughout this thesis, I refer to this as AR-Phase I which was conducted in the ‘pre-intervention era’. The market survey data obtained are analyzed, providing a basis for the development of specific research questions. The outcome of the analysis also informs a review of relevant management literature, helping to situate this inquiry and provide guidance to the firm.

Thereafter, AR-Phase II takes place within Dealers R’Us under the instrumentality of Soft System Methodology (SSM)². During this phase, specific problem statement, research questions, and objectives are formulated based on the dyadic foundations of the market intelligence and ideas from literature discussed in Chapters Three and Four respectively. The ARG is also fully constituted and convened to reflect and act on the identified organizational issue. Because this phase involved interventive and remedial action planning and implementation, it is deemed as the ‘intervention’ in this thesis.

The ARG reflects on the outcomes of the actions taken and validates the same both within and outside the firm (AR-Phase III). Lessons from that exercise form the input into the formulation of the second wave of action plans implemented to improve upon the actions taken in the second phase (This occurs in AR-Phase IV). A recursive cycle of action and reflection is set up between the penultimate phase and Phase IV in a bid to bring about change and move the practice under review towards a desirable form. More importantly, a dialectic exchange is set up between the new evidence emanating from the reflection/validation phase and ideas from management literature. I refer to these phases as occurring in the ‘post-intervention era’.

² See detailed explanation of Soft System Methodology (SSM) in Section 2.5

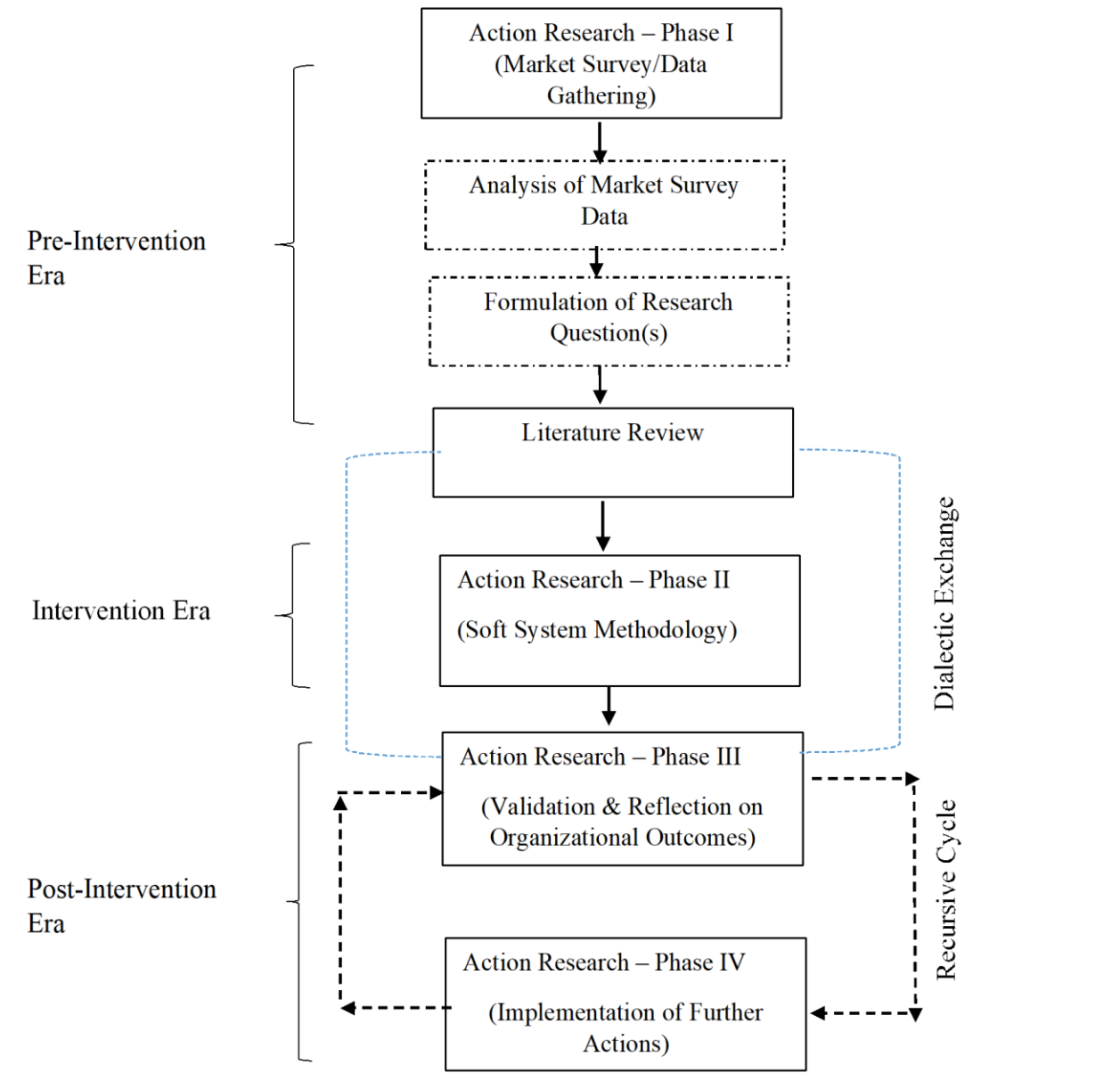


Figure 2: Research design. Adapted from a visual representation developed by the student practitioner (See Appendix C).

In the quest for a robust response to the organizational challenge identified, triangulation opportunities have been deliberately included in the research design. Virginia (2016) suggests that triangulation is a validation tool for qualitative research since it provides the researcher with information on the convergence of data from varied sources. This inquiry relied on data triangulation (using data sources within and outside my organization), theory triangulation

(combining Complex Adaptive Systems Theory, Social Identity Theory and Contingency Theory) and Investigator Triangulation. My Action Research group members become co-investigators of the organizational problem in their own rights as they participate in data collection and analysis. Coghlan and Brannick (2001) argue that Action Research is a methodology that thrives on the co-production of knowledge and the assimilation of divergent viewpoints to create change. There is an ethical imperative to do research with people and not on people (Yanar, Fazli, Rahman, & Farthing, 2016).

Ultimately, it is instructive to note that Action Research, by its very tenets, involves a recursive cycle of action and reflection (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001) forming a triangulation mechanism geared towards obtaining a comprehensive solution to the identified organizational issue. The general intent is to validate research lessons internally and externally and feed the results back into the action phase.

2.3 Action Research

Action Research (AR) is an inquiry methodology that elucidates and addresses complex social and organizational problems through a reliance on the active participation of those most impacted by these problems (Pedler & Trehan, 2008). According to Coghlan and Brannick (2001), it is a scholarly framework that provides responsiveness to organizational challenges. This study emphasizes its democratic and empowerment ideals which were popularized by Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1946).

AR involves a cycle of problem diagnosis, action planning, action implementation, and action evaluation. Similar to Coghlan and Brannick's (2001) AR spiral design, our inquiry is modeled as a spiral consisting of two action cycles divided into four phases. As shown in Figure 3, the first cycle commences with a data-gathering exercise required to construct the appropriate context for the inquiry in Phase I. Through the structure afforded by Soft System Methodology (SSM), we plan and act on the problematic organizational situation in Phase II.

Phase III is a reflection phase. It presents an opportunity to evaluate the outcome of implemented actions. This yields the insights required to embark on the second cycle of progressive actions in Phase IV.

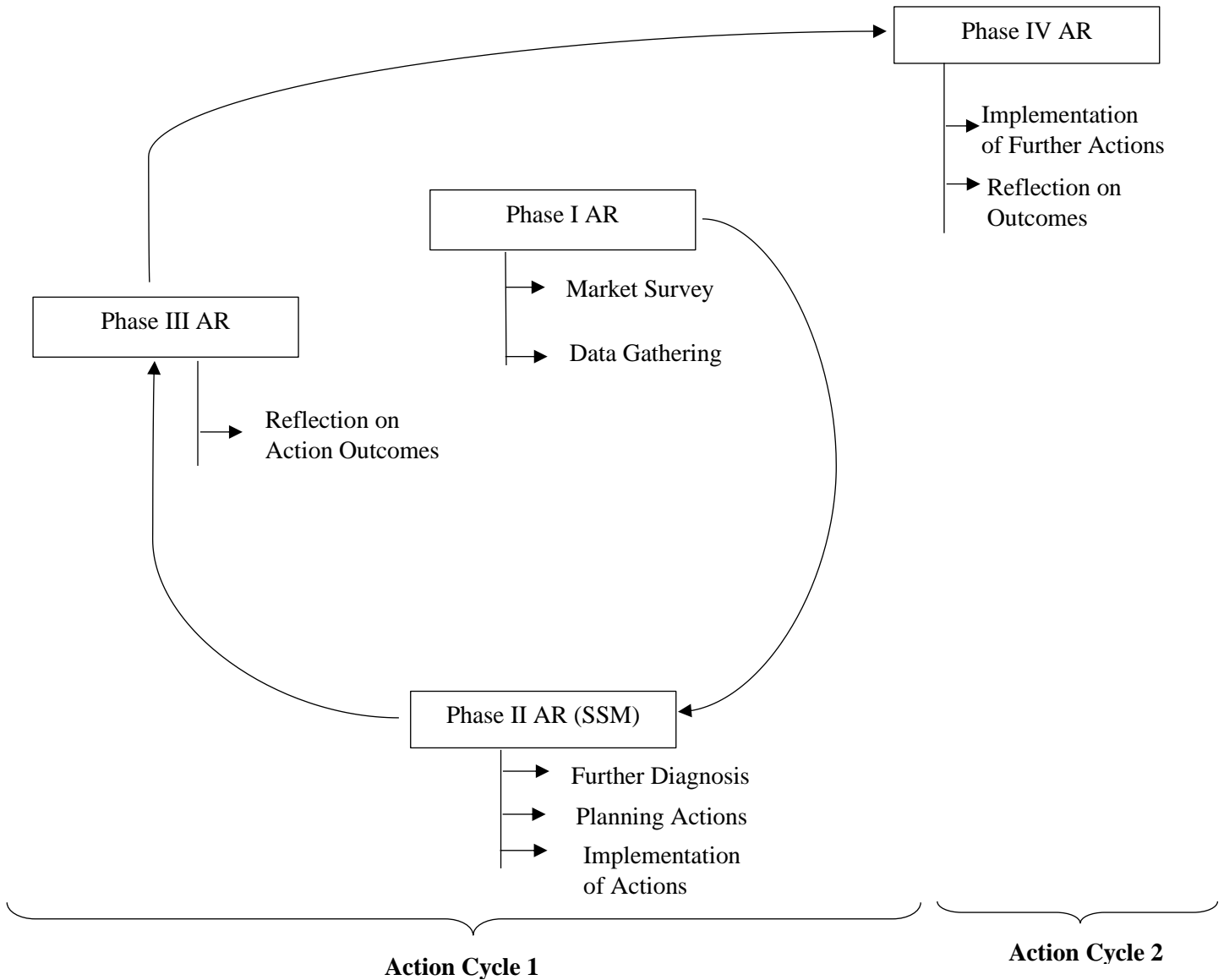


Figure 3: Action Research Spiral. Adapted from the research roadmap jointly developed by members of the Action Research Group (See Appendix C).

2.4 Justifying the Choice of Action Research

In this section, the choice of Action Research as a research methodology is further justified under five constructs – Complexity and Structure; Multiple Stakeholders; Value Conflicts and Uncertainty; Defiance of Conventional Solutions and Doctoral Program Requirements.

2.4.1 Complexity and Structure

Hawkins (2015) alludes to the fitness of AR for complex and messy organizational scenarios. Rogers et al. (2013) also refer to AR as a methodology that embeds a complexity frame of reference for decision making. As I begin to conceptualize the problematic situation at Dealers R’Us, the level of complexity at stake becomes more obvious. I must admit the difficulty I encountered as I wrapped my mind around the different problem constructs.

In section 1.1, several constructs come to the fore which may/may not be interrelated. However, the nature of a probable association is unknown. Ours is a quagmire characterized by a complex mix of internal organizational dynamics. There appear to be veiled nuances of power (and powerlessness), internal and external politics as well as other 'soft' people-related contexts in the identified organizational scenario.

AR is well suited for these scenarios as it confronts those issues head-on and does not ignore their existence. Nugus et al. (2012) and Flessner and Stuckey (2014) agree with this position when they underscore the complex nature of the political engagement between different stakeholders during AR projects. The ability to take contextual factors into account in the journey of organizational transformation is unique to AR and justifies the use of the methodology in a lot of practice-based interventions. There are multiple facets to our organizational problem and none of these are easy to put in a ‘box’. It is for this reason that the organizational picture I paint here is deserving of an AR inquiry.

2.4.2 Multiple Stakeholders

AR is well suited for organizational problems involving multiple stakeholders with divergent interests across different hierarchical levels (Tossavainen, 2017). My organizational scenario mirrors this description. The stakeholders that feature most prominently include our clients, the industry regulator - OMVIC, the CEO (myself), departmental directors and our consultants. I limit my analysis at this junction to the immediate vicinity of the organizational issue. A more expansive list of stakeholders is imaginable if one considers the global ecosystem that Dealers R'Us and its clients operate in.

Dealers R'Us has four departments and the conflict of interests between different stakeholders is palpable. The Registration and Licensing (R&L) department is mainly involved with assisting prospective dealers to obtain a valid dealer license. This includes ensuring that they comply with all registration requirements. Our Ethics Advisory (EA) department is directly saddled with the responsibility of working with existing dealerships on ethics and ethical compliance as well as allied regulatory matters. The Digital Marketing (DM) department works on online marketing and advertising briefs on behalf of automotive dealerships. Lastly, our Software Solutions (SS) team is responsible for developing and promoting a suite of web-based tools hosted on our Dealership Management System (DMS). The multiplicity of actors and the absence of synergy between the mission of each sub-group within the firm is one of the hallmarks of this organizational issue that qualifies it for an Action Research inquiry.

2.4.3 Value Conflicts and Uncertainty

Clark (1980) submits that AR is democratic, often helping to coalesce divergent values. The different values held by different stakeholders within the firm translate into the absence of any synchronization. This results in a value conflict that causes an uncertain future for our organization and its clients. For instance, our Digital Marketing (DM) department prides itself on producing the most engaging and aesthetically appealing digital media for automotive dealerships. Ethical compliance is not a top priority for the DM department. Therefore, any attempts to engage them on the identified organizational issue creates undue tension. If we do not change our current trajectory, it is uncertain that we will remain relevant in Ontario's automotive retail business for

much longer. For our clients, the risk of uncertainty is even greater. There is the possibility of potential fines, penalties, business closure and the eventual loss of their livelihoods.

2.4.4 Defiance of Conventional Solutions

After the analysis of the market feedback, it is obvious that our organization's ethics practice needs a revamp. In line with Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005, p.416), I engage in joint *sensemaking* with organizational leaders to find out *what is going on*. We reached no consensus through our deliberations. The multiplicity of perspectives and divergent opinions meant that we had no clear course of action. It was therefore easy to conclude that the identified organizational issue requires a methodology that is capable of creating change through a combination of inclusive participation and consensus-building. AR certainly fits this bill.

2.5 Soft System Methodology

Soft System Methodology (SSM) is an Action Research-based methodology for modeling and solving complex social processes and problems (Checkland, 1983). It was pioneered primarily by Peter Checkland in the 1970s based on the premise that stakeholders often view organizational problems through different lenses (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Por (2008, p. 335) argues that it allows peoples' viewpoints and assumptions about the world to be brought to light, challenged and tested.

SSM is the most structured and documented soft inquiry technique utilized in the elucidation of fuzzy, ill-defined and poorly structured 'wicked' problems (Ameyaw & Alfen, 2018; Flood, 2010; Schuilin & Kiewiet, 2016). The organizational challenge presented in Chapter One exhibits these three characteristics. Therefore, SSM was selected as an AR approach in this study primarily because of its proven ability to deal with the salient features of complexity, fuzziness and the consensus albatross in multi-stakeholder environments. The methodology has been applied successfully to numerous complex organizational problems. Mehregan, Hosseinzadeh, and Kazemi (2012); Sadri and Sadri (2014); Andayani, Sulistyowati and Perdana, 2016; Hanafizadeh

and Ghamkhari (2018) and Barusman and Redaputri (2018) are ready instances. In the following paragraphs, I describe the methodological approach in greater granularity.

SSM was implemented as described in Checkland (1985, p. 823) in Phase II of our organizational AR inquiry. This consists of seven sequential steps as shown in Figure 4. The process commenced with an entry into the unstructured problematic situation. During this time, characteristics of the organizational problem were brought to the fore in a joint social construction process (as seen in Checkland, 1983; Checkland, 1985; Checkland & Poulter, 2010). Several ARG meetings were held in the firm’s boardroom equipped with three adjoining 6’ x 4’ whiteboards and audiovisual equipment. Members attended focus group meetings in person and contributed verbally and via handwritten text on the whiteboard and on ‘post-it notes’.

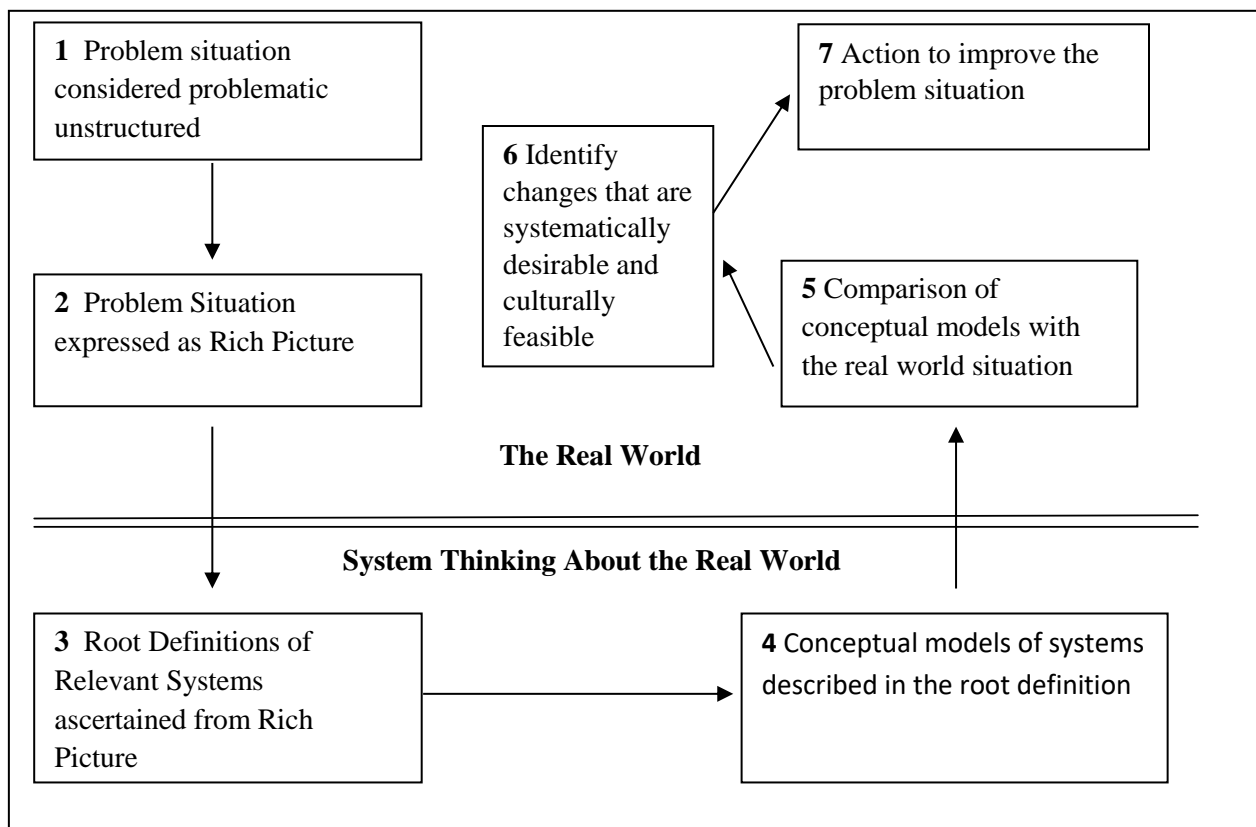


Figure 4. Soft System Methodology Inquiry Process. Reproduced from “Achieving Desirable and Feasible Change: An Application of Soft Systems Methodology” by P. Checkland, 1985, *The Journal Of The Operational Research Society*, 36(9), p.823.

This inaugural step was followed by an expression of the problem in rich pictorial representations. Checkland and Scholes (1990) define this step as a data-gathering phase that allows for the identification of all stakeholders and the associated processes that bind them. Members of the ARG take turns to make visual expressions of their thoughts on the organizational challenge on the whiteboard. Members also take turns to review the diagrams drawn by others, putting thoughts or questions that came to mind on 'Post-it Notes' pasted under each diagram. I bring up these questions and thoughts for discussion and debate at the group level. The motives behind certain images were examined and explained verbally to critics. This is a consensus-building approach that enhanced the common understanding of our knotty organizational challenge. All rich pictures are reproduced by this writer in an electronic format using the Microsoft Publisher application after the conclusion of the rich picture development process. Afterward, I present the electronic copies of the images to members of the ARG to ascertain their accuracy and provide room for edits.

In the third step, members of the ARG make verbal submissions on the root definitions of an ideal organizational scenario. We initially explore the global ecosystem of the organizational issue using the mnemonic CATWOE as defined in Underwood (1996). C stands for Clients, A for Actors, T for Transformation, W for Weltanschauung/Worldview, O for Owners and E for Environmental Constraints. Afterward, the group relies on Gerwel Proches and Bodhanya's (2015) PQR formula to craft the final root definition of purposeful activities needed to attain practice agility. P speaks to the 'what', Q to the 'how' and R to the 'why' of the ideal organizational state. In other words, we zero in on "doing P activities and practices, using Q modalities, to obtain R objective(s)". Participants submit handwritten ideas on P, Q, and R using 'Post-it Notes' pasted all around the meeting room in clusters. I collate the ideas as the focus group deliberates on a synthesis of seemingly duplicate ideas.

Thereafter, conceptual models of the activity systems geared towards organizational change are developed. Like Basden and Wood-Harper (2006) admonished, we carry out a critical analysis of purposeful activities that must be embarked upon in an open roundtable discussion. The conceptual models are drawn from a combination of verbal submissions and textual data written by participants on the whiteboards. In the fifth step, the conceptual models are compared to reality. As seen in Pereira, Medina, Gonçalves, and da Silva (2016), we seize this as an opportunity to

close the gap between our current reality and the ideal states. ARG members manually populate a three-column table hand-drawn on a whiteboard. Headers included '*Current State*', '*Ideal State*' and '*What must be done*'.

In the penultimate step, I hold a negotiation meeting behind closed doors with members of the leadership team to define and agree on possible and feasible changes. This face to face exchange is critical because the political support of Directors is sorely needed to achieve any major changes at the firm. The meeting lasts ninety minutes and I take notes as the team deliberates on contemplated actions. The decisions in this inner circle meeting are later ratified by a voice vote in the expanded ARG meeting. A tally of the votes is kept manually using the whiteboard. In the final step, the ratified actions are implemented to effect change.

2.6 Data Collection

In this AR study, data is collected within my organization and externally at an automotive dealership selected for a test case ethical compliance project. The small size of the firm compels a total sampling strategy internally. Data collection outside the firm is based on a critical case scenario in which decisive data is obtained in a representative ethical compliance consulting brief. The motivation for this strategy stems from resource expediency and limitations. Palinkas, Leveton, Vessey, and Chou (2017) submit that it is crucial to determine the dimensions of criticality. This allows for a reasonably logical generalization over the relevant universal dataset. Criticality criteria considered include prior experience with Dealers R'Us' ethics advisory service in the pre-intervention era; mid-size or large-sized automotive dealership typical of the firm's usual clientele and the presence of an ethical compliance citation or exigency necessitating urgency.

The AR inquiry commences with the collection of market survey data from automotive dealerships in Ontario (Phase I). This is followed by the implementation of AR-Phase II (SSM) in which data is collected from internal participants within my organization. During the implementation of AR-Phase III, internal and external data collection occurs. The data collection methods and strategies applicable to each phase are presented in Sections 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3 and 2.6.4 in order of sequence.

2.6.1 Field Data Collection in the Pre-Intervention Era (Action Research-Phase I)

Quantitative and qualitative data are acquired using a semi-structured questionnaire in the pre-intervention phase (See Appendix B) to validate the client feedbacks reported in Chapter One. The data collection instrument has three items and an open-ended comment section. I administer it to eighty automotive dealership personnel in person and require participants to fill out their responses manually. I adopt a total sampling strategy encompassing all six of Dealers R'Us' key clients. Two organizations declined participation, leaving me with four automotive dealerships who were interested in the survey. Respondents are asked to respond to a number of statements with possible answers ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'.

Returned questionnaires are collated and responses reproduced exactly in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis. The choice of a semi-structured questionnaire is closely linked to the familiarity of the Ontario automotive retail industry with surveys and the preference of the client site leaders for efficient time management during the inquiry. The semi-structured questionnaire deployed is easy to comprehend and can be completed in a shorter time frame compared to the length of time required for an interview. I prefer onsite data collection even though it is costlier than the remote or online format because of the ability to interact socially with participants and answer any questions they may have.

The market survey data obtained in Chapter Three sets out the radar of the literature review presented in Chapter Four. It also forms the initial basis for further diagnosis in Phase II of this AR inquiry (as seen in Chapter Five).

2.6.2 Intra-Firm Data Collection during the Intervention (Action Research-Phase II)

Qualitative data are collected in focus group meetings during the second phase of our AR inquiry which features the implementation of Soft System Methodology. The utility of focus groups for data collection in AR projects is well established. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) highlight its efficacy in the creation of new knowledge and in the diagnosis of organizational problems. Fletcher, MacPhee, and Dickson (2015) reviewed six Action Research endeavors and found that focus groups were used for data collection in five of those. Eskicioglu (2016) also utilized it in an Action Research project involving university students.

Based on these precedents, I chose to collect data internally using focus group interviews within an AR framework. Insights are drawn from all fifteen members of the ARG. I utilize seed prompts in the form of a few open-ended questions administered verbally to all participants in the meeting room. This is expected to elicit a natural conversation flow and result in additional questions, that produce a rich interactive discourse.

Responses are handwritten verbatim on three adjoining 6' x 4' whiteboards. Different colored markers are utilized to delineate different responses and emergent themes. I also observe and manually document participant facial expressions, tonality, body languages and other non-verbal cues in my notepad. After each meeting, this data is then typed out in full by me on a computer owned by the firm using a Microsoft Word processing application. The qualitative data obtained in Phase II of the AR inquiry guides the development of action plans reported in Chapter Four. The outcomes of actions taken are later evaluated and validated internally and externally in Phase III of the AR inquiry as seen in Chapter Five.

2.6.3 Field Data Collection in the Post-Intervention Era (Action Research-Phase III)

After the implementation of actions in Phase II of the inquiry, I seek to collect field data that can be used to judge the efficacy of the actions taken. In order to do this, a semi-structured questionnaire containing eighteen items is designed for external data collection. Respondents are asked to respond to a number of statements with possible answers ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. Paper copies are administered to twenty-eight external stakeholders at the test case client site (see Appendix C). This is done in person and participants are required to fill out their responses manually. The questionnaire yields qualitative and quantitative data which is reproduced in an exact form using Microsoft Excel for ease of analysis. That exercise solidifies some of the actions taken and provides instructive quantitative data that partly necessitates a second AR cycle as well as the implementation of further remedial actions reported in Chapter Seven (Phase IV).

2.6.4 Intra-Firm Data Collection in the Post-Intervention Era (Action Research-Phase III)

Quantitative data is also obtained within the firm to further validate the efficacy of the actions taken in Phase II of the inquiry. This is done using a semi-structured questionnaire containing twenty-five items. It is administered in-person to all twenty internal stakeholders at Dealers R'Us. The obtained data is reproduced in an exact form in Microsoft Excel. Just like the data collection efforts reported in Section 2.6.3, the insight gained from this exercise validates some prior actions take in Phase II and enriches the additional actions taken in Phase IV.

2.7 Data Analysis

In this section, the strategy and procedures used in the analyses of qualitative and quantitative data discussed in Section 2.6 are presented.

2.7.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

In Section 2.6, two qualitative data forms are noted – open-ended responses obtained from the semi-structured questionnaires administered in Phases I & III of the AR inquiry and the focus group narratives obtained in Phase II of the inquiry. I utilize two main analytical methods for these qualitative data forms. Focus Group narratives are analyzed using interpretive reflexivity while open-ended questionnaire responses are explored using Clarke and Braun's (2006) six (6) step thematic analysis approach. Specific details on each method are provided in the following sub-sections.

2.7.1.1. Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the intentional practice of continuous self-awareness taking the interactional dynamics between actors in an AR inquiry into account while focusing on how one's social positioning, personal biases, assumptions, and mental models impact interpretations and the joint construction of meaning in a participatory inquiry (Finlay & Gough, 2003). According to Finlay (2003), reflexivity enriches AR endeavors providing insightful meaning, self-awareness, and

discovery. Finlay (2002) identified reflexive practices to include introspection and inter-subjective reflection. To that end, I relied on personal introspection in my practice of first-person AR to understand the language and verbiages emanating from the inquiry. This is done against the backdrop of my social positioning in the ensuing milieu. Through active journaling during the inquiry, I continuously document the meanings, patterns, and interpretations that result from my introspective intuition. This approach is intended to fully exploit the collaborative discourse, allowing for a more robust construction of meaning.

Second-person AR perspectives in the ARG's cooperative inquiry are analyzed through intersubjective reflection. Members explore narratives through the prism of their social situation in relation to those of others. We maintain an awareness of the power and relationship ties as we navigate complexity during the inquiry. Shared meanings in the qualitative data and underlying conflicts (spoken and unspoken) are exposed in the process leading to the discovery of actionable co-constituted knowledge. As interactions unfold in the focus group meetings, I keep an active roster of these meanings and conflicts on three adjoining 6' x 4' whiteboards and enlisted the assistance of participants wherever clarification is required. Physical documentation not only provides an audit trail and the transition of worldviews but also helps participants to rethink and concretize their thoughts. By extending this inquiry to a larger community of practice in the test case ethical compliance field project, third-person AR narratives are explored through mutual collaborative analysis with the research participants.

2.7.1.2 Thematic Analysis

The choice of thematic analysis for the exploration of open-ended questionnaire responses was based on three factors – epistemological flexibility, rigor, and inclusivity. According to Clarke and Braun (2006), thematic analysis is agnostic from an epistemological standpoint, unlike methods like Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Grounded Theory method which are associated with a particular epistemological or theoretical leaning.

At the beginning of my doctoral studies, I experienced a period of epistemological ambivalence stemming from a perceived conflict between the promotion of interpretivism in certain taught course materials and my prior grounding in positivism. This situation created an uncertain phase

at the onset of my research during which I desired a flexible method that is not tied to/does not stem from a particular epistemology. Thematic analysis meets this requirement. By virtue of its widespread adoption and validation in qualitative research, it also satisfies the scholarly requirement of rigor.

In line with the participatory and democratic ideals of AR, I also sought an inclusive data analysis method that does not disenfranchise stakeholders within my organization. van Lieshout and Cardiff (2011) stress the importance of inclusivity and allowing practitioners to engage with the data analysis process in insider Action Research projects, their minimal research experience notwithstanding. Cardiff, McCormack, and McCance (2018) call this *participatory analysis*. This is particularly crucial because of the critical importance conferred on internal stakeholders by their authorship and ownership status in the organizational milieu. Thematic analysis offers the benefit of joint participatory analysis in line with the inclusive and democratic ideals of AR. Its systematic step-by-step sense-making and pattern-seeking approach is relatable and allows for inclusive stakeholder engagement, especially since participants at Dealers R'Us are not expert researchers.

Participants are provided with paper copies of Clarke and Braun (2006). Emphasis is placed on the staged thematic analytical method described therein. The article is written in plain and easy to understand language. Despite that, it is important to ensure consistency in the understanding of the method and how it is to be applied. So, I discuss the six-stage process with participants and entertain questions before full deliberations on the data.

The thematic analyses commenced with data familiarization. This approach is taken twice in this research, firstly in Phases I (pre-intervention era) and then in Phase III (post-intervention era) of the AR inquiry. For both phases, I extracted raw data from the returned questionnaires by typing it out verbatim on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Respondent numbers were affixed to each response for identification and tracking purposes. On a personal level, I got familiar with the data by reading it line by line and rereading it before presenting it to the team. Paper copies of the manuscripts are provided to internal stakeholders one week before our scheduled joint data analysis meeting to allow time for a pre-meeting review. In our Action Research Group meetings, a few members verbalized the raw data to the rest of the team. Other members also read the raw textual data quietly to themselves. We utilize a combination of a whiteboard and a

projected laptop displaying the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet utilized for the analysis. Members register data on both concurrently during the analysis.

At intervals, I throw out the question, ‘what does this narrative mean to you?’ as stakeholders digest the manuscripts. Participants are encouraged to take a latent analytical approach as they encounter the data. Beyond semantics, this necessitates an examination of the underlining ideologues and assumptions that inform the submissions. Initial ideas that result from this exercise are dictated verbally, handwritten on a whiteboard and typed out on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Over time, emerging ideas begin to concretize into potential codes and that opened up stage two of the analysis – the sorting of initial codes. Here, a code is defined as a string of prevalent ideas, biases and arguments. We identify common patterns within the textual data as well as threads leading to similar inferences. The excerpts relevant to the identified codes are grouped together in a tabular form and color-marked. The categorized excerpts are classified under initial codes that have now become more defined. Excerpt numbers are maintained for tracking and identification purposes.

In Appendix C, the code sorting stage of the thematic analysis conducted in the pre-intervention phase is presented separately as a tri-column table. The column titles include ‘Color Codes’ (different primary and secondary colors are listed as identifiers under this column), ‘Initial Codes’ (defined codes are placed under this column) and ‘Categorized Excerpts’ (I use this column to present some selected excerpts pulled from the raw data). Due to brevity considerations, the code sorting stage of the post-intervention thematic analysis is presented as part of a four-column table that includes the post-intervention version of the three-column titles already described above as well as an ‘emergent themes’ column used to document advanced stages of the analysis carried out as described in subsequent paragraphs.

After initial codes are sorted, we proceed with the definition of themes. At this stage, we read the raw data again in conjunction with the initial codes generated and begin to synthesize them into preliminary themes using a tabular format. We are most interested in patterns within each response and across the data set that are prevalent enough to qualify as a theme. Our focus group is also flexible on less prevalent patterns that have important implications for the inquiry. Some initial codes become themes in their own right while other themes are formed from the

combination of two or more codes. The criterion for selecting codes to be combined is the existence of interlinking patterns relevant to the organizational problem.

As shown in Appendix C, the combination and emergence of initial themes are expressed in a table using basic arithmetic symbols of addition '+' and equals to '=' respectively. For example, Code A is placed in a top row and Code B is placed in a bottom row in the same column. Both codes are separated by the addition symbol. An 'equals to' sign is placed to the right of the addition symbol and the two codes, after which the emergent theme is presented. At this stage, we maintain color code descriptions as a qualifying column on the table. This is a high-level analysis that entails processing the initial codes and emergent themes while referring to the raw data at intervals.

Furthermore, we proceed to theme refinement and naming. At this stage of the analysis, we seek out overarching ideas under which the initial themes may be subsumed. Members of the ARG create links between initial themes and seek out patterns and interconnecting ideas that lead to a refinement of the preliminary themes. The combination and emergence of refined themes are also expressed in a tabular format using basic arithmetic symbols of addition '+' and equals to '=' respectively. For instance, theme A is placed in a top row and theme B is placed in a bottom row in the same column. Both themes are separated by the addition symbol. An 'equals to' sign is placed to the right of the addition symbol and the two themes, after which the emergent theme is presented. For other initial themes, refinement comes in the form of a renaming. New names emerged based on additional considerations made for appropriateness, relevance, succinctness, and comprehensiveness.

In the pre-intervention phase, we take an inductive approach in our theme search, allowing the data to lead us wherever it may. In the post-intervention era, a deductive theme search is carried out. We seek to know if the emergent constructs would fit into the themes established in the pre-intervention phase. In both cases, our collaborative teams review the emergent themes and compare them to the raw data extracts in a bid to draw insights at a latent level.

2.7.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

The responses provided by respondents to the AR Phase I market survey and Phase III post-intervention survey are in the form of Likert scale data ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’. Total counts and frequencies are computed for each response type, allowing for the calculation of percentages. Weighted Average Scores (WAS) are also computed by appropriating weights to the ordinal data ranging from 1 to 5 with 5 corresponding to ‘Strongly Agree’ and 1 corresponding to ‘Strongly Disagree’. Assuming Statement X is posed to respondents and the frequency/count of all response types on our 5-point Likert scale range from N_5 through N_1 . N_i is the total count of all responses and P_5 through P_1 represents the percentage of corresponding response types.

An instance of the WAS and percentage computations carried out is presented in Table 2. A WAS closer to 1 indicates a high degree of disagreement while a WAS closer to 5 indicates a high degree of agreement. A comparison is drawn between WAS and percentages obtained for the pre-intervention market survey and those obtained from the post-intervention questionnaire to ascertain improvements in our ethics and ethical compliance consulting practice and the efficacy of actions taken.

	Assigned Ordinal Weight	Frequency/Count	Percentage
Strongly Agree	W_5	N_5	P_5
Agree	W_4	N_4	P_4
Neutral	W_3	N_3	P_3
Disagree	W_2	N_2	P_2
Strongly Disagree	W_1	N_1	P_1
Total	$W_t = W_5 + W_4 + W_3 + W_2 + W_1$	$N_t = N_1 + N_2 + N_3 + N_4 + N_5$	
<p>WAS for Statement X: $= \sum W_i N_i / \sum W_i$, where i is a positive integer, starting from 1. $= ((W_5 \times N_5) + (W_4 \times N_4) + (W_3 \times N_3) + (W_2 \times N_2) + (W_1 \times N_1)) \div (W_t)$ Percentage of each response type for Statement X: $P_i = (N_i \div N_t) \times 100$</p>			

Table 2. Computation of Weighted Average Scores and Percentages from Likert Scale Data

Note. The adopted computation and comparison method were obtained from Amakyi (2017)

2.8 Validity and Reliability Analysis

Data validity refers to the credibility of research methods and findings while reliability is a measure of a researcher's ability to obtain repeatable findings. Validity test procedures for qualitative research are well established. They include Face, Content, Construct and Criterion validity tests. Hope and Waterman (2003) argue that the validity of Action Research should really be based on the Aristotelian idea of praxis - which borders on taking actions on a problematic situation to cause change. This involves a subjective interpretation of the inquiry process. Due to this subjectivity, the credibility of Action Research has always been called into question (Campbell, 1988; Phillips, 1992). Coghlan and Brannick (2001) even submit that validity and repeatability are non-issues in Action Research. Due to variances in epistemological foundations, Lewin (1946) and Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985) submit that the utilization of positivist validity tests for Action Research is inappropriate.

Social phenomena are heterogeneous and in flux over time. Unlike the physical sciences where the result of an experiment can be repeated under controlled conditions, the assessment of reliability in Action Research must be on the recoverability of the reported experiences. To do this, I disclose the conditions and context in which the organizational problem, actions, lessons, and change are situated (as advised in Checkland & Holwell, 1998).

The main motive is a responsive intervention aimed at creating organizational change. Even though arriving at a generalizable theory is not the goal, I believe the ability to prove a high degree of credibility and reliability makes my work more acceptable in management and academic circles. Herr and Anderson (2005) echo this sentiment when they surmise that doctoral students writing an Action Research-based dissertation must not neglect validity and reliability.

By design, SSM ensures validity through multiple dialectics in multiple inquiry cycles (Dick & Swepson, 1999). This provides an opportunity for criticality and an avenue to adequately scrutinize research findings. Dick (2000) reckons SSM as involving four dialectics. The first is set up between the expression of the unstructured problem and the root definitions of the problem. The second dialectic is between root definitions and the ideal conceptual models. The third is between ideals and the reality of the complex situation been explored and the fourth dialectic is set up between action plans and the reality that comes from taking action.

Furthermore, face and content validity tests were conducted on selected research instruments in line with Bölenius, Brulin, Grankvist, Lindkvist, and Söderberg (2012). The pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires deployed in Phases I and III are subjected to the assessment of two doctoral research supervisors who are provided with electronic copies of the data collection instruments by email prior to their deployment. Both supervisors submit that the survey statements are capable of adequately capturing data relevant to this research. Participant face validity tests are also conducted on the post-intervention questionnaire. Five organizational leaders at the external research site are presented with paper copies of the said questionnaire to ascertain whether it adequately covers the concept of practice agility from the perspective of a service user. They all return affirmative responses in handwritten annotations made on the copies provided. Within Dealers R'Us, all four Departmental Directors are provided with electronic copies of the pre-intervention and post-intervention data collection instruments in advance. They also validate the questionnaires.

Content validity is achieved through the instrument analysis of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). Sangoseni, Hellman, and Hill (2013) advocate the use of raters that are familiar with the subject area under investigation. Therefore, paper copies of the questionnaires are provided to eight business ethics SMEs. The 'essentiality' criteria set include comprehensiveness/coverage, clarity, and language. The response rate is 100%. I utilize the Lawshe Content Validity Ratio (CVR) formula as presented in Lawshe (1975, p. 567). For all items on the instruments, the feedback provided by the SMEs yielded a CVR ranging between 0.75 and 1.0. The CVRs obtained meet the minimum threshold for validity set in Lawshe (1975, p. 568).

2.9 Ethical Issues

In this section, I present some of the ethical issues put into consideration in relation to data collection and analysis. Some of these issues border on procedural researcher-participant interactions while others emanate from the political nature of conducting an insider Action Research project.

Like most accredited doctoral research programs, the University of Liverpool DBA program maintains high ethical approval standards. I applied to the Ethics Committee for ethical approval

by providing the details of my proposed research. My application file included a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) which provides information to potential research participants on the goals of the study, potential risks, and benefits as well as participant rights and responsibilities. The basic tenets of participant anonymity and right of refusal, as well as secure data collection and storage, are clearly stated in the PIS. A consent form that calls for an acknowledgment of the information provided in the PIS is also attached in compliance with the requirements of the ethics committee. Furthermore, local approval letters were obtained and included in my application. Ethical approval documents can be found in Appendix B.

During this inquiry, I ensure that all potential participants read the PIS and complete the Consent Form. It is important for the research data collection methods to be designed in a way that ensures that participants can engage in joint sense-making without fear of retribution. Complete anonymity is guaranteed, and no participants are identified on any research documents.

I hold a position of power and authority within the organization but there are also four (4) gatekeepers who mirror a profile that Chabot, Shoveller, Spencer and Johnson (2012) describe as *access controllers*. I suspect that a feeling of powerlessness by some stakeholders can hamper the inquiry process. This is antithetical to the emancipatory ideals of Action Research. To mitigate this challenge, the ethical dimensions of the power relations within the company cannot be ignored. As seen in Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6, the strategies for data collection, analysis, solution implementation, and reflection phases are designed with inclusivity in mind.

Riecken, Strong-Wilson, Conibear, Michel, and Riecken (2012) opines that it is important for the voice of participants in an Action Research inquiry to be heard in decision making and solution implementation. Therefore, participants are assured that their engagement with the inquiry will count. It is also important to advise them that their participation will have no repercussions on their career growth or compensation at Dealers R'Us. I continue to encourage dissent and new ideas in the hopes of putting my prospective Action Researchers at a greater comfort level. To further empower stakeholders, I read their right to decline participation at regular intervals. Locke, Alcorn, and O'Neill (2013) describe this as giving participants communicative freedom.

2.10 Chapter Summary

In Chapter Two, the methodological framework for this workplace-based doctoral research is laid out. The adopted research design entails four AR phases implemented in two action cycles with SSM being the specific approach taken. Justifications for the choice of AR and SSM are made against a backdrop of the salient features of the organizational issue. Semi-structured questionnaires are utilized to collect quantitative and qualitative data before and after the intervention while focus group meeting proceedings are documented in qualitative form during the inquiry. Methods of data analysis discussed include reflexivity, thematic analysis, and weighted average comparisons. A summary of the methods deployed in each phase is presented in Table 3.

Research Phase	Predominant Action Research Activity	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Phase I	Data Gathering, Diagnosis (Market Survey)	Semi-structured questionnaire	Thematic analysis, Percentage & weighted average analysis
Phase II	Reflection, planning and action implementation (Soft System Methodology)	Focus group interviews	Reflexivity
Phase III	Post-intervention data gathering and reflection	Semi-structured questionnaire, focus group interviews	Reflexivity, Thematic analysis, percentage & weighted average analysis
Phase IV	Implementation of further actions	Focus group interviews	Reflexivity

Table 3. Summary of Data Collection & Analysis Methods Discussed in Chapter Two

I also detail the procedures taken within the SSM inquiry, providing the reader with a clear narrative on how each method informed the next steps in the AR cycle. In the later sections of the chapter, measures taken to ensure the validity of research instruments and the reliability of the research are discussed. This chapter sets the stage for an account of Phase I of this inquiry presented in Chapter Three.

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an account of the diagnostic market survey and data analysis conducted to further explore the client feedbacks reported in Chapter One. In line with Coghlan and Brannick's (2001) AR cycle, this diagnosis stage represents Phase I of Dealers R'Us' organizational inquiry. It lays a foundation for future responsiveness to the organizational issue of practice adaptiveness and agility. The emergent knowledge gained from the exercise is required to refine the preliminary problem statement presented in Chapter One. It also lends itself to the development of more specific research questions, aims and objectives that become crucial in Phases II and III of this inquiry.

3.1 Purpose of Market Survey

Dealers R'Us offers business and ethics advisory services to automotive dealerships of different sizes, personnel composition, ethical climate and market positioning. Unpredictable changes in compliance laws and ethics regulations are also not uncommon. Client feedbacks reported in Chapter One suggests the existence of an organizational problem. The firm's usual template-driven consulting approach was described as rigid and ill-equipped to handle changes in client scenarios and the unforeseen changes in the regulatory environment. The resultant client liability and progressive consulting revenue decline have become strong motivators for action.

A typical Action Research inquiry starts with planning, based on data gathered about an organizational problem of interest (Lewin, 1946). However, the brevity of the client encounters from which the above-referenced feedbacks were obtained did not allow for detailed data gathering required for an appropriate problem diagnosis and research question formulation. At this point, detailed insight into the true nature of the organizational challenge and its extent are lacking leading to a poorly defined problem. According to Chapman (1989), this can result in wrong research design and poorly focused data collection with negative consequences for the firm.

In order to properly define what appears to be a multi-faceted issue and conceptualize the organizational challenge in a manner amenable for scholarly research, a market survey was deemed necessary to gather requisite data on the identified issue. With a detailed understanding of the underlying parameters, greater specificity can be attained in the refinement of the research problem and the conceptualization of better-focused research questions, aims, and objectives. It is

expected that these will yield more robust and responsive action plans fit for the identified challenge.

3.2 Population Sampling Strategy & Participant Selection Criteria

Dealers R'Us actively services six key automotive dealerships in Ontario. These companies are of varying sizes (medium and large) and business types (franchised dealerships and used car dealerships). Due to the relatively small number of the firm's clientele and their variety, a purposive maximum variation sampling strategy was adopted. The goal was to maximize the diversity of the sample and gain as much information as possible.

On November 22 and November 24, 2017, I solicited organizational participation by meeting with the General Managers and Principal Dealers of all six dealerships in person. I provided them with Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Consent Form (CF) for this inquiry (see Appendix A) and allowed them to review the documents internally for a week and seek stakeholder approval where required. Four out of the six dealerships approached provided signed consent by email while two declined. The consenting companies included a large franchised dealership, a mid-size used car dealership, a mid-size non-franchised dealership and one branch of a multi-location used car dealership. The decliners were not characteristically different from the consenters with respect to size, composition and business type.

In December 2017, eighty market survey participants were selected from four dealerships. The participant selection criteria included prior experience with Dealers R'Us' ethics advisory service and general knowledge of the ethics landscape in the Ontario automotive retail industry. The latter criterion was benchmarked on an industry experience record of two years or more. Participants were informed of their selection by email and were provided with the PIS and CF with all ethical considerations fully outlined. This was in addition to verbal reminders when I visited the dealerships for a follow-up meeting. All contacted participants responded with a signed CF and indicated their interest in completing the survey by the same electronic means. 94% of the respondents were men and 6% identified as women. Other demographic details of the respondents are presented in Table 4.

Participant's Age		Participant's Industry Experience	
Age Range	Number of Participants	Years of Industry Experience	Number of Participants
18 - 30 Years	12	< 2 Years	0
31 - 40 Years	19	2 - 10 Years	21
41 - 50 Years	17	11 - 20 Years	25
51 - 60 Years	2	21 - 30 Years	3
> 60 Years	0	> 30 Years	1
Choose not to disclose	0	Choose not to disclose	0

Table 4. Demographics of Market Survey Respondents

Note. Data computed from participant information provided in returned pre-intervention questionnaires.

3.3 Questionnaire Development & Deployment

In December 2017, I sent out an introductory email to all ARG members within our firm notifying them of their nomination for a focus group study. The message included a summary of the market feedbacks discussed in Chapter One, a PIS, and a CF. Signed CFs were returned in person or email by all members indicating their nomination acceptance and consent within the week. Wilson (2013) establishes stakeholder requirement gathering as an important step in the development of survey instruments. Therefore, the ARG's first mandate in Phase I of this AR inquiry was to contribute to the design of the pre-intervention survey questionnaire. In a separate email sent out to members, I solicited potential questions for inclusion in the survey questionnaire. I also placed a suggestion box in the lunchroom where members could drop off 3" x 5" ruled index cards containing handwritten survey questions. A face to face ARG meeting could not be held at this stage due to the physical absence of a few key consultants who were on vacation at the end of the

year. Six members responded with suggestions by email and another four dropped off index cards in the suggestion box.

I collated and analyzed all ten responses with Departmental Directors in a face to face meeting. We concluded that three main question types were prominent. The first cohort sought to ask survey participants about the agility of Dealers R'Us' ethics advisory practice. The second cohort sought to know if our ethics practice meets the unique needs of each dealership that it serves. The third cohort touched on our revenue decline problems and low referral rates. Stakeholders sought to gauge general service satisfaction and whether or not a client will recommend our ethics advisory practice to others. The additional suggestions made by me and two other directors can be largely subsumed under these three cohorts. We, therefore, elected to design the questions around these broad cohorts.

We also pondered on the structure of the questions to be asked – open-ended versus closed-ended. The consensus was in favor of the latter based on the general familiarity of the automotive industry in Ontario with structured questionnaires. I however dissented in favor of open-ended questions based on the need for elaboration and depth in our study. This stalemate was later resolved as we reached a compromise and settled on semi-structured questionnaires as presented in Brinkman (2014) and McIntosh and Morse (2015). Organizational leaders reasoned that having closed-ended questions and an opportunity for respondents to elaborate is both expedient and meets our study needs. As such, we distilled the three cohorts into the three questionnaire statements provided below.

(a) Survey Statement 1: Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program is agile and responsive to varied and evolving ethical compliance needs in Ontario's automotive retail industry.

(b) Survey Statement 2: Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Compliance program is tailored to meet the specific compliance needs of my automotive dealership.

(c) Survey Statement 3: I will recommend Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Compliance program to other automotive dealerships.

The development process culminated in a two-part data collection instrument. Section A was designed to collect demographic variables while Section B contained the three items listed above. In the latter, respondents were required to agree or disagree with these statements on a Likert scale

questionnaire. There was also an opportunity to provide an open-ended explanation of their responses including any additional commentary on Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance practice. Lindsey (1991) highlights the perils and the unintended effects of technical jargon that they may have on a lay audience. For the sake of better comprehension and to mitigate this influence on our data collection efforts, I included an easily understandable definition of 'agility' in the questionnaire.

The validation of the pre-intervention data collection instrument followed the face validity and content validity protocols outlined in Section 2.7. Thereafter, paper copies of the market survey questionnaires were distributed to the participants in person. The survey response rate was 62.5%. Respondents completed the survey manually. An analysis of the market survey results and implications for this study are discussed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively.

3.4 Analysis of Market Survey Data

The market survey commissioned to better gauge market perception of Dealers R'Us' ethics and compliance practice yielded quantitative and qualitative data. Fifty unique Likert scale responses and thirty-two open-ended responses were returned. Percentages and Weighted Average Scores (WAS) were computed for each survey statement as shown in Table 2. The latter was based on an appropriation of an ordinal weight of 1 to 5 to each response option, with '5' corresponding to 'Strongly Agree' and '1' corresponding to 'Strongly Disagree'. Open-ended responses were explored with thematic analysis as described in Clarke and Braun (2006).

As seen in Table 5, 64% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree that Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program is agile. This corresponds to a Weighted Average Score (WAS) of 2.27, meaning that the majority of respondents aligned more towards a negative response to Statement 1. 67% of the respondents stated that our ethics program is not tailored to meet the specific ethical compliance needs of their automotive dealerships (WAS = 2.38). This outcome suggests that there is a widespread misalignment between our ethics and compliance programs and the unique requirements of the clients that Dealers R'Us serves. The responses to Statement 3 were most instructive because they shed more light on the revenue decline that our

ethics practice experienced for two consecutive years. 60% of the survey respondents will not recommend our ethics program to other dealerships (WAS = 2.47). This probably explains the low referral rates recorded in recent years. Organizational leaders understood the general apathy to mean that current clients were unlikely to retain our firm in the near future if they would not provide a positive reference or review of our consulting practice to other industry players. We drew a connection between this interpretation and revenue challenges reported in Chapter One.

Survey Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	0%	16%	20%	39%	25%	2.27
Statement 2	2%	17%	15%	50%	17%	2.38
Statement 3	5%	14%	21%	44%	16%	2.47

* Scale: 5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Neutral/I don't know, 2 – Disagree, 1 – Strongly Disagree

Table 5. Summary of Market Survey Results

Note. Data computed from Likert scale responses in returned pre-intervention questionnaires.

In addition to the analysis of the Likert scale responses, I facilitated the joint analysis of thirty-two (32) open-ended responses obtained from the market survey with our Departmental Directors. We examined the data inductively using Clarke and Braun's (2006) staged thematic analysis as described in sub-section 2.7.1.2. It entails a process of data familiarization, code generation, theme search and refinement (see Appendix C). Initial codes generated from the raw data include 'situational/environmental context' (from excerpts in red color); 'sync between consultants' (from excerpts in green color); 'spend time with client' (from excerpts in light blue color); 'lack of communication' (from excerpts in purple color); 'knowledge' (from excerpts in brown color); 'positive experience' (from excerpts in yellow color); 'price' (from excerpts in pink color); 'power and politics' (from excerpts in navy blue color); 'non-sustained gains' (from

excerpts in cyan color); ‘client needs training’(from excerpts in deep green color); ‘poor interpersonal relations’(from excerpts in lemon color), and ‘organizational structure’(from excerpts in lilac color).

We employ the combinatorial and renaming approach described in sub-section 2.7.1.2 and utilize the theme search criteria to arrive at a number of initial themes. For instance, a ‘consulting in the dark’ theme initially emerged from the interlink established between the ‘power and politics’ and ‘client needs training’ codes. Likewise, a merger between the ‘lack of communication’ code and the ‘no sync between consultants’ code resulted in the ‘internal collaboration’ theme. During the ARG’s deliberations, members elected to upgrade the ‘price’ and the ‘spend time with client’ codes to initial themes by renaming them as ‘low-value perception’ and ‘service offering needs a rethink’ respectively. A full account of the pre-intervention theme search is presented in Appendix C.

The initial themes generated are eventually refined and adequately defined. At a latent level, five final themes emerged from our inductive analysis. They are summarized below.

- (a) **Knowledge Gaps:** Different contextual factors impact moral decision making at automotive dealerships in Ontario and these vary from one organization to the other. In the words of one survey respondent, our consultants *do not seem to understand the nuances of our industry and what motivates dealers to comply*. There are significant gaps in our understanding of the relevant factors, which may have some influence on the agility of our ethics and ethical compliance program.

- (b) **Internal Collaboration:** There is a minimal synergy between different disciplines and specializations within our company which may be resulting in a marginal transfer of tacit knowledge, minimal collaboration and missed opportunities with consequences on the firm’s ability to adapt quickly and respond appropriately to change. One respondent noted that *our consultants did not communicate much with each other* during a recent consulting brief. There appears to be poor responsiveness, especially in areas where our ethics advisory department needs the input of other functional departments.

- (c) **Interpersonal Relationships:** There appear to be minimal cordial interpersonal relationships between our consultants, which may be having significant influences on the communication and collaboration patterns within our company. Some of the open-ended responses that solidified the inclusion of a relationship perspective in this study include one bordering on the observation of *so much finger-pointing going on* between consultants from different departments. Another respondent recounted working with two consultants *who did not appear to like each other very much*. The dysfunction appears to be negatively impacting our ethics and ethical compliance practice.
- (d) **Organizational Structure:** Dealers R'Us' functional organizational structure may be limiting the ability of its consultants to collaborate and respond appropriately to market changes. An excerpt from the survey is succinct on this. "*There is not a lot of collaboration going on*", said the respondent. Consultants from different functional groups contribute to briefs in a disjointed fashion. The influence of this on the agility of our ethics and ethical compliance practice is therefore suspect and worthy of further exploration.
- (e) **Service Design:** Our current service design revolves around presenting a generic, 'one size fits all' ethical compliance plan prepared based on applicable laws and ethics regulations to all clients. A survey respondent opined that we *did not spend time to take a critical look at his people, processes, and business*. As such, there is no customization to fit the specific realities of each dealership. Beyond recommendations, we also do not assist with the implementation of corrective/remedial actions and there is no evaluation of client outcomes either. This may be robbing Dealers R'Us of the ability to operate an agile ethics advisory practice.

The thematic angles gleaned from the qualitative data analysis provided more clarity to the analysis of the Likert scale questionnaire data. It is undoubtedly clear that there is a high rate of dissatisfaction and disagreement among the industry stakeholders surveyed. This suggests that our ethics practice is indeed non-agile and unresponsive to varying client contexts and changes in Ontario's automotive retail industry. Beyond that, there are structural, strategic and social undertones that appear to feature in the complex organizational milieu. The identified themes

certainly point to these potential areas of interest as worthy of further exploration. To this end, more specific research questions and objectives are formulated based on the knowledge gained in this diagnostic phase.

3.5 Evolution of Research Questions

In developing research questions for this study, I seek to address the need for responsiveness to the challenge of practice agility by exploring the emergent themes reported in Section 3.4. The initial problem statement presented in Section 1.2.1 has evolved into specific research questions developed using the market intelligence reported in this chapter.

The main Research Question (RQ) developed from the market survey described in Section 3.4 is as stated below:

RQ: How can Dealer R’Us’ ethics and compliance consulting practice become agile, and responsive to changes in client context and evolving compliance needs in Ontario’s automotive retail industry?

The resultant themes translate into five specific research questions worthy of exploration in this study. They are as follows:

- RQ(a): What is the influence of consultant knowledge gaps on the agility of Dealers R’Us’ ethics and ethical compliance practice?
- RQ(b): How do collaboration patterns between stakeholders at Dealers R’Us influence the agility of its Ethics and Ethical Compliance consulting practice?
- RQ(c): How do the interpersonal relationships between stakeholders at Dealers R’Us affect the agility of its ethics and ethical compliance practice?
- RQ(d): What influence does organizational structure have on the agility of Dealers R’Us’ Ethics & Ethical Compliance consulting practice?
- RQ(e): How does service design affect the agility of Dealers R’Us’ Ethics & Ethical Compliance consulting practice?

In turn, the research questions translate into refined aims and objectives presented in Section 3.6.

3.6 Emergent Research Aim and Objectives

An initial research aim and objective was presented in Section 1.2.2 based on the preliminary information available at the inception of this study. The market survey and subsequent analysis conducted in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, however, caused the emergence of a revised research aim and more specific research objectives.

The aim of this research study going forward is the creation of an agile ethics advisory practice within a niche consulting firm offering its consulting expertise to automotive dealerships. This broad aim lends itself to specific research objectives which are as follows:

- (a) To determine whether a reduction of consultants' contextual knowledge gaps has a positive effect on the agility and responsiveness of the ethics and ethical compliance practice at Dealers R'Us.
- (b) To increase the collaboration between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us and assess the impact on the agility of its ethics and ethical compliance practice.
- (c) To improve the interpersonal relationships between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us and assess the impact on the agility of its ethics and ethical compliance practice.
- (d) To assess the influence of alternative organizational structure(s) on the agility of the ethics and ethical compliance practice at Dealers R'Us.
- (e) To determine whether a consulting service redesign can have a positive effect on the agility of the ethics and ethical compliance practice at Dealers R'Us.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an account of Phase I of this AR study. It is directed at diagnosing and validating the organizational issue identified within Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance practice. A market survey designed to confirm or disconfirm the claims made by two key clients was conducted. In line with the participatory ideals of AR, organizational members contributed significantly to the design of the questionnaire and the analysis of the information that it yielded.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of data obtained from the market survey validated our ethics advisory practice as non-adaptive and non-agile with respect to the unique needs of each automotive dealership. The practice was particularly adjudged to be incapable of keeping up with unpredictable changes in the ethical compliance landscape. The resultant client dissatisfaction has negative implications for the firm's annual revenue position and continued viability.

More importantly, the thematic analysis of open-ended responses obtained yielded five thematic angles that must be further explored and acted upon in the interest of responsiveness. To do this, a revision of the initial research aim and objectives defined in Chapter One was deemed necessary. This resulted in the development of new research questions centered around the identified themes. In conclusion, the insight gained from the market survey in Phase I inform the literature review conducted in Chapter Four. By extension, it also underpins Phase II of this AR inquiry, where further diagnosis, planning, and action implementation are carried out.

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of the existing body of research on the subject of agility, especially with respect to the research questions raised in Phase I of this AR intervention. This literature review is situated on a tripod of empirical, conceptual and theoretical knowledge. I start with a review of agile organization literature, highlighting individual drivers of agility from an empirical perspective. The quest for a holistic response to the agility of Dealers R'Us' ethics advisory practice inspired an extension of the review to conceptual system-based agility models. These go beyond the reductionist approach taken in most agility-focused research papers.

In the concluding theoretical sections of this chapter, a review of relevant theoretical constructs covered includes Complex Adaptive System (CAS) theory, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Contingency Theory. More specifically, I draw a correlation between identified agility prerequisites and Complex Adaptive System (CAS) properties and concepts. This casts agile organizations in the mold of CAS, thus providing a central basis for crafting action and analyzing outcomes in this intervention. Lastly, gaps in management literature are discussed, accentuating the significance of this study.

4.1 Agility and The Agile Organization

In contemporary times, business organizations grapple with competitive pressures, changing technology, changing customer/client needs, internal politicking and other varied market factors (Luna, Kruchten & Moura, 2015). In this section, my review is focused on understanding agility, its drivers and enablers in the face of these challenges. This understanding is crucial for the transformation of a non-agile ethics advisory practice like ours in Ontario's dynamic automotive retail industry. More importantly, I present some specific references to the themes developed in Section 1.3 with a general intent to use these as frames of reference for the action component of this inquiry.

The concept of agility at the enterprise level was first proposed by Goldman, Preiss, Nagel, and Dove (1991). This was only a year after 'Agile Manufacturing' was birthed by the Iacocca Institute leading many to suggest that the former was inspired by the latter (Triaa, Gzara, &

Verjus, 2016). There are many definitions of agility. It has been defined as the utilization of market knowledge and a virtual corporation to exploit profitable opportunities in a volatile marketplace (Naylor, Naim, & Berry, 1999). Agility can also be viewed in terms of an organization's adaptability in the face of changes in its environment (McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009; Staber & Sydow, 2002). Prince and Kay (2003) define agility as the ability of an organization to reconfigure itself in response to sudden changes in ways that are cost-effective, timely, robust and of broad scope. According to Harraf et al. (2015), agility is a measure of responsiveness and anticipated responses to an external stimulus illustrating an organization's overall flexibility. Irrespective of context, these definitions are all anchored on adaptability, flexibility, nimbleness, speed and capturing change-related opportunities for learning and growth.

Therefore, an agile organization is one that makes quick and nimble changes in its operations and processes in response to potential opportunities occasioned by unpredictable changes within and outside its environment (Cooke, 2010). Rafał and Agnieszka (2017) conceptualize agile organizations as Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) that make change a routine through a deliberate process of learning, self-organization, and co-evolution. Werder and Maedche (2018) argue further that agility is the emergent quality that results from this process. A review of CAS literature, the main theoretical background for this doctoral research is presented in Section 3.4.

The concept of agility and the idea of an agile organization have featured extensively, especially with many advances in Information Technology (IT) as heralded in the declaration of the Agile Manifesto by Beck et al. (2001). The underpinning values include a focus on individuals and interactions over processes and tools; achieving a working solution over complete documentation (short cycle implementation) and customer collaboration over contracts (Bottani, 2018; Kavčič, Pesek, Bohak, & Marolt, 2018; Schön, Escalona, & Thomaschewski, 2015).

As a result of the advances made in IT, many other disciplines ranging from healthcare management to environmental sustainability have benefited immensely from the application of agile principles. Diverse professional applications abound in Dingsøy, Nerur, Balijepally, and Moe, 2012; Duarte, 2015; McPherson, 2016; Janssen & van der Voort, 2016; Tyszkiewicz & Pawlak-Wolanin, 2017; Sharp & Lang, 2018; Iqbal, Huq & Bhutta 2018; Crowder, 2015;

Accardi-Petersen, 2011; Williams, 2015; Nicoletti, 2018; Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2018; Wu & Barnes, 2018 and Collins & Wilson, 2018

Much of the relevant literature on agile organizations focus on providing prescriptions on how to attain agility and factors that enhance or prevent it. For instance, Ghobadi and Mathiassen (2017) submit that the barriers to agility in organizations include diversity in the work and disciplines of team members, the absence of physical proximity, poor planning, and documentation. Chow and Cao (2008) list senior management support as an important prerequisite for the success of efforts geared towards agility. In a Software Development context, Senapathi and Srinivasan (2012) argue that management support is not enough to guarantee agility. They relate non-agile scenarios with a limited understanding of agile methodologies at the management level.

A lot has been said about the influence of different organizational structures on enterprise agility. In traditional organizations with centralized hierarchical structures, management decisions and market responses are typically issued from the top of the hierarchy. In contrast, decentralized organizational structures give significant decision-making authority to employees on the lower rungs of the ladder, allowing decisions to be made and implemented nimbly as new information becomes available (Chen & Huang, 2007).

Cummins (2017) argues that the traditional organizational structure with centralized reporting lines and functional teams constitutes a hindrance to the kind of information sharing capabilities and cross-silo collaboration required in agile projects and organizations. He advocates a decentralized matrix organizational structure as a better alternative. Conboy, Coyle, Wang, and Pikkarainen (2011) corroborate this position when they submit that the ‘command and control’ relationship between executives and their subordinates in centralized hierarchical organizations does not support agility. The researchers argue that only collaborative leadership can provide agility.

Furthermore, Vassiliou, Alberts, and Shah (2016) argue that the effect of organizational structure on agility is situation dependent. In complex and dynamic scenarios, decentralized organizations demonstrated agility and can adapt to rapidly changing conditions. However, the traditional management structure provides predictable results where an organizational problem is easily delineated into discernible sub-components. They do not perform so well with changing and complex organizational problems.

Other factors that enhance agility include the appointment of champions who promote agile practices and help remove roadblocks to agility (Chesbrough & Crowther, 2006) as well as the assemblage of technically competent teams with members who enjoy some form of autonomy and collaborate on projects (Ahimbisibwe, Cavana, & Daellenbach, 2015). At the team member level, Ragin-Skorecka (2016) adopts a human perspectives approach in the determination of factors that determine a team member's agility within a team or an organization. These include knowledge, entrepreneurial tendencies, a sense of responsibility, a sense of belonging, cooperation, a futuristic perspective, modernity, and authorship. In my organization, I relate this submission to the knowledge, interpersonal relationship and collaborative dimensions identified in Chapter Three.

Effective communication is said to be essential for productive collaboration between team members (McHugh, Conboy, & Lang, 2012; Wyrich, Bogicevic, & Wagner, 2017). Mark (2002) and Lindvall et al. (2004) submit that colocation is the most effective strategy for getting teammates to communicate continuously and effectively. Hoegl and Proserpio (2004) argue that teams where members maintain proximity tend to produce higher quality work. In a comparative New Product Development (NPD) study, Zenun, Loureiro, and Araujo (2007) found that a co-located team performed better than a virtual team on the basis of established project efficiency parameters. It is, therefore, logical to assume that the enhancement of organization-wide collaboration and communication will have a positive effect on agility.

While the focus of most researchers is on agile reactions to external/market information, Nold and Michel (2016) draw our attention to a very important and often overlooked source of agile knowledge – the organization itself. They opine that making an organization agile also requires the mining of the tacit knowledge within it. This position rings true for me as the CEO at Dealers R'Us, especially in regard to the collaborative and human relation themes identified in Section 3.4. Nold (2012) also submits that organizational culture can either promote the sharing of information (to aid agility) or inhibit it.

With respect to service design, Stacey (2006) admonishes managers to instill an agile culture by establishing a sensory feedback mechanism, through an embrace of innovation. Management consultants provide intangible (but valuable) services and rely on service differentiation to stay ahead of competitors. According to Teece (2010), these firms rely on relationships and a number

of business models in their bid to innovate and maintain an edge in the knowledge market. As such, service design influenced by adequate knowledge of client needs is a potent tool for maintaining firm agility, identity and reputation (Chelliah, D'Netto, & Georges, 2014). However, little attention has also been paid specifically to the influence of service design on consulting practice agility. Management consultants also continue to advertise their ability to help businesses become agile but there is a dearth of research on the infusion of agility into the consulting process by way of service design.

Ultimately, the singular factors highlighted in this section serve as a guide to this inquiry, especially in the action planning stages. However, the different variables appear disjointed when a pluralistic or holistic consideration of organizational agility is made. The individual findings adopt a reductionist approach which assumes a univariate posture on the subject of agility. However, agility is a multi-dimensional concept (Sherehiy, Karwowski, & Layer, 2007). There is a practical utility in understanding how multiple variables that are simultaneously operational in a typical knowledge consulting firm impact agility at any one time. For instance, how does a decentralized organizational structure, multi-directional communication within a firm, an entrepreneurial culture, active feedback channels, and other relevant variables impact one another and in turn, organizational agility? I am therefore inspired to review the literature on all-encompassing agility frameworks or models in the interest of doing justice to the organizational issue that has become the focus of this intervention. In Section 4.1.1, holistic agility models are presented.

4.1.1 Holistic Agility Models

Holistic organizational agility models are derived from the distillation and structured arrangement of prescriptions such as those stated in Section 4.1. They are designed as all-encompassing toolsets that organizational design and managerial decisions can be built around in the interest of agility infusion (Winby & Worley, 2014). In Section 1.1, I argued that management consulting (and ethics consulting) as generally practiced is devoid of agility making it inflexible and non-adaptive to evolving client needs. For this reason, a review of conceptual agility models offers interesting insights relevant to this inquiry.

The Adaptive Work System (AWS) model presented in Winby and Worley (2014) and reproduced in Figure 5 is an attractive agility model relevant to this Action Research project. The model was developed by Stu Winby, Founder of Sapience, a management consulting firm. The AWS model has been applied to healthcare and Information Technology Action Research intervention projects. I am particularly interested in the AWS model because it provides a framework compatible with an iterative cycle of action and reflection. It also encourages the democratization of the inquiry akin to the ideals of Action Research (Coghlan & Casey, 2001).

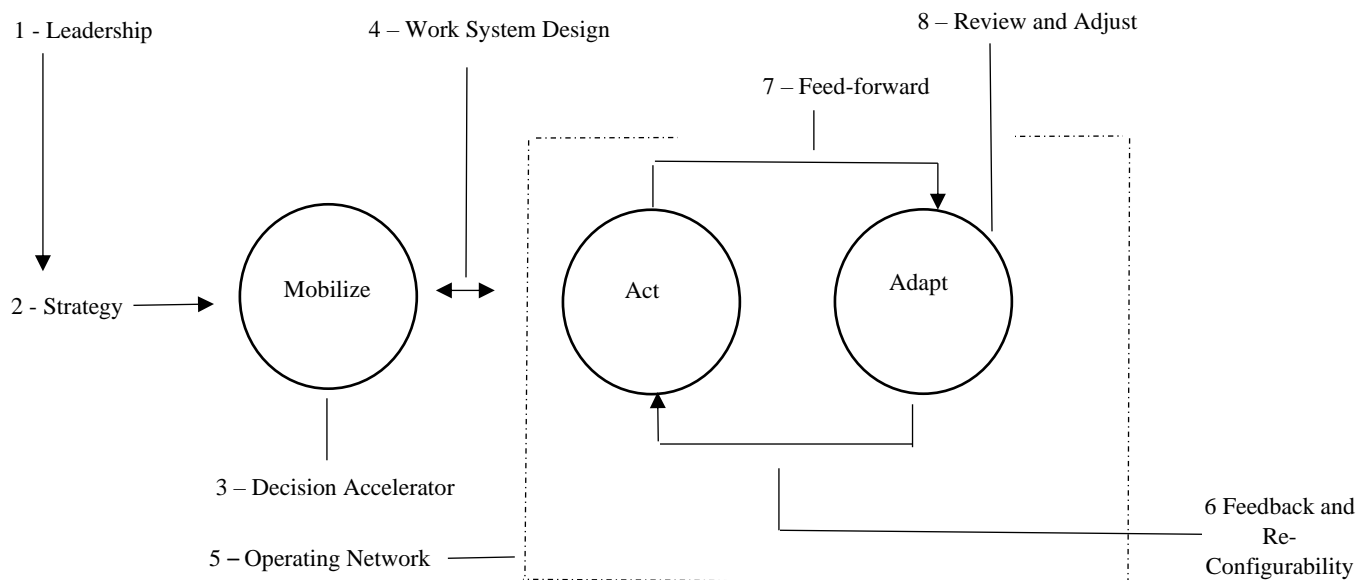


Figure 5. The Adaptive Work System (AWS) Model. Reproduced from “Management processes for agility, speed, and innovation” by S. Winby and C.G. Worley, 2014, Organizational Dynamics, 43(3), p.225.

The ‘routines of agility’ described by its proponents are in alignment with the Action Research cycle which involves problem definition, planning, implementing actions, observing and reflecting on changes and lessons (Pedler & Trehan, 2008). According to Figure 5, the Adaptive Work System (AWS) model consists of a three-step protocol that starts with mobilization, action, and

adaptation. It is based on ‘Routines of Agility’ which include strategizing, perceiving, testing, and implementing.

The leadership team in my organization consists of the CEO and Departmental Directors. The leaders mobilize all key stakeholders to problematize and come up with actionable solutions, known as ‘Work System Design’. An operating network consisting of adaptive teams may be formed to act to bring about change with feedforward and feedback adjustment mechanisms put in place to implement changes to the Work System Design as results trickle in. The adaptive cycle goes through iterations until the network decides that the mission is accomplished.

Another model of interest is the organizational agility conceptual model developed by Zitkiene and Deksnys (2018). It was developed from the distillation of several ideas in agility literature. According to Figure 6, the main features of the conceptual model include agility drivers, agility enablers, agility capabilities, and agile practices.

Agility drivers are factors that necessitate agility from an organization. Examples include changes in the marketplace, customer preferences, competitive pressures, technology, and socio-political factors. Agility enablers are tools at the disposal of an organization as it seeks to become responsive to agility drivers. Examples include technology, reliance on internal and external networks as well as organizational structures and processes. Agile capabilities refer to the capacity of an organization to sense agility drivers and deploy agility enablers as needed. Agile practices refer to practical actions taken to engender agility. Examples may include a change to organizational structure and processes, personnel development projects, outsourcing of identified inefficiencies and building industry partnerships to fulfill identified needs.

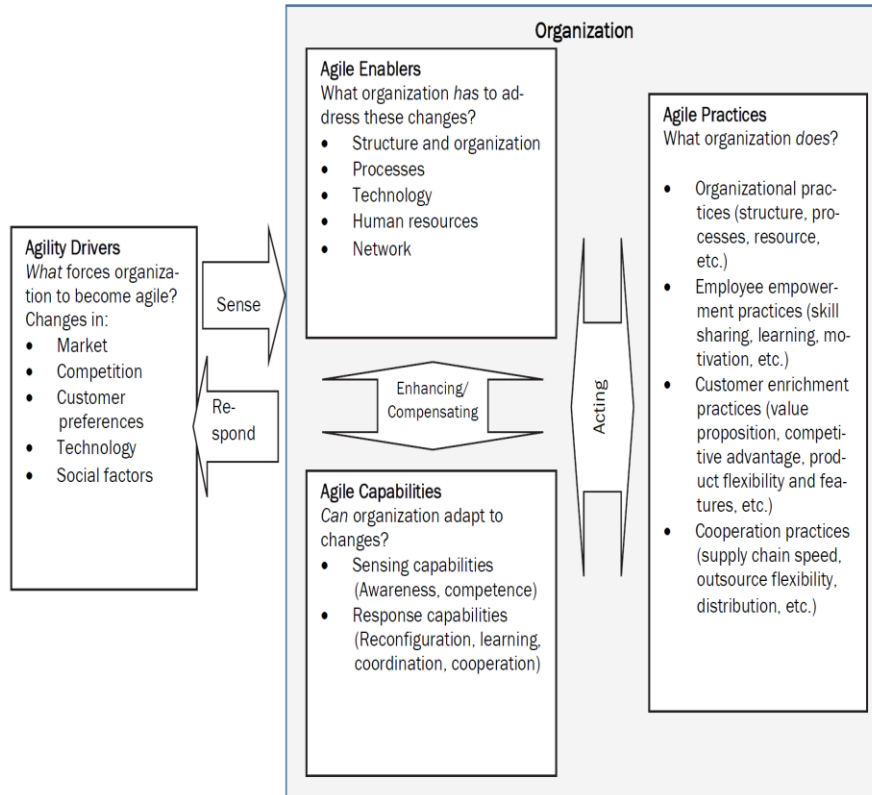


Figure 6. A Conceptual Organizational Agility Model. Reproduced from “Organizational Agility Conceptual Model” by R. Zitkiene and M. Deksnys, 2018, Montenegrin Journal of Economics, 14(2), p.127.

This model is based on a ‘sense and respond’ mechanism. Therefore, agility starts with the sensing of a change in the external environment, after which stakeholders assess the change and determine if there are agile capabilities and enablers fit for it within the organization. Organizations must always enhance existing capabilities and compensate for deficiencies. A response follows the analysis in the form of agile practices designed to tackle the identified change. The organization senses the external response to the implemented practices and proceeds with a further response if required. The cycle of sensing, adaptation, and learning continues perpetually, leading to an inherently agile organization.

Despite their seeming appropriateness, none of the models described in this section were specifically developed for ethics and compliance consulting or management consulting in general.

Therefore, they are not particularly fit for direct application in a knowledge consulting enterprise like ours. They also ignore the social and political dimensions that are most prominent in my organizational scenario. This contextual deficiency exposes a deficiency that must be addressed in a knowledge production setting like ours.

Furthermore, most of the findings reported in Sections 4.1 and 4.1.1 have an empirical basis and are not particularly steeped in any management theory. For this reason, I found it compelling to explore relevant theories that are applicable to the structural, procedural and human dimensions of our organizational challenge. Selected theories reviewed in the following sections include Complex Adaptive System (CAS) theory, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Contingency Theory (CT).

4.2 Complex Adaptive Systems

A Complex Adaptive System (CAS) is a physical, social, organizational, biological or economic system consisting of many heterogeneous sub-components/agents which interact non-linearly with one another causing the whole system to self-organize, adapt and emerge over time into an unpredictable coherent form (Akgün, Keskin, & Byrne, 2014; Heraud, Kerr, & Burger-Helmchen, 2019). The definition of CAS is also evident from the etymology of the key adjectival qualifier in the CAS acronym - 'Complex'. It comes from the Latin root word *complexus* which means 'thoroughly entwined or woven together' (Lewis & Short, 1879). Therefore, a CAS consists of aggregating components whose interactions are intricately entwined and interwoven together. This intricacy results in an internal dynamism that is also moderated and influenced by interactions with the external environment resulting in adaptive changes.

Researchers from multiple disciplines have taken interest in a CAS view because of its ability to explain different non-linear phenomena oftentimes difficult to capture with linear equations and models (Morowitz, 2002; Nesheim, Oria, & Tsai Yih, 2015). I am inspired to utilize CAS theory as the overarching theoretical foundation for this work because of its successful application in other professional settings.

There are several CAS applications in diverse professional fields. Instance include public health administration (Goodson, 2015; Hill, 2011; Sarriot, & Kouletio, 2015; Wilkinson, Goff, Rusoja, Hanson, & Swanson, 2018), business management (Akgün et al., 2014; Ramos-Villagrasa, Silva, Navarro, & Rico, 2018; Reiman, Rollenhagen, Pietikäinen, & Heikkilä, 2015; Valente, 2010; Wong, 2010), public governance (Booher & Innes, 2010; Kim, Johnston, & Kang, 2011; Kim & Maroulis, 2018; Koolma, 2013; Meek, De Ladurantey, & Newell, 2007), environmental sustainability (Kim & Mackey, 2014; Messier et al., 2015; Nair et al., 2016; Spijkers et al., 2018; Touboulic, Matthews, & Marques, 2018) and Information Technology (Maitland & van Gorp, 2009; Nan, 2011; Nan & Tanriverdi, 2017).

4.3 Complex Adaptive System (CAS) Theory

For centuries, physical scientists have explained and predicted physical phenomena using experiments, equations, models, and assumptions. Theirs is a reductionist and positivist approach based on a belief in an objective reality that is stable and predictable. This is underscored by the perception of a linear relationship between cause and effect (Sharp et al., 2011). From Galileo to Newton, Darwin, and Einstein, positivism gained ground and influenced western thought significantly. In the early 19th century, French Philosopher, August Comte extended this idea beyond physical phenomena, alluding that societies are subject to variants of the absolute laws of Science like gravity and evolution (Feichtinger, Fillafer, & Surman, 2018).

However, biological species, human societies, and organizations tend to diverge unpredictably from the predictions of positivist equations and models (Aarts, Fieberg, Brasseur, & Matthiopoulos, 2013; Schill, 2017). Thus, they are difficult to model from a linear perspective (Holland, 1992). This realization birthed General Systems Theory (GST), originally proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, an Austrian biologist in 1928. It states that organisms, societies, organizations and other similar entities in question can be classified as a system with constituent components, agents or parts that interact with each other infinitely (Boulding, 1956; Von Bertalanffy, 1972).

GST views the chaotic nature of these non-linear interactions and the patterns of order that emerge from apparent disorder through the lens of Chaos Theory. Small changes to constituent components/agents at the micro-level (initial conditions) can lead to large scale changes to the whole system at the macro-level (Skyttner, 2005). Beneath the visible disorderliness lie patterns, feedback loops, a reliance on initial conditions, self-organization and repetition (Kiel & Elliott, 1997).

Complex Adaptive System (CAS) theory draws broad inspiration from GST and Chaos Theory. CAS theory (also known as Complexity Theory) was conceptualized at the Sante Fe Institute, New Mexico in the mid-1980s (Chan, 2001). It was developed to aid in the understanding of the complex evolution and adaptation of non-linear systems (for instance human brain, the global economy, and the global ecosystem) that are difficult to comprehend using linear deterministic tools (Coetzee, Van Niekerk, & Raju, 2016).

At its core lies the quest to unearth how micro-level interactions between constituent agents/components progress unpredictably towards complex system properties at the macro level. Each agent exhibits a form of determinism based on how other agents adapt. Feedback loops play an important role in establishing micro-level responses, agent coevolution and ultimately emergent properties at the system level.

Beyond complex biological and econometric systems, CAS theory is quite useful in analyzing dynamic societies, communities and business organizations (Lansing, 2003). Group level behaviors on a global scale can be viewed as resulting from the non-linear interactions that happen at the local/individual level (Hartvigsen, Kinzig, & Peterson, 1998). Irrespective of the applicable complex system, certain CAS concepts feature prominently. These include emergence, self-organization, co-evolution, non-linearity, operation at the 'Edge of Chaos', diversity, multi-agency interactions and feedback loops (Alaa & Fitzgerald, 2013; Werder & Maedche, 2018). These CAS concepts are discussed below.

One of the most important features of CAS is self-organization. Zimmerman, Lindberg, and Plsek (1998, p. 265) define emergence *as the arising of new, unexpected structures, patterns, properties, or processes in a self-organizing system*. It is the undirected interaction of autonomous and interconnected agents/components that make up a CAS in a non-linear and unpredictable manner resulting in a collective end state (Hemelrijk & Hildenbrandt, 2012;

Riccardo, Andrea, & Francesco, 2016). Emergence is the result of the process of self-organization that a CAS undergoes. The micro-interactions of the constituting components/agents cause emergence and creates adaptive and learning capabilities (Auyang, 1998; Holland, 1998; Tussey, 2005).

Furthermore, emergence occurs at the 'Edge of Chaos, a high entropy midpoint between equilibrium and chaos (Battistella & De Toni, 2018; Mahmood, 2016; Pauwelyn, 2014). A CAS moderates itself and coevolves using feedback loops (Orsini et al., 2019). These loops prevent the CAS from settling into a static state or a decline into utter chaos (Eoyang, 1996; Grus, Cromptvoets, & Bregt, 2010; Patton, 1990). It also relies on the diversity of agents and the complex interactions within it as they co-evolve (Page, 2011).

Coevolution is a concept derived from Darwinian co-evolution of biological species (Hodgson, 2010). It refers to the simultaneous transformation of local agents or constituent components of a CAS as interactions occur between them. The CAS also evolves in tandem with other whole systems in the global environment.

The review of CAS concepts as done in this section is relevant to agile organizations because it creates an opportunity that can be used to draw a theoretical inference on the prerequisites for agility. In Section 4.4, I attempt to do this by casting agile organizations in a CAS mold based on similarities and congruences.

4.4 Agile Organizations as Complex Adaptive Systems

Agile organizations exhibit characteristics and features that align well with the CAS concepts discussed in Section 4.3. These organizations emerge in response to change by relying on feedback channels and the complex interaction of multiple agents. Their adaptive qualities make them nimble and flexible in the face of unforeseeable change. There is ample support for the establishment of a direct link between CAS and enterprise-level agility in management literature. For instance, Vidgen and Wang (2009) and Carpenter and Grünewald, (2016) argue that agile organizations demonstrate CAS characteristics such as self-organization, diversity, non-linearity, learning through feedback, interdependence, and coevolution. Augustine, Payne, Sencindiver,

and Woodcock, (2005); Hoda, Noble and Marshall (2013) and Werder and Maedche (2018) also directly describe agile organizations as Complex Adaptive Systems.

Furthermore, I reviewed sixty management research articles focused on the study of agility in different fields, ranging from healthcare management to organizational management (See Table 7 in Appendix D). All of the papers adopt various CAS metrics and terminologies in the elucidation of complexity and in the description of the agile properties of the systems under review. This finding confirms the popularity of CAS perspective as the predominant theoretical construct in agility studies. The decision to conceptualize agile organizations as a CAS in this study is based on these established precedents.

Despite the widespread application of CAS, it is agnostic from a values perspective. While it acknowledges the multiplicity of interactions between different components, it is oblivious of the social dimensions inherent within human organizations. The prominence of interpersonal relationships and social ties in the complex organizational problem identified in this thesis calls for the inclusion of complementary theories that are openly disposed to the human dimensions of the problem. In Sections 4.5 and 4.6, two of such theories are discussed.

4.5 Contingency Theory

One of the themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis performed in Phase I of this AR inquiry is Organizational Structure. This touches on organizational design and the predominant leadership within an organization. The design of an organization determines how it responds to market changes, uncertainty, and complexity (Burton & Obel, 2018). The leadership style of its managers also determines how internal stakeholders participate in and contribute to that organizational response as the firm pursues its performance objectives (Fitria, Mukhtar, & Akbar, 2017). Particularly, it influences the nature of interactions between organizational members.

Contingency Theory (CT) was developed based on these precepts and therefore offers potential insight into how the organizational structure and leadership style at Dealers R'Us may be impacting the responsiveness of its ethics advisory practice. It is based on the notion that the appropriate organizational response to each environmental context must be reflected in the way

firms are organized, managed and led. Because environmental contexts vary and are often unpredictable, this means that the traditional approach which assumes that there is one singular winning formula must be relaxed in favor of an adaptive context-driven management approach (Cheng, 2016). This is a theoretical perspective that draws a link between contingent environmental changes, organizational structure, leadership style, and organizational performance.

External factors of interest include market competition, market uncertainty, and complexity. Internal factors border on the centralization or decentralization of power, authority and decision making rights (Kaiser, El Arbi, & Ahlemann, 2015). These have implications for the degree of formalization and specialization in the organization. In fairly stable markets or industries, formalization and centralization in a bureaucratic/mechanistic environment are preferable. A hierarchical structure with clearly defined specializations and formalization of relationships between stakeholders is advisable in this instance. This occurs within the framework of a top to bottom leadership philosophy and an autocratic work environment.

For companies operating in turbulent markets or those to susceptible to unforeseeable changes in technology and a high level of dynamism, decentralization of power and a less hierarchical organic structure works better. Under this regime, leaders must establish good interpersonal relationships with their subordinates, grant them adequate decision making autonomy and engage them in participatory governance of the firm (Bates, 2016; Kováts, 2018). Performance is typically evaluated in terms of the efficiency of the economic activity that the firm is engaged in and its contextual adaptiveness.

CT dwells on the division of tasks, the allocation of authority and the continuous search for a structural and leadership fit/alignment with internal and external contingencies. Its most important tenet is that there is no single structure or leadership style that works best for all scenarios. In order to maintain competitiveness and stellar performance, firms must adapt in response to their situational context and adopt the appropriate structure and leadership style (Donaldson, 2001; Robbins & Judge, 2017; Vidal, Campdesuñer, Rodríguez, & Vivar, 2017).

In conclusion, CT has attracted criticism for not providing any insight into why a leadership style may not be appropriate for a particular organizational context (Mitchell, Biglan, Oncken, & Fiedler, 1970). The theoretical framework is also silent on actions that must be taken in

misalignment scenarios (Northouse, 2007). While CT focuses on task assignment and leader-member relationships, it is less concerned with the social dynamics between peers or member-member relationships, an important feature of organizational life that has a significance for firm-wide collaboration and synergy. Social Identity Theory addresses this loophole by focusing on the social relationships at the interpersonal and group levels. A discussion of this theory is presented in Section 4.6.

4.6 Social Identity Theory

The interpersonal relationship theme featured prominently in the market survey data analyzed in Chapter Three. The inadequacies of CAS theory and CT in addressing interpersonal relationships and the social dynamics between different stakeholders at Dealers R'Us necessitated a review of Social Identity Theory (SIT). Member to member exchanges and interactions have an impact on the inter-departmental collaboration and power relations at the firm. SIT is relevant here because it is concerned with the group-level and individual-level behavior interactions and relationships based on the classification of members of a larger group into different social sub-groups (Butler, 2018). This classification is often carried out by members on the basis of affiliation, conviction, proclivity, personal interests, like-mindedness or association (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Based on these criteria, members belong to and self-identify with one group or another within a larger subgroup. The groups to which one belongs may be referred to as 'ingroups', while other groups external to one's association may be referred to as 'outgroups.' Individuals gain their value, identity, and emotional significance by perceiving a sense of oneness with other members of their in-group (Nason, Bacq, & Gras, 2018). Membership status greatly impacts how organizational stakeholders relate with members of their group and those who belong to other groups.

In most work environments, there is a tendency for functional departments or seniority cadres to become the ingroups to which stakeholders self identify with and pay allegiance to the detriment of outgroups (other departments or cadres). Gino, Ayal, and Ariely (2009) and Gino, Gu, and Zhong (2009) suggest that member behaviors mirror the prevalent ingroup norm. In essence,

members develop positive dispositions towards their own in-groups while developing a negative perception of outgroups.

This bias has significant implications for intergroup dynamics. For this reason, SIT offers meaningful insight into the collaboration and rivalry between groups and teams (Ambrose, Matthews, & Rutherford, 2018; Ambrose & Schnitzlein, 2017; Bruskin, 2018). From this perspective, departmental silos set up within an organization become theaters of competition for scarce resources and political leverage.

Much of identity research in organizations have been focused on reducing unfair in-group favoritism through the attainment of superordinate identity – a common identity that leads to intra-company synergy, increased camaraderie between members of different ingroups and increased responsibility for the promotion of each other's interests (Moss, 2017). The Common Ingroup Identity Model proposed by Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, and Rust (1993) is the most prominent technique for reducing intergroup bias and engendering superordinate identity. Its main thrust is the de-emphasis of group boundary salience and transformation of a mentality of 'us' versus 'them' to that of 'we' leading to inter-group harmony and interaction (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

SIT offers an appropriate theoretical construct fit for understanding the socially embedded nature of the organizational challenge selected for this inquiry. It may help in the understanding of the collaboration patterns within different departments and the interpersonal relationships between consultants from different disciplines.

4.7 Identified Gaps in Management Literature

Organizational agility is a complex and multi-dimensional concept that has been extensively studied in multiple fields (Zitkiene & Deksnys, 2018). While a lot of research has been done on agile organizations and the prerequisites for attaining agility in different professional settings, there is a dearth of research on agility in knowledge consulting enterprises (Klarner, Sarstedt, Hoeck, & Ringle, 2013). Even with generic recommendations on different variables, the question of holistic system-level practice agility in management consulting remains unanswered. This is an obvious gap in management literature that this review exposes.

More specifically, Ethics Consulting involves a diverse group of stakeholders from multiple disciplines who interact non-linearly to shape unpredictable client outcomes. The human relationships within consulting organizations and at client sites are often complex, fraught with intra-organizational identity biases, conflicts and intricate power balances (Karantinou & Hogg, 2001; Mauerer & Nissen, 2014; Perner & Skjølvik, 2014). Despite this complexity, Ethics and Ethical Compliance consulting is yet to be explored through any theoretical complexity frameworks. The application of multi-variable models such as the Zitkiene and Deksnys (2018) conceptual model of organizational agility and the Winby and Worley (2014) Adaptive Work System to similar scenarios in other disciplines hold significant promise.

Notwithstanding, the above-named models have weaknesses that are worthy of note. The Zitkiene and Deksnys (2018) model was developed from the condensation of relevant agility literature. To the best of my knowledge, it has not been tested or validated empirically. On the other hand, the Winby and Worley (2014) model takes a mechanistic view and fails to account for the socially embedded nature of agility, ignoring the intergroup and interpersonal conflicts within organizations. The two models also lack contextual specificity to ethics consulting or its parent discipline - management consulting.

Another glaring gap in management literature borders on the dearth of research into the internal dynamics of knowledge consulting firms. A considerable amount of scholarly research work has been produced on knowledge consulting firms and over the last few decades, there has been an increased appreciation for the infusion of theory into practice (Sturdy et al., 2004). One area of concentration where this trend has been increasingly prominent is the client-consultant relationship (Appelbaum, 2004; Campagnolo, 2013; Cardona, 2018; Chelliah, 2010; Gammelsaeter, 2002; Kakabadse, Louchart, & Kakabadse, 2006; Handley, Clark, Fincham, & Sturdy, 2007; Mauerer, 2019; Mauerer & Nissen, 2014; Mohe & Seidl, 2011; Nikolova, Möllering, & Reihlen, 2015; Werr & Styhre, 2003). Another area of theoretical interest is consulting firm identity and market reputation (Chelliah et al., 2014; Mühlhaus & Bouwmeester, 2016; Nissen & Dittler, 2019). However, there is limited research into consultant-to-consultant relationships as well as inter-departmental collaboration and intra-organizational group identification within knowledge consulting firms.

While this inquiry is mainly focused on providing an adequate response to the challenge of practice agility within Dealers R’Us, the opportunity to close the gaps identified in this section is an added benefit, one that further increases the significance of this study.

4.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, a review of empirical, conceptual and theoretical literature on agile organizations and agile principles is presented. Under the empirical study, I focused on agility drivers and enablers with references to a decentralized organizational structure; multi-directional communication; internal and external knowledge sharing, an encouraging organizational culture and executive-level sponsorship of agile practices. These ideas inform the reflection and action stages in Chapter Five (Phase II of this AR inquiry). More specifically, they inspire potential changes that are likely to impact my organization’s people, processes, structure and go-to-market strategy.

Beyond loose recommendations on how different variables impact agility individually, I considered a holistic system-wide response to the question of organizational agility. This was in the form of conceptual agility models mostly based on a ‘sense and respond’ mechanism. Even though they are widely considered as all-encompassing because they account for multiple factors, these models do not adequately cater to the complexity of human relations as exemplified in the organizational challenge under review. Notwithstanding, the models offer a structured framework for conceptualizing action in this inquiry.

In the concluding segments, I attempted to situate the above-named agility drivers and models within appropriate theoretical constructs under the umbrella of CAS theory, SIT, and CT. The CAS perspective is particularly interesting because of the cross-linkages between CAS properties and the characteristics exhibited by agile organizations. By drawing an analogue between the two, this study gains suitable metrics that can be used to design contextual and practical drivers geared towards organizational agility. More importantly, it provides a rubric upon which resultant outcomes can be assessed and judged in this study.

CT and SIT hold significant promise for the understanding of the social dimensions of my firm's organizational problem. In this AR intervention, CT has the capacity to instruct remedial action with respect to organizational structure and leadership style in the face of unforeseeable changes. SIT compliments the other theories by catering to the social and interpersonal angles of the organizational problem. It presents a framework that has been touted as being able to reduce intra-organizational bias and increase collaboration within different disciplines at Dealers R'Us. Finally, I conclude with the identification of relevant literature gaps.

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, an account of Phase II of the Action Research (AR) inquiry conducted at Dealers R'Us is presented. We utilize Soft System Methodology (SSM), an AR approach that offers a complexity-based lens for understanding 'wicked' organizational problems (Checkland & Scholes, 1999; Saadi & Bell, 2019). The reader will recall that in Phase I of the inquiry, a market survey was conducted in our bid to better frame the organizational issue that has become the focus of this study. This corresponds to the diagnosis step in Coghlan and Brannick's (2001) AR cycle.

In Phase II, the seven steps of SSM implemented entail further diagnosis, reflection, planning and action implementation. Rich pictures, root definitions, and conceptual models are developed and used in the elucidation of the current organizational reality and the ideal/desired scenario. In the concluding section, I report the implementation of actions directed at the transformative agenda.

5.1 Soft System Methodology (SSM)

In this section, I provide a detailed report of the implementation of each of the seven SSM steps as discussed in Section 2.4. In my role as the facilitator of the ARG focus group meetings, I draw guidance from Krell and Dana (2012) who refer to the AR facilitator as a relationship builder, a power dynamic negotiator, session manager, co-contributor and co-implementer in the inquiry process. Accounts from our face to face focus group meetings are presented in the sub-sections below.

5.1.1 Step 1 – Entering the Organizational Problem

Timeline: January 5, 2018 – January 19, 2018

In step 1, the ARG makes its debut by facing our organizational issues head-on. This is a unique opportunity to properly articulate the problem(s) and engage members in a joint appreciation and ownership process. As CEO, I make opening remarks with a focus on the purpose and mandate of the group as well as the incentive for action. Foundational ethical policies are also emphasized.

This phase is crucial because the problems experienced in our ethics consulting practice is largely seen as an Ethics Advisory (EA) departmental issue. Based on exchanges at the inaugural meeting, some consultants in the other departments are oblivious of the challenges faced in the Ethics Advisory (EA) department. An excerpt of some of the comments made in this regard is presented below.

Consultant A – ‘I didn’t realize our ethics business had any challenges. We don’t see the revenue charts for other departments. The EA guys do not really say much to us, you know. Registration & Licensing is doing well and that’s the most I know’

Consultant J – ‘Our organization is compartmentalized. The Software and Solutions and Digital Marketing folks sometimes feel like they work for a different company.’

Consultant C – ‘Because we have done a poor job of communicating between departments, we don’t see what’s happening on the other end’

Our EA Director presents a summary of the market survey conducted in Phase I and the resultant research questions that were presented in Chapter Three to the focus group. I let ARG members have free rein in picking at the emergent themes. The decision to relax the usual sequential approach was intentional because I prefer to allow the sense-making to occur naturally and for new connections to be drawn. The general takeaway from the survey is that customers are dissatisfied with our ethics consulting practice. Our firm is out of touch with industry dynamics

and we are using a ‘one size fits all’ consulting approach. Business ethics needs are ever-evolving and vary across different automotive dealerships and stakeholders. One Director describes the situation succinctly when he said, ‘*we have our heads in the sand and are not responsive to market needs*’.

In consonance with the ‘Knowledge Gaps’ theme identified in Section 3.4, our consultants appear to be oblivious of the ethical perception of the clients they serve, the variety of ethical climates that they operate in and the dominant moral decision drivers at automotive dealerships in Ontario. Our company is also not engaging in internal and external knowledge transfer and collaborative consulting that allows its EA practice to evolve with the times. Lastly, the current design of our service puts us out of touch with our clients.

Entering the problematic space entails an articulation of the historical ethics and ethical compliance trends in the automotive retail industry. This caused us to review changes in the regulations administered by OMVIC over the last decade. These regulations continue to evolve, and client needs are also non-static. Members opine that our EA department is struggling to stay afloat in the milieu of changes. It is worthy to note that our industry is undergoing constant changes. With increased diversity, the ubiquity of computers/internet and the retirement of baby boomers, automotive dealers conduct their business very differently today. The introduction of regulations and the promotion of public awareness on ethics-related issues also means there is a more enlightened populace with an increased focus on unethical practices in the automotive retail sector. The challenges that result from these are enormous and are underestimated by my organization. Some of the exchanges that reflect these arguments are presented below.

Consultant A – The number of automotive dealerships in Ontario has doubled over the last ten years. This means that competition in the industry has increased significantly. The competition has influence on how dealers comply with the rules.

Director, R&L – We can't begin to fully appreciate our problems without considering the changes in our R&L clientele over the last few years. Our client base is more diverse and reflective of the general populace. We have more Indians, Chinese, Somalians, Nigerians and Ukrainians getting into the business these days. The age demographic is also more diverse. In those days, we registered mostly middle aged Caucasian men. We have not taken these changes into account and have continued our business like these changes have no ethical implications.

The ARG spends a considerable amount of time deliberating on the internal culture at Dealers R'Us. Participants agree that this is at the heart of the survey results and research questions posed. I noticed a few participants looking down at their notepads, and others looking away from my direction as this subject is broached. This is a particularly thorny path to tread on because of the power dynamics in the room. I have consultants and their managers discussing an issue that has every potential to result in 'finger-pointing' and an awkward conversation at the least. From the body language and non-verbal cues observed, it is my observation that some of the consultants are a little reticent and non-committal on their understanding of what is wrong with our organizational culture.

To douse the apparent tension in the room and encourage greater participation, I re-establish the ground rules which include a non-retaliation and a non-retribution policy. This is not going to be an exercise in witch-hunt but a genuine attempt to understand our organization and make it more successful in the marketplace. I encourage Directors to engage in the process with an open mind, even if that means exposing my own shortcomings as a leader in the company. The vulnerability in the management cadre is palpable but I seize the moment as an opportunity to lead by example and put other participants at ease. At this point, the conversation begins to 'flow' again.

The reactions that I got from group members afterward suggest an organizational culture that disincentivizes collaboration, communication, internal knowledge transfer, and interdisciplinary synergy. *'What's the incentive to share information?'*, Consultant D asks rhetorically. He continues further by saying that he is evaluated based on metrics set by his Director and that does not include collaboration or information sharing with other departments. *'Our worlds don't criss-cross and there is no formal forum to share ideas'*, Consultant B said. These submissions justify the inclusion of the 'Internal Collaboration' and 'Organizational Structure' (reported in Section 3.4) as some of the thematic pillars of our intervention. It can be interpreted to mean that we are operating the different disciplines within the firm as silos. Our current organizational design makes interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge transfer difficult. There is also minimal synchronization in the development of departmental goals.

It is surprising to learn about the feelings of power and powerlessness across different departments within the company as we pondered on the culture at Dealers R'Us. Participants are drawing preliminary links between the prevalent power dynamic and the absence of internal collaboration and communication. This is evident from the submissions of participants in the Software and Solutions (SS) and Digital Marketing (DM) departments who highlight a feeling of *'littleness'* and low political relevance within the organization. They submit that Registration and Licensing (R&L) and Ethics Advisory (EA) departments get more attention and are headed by Directors they perceive to have more political clout within the organization. *'No one cares about our opinion in Digital Marketing. We are not even consulted on most decisions. It's like we don't matter. We realize that, so we keep to ourselves'*, Consultant J says with a frowned face as he slouches in his seat. This reaction gives a lot of credence to our focus on 'Interpersonal Relationships' as one of the themes in this inquiry. Other comments that mirror the perception of powerlessness are presented below:

Consultant N – *‘I feel little every time our Director tells us that our request for a budget increase was not approved. I feel for him, because even though he does his best, he may not be as respected as the other directors who get their way all the time.’*

Consultant P – *‘EA and R&L guys have been condescending in the past. It’s almost a ‘we are better than you’ type situation. You can imagine why we are not keen on reaching out.’*

The observations made above point to a sense of disenfranchisement and insularity within the Software Solutions and Digital Marketing departments based on a perception of an unfair power dynamic and the prevalence of inequality within the firm. This appears to be making the affected consultants less inclined to proactively collaborate with their colleagues in other departments. Based on the critical importance of this observation and the contentious nature of the ensuing discourse, we agree to revisit it in subsequent focus group meetings.

Furthermore, we draw inspiration from Ragin-Skorecka (2016) who attributes agility to entrepreneurship, a futuristic perspective and a sense of belonging. To this end, I encourage the group to explore causal relationships between these factors and the ongoing organizational problem. During this moment, I notice Consultant O shaking his head slightly with a mild smirk on his face. This prompted me to ask for his opinion on the matter. *‘I have brought a few ideas for new services to the attention of management in the last few years. Nothing came out of it, so these days I just stick to my briefs’*, he said. I interpreted this submission to mean that some of our consultants are frustrated by the lack of encouragement for an entrepreneurial culture within the firm. I also understand this to be a testament to the prevalent leadership philosophy and the disenfranchisement of contributing stakeholders.

These submissions are indicative of my conservative leadership style and low appetite for pushing the envelope beyond traditional confines. Even though members stop short of calling me out blatantly, I make a verbal note of my influence on the entrepreneurial culture of the firm and publicly own the risk-averse disposition of our departmental leaders. I treaded on a more defined path and tended towards the conventional management consulting business model. This observation has a direct linkage to an important theme identified in Section 3.4 – ‘Service Design’.

Our inadequately designed consulting service is greatly influenced by my risk-averse leadership philosophy.

Furthermore, members of the ARG delve further into other inadequacies within our practice that is making us non-agile in the face of changing market needs. The Director of our Registration and Licensing department pokes at an important issue that sits at the heart of our organizational challenge - knowledge. *'Do we know what factors influence ethical compliance decisions at different automotive dealerships in Ontario?'*, she asks. I notice a few blank stares in the room, and no one is particularly eager to respond. It is as though participants are concerned about being wrong. After an awkward moment of silence, EA consultants attempt to respond to this question. The responses reveal knowledge deficiencies that further validates the choice of 'Knowledge Gaps' as one of the overarching themes presented in Chapter Three.

Our consultants simply do not know how contextual parameters impact ethics and ethical perception in our client sites. The following commentary opens a 'can of worms' and exposes our organizational vulnerabilities even further. Factors such as compensation, personal values, gender type, ethics training, experience, and ethical climate were brought up and there were multiple viewpoints with no definitive answers. One participant captured this aptly when she said, *'we don't know enough, and what we know is not effectively shared'*. The last part of this response elicited defensiveness from R&L, DM and SS consultants. The reactions from some of these participants also showed a tonal contrast that suggests disagreement.

As a result, the conversational dynamic in the room evolved into that of 'finger-pointing' between certain participants. Consultants are indirectly pointing towards their Directors and some Directors are suggesting that their counterparts may be to blame for the issues. I elect not to get in the way of this dynamic as it exposes a mix of relational and identity problems in the unfolding organizational problem. Again, I feel personally responsible as the leader of the organization, but I resist the urge to mount a defense all the same.

One advantage of allowing the interactions to play out was the multiplicity of perspectives and actors that are now enlivening our discourse. Participants are beginning to broaden their horizons and are not limiting themselves to the usual departmental silo. Through the interactions, the ARG

is becoming aware of the complex web of interconnections that belie the organizational issue. While exploring these connections, we go off course a few times, with participants eager to dive into the details. This calls my dual role as a facilitator and co-contributor into question as I change hats momentarily. I try to keep the focus group on track with the objective of Step 1 of the SSM experience – encountering and unearthing the problem(s).

With the passing of time and a few ARG meetings characterized by similar debates, our narratives appear to be coalescing, and our joint ownership of the problem(s) is becoming more obvious to everyone. Participants are beginning to latch on to the initiative and make it less of a singular departmental challenge. Some of the submissions that reflect this observation border on openness to a cross-functional adoption of the organizational issue, the reduction of the internal tensions within the firm and a general desire to save it from existential jeopardy.

Ultimately, the ARG aspires towards a common adoption of the issue. The intent at this stage is not to come up with instant solutions. I am keen on getting some consensus within the group so that we are on the same boat as we move along with the inquiry process. I share inspirations from management theory concepts with members of the ARG as we narrow the scope. These include feedback loops (CAS theory), ingroup bias (Social Identity Theory) and contingent organizational design (Contingency Theory). The resultant draft resolution is as follows:

- (1) At Dealers R'Us, we do not know how our clients (automotive dealers in Ontario) perceive ethics and what factors influence their ethical perception.
- (2) Our organizational structure and processes discourage agility and make us ill-prepared to respond to changes in client contexts.
- (3) Cultural, political, leadership and power dynamics within the organization are proving to be significant roadblocks to entrepreneurial innovation, organizational learning, and synergy
- (4) As a result, our service is currently designed to limit client interface and collaboration, industry knowledge transfer and an opportunity to react to changes.
- (5) Revenues are falling because of the factors mentioned above.

5.1.2 Step 2 - Expressing the Problem

Timeline: January 22, 2018 – February 2, 2018

In step 2, the ARG relies on the preliminary information gathered and the themes generated from the market survey reported in Chapter Three as it gets ready to tackle the organizational problem head-on. We deepen the conversation by expressing the problem using pictorial representations known as rich pictures. Before arriving at these, there was a group consensus on two conclusions. They are as follows:

- (a) Our organizational situation is complex and involves an intricate web of internal and external actors.
- (b) Rich pictures give us a chance to mentally grasp this complexity. Shankar Sankaran and Derek (2014) put this succinctly as capturing context, impact, and meaning in a complex scenario.

In appreciation of this complexity, we begin to develop rich pictures in segments before a final assemblage at the end of Step 2. To do this, we develop visualizations detailing the group's consensus on different subjects that have a connection to the larger issue. Our intention is to gain a better understanding and to avoid missing the salient points on each subject.

To start the process, the focus group identifies all internal and external stakeholders pertinent to our organizational problem. Members are advised to cast a wide net but leave the interconnections out at this point. We do not intend to rank the actors in any order of precedence as this is not critical to our inquiry at this stage. A broad range of industry actors was identified verbally and handwritten in a tabular form on a whiteboard. The list was diverse and covered all immediate and remote players ranging from industry regulators to service providers.

After gaining clarity on the global ecosystem, the ARG zooms in on our relationship with automotive dealers. The purpose of that exercise was to develop a rich picture depicting the path to the market of our EA business at the time. Participants feel strongly about the need to understand the associated complexity as we do a more focused inquiry into the consultant-client interactions that constitute our Ethics Advisory business.

Most of our clients are automotive dealerships who may have recently undergone an audit/inspection/investigation from OMVIC. They want us to develop a plan of action(s) that can bring them into compliance and help them avoid regulatory penalties. The identified issues are varied, ranging from incomplete/non-compliant documentation to misrepresentation in advertising and customer fraud complaints. The Ethics Advisory Consultants meet with the dealer and his/her salespeople. Often times, they present the client with a generic ethical compliance program that was developed from the statutes that govern the automotive retail industry in Ontario. Dealerships are referred to the sections that apply based on the problem description. Thereafter, the client implements changes based on prescriptions in our general playbook.

After attaining a common understanding of our path to market, members of the ARG agree that our 'go-to-market' strategy is reactive and includes no proactive measures designed to help automotive dealers maintain ethically compliant businesses. This conclusion spurred conversations about the design of our service, a key focus of one of the specific research questions posed in Section 3.4. Participants draw broad connections with preliminary submissions made in Step 1 of the SSM process, where we had concluded that Dealers R'Us has limited knowledge of the factors that influence the ethical decisions of its clientele. As such, we do not propose proactive programs that result in desired outcomes at our client sites. Having developed a global view of our situation in the industry, members of the ARG proceed to develop a pictorial representation of their understanding.

The conceptualization shown in Figure 7 depicts Dealers R'Us' business model in Ontario's automotive retail industry. Based on the submissions of group members, it is obvious that our Ethics practice does not assimilate insight from the market or from other internal departments. Our solutions lack the kind of market intelligence that makes them amenable to the evolving needs of our clients. Our SS, DM, R&L departments have several interfaces with customers and inadvertently have access to some of the data that our Ethics Advisory department needs. However, organizational dynamics, politics and the prevalent culture limit common goal setting and information sharing.

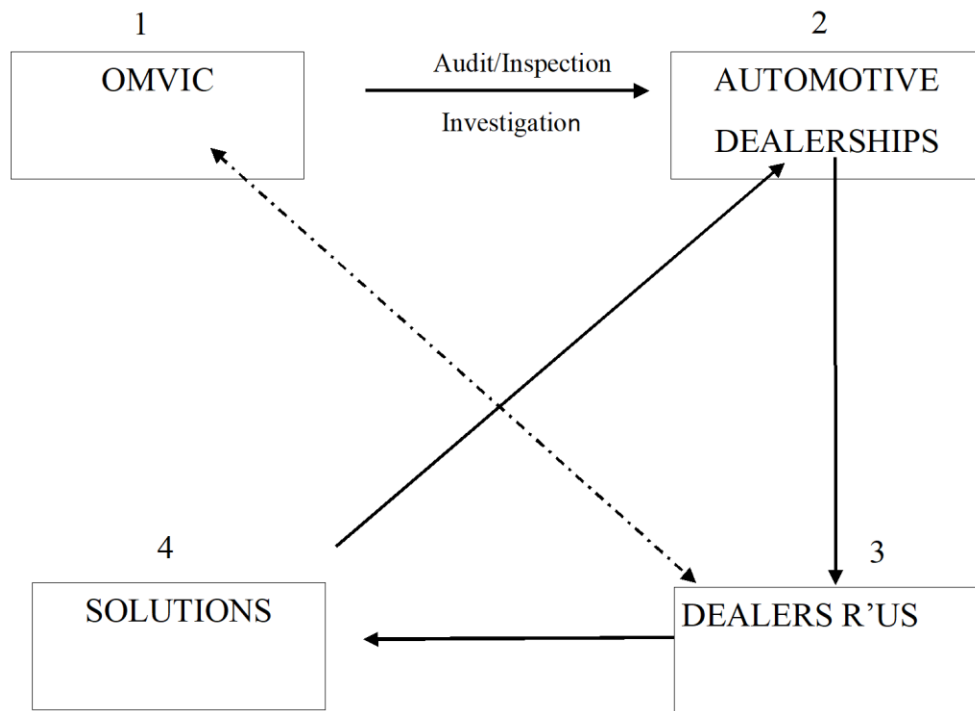


Figure 7. Pre-Intervention Ethics Advisory Service Design. Reprinted from an internal document saved on Dealers R’Us’ Server

A phrase from the Director of our Ethics Advisory department is succinct. He states that we ‘*have our heads in the sand*’ and are ‘*oblivious of the changes happening in our business environment*’. The support in the room for this assertion is immediately noticeable. I observe a few nods across the aisle and also noticed that participants were quick to build on the submission made. They alluded that our oblivion results in the development of non-custom and ill-fitted ethical compliance programs, out of touch with our clients’ expectations. In Figure 8, we depict Dealers R’Us with inverted human avatars that have their heads buried in the sand, away from the glare of the sun and the surrounding environment. Our consultants churn out non-custom and ill-fit solutions that can be likened to fitting square pegs in round holes. This leads to dissatisfied clients and unmet expectations, a situation that impacts our bottom line significantly.

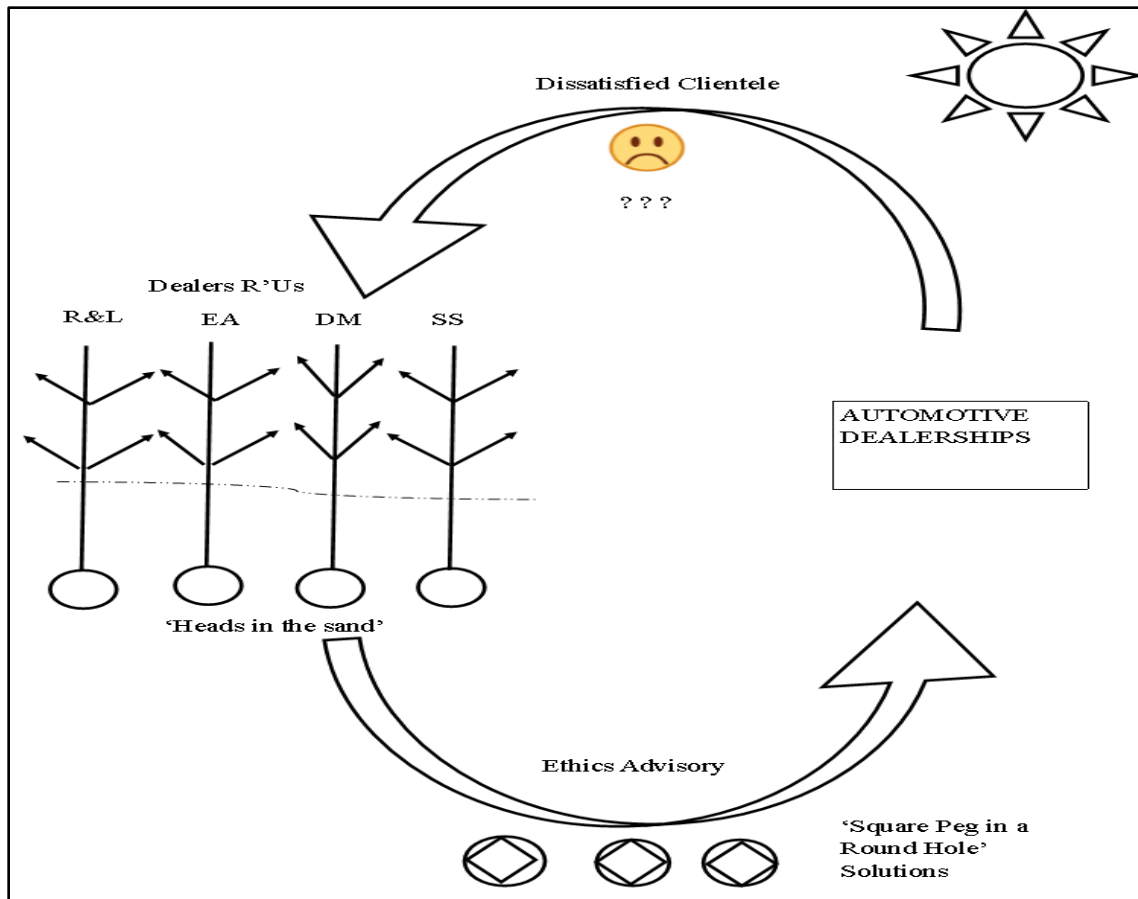


Figure 8. Picture Depicting Pre-Intervention Survey Results. Pictorial representation developed during focus group meeting by members of the Action Research Group (See notes in Appendix C)

As the ARG continues to frame the organizational problem, we open the pandora’s box on a host of structural and political issues bedeviling our organization. Even though our Ethics Advisory department is directly responsible for our ethical compliance programs, its aloofness and aloneness mean it does not get access to insights from other departments. This is characterized by ‘finger-pointing’, feelings of unequal distribution of political power and patronage, a disjointed organizational structure and the culture of innovation resistance.

Figure 9 shows the phenomenon of ‘finger-pointing’ and the ‘blame circle’ set up within the ARG and in our company at large. Consultants in the Ethics Advisory department often say that their counterparts in the other departments should do more to help them. This was evident in the exchanges recorded during Step 1 of the SSM process. ‘*R&L really needs to step up their game*’,

one EA consultant said. ‘Well, we can do more, but my Director decides where I spend my time’, an R&L consultant responded in a defensive tone. The resultant blame circle revealed the absence of accountability and a preference for placing responsibility at the doorsteps of other internal stakeholders. I reckon that this observation is critical to the organizational challenge under review. In Figure 9, I present a visual representation of this by depicting different internal stakeholders within the firm pointing fingers at each other in a blame circle.

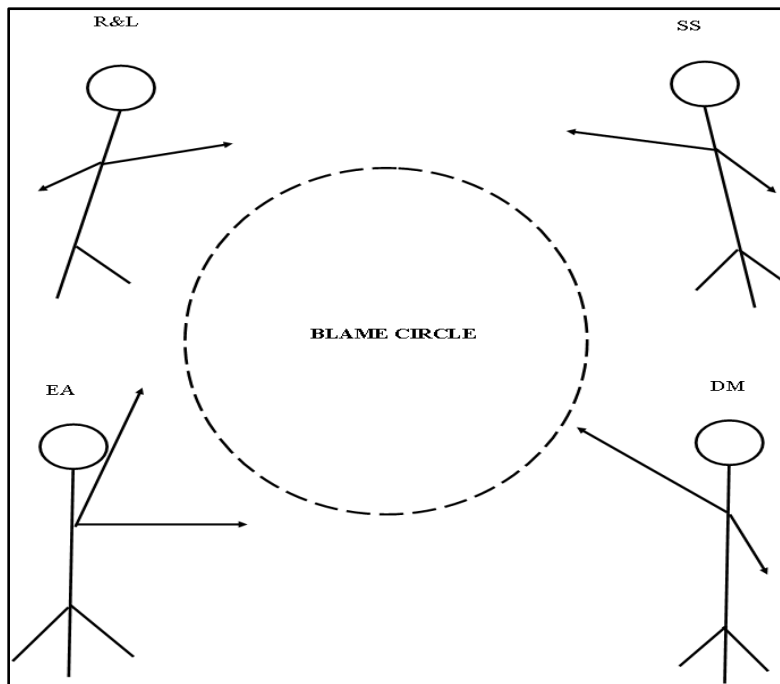


Figure 9. Picture Showing Blame Culture. Reproduced from my personal notes taken during Action Research Group Meeting (See Appendix C).

At this junction, the ARG spends some time discussing the absence of an interdepartmental synergy and communication to allow for the sharing of insights. Cromity and de Stricker (2011) call this a ‘Silo Culture’ which has the capacity to deprive any organization of operational synergy. Participants surmise that the Ethics Advisory and the Registration and Licensing departments are ‘closer’ in communications and are more likely to work together and share insights. The Digital Marketing and Software Solutions departments were created two years after the inception of the

company. As a result, members of the ARG submit that these departments are ‘closer’ in communication and association, segmented from the Ethics Advisory and the Registration and Licensing departments. The picture depicting this segmentation is shown in Figure 10. We utilize a representation of agricultural silos to depict each department and their disjointed nature as far as collaboration and information sharing is concerned. We also include a partition curtain indicating the abysmal intra-organizational collaboration preferences painted above. Preferential information sharing patterns are also shown by dotted arrows between departments that share some affinity.

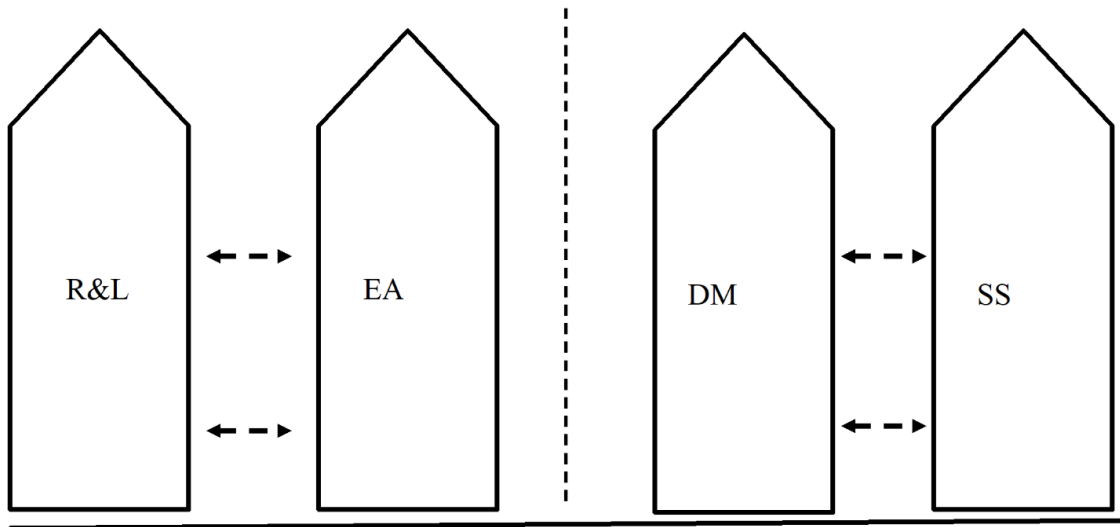


Figure 10. Picture Showing Information Silos at Dealers R’Us. Reproduced from a pictorial representation of the information and collaboration dysfunction jointly developed by members of the Action Research Group (See Appendix C).

One participant submits that ‘*whenever consultants from different departments are compelled to share insights with one another, this exchange occurs over the ‘silo wall’ reactively but there is no proactive and continuous cooperation and sync between departments*’. At the tail end of her submission, I noticed a shrug and raised eyebrows, non-verbal expressions that I interpret to mean that she feels helpless about the situation – an ‘it is what it is’ moment.

AR is fit for this kind of problem because it opens up the communicative space in an organization through collaboration and the embrace of multiple perspectives (Hawkins, 2015). This observation leads us to a consideration of the influence of power, powerlessness, identity and political relevance in the company.

Members of the ARG rank themselves and other internal stakeholders anonymously on a perceived political relevance scale of 1 to 5 with '5' corresponding to 'most influential/powerful'. The results are collated and translated into a graphical picture shown in Figure 11. The graph shows that participants in the Ethics Advisory department were adjudged to be the most politically relevant. They were followed closely by participants in the Registration & Licensing Department. Participants from the Software Solutions and Digital Marketing departments view themselves and are seen as the least politically relevant within the organization. It is eye-opening to realize that participants have a vivid appreciation of the influence of politics on organizational life. The placement of each participant on the political spectrum influences group identity, how stakeholders perceive the organization and how they relate with other political players. Members of the ARG are using the resultant picture to symbolize identity politics and the inequality of power as it relates to the dysfunction that we are unearthing. We utilize human avatars of varying heights to depict the perceived political relevance of all disciplines within the firm.

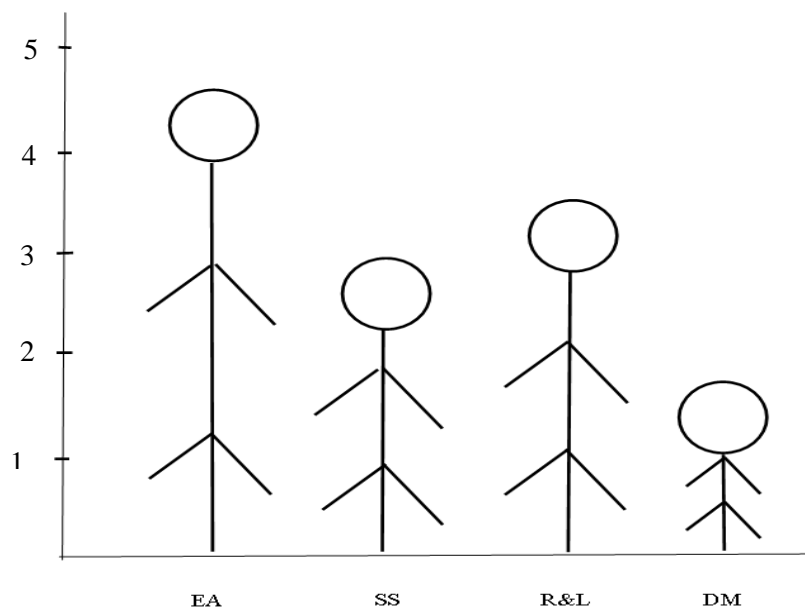


Figure 11. Political Relevance Chart. Reproduced from the pictorial representation of political perception jointly developed by members of the Action Research Group (See Appendix C).

Ultimately, members of the ARG agree that the challenges faced by our Ethics Advisory practice is one that puts our entire business at risk and all hands must be on deck to find a lasting solution. There is no better way to visualize this conclusion than to depict it in terms of revenue. We added a concluding graphical representation of this to our collage of rich pictures. Figure 12 shows a trend of declining revenue which negatively affects the viability of all departments in the company.

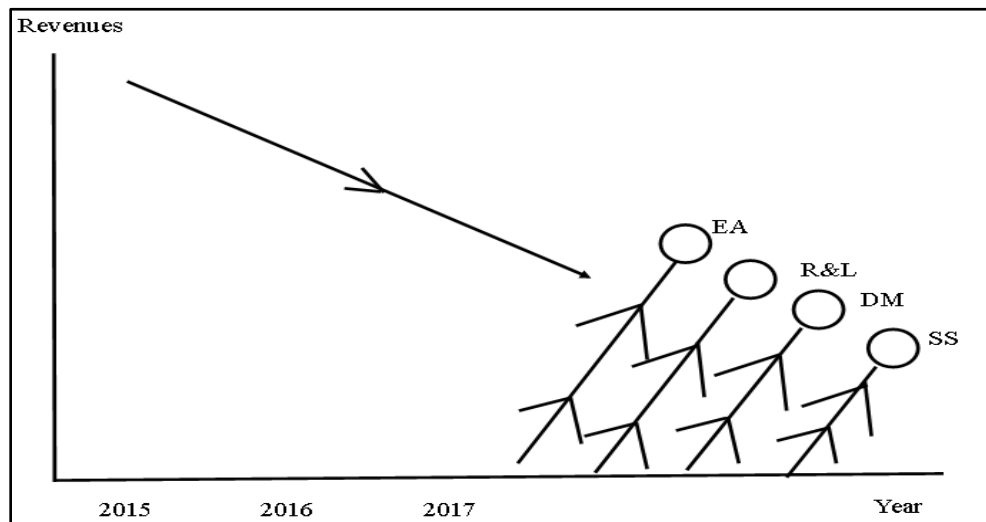


Figure 12. Picture Depicting Declining Revenue Trend. Reproduced from the pictorial representation of Dealers R’Us’ dire financial situation jointly developed by members of the Action Research Group (See Appendix C)

The downward revenue trend has a negative impact on the Ethical Advisory department, but other departments are equally affected as well. Figure 12 shows this downward spiral vividly and this has a convincing and coalescing effect on all members of the ARG. It is the final imagery that helped to win the support of certain consultants from other departments in my opinion.

Thereafter, we summarize the results of our joint sense-making exercise by combining Figures 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. This combinatory approach produced the Rich Picture in Figure 13. The Rich Picture provides a snapshot of our organizational problem as currently understood. It details the

structural, political and social dimensions that came to the fore during our joint problematization. More importantly, it provides a solid basis upon which further investigation and remedial actions can be based.

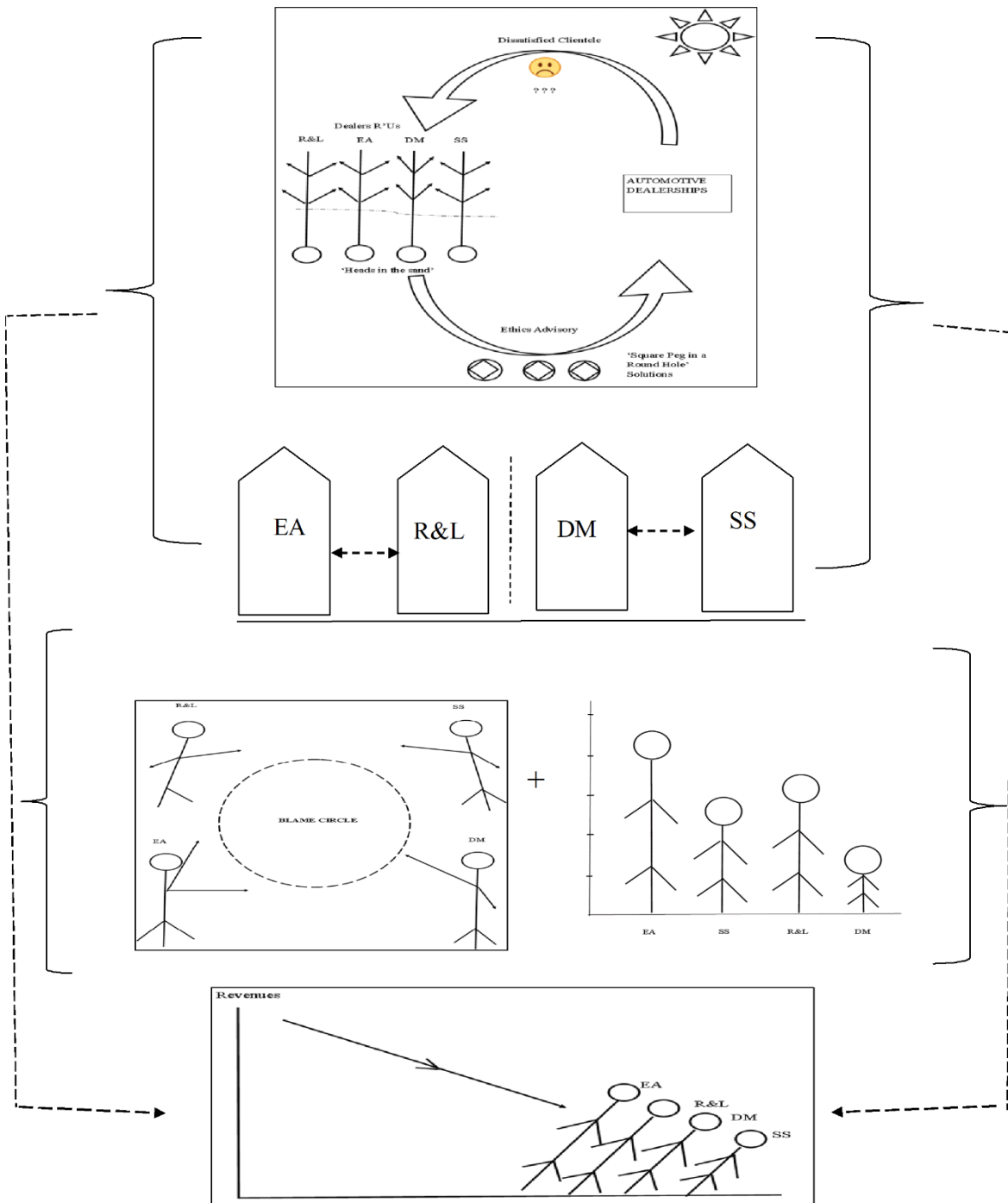


Figure 13. Rich Picture Detailing Organizational ‘Wicked’ Problem. Obtained from an assemblage of Figures 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12.

The upper section of the rich picture speaks to structural issues as it details the dysfunctional nature of Dealers R’Us EA practice. One half depicts the lack of a contextual fit between the ethical compliance problems in the field and the generic design of our EA practice. This situation is exacerbated by consultant oblivion leading to a largely unsatisfied clientele. In the other half, the communication silos between different departments indicate a collaborative anomaly. This is considered to be a contributory factor to the organizational issue. In the lower section, the political coloration of the issue comes to the fore. Here, blame trading and finger-pointing indicate a lack of accountability. This section also highlights the perception of power and powerlessness within the firm.

As shown in the bottommost image, the combination of the upper and lower visual narratives culminates in an untenable financial situation for Dealers R’Us. The effect of the status quo is shown to be equally detrimental to all departments and disciplines within the firm, leading to a more relatable problem statement across departmental divides.

5.1.3 Step 3 – Developing Root Definitions

Timeline: February 9, 2018 – February 23, 2018

After the expression of the organizational problem with rich pictures, the ARG proceeds in its SSM inquiry with root definitions. As stated in Section 2.4, we utilize the CATWOE mnemonic for this purpose.

(i) C – Clients

Clients are the potential beneficiaries (or ‘sufferers’) of the process/system under review. Coming to an agreement on our clients appears to be an easy task for members of the ARG. Everyone agrees that the automotive dealers that we provide ethical advisory services to are the relevant clients in this case. Based on the first two steps of our SSM inquiry, we work through some key questions for the sole purpose of understanding where we are in relation to our clients. I pose a number of questions that resulted from my reflection. A summary is provided below:

(a) What are our clients really concerned about right now?

The common thread in the responses provided to this question is that automotive dealerships in Ontario require custom ethical compliance solutions that are crafted to suit their specific situations and needs in an evolving ethical compliance regime.

(b) What does our current offering do for our clients and what's missing?

Through this double-edged question, we achieve two objectives. The first being gaining clarity on what our ethical advisory service means to our clients. We also seize the opportunity to delve deeper into the specifics of the organizational challenge and gain preliminary consensus on the main undesirable features of our workplace scenario. Respondents submit that our services provide general guidance on how automotive dealerships can meet ethical compliance requirements. Identified deficiencies include oblivion on client moral decision drivers; the absence of internal synergy between support disciplines and our Ethics Advisory department as well as the absence of client contexts and program customization.

(c) Who cares/wins if we make improvements to our ethics practice?

This question points participants in the direction of the beneficiaries of the system. In our case, clients come in as the first choice for all respondents. On another note, our organization, Dealers R'Us will benefit greatly in the form of increased revenue and better customer reviews/ratings. Other secondary beneficiaries also include Ethics Advisory consultants who may have a more prosperous practice. Furthermore, the regulator (OMVIC) will like to see higher compliance rates in the automotive retail industry. Therefore, it encourages and cares about efforts geared towards achieving this.

(d) What are the implications of maintaining the status quo for our customers?

The EA consultants are most vociferous in their response to this question. It appears that they are acting as champions and crusaders for our clients. One consultant argues that *maintaining the status quo will have serious business repercussions for automotive dealers*. Ethics and

ethical compliance are top-rated issues in the automotive retail industry and companies like ours provide advisory services that help automotive dealers manage their compliance risks. The continued utilization of our ethical compliance program in its current form means that our practice is unlikely to be adaptive to specific customer needs. This directly translates into a low compliance rate and a higher probability of incurring fines or penalties from regulators.

For our organization, I argue that the continued viability of our business lies in revamping our EA practice and our organization. Failure to change means the continuation of a downward spiral that is being experienced with our revenues. This is an untenable situation that can threaten the maintenance of an Ethics Advisory department and the jobs of the consultants that work there. If our Ethics Advisory department becomes unviable, the ripple effects will be felt in other departments as well.

(ii) A - Actors

Actors are the individuals who would implement actions to make a jointly desired organizational change possible. Specific questions with respect to actors were posed to members of the ARG.

(a) Who is responsible for making a change(s) to our ethics practice?

This question elicits several interesting perspectives akin to the ‘finger pointing’ scenario painted in Figure 9. Participants from the Registration and Licensing, Software Solutions and Digital Marketing departments mostly opine that it is the responsibility of our Ethics Advisory department to initiate and promote desired changes. Consultants from the Ethics Advisory put up a counter-argument for an inclusive approach. My understanding of the ensuing discourse is that other departments want to only play a supporting role and not share equal responsibility in whatever future changes are made. With further prodding, a consultant explains that she would like to *‘keep her local universe fairly stable and not upset the apple cart’*.

This is a resistance to change borne out of concern for self-interest and personal security. I sense apprehension over what changes would mean for each individual and how their lives may be enhanced or made more difficult in a new dispensation. While the Action Research Group deliberates on this question, a consensus is not in sight. Even though I am tempted to continue the reflection and dialogue until an agreement is reached, I opt to steer participants to a different conversation with the hopes of coming back to the initial question.

(b) Why should actors care about making a change(s) to our ethics practice?

Participants rally around a single point as they respond to this question. They agree that the continued success of our company lies in the continued prosperity of our Ethics Advisory business. We also relate potential solutions to the identified organizational challenge as having ripple effects on the growth of other departments. Therefore, all consultants in our organization have a personal and organizational reason to support the impending changes.

After gaining group consensus on this above-mentioned point, I quip that if everyone in the company cares about positive change, we are all ‘actors’ with different (but equally important) roles to play as far as this SSM inquiry is concerned. It is relieving to observe the nods across the room and the acquiescence of those who had indirectly denied ownership.

(c) Do we have the right actors for the desired improvements?

At the start of this Action Research project, I set out to invite the right players to engage in the inquiry, knowing fully well the futility that lies in the lack of joint ownership across the entire organization. In our ARG meeting, a skill and talent assessment exercise helps us to answer this all-important question. Members of the ARG agree that we have adequate representation of all internal stakeholder groups and members have the wherewithal to act on changes proposed by the group.

(iii) T - Transformation

Transformation speaks to the change we would like to see in our organization. I think it is most necessary for the ARG to deliberate on the nature of the desired transformation and what it would take to achieve our goal(s). Some of the questions utilized in our focus group interviews include:

- (a) What are the desirable outputs from this Organizational Action Research inquiry?

There are several desirables put forward by members of the ARG in response to this question. These border on revamping our Ethics Advisory consulting practice to respond to customer-specific requirements and engage widely with other departments within the company. They are summarized in the responses given below.

Director, Ethics Advisory (EA) – *‘I will like to see an EA department that meets customer-specific needs with respect to custom-tailored and proactive ethical compliance programs’.*

Consultant A – *‘I think one of the most desirable benefits of this exercise should be achieving synergy and closer cooperation between all departments, their activities, goals and metrics.’*

Consultant H – *‘I will like to see a restructuring that gives every department equal importance and relevance, so that we are all working together towards the same goal’.*

Consultant D – *‘Improved customer satisfaction with our EA services. That’s what I will like to see’*

- (b) What will it take to achieve these outputs?

Members of the ARG submit that a continuous infusion of market intelligence into our Ethics Advisory practice is a prerequisite for achieving the desired output. Through this, stakeholders can learn about the factors that influence the ethical perception and ethical behavior of automotive dealers. It was also agreed that an organizational structure that

properly aligns all departments, ensures synergy and guarantees inter-departmental collaboration is sorely needed. Respondents opine that this may address power and identity issues expressed by stakeholders.

(c) How will we get from we are right now to the desired point?

At this stage of the SSM inquiry, we begin to draw up conjectures on what may seem to be our path to change. I encourage members of the ARG to focus on specific actions that can help to actualize our objectives. Some of the ideas put forward are summarized below:

- (i) Organizing quarterly ethical perception and industry awareness training for our consultants
- (ii) Canceling our generic ethical compliance program in favor of a custom, context-driven program developed ‘from the scratch’ for each automotive dealership.
- (iii) Organizing social inter-departmental bonding activities to aid communication and alleviate relationship issues in our company.
- (iv) Experimenting with a different organizational structure different from what we have to engender collaboration and cross-communication. A key instance provided by a participant was the dismantling of our current hierarchical silo structure in favor of a flat matrix organization where consultants are cross-trained in all our business activities.
- (v) Embedding our consultants with clients so they can learn the nuances of their trade.
- (vi) Directly confronting issues around inequality and politics within Dealers R’Us—breaking down barriers, mending fences, developing a culture of ‘openness’ and not shying away from personnel reassignments, where necessary.

(d) Do we have what it takes and is the transformation feasible?

After deliberating on the desirable outputs and what we need to achieve them, it is important for the ARG to consider the feasibility of change. This was an important step in beginning to get employees to envision the process of change. Most members of the ARG express a sense of general optimism on the feasibility of our recommended action items. Ethics Advisory consultants are concerned with the amount of work that will go into creating custom ethical compliance programs. One participant complained about *manpower utilization and an escalation of the average customer invoice which may make us non-competitive.*

Two departmental directors also appear to be defensive of their political relevance in a flat matrix organization. ‘*You wouldn’t need us anymore, you can just report directly to the CEO*’, one of them jokingly said. The other defends the current organizational structure, stating that ‘*the structure is not the issue, it’s the knowledge deficit*’. He argues that the current organogram allows for focus and specialization. I counter these submissions by encouraging participants to be open to the lessons that change may bring, irrespective of the situation of each stakeholder during and after the intervention.

(iv) W - Weltanschauung (Worldview)

‘Weltanschauung’ or worldview speaks to the bigger picture and the broader impacts of the proposed changes at Dealers R’Us. In this ARG meeting, we take a deeper reflective approach to examine the implications and reach of the change we seek. A summary of the focus group questions and responses recorded are given below:

(a) What do the identified challenges truly mean for all stakeholders (internal and external)?

Members of the ARG take turns to define what our proposed changes truly mean to them. There are responses related to customer satisfaction and more successful careers; collaboration resulting in career advancement opportunities; creation of incremental business opportunities for other departments and higher compliance rates at end-user sites.

(b) What will change/ transformation mean for relationships within the organization?

Achieving a greater level of cooperation and collaboration between all departments of Dealers R'Us is bound to alter the relationships between our Consultants and Directors. Considering the political nature of our organizational problem, the question above allows participants to jointly express their hopes, fears, and expectations. Members of the ARG are hopeful that a reorganization of the company will result in a better working relationship between consultants. More particularly, employees in the SS and DM departments foresee an opportunity to become more *politically relevant in the scheme of things* and be given greater 'attention'.

Again, a departmental Director expresses some concerns about *losing control* of his consultants as it relates to departmental resources and goals. His argument borders on the time and resources that interdepartmental collaboration would consume in a new dispensation. I interpret this to mean an inconvenience with a new power equation that puts those Directors at par with others in the company. It is also related to uncertainty about their situation in a reorganized company. I find it important to address this potential hindrance to change. At this point, I remind everyone in the meeting room that this is not a witch-hunt or a downsizing exercise. The intent is to assure everyone that they will have an important part to play in the emergent organization.

Furthermore, I encourage participants to examine my leadership of the firm. '*I am surprised with how you've let us all contribute to the decision-making process since I've been part of this group, definitely something we need to do more*', one consultant quipped. Another stated that '*the change we seek requires a different company culture, a different style of leadership*'. I probed further to better understand the respondent's comments and she clarified by saying that I tend to be *prescriptive and less accessible*. I interpret these statements as a direct commentary on my authoritative and less democratic leadership style. Even though the respondents are trying to be polite considering the uneasiness in the room at this point, their candidness elicited open appreciation from me and caused me to reflect on my contribution to the prevalent organizational culture. I also reflect on how the status quo must change in the consulting firm of our dreams.

(c) What will change/transformation mean for the industry and industry regulators?

We examine the worldview of other players in the automotive retail industry, including the industry regulator, OMVIC and competing consulting houses. Through our AR inquiry, we discuss what our internal change will mean for external stakeholders. OMVIC exists to ensure ethical compliance and protect the car-buying public in the Province of Ontario. Their main preoccupation is to ensure that our clients comply with the MVDA and its Code of Ethics.

The proposed changes at Dealers R'Us are ultimately geared towards higher ethical compliance rates at automotive dealerships. Members of the ARG, therefore, argue that the industry regulator must be really pleased with our efforts and that may open an avenue for closer collaboration in the future. Furthermore, we subject the competitive landscape to scrutiny and conclude that our proposed transformation would result in the elevation of service offerings at other consulting houses. Hence, our joint resolve is to create certain protections around solutions that emerge from our organizational transformation.

(v) O - Owner

The owners within our organization are identified as the CEO and the Departmental Directors. We exercise considerable decision-making rights in the course of our duties. For that reason, the ARG concludes that we should be saddled with the responsibility of steering the desired transformation. Other responsibilities include providing political support for our proposed transformation and ensuring that it stays on course. Directors of the SS and DM departments argue that they *feel more empowered* to embark on an organization-wide initiative with my sanction. Their comments expose the dire influence of power and powerlessness on agility, innovation, and pro-activeness in our organization.

(vi) E - Environmental Constraints

The final step in the CATWOE analysis involves the identification of environmental constraints. I admonish participants to envisage potential factors that can prevent or limit the success of our proposed transformation. The goal is to properly plan for and mitigate these factors. The environmental constraints put forward include resource constraints, time limitations, and competitive pressures. Insider Action Research projects take a considerable amount of resources. Members of the ARG point to their role duality as far as resources are concerned. They still have their regular day jobs and maybe constrained especially where Action Research efforts require the dedication of personnel. We agreed to mitigate this by adequate resource planning and keeping an open line of communication. All ongoing projects and briefs will also be completed by the current assignees.

I also remind members of the ARG about the time constraints set by my doctoral program. That means that I have certain reporting requirements that have to be met by the deadlines set by the University of Liverpool. However, I reiterate that the story of learning and change should continue well after the expiration of my studies. A consultant brings up the issue of competitive pressures that may also impact our inquiry. His concerns stem from a possibility that other consulting houses may react to our internal changes and put us on the defensive in the market. We agree to stay the course but protect our business while we do so.

After our CATWOE analysis, we utilize the PQR formula (do 'P' by 'Q' to achieve 'R') outlined in Section 2.4 to come up with a defined root definition. Wang, Liu, and Mingers (2015, p. 565) describe them as succinct descriptions of notional systems of human activity.

Ours is defined as follows:

<p>A system to create an agile and responsive ethical advisory practice through an adaptive reliance on evolving market knowledge, consultant empowerment and organizational restructuring to achieve a high level of client satisfaction.</p>
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As advised by Gasson (2013), members of the ARG develop input-output diagrams shown in Figure 14 to represent the transformations we seek within our organization and our Ethics

Advisory practice. Inputs represent our current statuses and outputs represent our desired states. These include a transformation from an era of oblivion on the drivers of ethical perception to an era of knowledgeable consultancy backed by a continuous infeed of the latest market intelligence on moral decision making and ethical perception in Ontario’s automotive retail industry. The group is also desirous of a transformation from a silo, segmented organization with minimal information sharing to one that is fully integrated, collaborative and actively shares information.

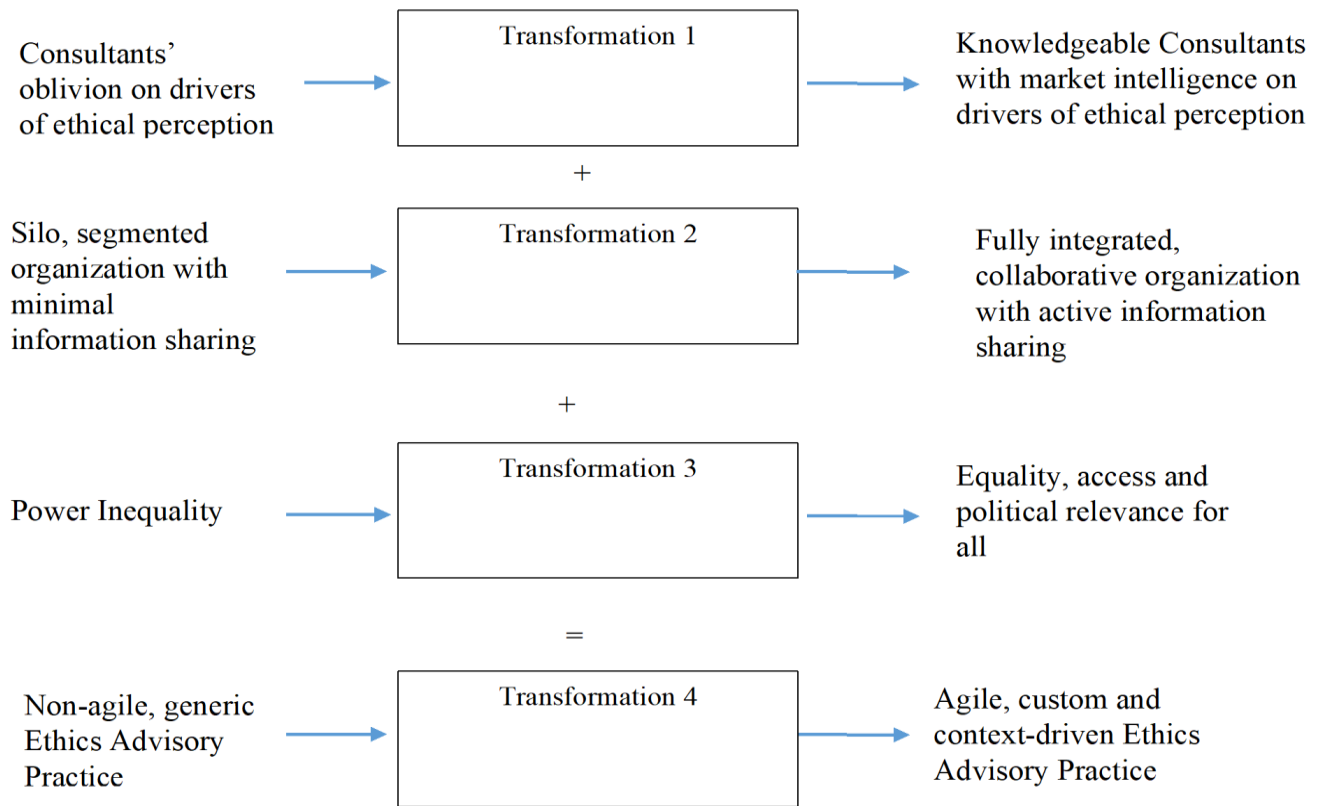


Figure 14. Input-Output Diagrams Showing Projected Transformations. Adapted from “Input-Output Transformations” by S. Gasson, 2013. (<http://cci.drexel.edu/faculty/sgasson/SSM/Stage3a.html>).

The ARG is convinced that none of these goals are possible without a transformation from the prevalence of perceived power inequality to an era of equality, access and political relevance for all. It is hoped that the transformations above will culminate in the major transformation sorely

needed at Dealers R'Us, which is a transformation from a non-agile, generic ethics advisory practice to one that is agile and responsive to situational and contextual factors in Ontario's automotive industry.

5.1.4 Step 4 – Developing Conceptual Models

Timeline: February 23, 2018 – February 28, 2018

The development of conceptual models naturally follows the root definitions provided in subsection 5.1.3. A conceptual model tells us about the sequence of purposeful human activities that must take place to achieve the transformation that we need at Dealers R'Us. According to Guay and Waaub (2015), models help to structure our exploration of the complex organization problem under consideration. The ARG defines purposeful activities relevant to our cause as follows:

- (a) Instituting monthly team bonding activities to foster communication, build healthy relationships, break down barriers and enhance information sharing across interdepartmental lines. The inspiration for this activity was partly drawn from a desire to reduce in-group favoritism as explained by Social Identity Theory. Notably, this is expected to address the 'Interpersonal Relationships' theme identified in Chapter Three.
- (b) Formation of experimental interdisciplinary teams comprising of a consultant from each of the four departments in a matrix organizational structure. This activity was derived from a combination of participant reflection with ideas from Contingency Theory. It is directed at the 'Internal Collaboration' and 'Organizational Structure' themes identified in Chapter Three.
- (c) To account for the 'Knowledge Gaps' theme, members proposed that we invest in a quarterly ethical perception and awareness training for all internal stakeholders.

In our bid to act on the 'Service Design' thematic focus of our intervention, the following proposals were made:

- (d) Embedding our interdisciplinary teams with clients one day a week, for a month. This move seemed necessary to create active feedback loops as advised by Complex Adaptive System Theory.
- (e) Creating custom ethical compliance programs and implementing them with clients. It occurred to me that this activity borders on program emergence, with emergence being a key feature of CAS theory.
- (f) Measuring program effectiveness with clients in the field
- (g) Direct CEO-Consultant interactions to review client progress on a bi-weekly basis
- (h) Document lessons from the experience and rotating matrix team members for the next intervention.

The sequence of these activities is shown in Figure 15. Action items (a) and (b) correspond to steps 1A and 1B respectively. Activity 1A involves deliberate and periodic team bonding activities. Activity 1B leads us to form interdisciplinary matrix teams.

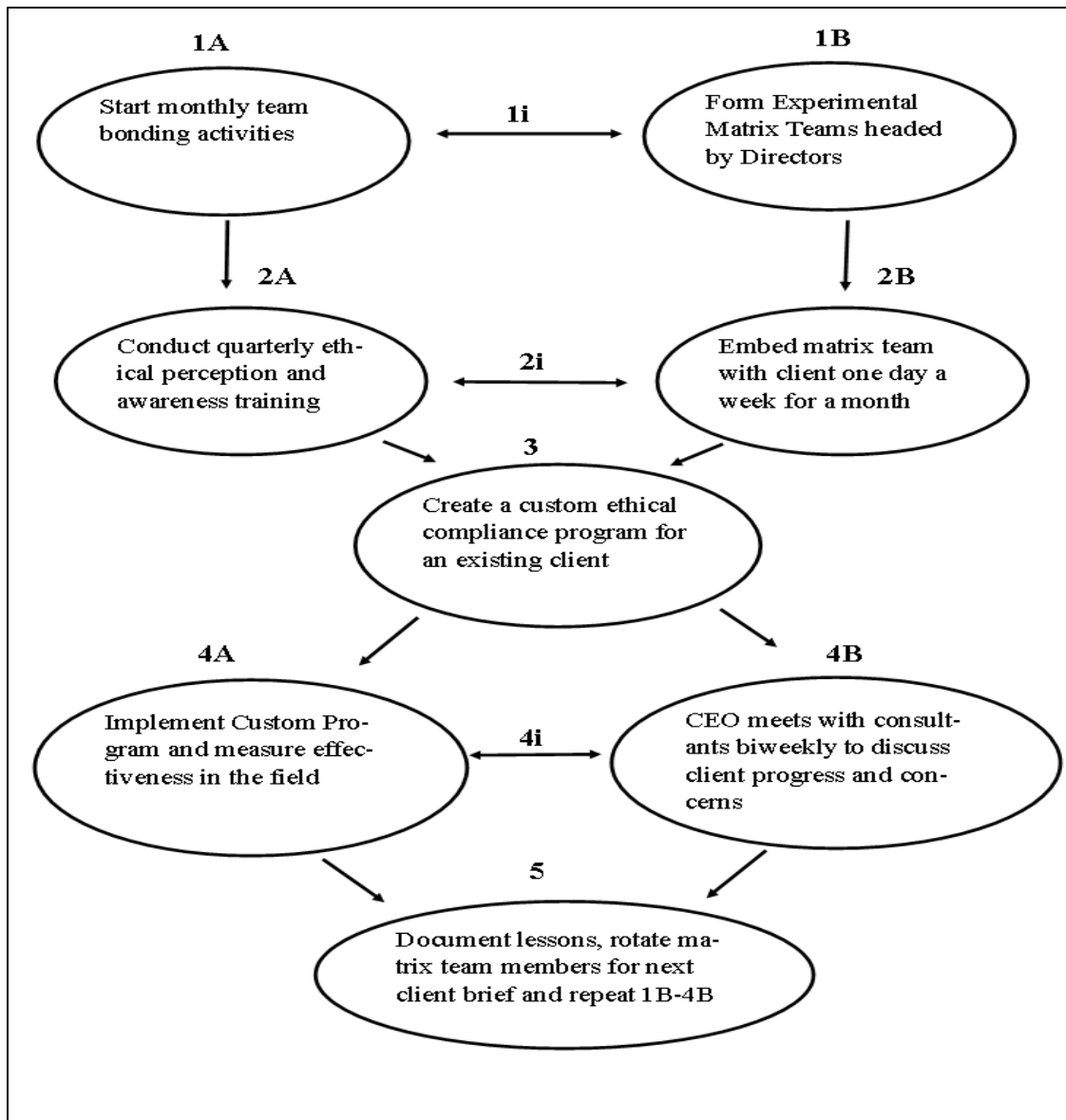


Figure 15. Conceptual Model Showing Purposeful Human Activities. Adapted from remedial plan jointly developed by members of the Action Research Group (See Appendix C).

We reckon that carrying out these activities simultaneously and connecting them as exemplified by interlink ‘1i’ provides coordination and sync that would be more expedient for the company. Members also submit that the bonding activities will help to build bonds and camaraderie. It may also help leaders pick amiable team members who can work well with each other in future project teams. This is followed by ethical perception training in addition to a physical co-location of our matrix team with the client’s team. These are activities 2A and 2B respectively.

They are intentionally designed as simultaneous steps as well, connected by interlink '2i'. Members of the ARG agree that this step is an intensive acculturation phase that is supposed to infuse context and dynamism into our Ethics Advisory practice. Consultants will learn about the drivers of ethical perception at automotive dealerships while confirming lessons through their physical presence at client sites.

With the knowledge gained from activities 2A and 2B, our embedded matrix team will develop a custom ethical compliance program with the client (activity 3). The program is implemented in Activity 4A and its effectiveness measured with the client. I have been asked to break away from the indirect contact I had with consultants in the past. Therefore, activity 4B will have me doing biweekly meetings with our consultants to gauge client progress and discuss concerns. This is done simultaneously with activity 4A. In the final step (activity 5), we will document lessons learned from the intervention, rotate team members for the next client brief and repeat the above-mentioned sequence.

5.1.5 Step 5 – Comparing Conceptual Models to Reality

Timeline: February 28, 2018 - March 2, 2018

In Step 5 of this SSM inquiry, the ARG compares conceptual model activities to the real world. We focus on measures to bridge the divide. With respect to team bonding, participants opined that the existence of interpersonal rifts would make attendance at social activities tricky and awkward for certain individuals. It was agreed the incentivization of attendance and getting the CEO involved with smoothening relationships is required to avert this. The ARG also agreed that the success of the proposed interdisciplinary matrix teams would be dependent on adequate coaching and careful team selection. The most contentious measure that was thoroughly debated bordered on the creation of a custom ethics program. We identified a broad difference between our conceptualization of the future of this program and our current reality. To bridge the gap, the ARG concluded that there is a need for consultant field embedment, site observation and the development of a custom fit compliance plan. We utilize the same comparative procedure to other activities in the conceptual model in order to increase the odds of success.

5.1.6 Step 6 – Determining Feasible Changes

Timeline: March 5, 2018

In determining culturally feasible and desirable changes, I presented a list of proposed solutions to influential stakeholders within the organization. These include Directors of the Ethics Advisory, Registration and Licensing, Software Solutions and Digital Marketing departments. These individuals hold vital administrative and political power within the organization and can make or mar the implementation of actions. I see this as an opportunity to create what Anderson (2017) refers to as horizontal relationships from a democratized organizational inquiry. To that extent, I engaged in proactive stakeholder management to gain their support and eliminate barriers to action by engaging these influencers exclusively, beyond the general ARG meetings. Some of their objections and our mutually agreed workarounds are presented below.

5.1.6.1 (1B) - Form interdisciplinary matrix teams headed by Directors

Interdisciplinary matrix teams are cross-functional groups assembled to achieve a goal on a temporary or permanent basis (Ford & Randolph, 1992). Key stakeholders at Dealers R'Us are in favor of a matrix style organizational structure. However, there are concerns about having multi-disciplinary teams led by Directors that have only one main professional specialization. These leaders prefer to lead matrix teams onsite where the focus of the consulting brief is largely within their specializations. There was not a lot of interest in the full administration of a multi-disciplinary team outside the regular consulting briefs. I sense this apathy to be directly related to fears of the uncertainty that characterizes the politics of matrix organizations. Witt, Hilton, and Hockwarter (2001) put the responsibility for navigating this complexity on team leaders. As such, I understand the apprehension expressed by the Directors. We agreed to have a two-way reporting path. Under this arrangement, consultants will report vertically to the CEO and horizontally to Departmental Directors. In line with the intent of Action Research, there will be periodic reviews and reflections on this new organizational structure, with changes made where applicable.

Directors also kicked against the idea of going full throttle with matrix style teams on multiple client briefs at the same time. One key stakeholder warned that that could lead to a *'burnout'*. Another quipped in that, *'testing the waters with both feet'* may be risky. Directors fear that our

resources will be stretched thin considering that some consultants may be wearing multiple hats by functioning in a matrix team as well as in their routine departmental silo. More importantly, they also worry that we may not be able to fully grasp lessons from an action initiative such as this if we have too many going at the same time.

To address this concern, we all agree to start with the deployment of one ‘*experimental*’ matrix team instead of having three or more working on multiple briefs simultaneously. Directors also advise that we implement a handover of existing briefs by appointed members of the matrix team to free up resources. Consultants who are not members of a deployed matrix team will work on current briefs. Key stakeholders seem at ease with the approval of these suggestions and are speaking more positively about our prospects as far as a matrix style consulting team is concerned.

5.1.6.2 (5) - Rotate matrix team members after every consulting brief

Key stakeholders do not think the idea of rotating matrix team members after the conclusion of every consulting brief is a feasible or culturally desirable idea. Directors cite the need to build deeper working relationships between consultants by having them spend more time together beyond the length of one consulting job. Their position appears to be largely supported by management literature. For instance, Barrett (2015) refers to team rotations and ad-hoc team scenarios as ‘making friends on the fly’, a situation that presents specific knowledge, environmental and reactionary challenges. White, Eklund, McNeal, Hochhalter and Arroliga (2018) also posit that teams with varying memberships struggle with establishing trust, shared mental models and a common identity.

I quip that the cost of bringing a new matrix team to speed in the first few instances may be enormous. However, I find the prospect of breaking down all silos and collaborative walls within the organization attractive. To this end, I propose a middle ground that the Directors find agreeable - a quarterly rotation that provides enough time for intra-team relationship/capacity-building while keeping company-wide collaboration at the center stage.

To determine resource allocation and prioritize action, we utilize the Ease-Benefit Matrix presented in Burge (2015). Key stakeholders situate the proposed purposeful human activities put forward in Activity 4 and the amendments agreed upon in Activity 5 on the matrix. Our analysis

is based on the perceived ease and benefit of each activity. Figure 16 shows the analysis of all purposeful human activities.

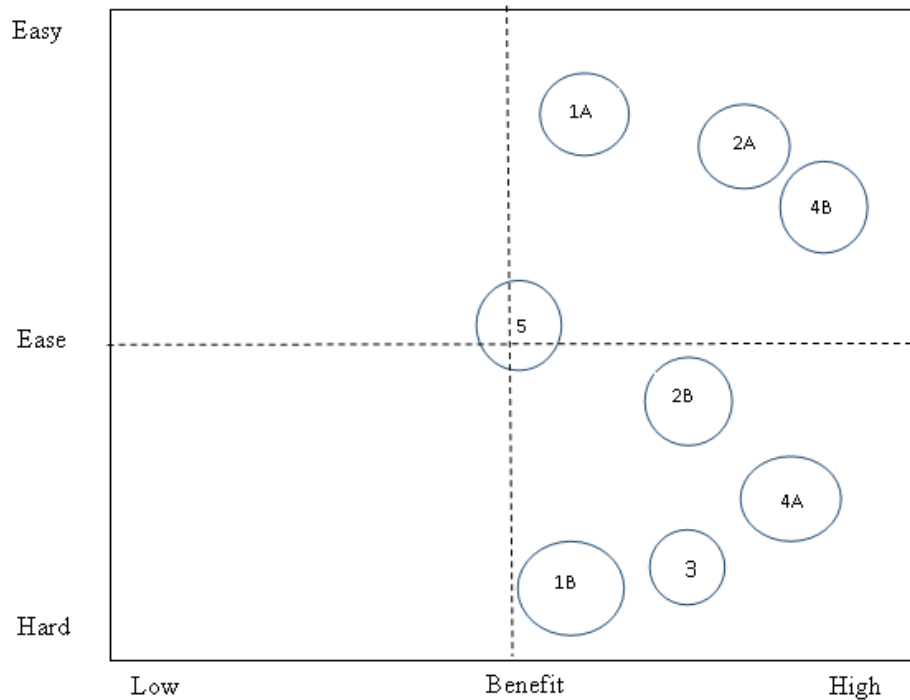


Figure 16. Ease- Benefit Matrix Showing Analysis of Purposeful Human Activities. Adapted from “An overview of the Soft System Methodology” by S. Burge, 2015, p.13

(<https://www.burgehugheswalsh.co.uk/Uploaded/1/Documents/Soft-Systems-Methodology.pdf>).

We use this step to understand potential resource and personnel constraints and how we can best manage both. Activities 1A, 2A, and 4B are adjudged to be relatively easy and as holding high benefit potential for our company. Activities 1B, 2B, 3 and 4A require more organizational resources, planning, and coordination. For instance, the joint implementation of our compliance programs with clients is considered a challenging but highly rewarding task. As such, the perception of difficulty is higher but so are the potential rewards. Key stakeholders agree to

allocate more resources and pay extra attention (on a longer-term basis) to activities in the bottom right quadrant of the matrix to ensure overall success.

5.1.7 Step 7 – Implementing Action

Timeline: March 9, 2018 – August 31, 2018

The ARG decides to proceed with agreed-upon actions reported after gaining key stakeholder and general support. Accounts of actions implemented are presented below.

5.1.7.1 (1A) – Organize Team Bonding Events

A number of informal events designed to build healthy working relationships in our organization have been instituted. Henttonen, Johanson, and Janhonen (2014) report that building strong social bonds amongst team members improves their effectiveness. Youngsook, Sanghyuk, and Taewhan (2017) also submit that team-building intervention results in team cohesion, team efficacy, and communication. The reader will recall that we identified ‘Interpersonal Relationships’ as one of the main themes of this study, a position that was further buttressed in the problematization phase of this SSM inquiry. For this reason, I approved a monthly ‘Happy Hour’ event, open to all employees. The inaugural social event held after work hours on March 9, 2018, at the Rez Bar in Toronto, ON. Fifteen employees were in attendance. Food and drinks were catered, and the evening was filled with board games, one on one conversations, karaoke sing-alongs and other social activities. I observed an uninhibited flow of conversations and our consultants got to know each other better.

In subsequent ‘Happy Hour’ events held; we engaged in joint ‘storytelling’ exercises to enhance communication within our teams. Passila, Oikarinen, and Kallio (2013) prove that storytelling enhances dialogue in organizational AR scenarios. In our case, attendees arranged in a ‘big circle’ were asked to express their workplace experiences in short five minute stories. I provided the team with several keywords and phrases that participants used to start their stories after hearing it from another speaker’s story. These words include ‘the first time’, ‘the last time’, ‘difficulty’,

‘opportunity’, ‘excited’, ‘collaboration’, ‘customer satisfaction’, ‘solution’, ‘communication’, ‘stressed’, ‘respect’ and ‘power’. Through these, attendees practiced active listening and spoke their minds on their workplace experiences.

Stapleton and Wilson (2017) argue that community narratives serve as a joint sense-making platform. Some attendees relayed different stories bordering on their opinions, hopes, fears, and expectations for their consulting work at Dealers R’Us. Others told stories about their first few days at work and transitions in their worldview as time progressed. By using summaries on ‘post-it notes’, we were able to draw interconnections between the different stories and show the multiple perspectives on a single story. Initially, there were many interruptions from certain attendees, causing me to intervene by enforcing ground rules of active listening and orderly decorum.

In furtherance of our desire for collaboration and communication, our EA Director also introduced other team bonding activities over lunch. They include Trivia and Team Jigsaw games. The former involves asking work-related trivia questions to raise employee interest and aid team cohesion. The attendee with the highest number of correct answers won a \$50 Home Depot gift card each time the game was played. As a result, there was an increased interest in knowing about our organization, its people and our industry. The Team Jigsaw game is a time-limited team activity where two teams worked together on two separate halves of the same puzzle. I divided participants into two teams of five players and each team was tasked with working on one half of the puzzle and coordinating with the other team to complete the entire puzzle. Players were compelled to work with each other and communicate across team lines.

Interestingly, participation rates in the above-named team bonding activities remain high. In each event, we have not had less than ten attendees since the inception of the initiative. Moreover, A few leaders have evolved into coordinators of these activities and are helping to determine programming and content.

5.1.7.2 (1B)– Form Matrix Teams

On March 19, 2018, I announced a partial switch from our functional organogram to a matrix organogram comprised of three (3) new interdisciplinary teams. The teams are named as follows – Team Alpha, Team Bravo, and Team Charlie. This action directly addresses the ‘Organizational Structure’ theme discussed in Section 3.4. According to the organogram shown in Figure 17, each team comprises consultants from the Registration and Licensing, Ethical Advisory, Digital Marketing, and Software Solutions departments. The intent is to have each team work on specific client briefs handling all relevant consulting opportunities collaboratively. The CEO has been tasked with interfacing with all teams especially in the early stages and discipline leaders will be assigned to lead the new teams as needed.

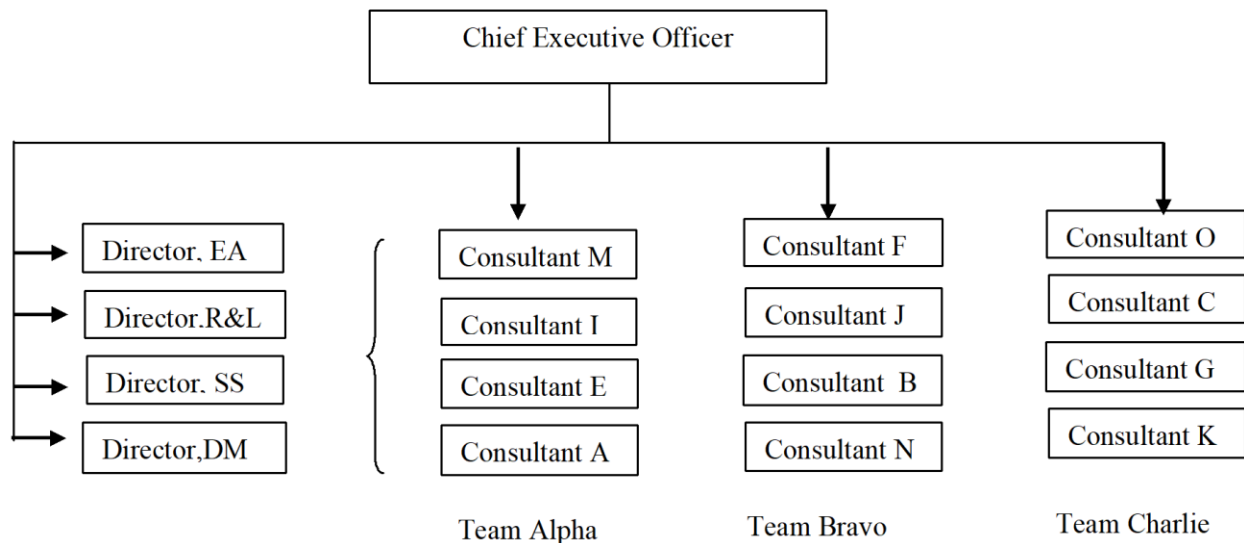


Figure 17. Composition of New Interdisciplinary Matrix Teams. Adapted from sketch developed during Action Research Group Meetings (See Appendix C)

The deliberations that led to the formation of the above-named teams were somewhat tense. There was also a bit of political maneuvering by certain stakeholders. I learned from grapevine sources

that two consultants lobbied actively to be included in Team Alpha. I prodded further to understand their motives and I realized it was mainly due to two reasons. One consultant wanted to continue to work for her current boss, the Director of Ethics Advisory department. The assumption was also that Team Alpha will be deployed into the field first. The other consultant was keen on *staying busy and needed* in the company.

Furthermore, there was apprehension on how the new teams would work and the role of Directors in the new arrangement. There were also a few consultants and one director who was not assigned to any matrix team. This led to apprehension about their continued employment at Dealers R'Us. To this end, I made sure to assure these individuals of spots when the matrix teams are rotated. I reckon it was relatively easy to get the teams set up and gain buy-in considering that we had built some interpersonal relationships between our consultants through the team bonding activities described in 5.1.7.1.

5.1.7.3 (2A)– Organize Ethical Perception and Ethical Awareness Training

The strategic orientation of a firm is partly determined by the ethical perception of its employees (Patient & Takawira, 2017). One of the key barriers to agility in our Ethical Advisory practice has been identified as consultants' ignorance on the ethical perception of automotive dealers and the factors that influence it. This deficiency corresponds to the 'Knowledge Gaps' theme identified in Chapter Three. It also explains the absence of industry perspectives and situational contexts in our ethics and ethical compliance programs.

Therefore, the ARG agreed that there is an urgent need to ensure that our consulting is guided by industry intelligence. To this end, I instructed the Director of our Ethics Advisory department to recommend a respected ethics consultant to give our organization training on ethical perception drivers in Ontario's automotive retail industry. In furtherance of this effort, we will also bring in our clients on a quarterly basis to listen to their perspectives on ethics and how varying contexts are impacting moral decision making at automotive dealerships.

On April 9, 2018, an Ethical Perception and Ethical Awareness training session was held for all employees and management of Dealers R'Us. The trainer is a well versed 30-year automotive industry veteran who is now an independent ethics trainer. It was eye-opening to learn about how

different parameters influence ethical perception and ethical decision making at Ontario's automotive dealerships. Against popular public opinion, we learned that not all automotive dealership personnel are unethical. The levers of moral decision making are swayed by different factors. These factors include personal moral values; the prevalent ethical climate at the automotive dealership; length of industry experience; the structure of compensation; competitive pressures; availability of reinforcers like training and positive role modeling. These factors should be optimized to obtain a positive ethical outcome.

5.1.7.4 (2B)– Embed Matrix Team with Client

To consolidate our ethical perception and ethical awareness training, we deploy Team Alpha, a multi-disciplinary group of consultants in the field. The sampling strategy was dictated by the need to collect critical field data that can be logically applied to all or most of Dealers R'Us' client base, taking resource and time limitations faced by the firm into consideration. As such, I utilized Critical Case Sampling, a purposive sampling method in which the ARG defined applicable criticality criteria and selected one automotive dealership that meets these criteria for data collection. Duignan (2016) posits that this data sampling strategy provides insight that can not be enhanced by a larger sample. Since most of our clients are medium to large automotive dealerships, it was important to select a research site with a similar operation. We elected to collect data from a recent client who had exposure to our pre-intervention compliance program. It was also preferable to work with a dealership that had a current ethical compliance need or a recently identified ethics-related problem – a recent non-compliance citation, directive or penalty from the industry regulator. The ARG was convinced that the critical case will provide decisive data that can help to counter the phenomenon of non-agility in our ethics and ethical compliance practice. On the basis of these criteria, a logical generalization can be made in a representative manner over the universal set of Dealers R'Us clients. As Patton (2014, p. 266) puts it, *'if it happens there, it will happen anywhere'*.

The selected external research site is a medium-size used car automotive dealership located in Brampton, ON. It has twelve salespeople working in its front-end operations on a rotating shift basis and sixteen employees working in its fixed operations and administration departments. This is an established business that has been in existence for forty-five years. This dealership had been

a Dealers R'Us client for two years, with our last consulting engagement completed six months ago. The dealership failed an OMVIC inspection and we were asked to draw up an ethical compliance plan for their sales and marketing departments. The plan was created from our generic template and presented to the client for implementation. The preliminary feedback I received from the client weeks after we completed our brief was that his salespeople had complied.

Three months later, OMVIC returned to the automotive dealership for an unannounced follow-up inspection. For a second time, our client failed the inspection on multiple counts. A few salespeople were found to have fraudulently declared vehicle histories in their sales documentation. A Marketing Manager also failed to include the proper mandatory disclosures in several online advertisements as stipulated by law. The penalty was stiff - \$25,000 in fines and quarterly audit requirements by the regulators.

To this end, I pitched the General Manager at the dealership on the idea of a co-located consulting team that will understudy their operations and work with them to develop and implement custom-tailored action plans with the sole aim of bringing the dealership into compliance. After all, shadowing is an important technique in Action Research (McDonald, Simpson, & Sclavi, 2014). On April 23, 2018, I introduced Team Alpha, from Dealers R'Us to the General Manager of the dealership and its deployment officially began. Their initial mandate was to understudy operations, culture, and personnel at the dealership. Armed with this knowledge, we hope to design a custom ethical compliance program with the client and to jointly implement it with the General Manager and his staff.

For the initial mandate, Team Alpha interviewed stakeholders onsite and understudied the client's operations one day per week for a month, spending a total of 48 hours at the dealership in four (4) 12-hour shifts. The team interviewed various stakeholders at the client site. In an unobtrusive manner, it also observed and took notes on customer-client interactions, sales pitch and the deal closes, sales documentation, internal sales meetings, back end operations, and marketing plans.

During this time, I met regularly with members of Team Alpha to review their notes, discuss thoughts and their concerns. I learned that negative role modeling by senior members of the organization was negatively affecting the ethical perception of the younger salespeople. The mid-level management team at the dealership appeared to have a significant influence on unethical

behaviors at the dealership. In addition, manual documentation processes being used were open to unethical manipulation and unintended errors.

There were also no reinforcers (e.g. ethics training) to remind the dealership staff of the need to be ethically compliant. Salespeople were '*slipping back into their old habits*' weeks after consultants' intervention. The client recently hired five salespeople who are new college graduates. These new salespeople were struggling to get by financially because of the 100% commission payment structure in place. They did not have an existing book of customers and therefore did not mind circumventing a few rules to get by.

The ethical climate at the dealership encouraged non-compliance. This is fuelled by increased competition in the retail market. Many new entrants are giving established dealerships a good run for their money. As such, very little attention is paid to ethics and compliance-related issues by the leaders, almost all meetings focus squarely on beating the competition, increasing sales and maximizing revenue. Team Alpha's preliminary report further confirmed the notion that the absence of client site observation makes our Ethics Advisory ill-equipped to respond appropriately to contextual challenges.

5.1.7.5 (3 & 4) –Create and Implement Custom Ethical Compliance Program

Alongside the General Manager (GM) and senior leadership of the automotive dealership, Team Alpha painstakingly designed and implemented a custom ethical compliance program presented in Figure 18 based on the contextual situation of the client organization and with the uniqueness of its stakeholders in mind. Acting on the 'Service Design' theme in this concrete manner demonstrates our resolve to make good on the transformative agenda of this intervention.

Duryan and Smyth (2019) highlight the importance of senior management support in circumventing hierarchical constraints in AR projects. Therefore, gaining custodianship and buy-in from the GM was necessary because we wanted to begin to reshape the ethical compass of the dealership from the very top. On our end, we had to unlearn everything we did in the past as far as ethical compliance programs are concerned. We decided to build something new from the ground up, on a fresh slate and with the potential users of the program.

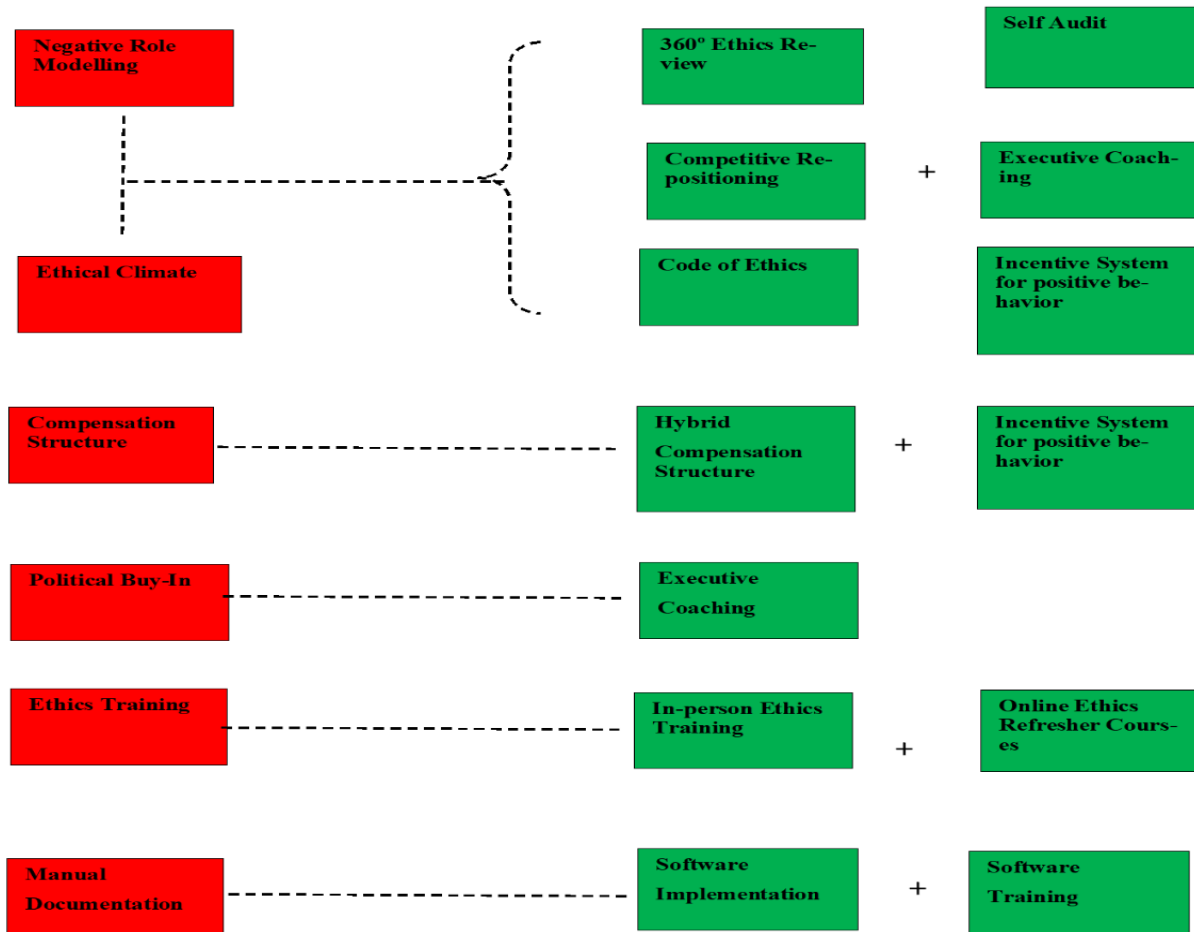


Figure 18. Custom Solution Map Developed by Team Alpha during Field Deployment. Reproduced from a visual representation included in Team Alpha’s Handwritten Notes.

Attention was paid to specific causal factors stated in Section 5.1.7.4 to avoid generalizations of the past. According to Arif, Alastair, and Fiona, (2018), visualization enhances sense-making in the midst of complexity. The custom compliance plan allowed for a joint understanding of how different root causes were to be targeted. For instance, an incentive system for positive ethical behavior was included in the dealership's human resources policy to tackle the problematic ethical climate at the dealership. A change in the commission-based compensation structure for new employees was also directed at disincentivizing unethical sales practices. The non-compliance loopholes created by the manual documentation procedures at the dealership were well within Team Alpha’s radar. It deployed a Dealership Management System and automated the dealership operations to eliminate these loopholes.

Other action components implemented include the development and inculcation of a code of ethics, ethical compliance training, and an internal compliance audit system. Team Alpha could not implement its competitive repositioning plan and the executive coaching program due to delays in approval and calendar conflicts respectively.

5.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a documentary account of Phase II of our AR inquiry which entailed further joint diagnosis, reflection, planning and the implementation of actions geared towards consulting practice agility. We utilized a staged SSM framework that involved entry into the unstructured organization problem; the elucidation of the inherent complexity through visual imagery; the development of root definitions and conceptual models of purposeful activities targeting the exact changes that we seek. An internal negotiation process followed which included a comparison of ideal models with reality as well as the determination of culturally feasible and acceptable actions with internal stakeholders. Thereafter, we set out to execute ratified actions.

Actions implemented within the organization include the corporate sponsorship of team bonding events and the institution of an ethical awareness training program. We also embarked on an ambitious organizational restructuring process that was kicked off with the formation of three cross-functional teams. Based on a critical case sampling strategy, one interdisciplinary team was deployed to the field to engage in a test case consulting project. The embedded team relied on a new service design approach that included a field observation phase and joint problematization with external stakeholders. The outcome was a customized ethical compliance plan fit for the specific local context at the client site. The remedial actions taken validate and cater to the thematic angles highlighted in Chapter Three. They also set the stage for Phase III of this AR inquiry where we observe organizational outcomes and reflect on implications for the firm.

6.0 Introduction

Action Research (AR) involves a recursive cycle of actions and reflective assessments of resultant organizational outcomes (Bradbury, Lewis, & Embury, 2019; Coghlan & Brannick, 2001). Phase III of this AR inquiry is dedicated to the latter. The focus is on the evaluation of organizational outcomes resulting from the remedial actions taken in Phase II of this inquiry to address the non-agile ethics consulting practice at Dealers R'Us.

Chapter Six is divided into two parts. In the first part, I present outcomes recorded internally within Dealers R'Us as a result of the structural and social changes made. Each of the actions reported in Section 5.1.7 is subjected to critical reflection. In the second part, I focus on the external validation of our new service design approach using client outcomes recorded in our test case field consulting project. In both parts, inferences are based on the analyses of qualitative and quantitative data obtained using semi-structured questionnaires and focus group discussions in the post-intervention era.

6.1 Internal Data Collection & Reflection on Organizational Outcomes

Two meetings of the ARG were convened on September 3, 2018, and September 6, 2018, to reflect on outcomes of the purposeful activities implemented in Step 7 of our SSM process. In addition to our usual focus group discussions, all twenty internal stakeholders were also presented with paper copies of the internal post-intervention questionnaire (see Appendix B). Based on a Likert scale design, it contains twenty-five items that cover the five broad themes identified in Chapter Three (Phase I). The questionnaire also includes an open-ended response section. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using percentages and Weighted Average Scores (WAS) as shown in sub-section 2.6.2. A high WAS indicates a high degree of agreement and a low WAS indicates a high degree of disagreement. Focus group submissions were also interpreted reflexively. In the sub-sections below, the outcome of each internal activity/action taken is discussed in relation to the aforementioned themes.

6.1.1 Activity 1A – Team Bonding Activities

Onsite and off-site team bonding activities have been well received by stakeholders. The reader will recall that the existence of communication silos was fingered as one of the reasons why Dealers R’Us’ ethics consulting practice is non-agile. Stakeholders seldom exchanged critical information and industry insights, leading to the creation of ineffectual and rigid compliance programs, a dissatisfied clientele and a decline in revenues. 89% of survey respondents agree that the team bonding exercises had a positive effect on interpersonal relationships between internal stakeholders (WAS = 4.12). As such, the implementation of team bonding exercises began the process of tearing down existing ‘*silo walls*’ that hindered communication, collaboration and the transfer of knowledge between consultants from different disciplines. Han (2018) argues that the outcome reported here translates into the creation of social capital and a strong social network that enhances team communication and effectiveness.

This outcome is evident in the uncommon display of camaraderie by our consultants and the renewed vigor (increased level of participation) that has now become a feature of our organizational meetings, huddles, and electronic mail exchanges. In line with Jesús, Carlos and Arturo's (2018) submission on the correlation between participation and competitiveness, Dealer R’Us is becoming a more competitive automotive retail consulting enterprise by virtue of Activity 1A.

The culture of reticence and the reluctance to share information is ebbing in favor of a more open, collaborative and participatory one. It is instructive to note the impact of the permissive environment created by the ARG’s activities on the observations made above. ‘*I feel empowered by all the changes happening and that signaled to me that Management is serious and has good intentions*’, one consultant noted. This led him to ‘*open up*’ and communicate freely with others in the organization. Another consultant mentioned that she felt like *a gag order was lifted off* her department when her supervisor no longer ‘*policed*’ her collaboration/communication with other departments. This outcome aligns well with what Grubenmann (2017) refers to as the creation of lateral company-wide communication channels and an increase in the frequency of communication as a result of matrix organizational structures put in place.

Furthermore, Naim and Lenka (2017) point to the correlation between professional competency development and intra-company knowledge sharing. Stakeholders at Dealers R'Us corroborated this submission when they alluded to the career enhancement potential realized from communicating with stakeholders from other disciplines. To the Director of Registration and Licensing Department, the cross-disciplinary flow of information has contributed to his professional career development. *'I used to feel like I had hit a ceiling professionally, now I am finding out there is more to learn from talking to other departments that could contribute to my career growth'*, he submitted. After analyzing the above-stated results, the ARG deem activity 1A, directed at the 'Interpersonal Relationships' theme, as a success. We ratified continued implementation to bolster the gains already made.

6.1.2 Purposeful Human Activity 2A – Ethical Awareness and Perception Training

Contextual knowledge gaps were identified as one of the reasons for the non-agility of my consulting firm's ethics advisory practice. Activity 2A involved regular and periodic training of all internal stakeholders on the influences of different parameters on ethical decision making at automotive dealerships in Ontario. After the conclusion of a few training sessions, there appears to be an increase in the level of ethical awareness and a general understanding of ethical perception drivers in Ontario's automotive retail industry.

The transformation to being contextually knowledgeable became a reality as a result of the action that we took. According to Steele, Johnson, and Watts (2016), most organizations use participant reactions to judge the effectiveness of ethics training programs. As such, statements intended to gauge the effectiveness of the ethics training program were included in the post-intervention questionnaire distributed to internal stakeholders. 95% of the respondents agree that they have gained fresh industry perspectives from the training program (WAS = 4.1). 94% agree that ethical awareness and perception training should be sustained to keep our organization's ethics practice agile in the face of evolving market trends (WAS = 4.29).

Activity 2A was found to be an appropriate response to the ‘Knowledge Gaps’ theme because it infused industry-specific knowledge into our Ethics Consulting Practice. This was the desired transformation that the ARG sought as defined in Step 3 of its SSM inquiry. It is hoped that the tweaks and additions to the programs will further help to sustain the gains made as we strive to become an agile consulting enterprise in Ontario’s automotive retail industry.

6.1.3 Activities 1B and 2B – Formation and External Embedment of Matrix Team

The formation and external embedment of matrix teams proved to be instructive as far as the ‘Organizational Structure’ and ‘Internal Collaboration’ themes are concerned. It realigned power structures, created new relationships and a new business model for our company. Based on recommendations of key stakeholders in Step 6 of the SSM process, we towed the path of gradual and hybrid-style implementation. Three matrix teams were formed, one was deployed and consultants who were not members of a matrix team continued with existing consulting briefs under the incumbent functional structure.

Activity 1B further encouraged internal communication and collaboration between our consultants. Matrix teams formalized the inter-disciplinary transfer of knowledge and signaled to all stakeholders that this may well be our ‘*new normal*’. The results recorded mirror the submission of Pakarinen and Virtanen (2017) on cross-functional teams. The researchers posit that these teams benefit from improved performance, collaboration, and coordination.

We have transformed our organization from the silo style organogram to a matrix design, altering the regular reporting lines and enhancing the formal (and informal) relationships that internal stakeholders maintain with one another. One of the biggest impacts of Activity 1B is on the subjects of powerlessness and political irrelevance that was identified in the joint sense-making phase of our SSM inquiry. Stakeholders from the Software Solutions and Digital Marketing departments had expressed a feeling of being less significant in the political calculations of our organization. The new matrix teams are made up of members from multiple disciplines and departments. These teams report vertically and directly to the CEO and horizontally to Discipline Directors.

Consultants report a *'leveling of the playing field'* and the gradual eradication of political inequality in our organization. They tout increased access to the CEO and the equal representation of their interests at the highest levels of the company as a benefit of Activity 1B. Like Blackburn (2008) puts it, everyone is being treated as important. 95% of the post-action internal survey respondents agreed that a matrix organizational structure resulted in better face to face communication and collaboration between consultants from different disciplines (WAS = 4.26). They also agreed that the matrix organization created a sense of equality, equal access and common identity in the firm.

Furthermore, the outcomes of Activity 2B (external embedment of the matrix team) were discussed in our ARG meeting. Being in the same team with professionals of other disciplines has helped to improve collaboration, communication and the probability of success in our consulting briefs. 82% of survey respondents submit that the formation of interdisciplinary teams and close field collaboration between consultants from other departments has resulted in improved interpersonal relations between consultants from different disciplines.

Schnetler, Steyn and van Staden (2015) submit that matrix teams tend to be more responsive to changing market conditions. The experience gained from the onsite embedment of Team Alpha with our clients' employees supports this notion. It allowed us to truly understand obvious and nuanced variables that impact ethical decision making at the automotive dealership. Storey and Larbig (2018) argue that this understanding is an important requisite for designing service offerings. Members of Team Alpha were also asked about their thoughts on their field deployment. Here are a few submissions made during the ARG meeting:

Consultant I - *'Being embedded with the client and working closely with them from start to finish gave us front row seats and helped to capture all the contexts and nuances that we would normally have missed. That helped us to be nimble and agile'*

Consultant A - *'I learnt a lot about the organization we were working with by virtue of our close proximity. Understanding the people and the underlying politics helped to navigate the problems that we were called in solve. Navigating stealthily through the pond is what makes agile consulting very interesting.'*

The responses reproduced above reflect the general perception of our new service design approach. There is a common thread that points to the benefits of data proximity and face to face interactions with stakeholders at the client site.

I sought to learn about the dynamics of the deployed team. The submissions of Team Alpha members suggest that even though the inter-disciplinary team composition worked quite well, there were however coordination lapses. These were marked by an initial *cloud of ambiguity with respect to roles and responsibilities*. Mattila, Hallikainen, and Rossi (2010) and Nicholas and Steyn (2012) allude to this problem as one that bedevils many matrix teams. The team eventually overcame these hurdles through communication and self-organization as the consulting brief progressed.

I also sought to understand the demerits of a matrix style organogram with multiple reporting lines. I am responsible for administrative oversight over the matrix teams, but the Discipline Directors exert considerable influence over the technical aspects of our consulting briefs. The respondents were largely indifferent to the dichotomy of authority. Only 11% of the respondents experienced loyalty or authority conflicts with regards to having to report simultaneously to the CEO and Discipline Directors. The experimentation with vertical and horizontal reporting lines have resulted in minimal power tussle and no significant loyalty conflict or struggle for resource allocation. Ultimately, Activities 2A and 2B have resulted in increased communication, collaboration and inherent adaptiveness at Dealers R'Us. Members of the ARG, therefore, voted to retain the matrix organogram.

6.1.4 Activities 3 and 4A – Co-Creation and Implementation of Custom Ethical Compliance Program in the Field

Activities 3 and 4A are at the epicenter of this AR study and directly tackle the organizational malaise that it is directed at – the non-agile ethical advisory practice at Dealers R'Us. Through SSM, the ARG reached a consensus that field colocation, the co-creation of ethical compliance programs and joint implementation with our clients are desirable and feasible actions that must be

taken. Team Alpha comprising of consultants from all four departments of the company were deployed to the field to implement these actions in a test case scenario. This is a major redesign of our ethics advisory service. Our new service approach (a direct reaction to the ‘Service Design’ theme) is in stark contrast with the former service design offering where Dealers R’Us provided recommendations solely based on client problem descriptions and did not get involved in solution implementation.

The post-intervention questionnaire administered internally yielded meaningful insights on service design. 94% of the respondents agreed that they were more effective in the field working directly with clients. This corresponds to a Weighted Average Score (WAS) of 4.20. 93% submitted that implementing solutions onsite with clients led to better ethical compliance outcomes (WAS = 4.26) and 80% agreed that Team Alpha was more agile and responsive to changing and contextual client needs by virtue of its field embedment (WAS = 3.93). Borrowing agile practices from Beck et al. (2001), our ethics consulting team also implemented solutions in short cycles and frequently sought client feedback as inputs to the next implementation phase. 86% of the survey respondents agree that this approach led to a more positive ethical compliance outcome for the client.

6.2 External Validation of Organizational Outcomes

In a bid to gain more insight on the implications and efficacy of our new service design approach, qualitative and quantitative data were obtained from external stakeholders at the Team Alpha field project site. The conclusions drawn in this sub-section resulted from three avenues – the analysis of Likert scale survey data, the thematic analysis of open-ended responses and the analysis of feedback from a key client stakeholder.

A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to all twenty-eight stakeholders at the client site after Team Alpha’s intervention (See Appendices C and D). The response rate was 89%. Participants were asked to adjudge statements on a Likert-scale ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’. The survey responses were converted into WAS and percentages leading to interpretations for our practice. There was also an opportunity to provide open-ended responses

clarifying the Likert scale entries. These qualitative responses were explored using Clarke and Braun's (2006) thematic analysis approach. In the concluding segment, inferences are drawn from the feedback provided by the General Manager of the automotive dealership in the post-intervention phase.

6.2.1 Collection and Analysis of Field Data Obtained from Post-Intervention Questionnaire

The post-intervention questionnaire administered externally is comprised of five sections. Section A covers the demographic details of respondents. Section B is an exact reproduction of the pre-intervention survey utilized in Phase I of this AR inquiry (as presented in Chapter Three). The ARG sought to include this section in the survey to gauge transitions in perspectives and to provide a basis for the comparison of client perceptions of our EA practice in the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases. In Sections C, D and E, the focus is on obtaining more information on some of the broad themes highlighted in Section 3.4. They include Knowledge Gaps, Internal Collaboration, and Service Design. The other two themes (Organizational Structure and Interpersonal Relationship) were intentionally left out because stakeholders at the client site will ordinarily have no direct insight into the internal workings of Dealers R'Us. In the following subsections, I analyze the survey results.

6.2.1.1 Section A: Demographic Variables

The demographic variables relevant to the field post-intervention survey conducted at the Team Alpha field project site are presented in this segment. Twenty-five of the twenty-eight stakeholders who received the paper questionnaire responded. Twenty-two respondents identified as male and three respondents are female. Respondents had varying experience levels. Our survey covered a broad experience span ranging from greenhorns with less than two years under their belt to industry veterans who have spent over two decades in the automotive retail industry. More details on the demography of our survey respondents including age ranges can be found in Table 8.

Respondents' Age		Respondents' Industry Experience	
Age Range	Number of Respondents	Years of Industry Experience	Number of Respondents
18 - 30 Years	5	< 2 Years	5
31 - 40 Years	15	2 - 10 Years	10
41 - 50 Years	4	11 - 20 Years	8
51 - 60 Years	1	21 - 30 Years	2
> 60 Years	0	> 30 Years	0
Choose not to disclose	0	Choose not to disclose	0

Table 8. Demographics of External Post-Intervention Survey Respondents.
Note. Data computed from participant information provided in returned post-intervention questionnaires

6.2.1.2 Section B: General Service Feedback

After the implementation of actions outlined in Chapter Five with respect to our team composition, service design and consulting approach, 87% of surveyed respondents at the client site agree that Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program has become agile and responsive to varied and evolving ethical compliance needs in Ontario's automotive retail industry (WAS = 4.04). It is interesting to note that only 16% of the pre-intervention population agreed with the same statement in the pre-intervention phase (WAS = 2.27). 92% of the post-intervention survey group agree that new compliance program is tailored to meet the specific compliance needs of their automotive dealership, only 19% of the pre-intervention survey group agreed that Dealers R'Us' former program was appropriate for their particular workplace context. In terms of referral possibilities, 85% will recommend Dealers R'Us to other industry contacts for ethics and ethical compliance related matters. This is in contrast with a 19% potential referral rate obtained before the implementation of actions.

6.2.1.3 Section C: Knowledge Gaps

Respondents shed light on the possession and deployment of requisite knowledge by our consultants. A majority (83%) of the questionnaire respondents agree that Dealers R'Us consultants demonstrated adequate industry knowledge in the course of their intervention. In regard to consultants relying on each other's knowledge competencies, only 44% agreed that our consultants were able to do that effectively in the field. This outcome is rather surprising because the success of an interdisciplinary team is dependent on how well its members can utilize each other's discipline-specific skills and knowledge in the actualization of the team objectives. Considering the positive tone of the responses to other related statements, the only plausible explanation here is one that points to a potential area of improvement for our interdisciplinary teams – consulting transparency. 56% of the respondents could have been better informed about the internal workings of Team Alpha. In the future onsite deployments, this will be taken into full consideration.

On a more positive note, 87% of the respondents agree that our consultants possessed context-specific knowledge fit for the ethical compliance challenges faced by their automotive dealership and the larger automotive retail industry in Ontario. In terms of eagerness to acquire knowledge about the client site, the percentage of agreement is even higher at 92%.

6.2.1.4 Section D: Internal Collaboration

Under the collaboration tab, 52% of questionnaire respondents agree that Dealers R'Us consultants worked well with each other as a team during their field deployment. Considering the changes made to our organizational structure, one would expect this number to be higher. The ambivalence of 48% of the responding population further buttresses the issue of consulting transparency. Managers and Sales Department employees at the automotive dealership had a greater amount of contact with our consultant than the backend and administrative office stakeholders. As such, they had more visibility into Team Alpha's processes. There is a need for improvement in this area if our consultants hope to carry all client stakeholders along in the course of their transformative work.

The outcome here may also have been due to the client site orientation lapses. Only 13% of the respondents agree that they were briefed on each consultant's roles and responsibilities at the inception of the intervention. In subsequent deployments, the need for a detailed orientation and team onboarding exercise will not be overlooked. Notwithstanding, all of the questionnaire respondents agree that having consultants from multiple disciplines onsite at the same time on the same team makes collaborative consulting a lot easier to achieve.

6.2.1.5 Section E: Service Design

In a bid to gather market intelligence on changes made to Dealers R'Us' Ethics Advisory service in this Action Research study, survey respondents were asked to agree or disagree with related statements. 87% agree that Dealers R'Us working in the field directly with clients is a more effective service design approach. Similarly, from the responses of 95% of the respondents, one can surmise that there is an association between a productive client consulting experience and onsite engagement with a multi-disciplinary consulting team.

This outcome is easily understandable when one considers the 91% of the responding population who submit that consultants working directly with their automotive dealership to implement solutions resulted in higher ethical compliance rates. Furthermore, all the survey respondents alluded to the effectiveness of short-cycle solution implementation and feedback solicitation in regard to achieving better ethical compliance outcomes.

With respect to the statement linking onsite colocation with agility and contextual responsiveness, 91% of the respondents agree. It is noteworthy to state that this percentage of agreement is slightly lower than that obtained when a similar question was asked in plain language (95%). Even though a definition for agility was provided to respondents, the term 'colocation' was not defined, and this may well explain the variance. In future deployments, a full glossary of all terms may help get more accurate responses.

The impact of external embedment on our organization has been far-reaching and eye-opening. The implementation of team embedment in this SSM inquiry exposed the efficacy of direct client-consultant interactions in creating an agile ethics consulting practice. By customer delight standards, Team Alpha had a successful brief - the most eventful we have had since the inception of the company. The outcomes discussed above represent lessons that will form the cornerstone of our emerging practice. These are in addition to highlighted changes that must be made in our future field deployments.

6.2.2 Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Twelve open-ended responses obtained from the post-intervention questionnaire administered externally were thematically analyzed by members of the ARG. We examined the data and generated themes deductively using Clarke and Braun's (2006) staged thematic analysis approach as discussed in sub-section 2.7.1.2. The intent was to identify patterns in the data that fit the themes identified in Section 3.4. We intended to translate the outcome of the analysis into lessons for our practice.

As shown in Appendix C, initial codes generated from the raw qualitative data include 'spend time with client/engaged client' (from excerpts in red color); 'go beyond the surface/make a dedicated effort' (from excerpts in light green color); 'provided learning/knowledge' (from excerpts in purple color); 'future hopes'(from excerpts in brown color); 'professionalism/depth'(from excerpts in pink color); 'offered customized solutions'(from excerpts in light blue color); 'context-specific solutions'(from excerpts in magenta color); 'relationships'(from excerpts in beige color); 'resultant relationship problems' (from excerpts in deep blue color); 'negative outcomes' (from excerpt in cyan color); 'apprehension' (from excerpts in sky blue color); 'collaboration between consultants/interdisciplinary teamwork' (from excerpts in deep green color) and 'positive outcomes/desired ethical compliance outcome' (from excerpts in yellow).

We revert back to the combinatorial and renaming approach described in sub-section 2.7.1.2 and exemplified in Section 3.4. The ARG utilized this same theme search criteria to arrive at a

number of emergent/initial themes. For instance, a ‘dedicated onsite consulting’ theme initially emerged from the interconnection established between the ‘spend time with clients’ and ‘go beyond the surface’ codes. Likewise, a combination of the ‘professionalism/depth’, ‘offered customized solutions’ and ‘context-specific solutions’ codes yielded an initial theme pointing towards ‘solution fit and service design’. Beyond the combination of initial codes, we also employed code transmutation in some cases. For example, the ARG chose to convert the ‘provided learning/knowledge’ to an initial theme bordering on ‘context-specific knowledge’.

Afterward, we embarked on a refinement process that entailed the deductive classification of the initial themes under the broad foundational themes that are presented in Section 3.4 based on an associative criterion. As shown in Figure 19, categorization in each instance is based on relevance and association with the thematic pillars of this study.

In this thesis, ‘Interpersonal Relationships’ has been applied strictly to consultant-consultant/internal relationships. For the sake of contrast and to account for external relationships, I have elected to remove the adjectival qualification (interpersonal), thereby amending ‘interpersonal relationships’ to ‘relationships’. The latter should be taken as encompassing client-consultant relationships and consultant-consultant relationships. Likewise, members opined that ‘internal collaboration’ as used in this thesis applies to interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup collaboration within Dealers R’Us. Based on the findings in this study, it is logical to cover client-consultant/external collaborations in addition to these. Hence, the change from ‘internal collaboration’ to ‘collaboration’ in this post-intervention data analysis. ‘Organizational structure’ was excluded since external questionnaire respondents shared no direct insight on this.

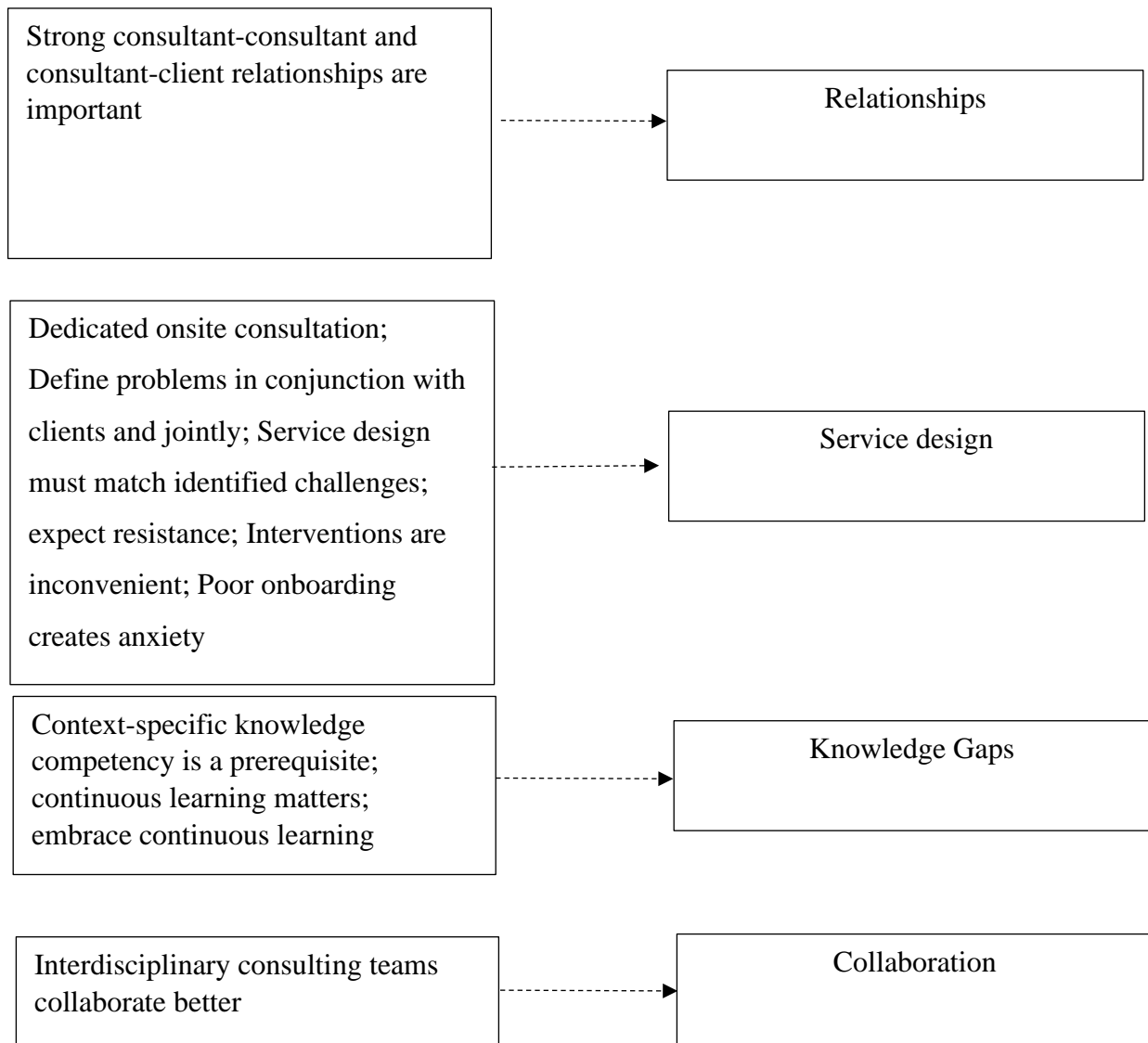


Figure 19. Example Depicting Final Phase of Deductive Thematic Analysis Conducted by the ARG in the Post-Intervention Era. Reproduced from Visual Representation Developed During an ARG Meeting.

At a latent level, the emergent themes have been summarized under four categories – Service Design, Knowledge Gaps, Collaboration, and Relationships. The full thematic analysis process is shown in Appendix C. A summary of the specific insights gained under the four thematic classes is provided below.

6.2.2.1 Service Design

An agile ethics advisory service is one that is designed to meet the specific and evolving needs of automotive dealerships taking people, process and the regulatory environment into context. Dedicated onsite consultation provides the privilege of data proximity required to achieve this. Active listening and continuous observation during the onsite colocation establish active feedback channels that guide decision making and solution planning. Moreover, executing solutions in short cycles allows for frequent client input and consulting adaptability. These all result in a high solution fit, consultant credibility, and higher compliance rates.

6.2.2.2 Knowledge Gaps

Context-specific knowledge competency is a prerequisite for agile ethics consulting. Continuous lessons as well as internal and external knowledge shares about ethical perception drivers and trends in the regulatory environment confer credibility and equip our practice with the insight it needs to adapt. Continuous reflection on what we already know, what we need to know and on how we apply both help us to evolve our ethics advisory practice with changing contexts

6.2.2.3 Collaboration

Interdisciplinary consulting teams collaborate better and the synergy results in higher ethical compliance rates at automotive dealerships. Defining problems in collaboration with clients and the joint implementation of solutions creates a joint sense of ownership and increases client cooperation. These, in turn, contribute to the development of a nimble and responsive practice.

6.2.2.4 Relationships

A good working relationship must exist between consultants and client stakeholders on one hand as well as between consultants on the consulting team. In addition, ethics consulting interventions can have serious repercussions for existing intra-client stakeholder relationships. Early and continuous communication is crucial to mitigate resistance and manage the ensuing dynamics.

6.2.3 Feedback from Key Stakeholder

In the aftermath of the external intervention reported in Chapter Five, I had lunch with the General Manager (GM) of the automotive dealership that hosted Team Alpha in our test case ethics consulting project. This was an opportunity to solicit feedback on the performance of Team Alpha and on the changes we made. According to the GM, the creation of a custom ethical compliance program with stakeholders within his dealership` turned out to be largely successful. He was impressed with the fact that his automotive dealership was brought into 100% compliance within three months of our intervention.

The dealership is said to have recorded positive outcomes from changes shown in Figure 18. These changed the prevalent ethical climate of permissiveness at the client site to one that is proactively centered around meeting and exceeding the moral standards set by the industry regulator and the society. The post-intervention mock audits conducted revealed total compliance with the extant laws and OMVIC's Code of Ethics. *'The continued sustenance of the progress we've made is a clear departure from the past where our salespeople forgot about ethical compliance a few weeks after introducing your ethics program'*, he said. I interpret this submission to mean that the contextualized nature of the new ethical compliance plan made it more amenable to the peculiar needs of the dealership leading to sustained ethical compliance.

6.3 Chapter Summary

Chapter Six documents Phase III of this AR inquiry. It details the reflective evaluation and assessment of the organizational outcomes recorded after the implementation of actions in Phase II. Data relevant to the evaluation of these actions and the thematic angles identified in Chapter Three was collected within the firm and in the field. Questionnaire data and associated qualitative data were analyzed as discussed in Section 2.6. The reflexive analysis of the feedback from ARG members and a key external stakeholder compliments the inferences drawn.

Social bonding events opened up the communicative space and built social capital within the firm. Ethics training improved the ethical awareness of consultants and exposed them to nuanced moral decision drivers in the automotive retail industry. Changing from a hierarchical organizational structure to a matrix organization comprised of interdisciplinary teams broke down the identity silos within the firm and improved collaboration between consultants from multiple disciplines. It also reduced the perception of political inequality and powerlessness felt in certain quarters. Multiple reporting lines in the matrix structure resulted in minimal leader loyalty conflicts.

Team Alpha's field deployment turned out to be one of the most consequential actions taken in this inquiry. It opened a new vista for our EA practice because it allowed for the specific peculiarities in the client's local universe to be accounted for leading to the development of a fit-for-purpose ethical compliance program. During our outreach, role ambiguity and consulting transparency concerns were sore points, however.

The questionnaire administered externally suggests that the remedial actions taken made our EA practice adaptive to the specific needs of the automotive dealership under review. Our consultants were adjudged to possess the requisite knowledge required for agile consulting. This validated the efficacy of the efforts put into our ethics training. Furthermore, the field colocation of professionals from multiple disciplines on the same brief was said to be instrumental to the success recorded. Face to face collaboration with external stakeholders, short action cycles and feedback solicitation were also found to have contributed immensely to an adaptive consulting experience from a client perspective. The deductive thematic analysis of open-ended responses

further confirmed the conclusions reached. Changes made within and outside our firm resulted in full ethical compliance at the automotive dealership and reduced backsliding into old non-compliance habits.

Ultimately, this analytic reflection phase provides the insight required to solidify the actions taken within Dealers R'Us and the inspiration for future improvements. Therefore, the implementation of further actions in Phase IV is a natural progression for this inquiry.

7.0 Introduction

The first action cycle in our Soft System Methodology (SSM) inquiry led to outcomes that were subjected to a thorough reflection process by our focus group in line with the ideals of Action Research (AR). Organizational outcomes were reviewed with Action Research Group (ARG) members in a bid to gain their feedback and ratifications on the next steps. This process resulted in a set of actions required to modify and improve on the outcomes already recorded. These recommendations developed and or implemented between September 10, 2018, and September 28, 2018, border on the politics of leadership and interdisciplinary team dynamics within the firm.

7.1 Redefining Leadership Roles

Power and legitimacy are highly valuable resources to those who hold them (Hays & Goldstein, 2015). Two Departmental Directors expressed concern about *'losing control'* in our emerging organization. This is a fallout that resulted from our focus and action on 'Organizational Structure' as one of the thematic pillars of this inquiry. The response bothers on the withdrawal of resource allocation privileges and administrative power. To assuage the concerns related to resources, the ARG recommended better communication of needs as new consulting briefs come in. The complainants oppose this suggestion on the ground that it is too simplistic. In order to appeal to the desire for relevance, I proposed a broadening of leadership capacities in our organization beyond functional lines to accommodate the leadership potentials, experiences, and aspirations represented in our management cadre.

The portfolios identified as needing leadership include Training Excellence and Continuous Improvement, Market Insights, Client Delight and Company Culture. In addition to being discipline experts, Directors who used to head departments will now lead our organization on the assigned portfolios. It was gratifying to note the general acceptance and openness of discipline leaders to the idea as I broke the news.

7.2 Interdisciplinary Teams - Dealing with Coordination, Transparency & Role Ambiguity Problems in the Field

Actions taken on the ‘Service Design’ theme resulted in some teething problems. In response to the coordination and role ambiguity challenges faced initially by Team Alpha during the first cycle of actions in this Action Research project, the ARG reached a consensus on an appropriate onboarding process to be implemented before any interdisciplinary team is deployed to a client site. We drew inspiration from the application of onboarding processes for Information Technology (IT) project teams (see Fagerholm, Sanchez Guinea, Borenstein, & Munch, 2014).

During onboarding, a preliminary presentation of the client’s brief is made alongside high-level objectives. Defined roles and responsibilities, as well as projected activity sequences, are also outlined under the assumption that actual realities on the ground may necessitate a modification. Where team leaders are faced with discipline-specific knowledge gaps, a consultation with the relevant discipline expert (Director) within Dealers R’Us will be arranged. It is hoped that this will help the team to take the best course of action in the field.

In a bid to forestall a reoccurrence of the transparency issues observed by clients during Team Alpha’s deployment, a detailed orientation event designed for stakeholders at the client site has also been designed. Through this event, the goals and objectives of the deployed team are outlined alongside the roles and responsibilities of each consultant on the team. External stakeholders will be able to learn about how team members will collaborate with one another in the field. They will also be informed of a common liaison for the intervention project. In order to keep them abreast of developments as the brief proceeds, there will also be short progress meetings where a snapshot of actions and outcomes can be reviewed by all stakeholders.

7.3 Matrix Organizational Structure – Dealing with Fallout

The creation of three interdisciplinary teams in our test matrix organizational scenario was an adequate response to the ‘Organizational Structure’ theme identified in Chapter Three. This initiative engaged twelve consultants, but it left out four consultants who continued to work on pre-existing client briefs like we usually did under the old regime. On August 15, 2018, and August 17, 2018, two of these consultants (Consultants H and Consultant L) submitted their resignation letters.

In line with the company’s Human Resources Management policy, I conducted exit interviews with these individuals in a bid to understand the motivations behind their resignation and to provide lessons to our practice from their experiences. Kerse, Kocak, and Ozdemir (2018) posit that job insecurity directly leads to emotional exhaustion. My findings are indeed congruent with this submission. I gathered that these individuals felt uncertain about the organizational change that Dealers R’Us was undergoing. Because of their temporary non-inclusion in the unfolding matrix structure, they felt unengaged and worried about their future at the company.

While AR typically serves to increase the capacity of stakeholders to participate in the organizational discourse (Hilsen, 2006), it is ironical that the first round of action has not resulted in a full actualization of this ideal for all within the firm. The fears expressed by Consultant H and Consultant L were also spiked by a rumor that had allegedly gone around the company that Management intends to terminate the employment of consultants that were not already included in the three interdisciplinary teams formed. This rumor could not be further from the truth, but the apprehension of these individuals is understandable, considering that Silva, Wassim, Richard, and Leila Canaan (2013) also correlate job insecurity with powerlessness and employee frustration. In the interest of seeking critical disconfirming evidence, I pled with Consultants H and Consultant L to participate in our post-intervention data collection exercise, even after their exit from the firm.

The exit of two consultants from Dealers R’Us meant we had to launch a recruitment drive to fill the open spots. We have since hired two new consultants in this regard (Consultant Q and Consultant R). More importantly, I was worried about the two other consultants (Consultants D

and Consultant P) who could potentially be disenchanted as a result of their non-inclusion. To mitigate attrition, leaders within our company and members of the ARG simultaneously ratified a company-wide transition to a full matrix organizational structure. In this regard, we have now formed an additional interdisciplinary team - 'Team Delta'. Its members include Consultants D, P, R, and Q. At this point, all consultants in our organization have now been seconded to interdisciplinary teams in the interest of full engagement and restoring the morale of potentially disenchanted consultants. The ARG also ratified further field embedments leading to the deployment of Team Bravo and Team Charlie.

The ARG also reached a consensus on information dissemination. It has done a poor job of informing the larger organization about its activities and resolutions, leading to misinformation and rumor-mongering. In order to stem this tide, members agreed to launch a bi-weekly newsletter to inform non-members about key resolutions reached and the general direction of our inquiry. The newsletter has served to provide general updates on our progress. The Digital Marketing Director was appointed as the editor of the newsletter and a few issues have already been posted on the company intranet site. It is not difficult to tell that this action has proven to be effective. *'It's nice to be kept in the loop, makes me less apprehensive about impending changes'*, one non-member said.

The implementation of action has resulted in unintended '*casualties*' and loss of talent at our organization. As a result of lessons learned, we have however implemented further actions including the wholesale adoption of a full matrix organizational structure incorporating all consultants and the development of an information management mechanism.

7.4 Powerlessness and Intra-Organizational Communication

One of the indirect causes of non-agility that we identified during the problematization phase was political inequality and powerlessness. Some stakeholders felt disenfranchised and far removed from the '*center of power*', leading to a feeling of aloofness, nonchalance, and unwillingness to communicate or collaborate with others. In the first action cycle, specific measures were put in

place to address this anomaly, including the adoption of a matrix organizational structure, team bonding events and the CEO's direct interface with consultants.

As a result of the actions already implemented, several lateral lines of communication have since been established with increased collaboration recorded. However, the exit interview with Consultant L revealed that powerlessness is still a concern and a root cause of poor communication within our organization. I asked Consultant L why she did not inform me about our concerns considering the increased access I had provided to our consultants. She said she did not know how to approach me about her *uneasiness with being left out*. '*Despite recent changes to the reporting structure, I was not bold enough to approach you with that information*', she said. Her response turned out to be highly indicative of the need to further empower consultants to be proactive and freely communicate within our organization.

Park and Hassan (2018) confirm that employee empowerment leads to an increase in voice engagement within organizations. This is exactly what is needed at Dealers R'Us. After sharing the above-stated feedback with members of the ARG, they concluded that I have to do more to build direct professional relationships with our consultants in a bid to improve intra-organizational communication, reduce the perception of inequality and restricted access. In response, I have instituted a monthly rapport meeting with consultants to give them an additional avenue to freely discuss the issues that matter to them. Mroz and Allen (2015) detail how these meetings can help increase Leader-Member eXchanges (LMX) and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) while reducing employee Intention to Quit (ITQ). Lloyd, Boer, and Voelpel (2017) also suggest that managers who take time to deliberately listen to the viewpoints and concerns of their subordinates engender a greater sense of job satisfaction and interactional justice.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter details the implementation of further actions in Phase IV of this AR inquiry. The actions taken solidified the gains made with respect to the agility of our ethics consulting practice. We redefined leadership within the firm in alignment with the ideals of an agile organization. The organization also instituted onboarding and client orientation procedures to deal with role ambiguity and consulting transparency issues during the field deployment of interdisciplinary teams.

Talent attrition was an unexpected fallout that resulted from our AR. I fingered the uncertainty of change and the continued perception of an unfair power dynamic as the root causes. This was exacerbated by miscommunication and the partial change in our organizational structure. To prevent a reoccurrence, the firm migrated fully to the matrix organogram with the formation of an additional interdisciplinary team and the ratification of additional field deployments. Additional avenues for leader-member exchanges and employee empowerment were also provided.

The completion of Phase IV of this AR inquiry represents an important milestone and vantage point at which meaningful conclusions can be reasonably drawn with respect to the research questions raised in Section 3.5. In the following chapter, I discuss the outcome of the entire organizational intervention and discuss implications for the firm and the automotive retail sector.

8.0 Introduction

In Chapter Eight, the key results obtained from my organizational intervention are discussed with a focus on providing specific answers to the research questions posed in this thesis. Using management literature as a frame of reference, I discuss the impacts of themes presented in Section 3.4 (Knowledge Gaps, Organizational Structure, Service Design, Intra-organizational Collaboration, and Interpersonal Relationships) with regards to the agility of Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance consulting practice. Based on these, I also present a recommendation to the firm in the form of a conceptual framework geared towards an agile ethics consulting practice. In the concluding sections, the limitations of this research and potential areas for future research are discussed.

8.1 Answering the Research Questions

In Section 3.5, I posed a number of specific research questions in relation to the themes identified from the market survey conducted in Phase I of this AR inquiry. In this section, I draw on the actionable knowledge created in subsequent phases in my bid to answer these research questions. Linkages are also made with the theoretical foundations laid in Chapter Four.

8.1.1 Knowledge Gaps

RQ(a): What is the influence of consultant knowledge gaps on the agility of Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance practice?

In this study, I found that knowledge deficiencies hampered the adaptiveness and agility of my organization's ethics advisory practice. The ARG's work exposed our organization as one without active internal and external knowledge channels. This meant that our consultants did not stay abreast of situational and contextual factors in the Ontario automotive retail industry. In addition, internal knowledge was not adequately shared between departments. Particularly, the oblivion about moral decision drivers, ethical perception influencers and changes to industry regulations made our practice incapable of agility. Due to the dynamism of the automotive industry in Ontario,

this deficiency worsened with changes in the market and as we moved from one consulting brief to another.

In this regard, we instigated individual and group learning and encouraged consultants to critically reflect on their pre-existing mental models. Specifically, actions were directed at reducing the identified knowledge gaps through periodic industry-led training sessions, gaining proximity to automotive dealership data in our consulting process and encouraging the internal transfer of tacit knowledge. In addition to comparing my research findings with management literature, I review the organizational outcomes against the theoretical rubrics of CAS theory, CT and SIT.

Deliberately designed training and learning programs improve organizational agility (Haneberg, 2011; Muduli, 2017; Pathak, 2017; Youndt, Dean, & Lepak, 1996). The findings made in this inquiry align with this position. Through continuous ethical awareness and ethical perception training, industry events and immersion in client environments, we established viable feedback loops through which the organization can learn about the pertinent factors that influence moral decision making in automotive dealerships in Ontario.

Furthermore, there is a consensus in ethics training literature on the importance of safety in ethics training (Abma, Molewijk, & Widdershoven, 2009; van Baarle, van de Braak, Verweij, Widdershoven, & Molewijk, 2018; Wortel & Bosch, 2011). This is in reference to participants being free to engage in a reflective and interactive exchange where they can air divergent opinions without the fear of retribution or repercussion. The exchanges during the training sessions at Dealers R'Us were enabled by a perception of participant safety which was attained through verbal and written assurances provided to attendees.

Ethics training by virtue of its dialogic design served as a fertile ground for continued exchange between internal stakeholders from different disciplines within the firm. I viewed this as another opportunity to generate a greater understanding between different internal groups in a bid to get them to collaborate more, especially in relation to the firm's ethics advisory practice. In the first two training sessions, I observed homogeneity in the contributions made by participants. According to CAS theory, homogeneity is inimical to adaptation and agility (Espejo & Gonzalez-Rodriguez, 2015).

On another hand, Argyris (1990) relates the homogeneity of opinions to groupthink. Groupthink is generally attributed to highly cohesive groups (Breitsohl, Wilcox-Jones, & Harris, 2015; Janis, 1982; Kelman, Sanders, & Pandit, 2017; Macleod, 2011; Mintz & Wayne, 2016; Prentice, 2007). Considering the ‘silo culture’ at Dealers R’Us before and partly during this intervention, the attendees drawn from different departments cannot be considered to be a cohesive group. Social Identity theorists would argue that the attendance of discipline managers should ordinarily increase the salience of identity fault lines (Scheepers, Ellemers, & Sassenberg, 2013). One would expect this to exacerbate the divergence of opinions. The plausible explanation for this divergence from literature is that participants were united based on a common ethical perception conferred by the prevalent organizational thinking in the pre-intervention phase. The interesting revelation here is that the disparate groups within my organization marked by salient identity fault lines exhibited convergence based on a common knowledge gap.

Under CT, the continuous inflow of market data to the firm will allow it to adapt to new internal and external conditions. In that regard, the ethical perception and awareness training anchored by industry professionals aided contingency within our organization. The periodic frequency of these training events provides an allowance for an adaptive organizational structure that is based on timely information about the market shifts, opportunities, threats, and trends.

The internal transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge between stakeholders from different disciplines at Dealers R’Us was facilitated by a reduction of negative outgroup bias. According to Social Identity Theory, this results in a positive predisposition between salient groups. Particularly, my firm’s ethics advisory practice gained immensely from the internal knowledge base held by Software Solutions, Digital Marketing, and Registration and Licensing discipline experts. That contributed to a reduction of the knowledge gaps in our ethics and ethical compliance practice on its path towards agility.

An increase in the cross-flow of ideas from within and outside our organization resulted in a high entropy state which is a precursor to spontaneous emergence in CAS theory. Even though inspired by this study, this crossflow was largely undirected and uncoordinated. The high impact improvements in service delivery already recorded also mirror the ‘butterfly effect’ commonly

known to result from the low-level non-linear interactions of system components which lead to an outcome of a higher order magnitude (Zekai & Selman, 2017).

In Steele et al. (2016), ethical awareness (defined in terms of ethical sensitivity and moral sensitivity) is listed as one of the major criteria for evaluating ethics training programs in organizations. Rest (1986); Jones (1991); Fiske and Taylor (2008) and Warren, Gaspar and Laufer (2014) also agree that formal ethics training improves the salience and cognition of moral concepts. The outcomes recorded in this study mirror this position. Just like Smith, Fryer-Edwards, Diekema, and Braddock (2004) found in an ethical dilemma study, our utilization of case-based illustrations, roleplay and group discussions aided knowledge transfer and improved the training experience.

Face to face interaction afforded by the training delivery format deepened the interaction between participants. With respect to the mode of delivery, there are contradictions in training literature on the efficacy of face-to-face communication in organizational training when compared to other methods. The findings made in this study align with Arthur, Bennett, Edens, and Bell (2003); Ponemon and Felo (1996) and Sekerka (2009) who argue in favor of face to face training. Zhang, Watson, and Banfield (2007); Talati, Davey, Grapes, Shilton, and Pettigrew (2018) and Isfahani and Moghadas (2018) found a minimal difference between the utility of face to face training and training via electronic or social media channels. Todd et al. (2017) extend the discourse by advocating a mix of online and face-to-face delivery formats.

In conclusion, field colocation conferred the benefit of data proximity to our ethics and ethical compliance practice. This reduced contextual knowledge gaps and allowed for a contingent response to unforeseeable complexities that emanated from the consulting engagement.

8.1.2 Intra-Organizational Collaboration

RQ(b): How do collaboration patterns between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us influence the agility of its Ethics and Ethical Compliance consulting practice?

In this study, I found that a dysfunctional collaboration pattern between internal stakeholders limited the agility of Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance practice. This was mainly through the minimization of knowledge transfer and synergistic work processes. Our AR-based intervention led to the implementation of actions that removed obstacles to collaboration and improved the working relationships between consultants from different departments. This had a positive effect on the quest for an agile ethics practice.

The observed collaboration patterns between the internal stakeholders at Dealers R'Us in the pre-intervention era was divisive and tended to be mostly in between stakeholders from the same department to the detriment of 'outsiders' who work in other departments. This is in line with the predictions of Social Identity Theory which borders on the formation of a common identity between a group of individuals leading to in-group biases that limit their openness and a positive disposition to other external groups.

Common identities were observed along departmental lines and in-group favoritism influenced stakeholder collaboration to a great extent. The identities and group preferences formed by these internal groups resulted in a fragmented silo culture and dysfunctional collaboration patterns that had adverse effects on the agility of the EA practice at Dealers R'Us. Therefore, the ARG worked assiduously to create a common identity and reduce the salience of silos within our organization.

SIT dwells on in-group favoritism assuming that the members of a group who share a common identity will favor one another to the exclusion of members of outside groups. In addition to the in-group favoritism, another interesting phenomenon was observed – preferential outgroup favoritism. Consultants from our firm's EA department had a closer affinity to their counterparts from the R&L department. Therefore, they preferred to collaborate with each other in the pre-intervention era. On the other hand, stakeholders in the Software Solutions and Digital Marketing departments appeared to share more in common and thus collaborated more easily. The reasons behind the formation of preferential outgroup biases are due to the firm's evolutionary history, the

shared similarities between consultants in the referenced departments and proximity in the perceived political relevance of each group.

Proponents of SIT posit that weakening the salience of intergroup distinctions creates a superordinate identity – an ideal state where members see themselves as belonging to one group as opposed to separate groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; McKeown, 2014; Pisor & Gurven, 2015). For the sake of this study, superordinate identity can be said to have been attained based on the extent to which internal stakeholders at Dealers R’Us identified with the mission of the ARG during this inquiry. This was most evident in the development of organization-wide solidarity and a sense of shared purpose. Particularly, the elevation of the revenue-related problems caused by the non-agility of advisory practice under review helped to coalesce internal stakeholders and deemphasize intra-group allegiances.

According to Luna (2016) and Neufeld and Schmitt (2018), superordinate identity creates a coalition of diverse subgroups in the movement for change. Our consultants rallied around a common mission – which was to save the firm and to create an agile ethics consulting practice that meets the needs of its clients in the Ontario automotive industry. More specifically, through actions such as the team bonding activities, negative outgroup biases were significantly reduced because consultants from different departments got to know each other at a greater depth. The establishment of these multi-directional communication channels began the process of unifying a fragmented consulting firm. Consultants began to see each other as comrades in the same ‘fight’.

Furthermore, I found that the formation of autonomous interdisciplinary teams dismantled allegiances to in-group tendencies, resulting in increased collaboration between stakeholders from different departments. Two main factors are important to note here – autonomy and physical proximity of socially non-identical team members. Cohen and Bailey (1997) argue that autonomy allows team members to have a positive disposition to one another. Sethi (2000) also found a positive association between team autonomy and superordinate identity. These findings are in line with the outcomes of actions taken in this study.

The actions implemented also conferred our cross-functional teams with significant self-organization privileges. During Team Alpha’s deployment where the EA Director acted as team lead, the non-interference of other Departmental Directors reduced the emphasis on functional identity and increased favorable responses between team members. In accordance with CAS

theory, the team relied on feedback channels, self-organized and co-evolved based on the situational context it was immersed in. The resultant collaboration patterns followed a non-linear emergent path. Despite Team Alpha's self-organization experience, self-organization at the organizational level was not achieved. I reckon that this is due to the infancy of our intervention and it probably speaks to the difficulty of attaining this theoretical objective in practice.

Furthermore, the physical proximity of team members in the field created room for communication, social interaction and knowledge transfer. This led to the individuation of consultants from different departments and a more positive response from historically 'hostile' stakeholders. Group literature is divided over the outcomes recorded here with respect to proximity. Allen (1970), Sethi (2000), Kessler (2000), Sethi and Nicholson (2001), Mark (2002), Williams, Shore and Foy (2006), Levy et al. (2017) conclude that team-member proximity is directly proportional to an increase in communication. On the other side of the aisle, Carmel (1999) argues that a categorical statement cannot be made on the benefits of team proximity. He alludes that the failure to account for advances in information technology when analyzing this subject matter is a grave error. Furthermore, Chong, Eerde, Rutte, and Chai (2012) submit that the contradiction in group literature is because organizational outcomes are dependent on contextual factors such as time pressure faced by teams.

In conclusion, Dealers R'Us' EA practice has witnessed an increase in the internal collaboration between stakeholders due to the recategorization of identity fault lines. In addition to a focus on mitigating in-group bias, the reduction of preferential outgroup favoritism was achieved through the propagation of a common goal, a superordinate identity, team autonomy, and field co-location. However, the goal of firm-wide self-organization as espoused in CAS theory was not achieved during the course of this study.

8.1.3 Interpersonal Relationships

RQ(c): How do the interpersonal relationships between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us affect the agility of its ethics and ethical compliance practice?

In this AR study, the interpersonal relationships between internal stakeholders at Dealers R'Us was found to have a strong influence on the agility of its ethics and ethical compliance practice. Interpersonal relationships became a source of socio-emotional wealth and organizational energy with which stakeholders dealt with change (as seen in Dutton & Ragins, 2007). Like Appelbaum, Calla, Desautels, and Hasan (2017), I found this association to be most evident in the collaboration culture of the firm and the transfer of tacit knowledge between different disciplines. In subsequent paragraphs, these vistas are explored against relevant theoretical perspectives.

In the pre-intervention era, the absence of strong interpersonal relationships between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us hampered collaboration and synergy between different departments that make up our firm. In line with SIT, in-group favoritism caused consultants from each discipline to exhibit insularity and a negative disposition to working with other employees across the 'departmental aisle'. In addition, preferential out-group favoritism was also observed causing the organization to be fragmented along historical fault lines.

The remedial actions taken in this study began the process of tearing down relationship barriers between different stakeholders within Dealers R'Us. Through deliberate team bonding exercises, the formation of interdisciplinary teams and organizational restructuring, the interpersonal relationships between stakeholders in the company have been greatly improved. This outcome is reminiscent of findings in management literature (Chung, Ma, Hong, & Griffiths, 2012; Henttonen et al., 2014; Pham, 2017). Emilova (2014) also lists interpersonal cooperation as a dimension of interpersonal relationships. The high percentage of consultants who have cooperated with others within our firm as a result of the actions taken in this study is a testament to the efficacy of the measures taken.

As seen in Henttonen et al. (2014), I found a reasonable association between the virile social network that resulted from these actions and the performance of our interdisciplinary team. Under the periscope of SIT, the development and wholesale adoption of a superordinate identity aided interpersonal relationships. This coincides with the reduction of the divisive 'us' versus 'them'

mentality where the salience of departmental fault lines became less important. Bringing the organization under one umbrella and a common mission incentivized the improvement of the interpersonal relationships between our stakeholders.

It is interesting to note that interdisciplinary team members who had never really worked closely together in the past did so with relative fluidity (after an initial period of role ambiguity). The diversity of expertise, skills, and worldview turned out to be complimentary in the face of an evolving consulting brief. When viewed through a CAS theory lens, a higher mass of positive interpersonal relationships led to an increase in the emergence of ideas and solutions fit for unexpected and unforeseeable changes in this instance. This translated into a highly adaptive consulting approach that produced positive and sustainable outcomes for the client.

The changes made to the organizational structure of our organization also had significant impacts on interpersonal relationships at Dealers R'Us. Dealers R'Us transitioned from a hierarchical organizational structure to a flatter matrix structure. In the new regime, team members from different disciplines now spend more time communicating with each other. This is enhancing the quality of multiple relationships in our firm.

Actions geared towards equalizing power, political privilege and relevance across the four departments of the organization elevated marginalized stakeholders and empowered them to relate with their counterparts on a level playing ground. As a result, Dealers R'Us has witnessed the development of multiple friendships and stronger working relationships between consultants from different disciplines. In a twenty-five year AR study, Schuiling (2014) chronicles the dramatic changes experienced at a European company as it transitioned from a hierarchical organization to a matrix type. His findings corroborate the outcome of this inquiry from a relationship perspective.

In a CAS theory context, improved interpersonal relationships caused tacit knowledge to be mobilized and shared in an emergent fashion. Akgün et al. (2014) agree with this submission when they posit that networks of interaction are responsible for this kind of emergent behavior. These networks cause stakeholders in the organization who were used to operating in a 'silo culture' to open up and perceive the mission and goals of other departments in a less fragmented manner. My findings also correlate with the submission of Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009) on networks of interaction. They postulate the idea of a relational space where meaningful connections are established between stakeholders from different functional backgrounds. At Dealers R'Us, this

relational space founded informally, afforded stakeholders the opportunity to truly know their peers ‘beyond the surface’ - including their biases, motivations, ambitions, fears, and enablers.

Ultimately, the switch to a matrix organizational structure and the encouragement of positive interpersonal relationships amongst stakeholders has helped to increase collaborative engagements which are in turn moving the ethics and ethical compliance practice at Dealers R’Us towards an agile state.

8.1.4 Organizational Structure

RQ(d): What influence does organizational structure have on the agility of Dealers R’Us’ Ethics & Ethical Compliance consulting practice?

In this AR inquiry, I found that a hierarchical organizational structure comprising of functional teams inhibited the agility of Dealers R’Us’ ethics and ethical compliance consulting practice. On the other hand, a matrix organizational structure made up of interdisciplinary teams contributed towards the adaptiveness of our EA practice.

The change to a matrix organogram resulted in the proactive creation of multiple relationships across the defunct departmental lines with several lateral and vertical lines of communication established amongst internal stakeholders at Dealers R’Us. This translated into the wide propagation of tacit knowledge that would otherwise remain undeployed and untapped within the company. The new internal communication patterns set up within the company is migrating our practice towards a higher level of responsiveness and adaptiveness.

In a study of agile software development teams, Cataldo and Ehrlich (2011) found out that multi-level hierarchical structures gave rise to a lower amount of overall communications because the communication flows vertically in a particular direction with minimal communication between people in the same level of the hierarchy. Even though Dealers R’Us operates in a different industry, this was the case in the pre-intervention era. The old hierarchical structure established restrictive silos that stifled the free flow of ideas, the exchange of skills and the transfer of tacit knowledge that Dealers R’Us require to be agile. Under the new regime, I observed an increase in

the entropy of multi-directional communication, collaborations and tacit knowledge transfers within our company.

Team dynamics is a critical determinant of organizational agility (Keister, 2014). Some of the team dynamics observed within Team Alpha diverged from general submissions in management literature. Sixty-Nine percent of internal survey respondents who reported simultaneously to the CEO and Discipline Directors did not experience loyalty or authority conflicts. However, the consensus in management literature is that leader loyalty conflicts and power struggles are pervasive in matrix organizations (Bannerman, 2010; Davis & Lawrence, 1978; Engwall & Källqvist, 2001; Gos, 2015; Greiner & Schein, 1981; Larson & Gobeli, 1987; McPhail, 2016; Milikić, 2017; Nicholas & Steyn, 2012; Schnetler et al., 2015; Turner, Utley, & Westbrook, 1998).

Matrix team structures are also said to result in a misalignment of goals especially where there is no synergy between functional managers and administrative managers (Sy & D'annunzio, 2005). The situation can lead to ambiguity of authority, divided loyalty and team confusion (Moodley, Sutherland, & Pretorius, 2016). There are a number of reasons for the observed divergence from literature. Even though I had a number of interfaces with our interdisciplinary teams to gauge consultant feedback and provide support, I allowed the team leader to have free rein in administering the team, determining the direction and pace of the consulting brief and allocating resources. As such, the team leader enjoyed adequate legitimacy throughout the consulting brief. Furthermore, team members were relieved of their regular departmental duties to avoid resource constraints and role dualism.

Most team researchers agree that the establishment of relationships and social exchanges is crucial for positive and effective team dynamics (Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Levine & Moreland, 1990; Monzani, Ripoll, & Peiró, 2014). In my organizational context, the socialization processes afforded by the team bonding exercises organized prior to the formation of matrix teams helped Team Alpha to build a high quality dyadic member-leader loyalty and reduce the ambiguity of authority during team deployment.

From a CAS theory perspective, it can be said that new relationships emerged from the self-organized leader-member and member-member exchanges. The team identity and internal relationships co-evolved through the life of the project buoyed by team diversity. The causative influence of all of these on team performance was unpredictable and non-linear. Low order

interactions between members eventually had significant influences (akin to a butterfly effect) on the team's adaptiveness as it encountered changes at the client site.

The formation of interdisciplinary teams in our new matrix organizational structure also served to reduce the perception of political inequality and increased access for previously marginalized groups. In the pre-intervention era, stakeholders expressed social identities based on the functional fault lines created by the silo structure of the firm. In line with Social Identity Theory, the matrix organizational structure reduced the salience of these fault lines, resulting in the creation of a company-wide superordinate identity with positive effects on interpersonal relationships and collaboration culture.

Team diversity is a feature of matrix organizations that is generally assumed to result in creativity and innovation (Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011; Zhang, 2016). However, there are dissenting voices that call for caution in the management of team diversity. This warning borders on the tendency of cross-functional teams to encounter decision-making conflicts and knowledge integration problems (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009; Majchrzak, More, & Faraj, 2012).

Diversity, in this case, is considered a potential albatross and not a strength. In my organizational context, the diverse background represented by members of our cross-functional teams resulted in an initial phase of role ambiguity that soon became more defined as the consulting brief proceeded. This did not result in significant knowledge integration problems and decision-making conflicts within the team. It is important to note that team size and membership may have had a moderating influence on the outcomes recorded. Our cross-functional teams are relatively small with nearly equal representation from all departments within the company. Most of the research findings on cross-functional teams were conducted in large organizations with large teams. In this case, representation and functional identity become important facilitators of group dynamics.

CT is concerned with aligning organizational structure and leadership style, with internal needs and market circumstances. In this study, a continuous change in the organizational structure and leadership style in response to internal and external stimuli was adjudged to be an arduous task that can attract a high cost and result in an unstable work environment. This is a situation that is unmanageable for a small consulting firm like ours. Neilsen (1974) argues that small firms undergo a different kind of evolution and experience different problems when compared with large

organizations. Abba, Yahaya, and Suleiman (2018) also highlight the mismatch between contingency research and small organizations, pointing to differences in controls, administrative wherewithal, and vertical span.

As a result of resource-constraint and cultural concerns, we embraced the idea of selective contingency - a scenario where the firm senses internal and external changes while determining if an alignment is possible between its resources, agility goals, market efficiency, and attainable organizational structures. This means that the firm can decide on which opportunities and signals it can reasonably capture and adapt to.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this study lead me to conclude that any organizational structure that deprives the firm of market feedback channels, disempowers/disenfranchises any group of internal stakeholders and limits collaboration/knowledge sharing is inimical to agility.

8.1.5 Service Design

RQ(e): How does service design affect the agility of Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Ethical Compliance consulting practice?

From a service design perspective, I found the prerequisites of an agile ethics and ethical compliance practice to include field data proximity/field collocation, the leverage of stakeholder relationships, onsite observations, joint problem definition with clients, consulting transparency, short-cycle solution implementation, the frequent use of feedback channels and outcome evaluation. Therefore, presenting a coherent answer to the above-stated research question involves the elucidation of these prerequisites.

In a recent study, Bronnenmayer, Wirtz, and Göttel (2016) found that collaboration had the highest importance for perceived management consulting success. This finding is congruent with the results reported during the client engagement component of this study. Client collocation proved to be a remarkable step in our intervention project because it gave our consultants the opportunity to truly collaborate with the client and develop a shared vision.

Client site collocation gave us data proximity like never before and the opportunity to interact on a face to face basis with stakeholders. More importantly, the joint deployment of team members

from all disciplines within our firm aided communication and interpersonal relationships. As seen in SIT, the formation of a superordinate identity also occurred evidenced by the teams' united front and common mission. It is important to note that Beck et al. (2001) list face to face interactions as one of the enablers of agile teams. I find the increased and closer client-consultant and consultant-consultant interactions to be critical game-changers for our ethics consulting practice. It allowed our team to test portions of the solution offering and get instant feedback from the client. That served to sustain and improve the entire implementation phase.

Furthermore, the inclusion of an observatory period in our service redesign equipped our practice with the requisite local knowledge needed to be flexible and adaptive in the face of changing contexts. It afforded our consultants the opportunity to understand the deep-seated personal, cultural and political causes of ethical non-compliance at the client site while building a rapport with stakeholders that would later prove to be essential for solution implementation. Like Kubr (2002) advises, this was a time to collect vast amounts of data for the purpose of problem diagnosis and a time to anticipate potential landmines that could undermine the client-consultant relationship.

A redesign of our service offering to include client-consultant collaboration helped to gain trust and political buy-in across different levels within the organization. Botezat and Tomescu (2008) confirm our field experience when they submit that this approach is a prerequisite for building an effective and constructive relationship based on trust with beneficiaries of consulting arrangements. Poulfelt, Olson, Bhambri, and Greiner (2017) and Sutter and Kieser (2015) also allude to the effectiveness of bringing clients into the solution implementation experience.

The utilization of short implementation cycles and an establishment of active feedback channels as advised by CAS theorists helped to adapt and respond to unforeseen circumstances in the field (Lawrenz et al., 2018). There were many signals during the solution implementation phase of Team Alpha's deployment that would have been missed in the pre-intervention era.

In a nutshell, the outcome of this study confirms that service design has a significant impact on the agility of Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance practice. We redesigned our service offering to include proximity to field data, taking time to properly diagnose the problem with the client and implementing solutions jointly in short cycles with adequate feedback resulted in an adaptive consulting experience. Our service redesign allowed for increased interactions between client

stakeholders and consultants. This led to the emergence of new relationship forms and patterns that we relied upon through the course of the intervention. As such, the new service design can be said to have moved Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance practice closer to an agile state.

8.2 Recommendations to my Firm on Ethics Consulting Practice Agility

The provision of answers to the study research questions in Section 8.1 set the stage for the offering of recommendations on Ethics consulting agility to Dealers R'Us. It is important that these recommendations are easily understandable and practicable to internal stakeholders within the firm who are non-academic researchers. The multiplicity of ideas already presented in this thesis also calls for a structured and coherent presentation. Therefore, a conceptual framework format is deemed appropriate in this regard. Its use for the organization and presentation of complex multi-dimensional concepts such as the one examined in this inquiry is well established (Rodman, 1980; Shields, 2014). Therefore, I aggregate the actionable knowledge gained from this study and present it to my firm for the adoption in the form of a Conceptual Framework for Agile Ethics Consulting (see Figure 20).

In order to develop the above named conceptual framework, I retrofitted the Zitkiene and Deksnys' (2018) organizational agility model with experiential evidence obtained from this AR inquiry. It consists of four interlinked segments – Agile Consulting Drivers, Agile Consulting Enablers, Agile Consulting Capabilities, and Agile Consulting Practices. The agility drivers relevant to our firm include changes in client expectations and regulatory ethical compliance requirements. As explained in Chapter Three, they compel an adaptive consulting practice. Enablers account for the tools, ways, and means that have been found to be critical for practice agility in this inquiry. The actions and changes implemented in Chapter Four and Chapter Six feature prominently in this segment. Instances include interdisciplinary teams, continuous learning and field data proximity amongst others. Agility enablers are themselves enabled by agile sensing and response capabilities. Through changes made to our service design and the establishment of an active infeed knowledge channel, sensing capabilities have been shown to thrive within the firm. The response capabilities are mostly underscored by continuous anticipation of change and the readiness to act when needed.

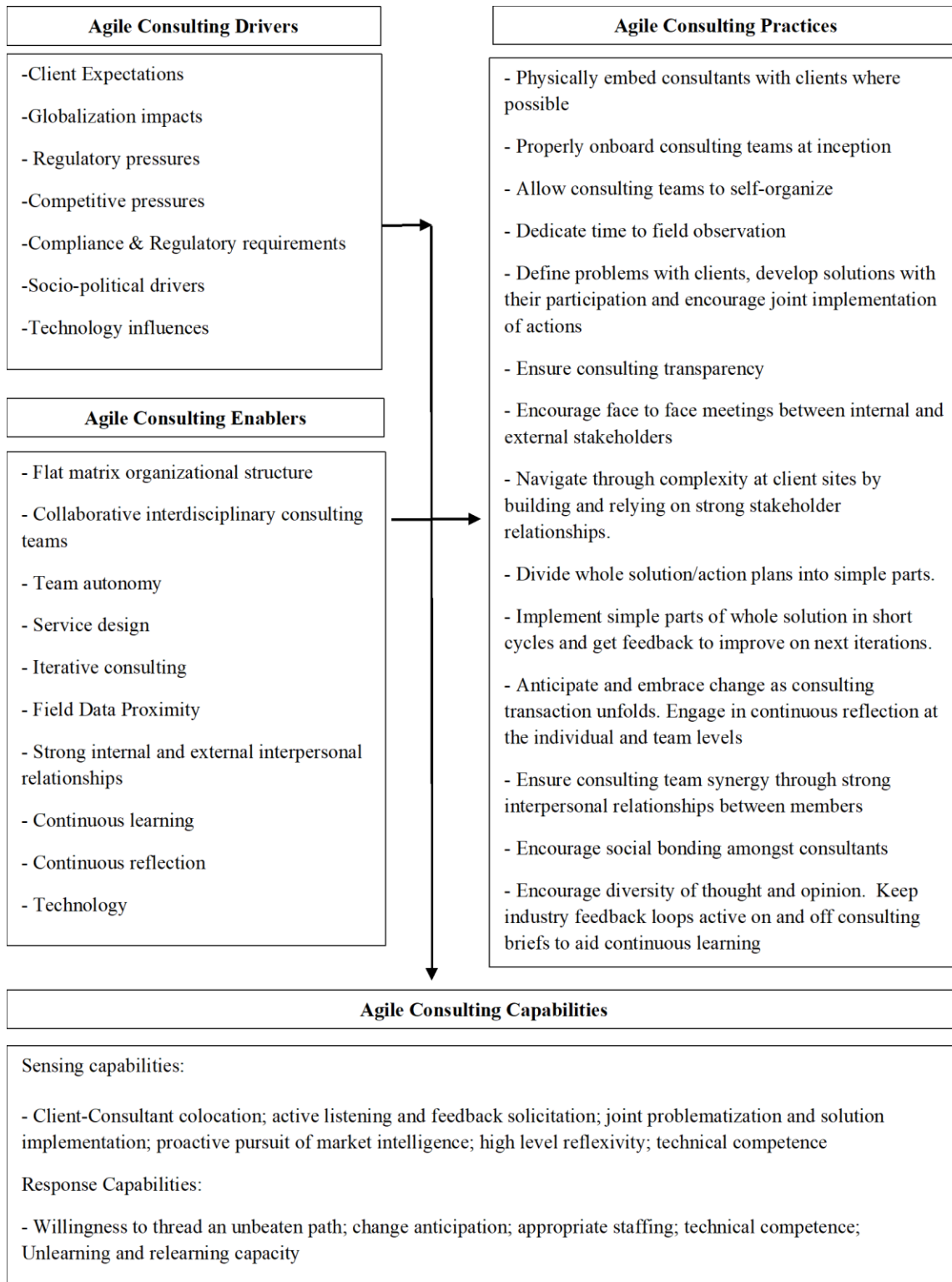


Figure 20. A Conceptual Framework for Agile Ethics Consulting. Framework design adapted from “Organizational Agility Conceptual Model” by R. Zitkiene and M. Deksnys, 2018, Montenegrin Journal of Economics, 14(2), p127.

The part of the conceptual framework that most represents a direct call to action is the agility practices segment. The highlights reported in sub-section 8.1.1 through 8.1.5 feature prominently here. They include recommendations on building positive relationships and solidarity within the firm, field consulting, team autonomy, face to face interactions, consultant-client collaboration, short cycle action cycles, and active feedback solicitation.

This framework provides a valid response to the research question raised in Section 3.5 by distilling the different insights gained from this study into an easily discernible and implementable framework. It holds significant promise for Dealers R'Us as it tries to keep up with the complexity of local and global change as well as the varied dynamism of its client-consultant relationships. By recommending this framework for organization-wide adoption, I am solidifying the gains made already during the course of this inquiry and ensuring that Dealers R'Us stays on the path to agility after the expiration of my studentship.

8.3 Research Limitations & Recommendations for Further Research

The relatively small size of Dealers R'Us meant that I had to utilize a small sample size for internal data collection. This represents a research limitation that must be considered in interpreting the results of this study. Two strategies were employed to mitigate this. The first is centered around finding additional data sources (clients) and seeking out different data types before and after the intervention (Likert scale data and open-ended responses). The second strategy entails reliance on the multiple dialectics provided by Soft System Methodology. This combined approach increased data validity and reliability in this inquiry.

Furthermore, agile methodologies applied in Information Technology (IT) and manufacturing have gone through several field evaluations. Hence, their applicability to a wide range of practical applications. The Conceptual Framework for Agile Ethics Consulting synthesized from the outcomes of this research requires the same level of validation and scrutiny. Hence, it is an appropriate target for future research.

8.4 Chapter Summary

How can my organization's ethics and compliance consulting practice become agile, context-driven and responsive to evolving industry needs?

In this workplace AR, I sought to answer the main research question (RQ1) reproduced above. To do this, I explored the influence of five main factors on organizational agility – knowledge gaps, intra-organizational collaboration, interpersonal relationships, organizational structure, and service design. Specific findings on each of these factors have been discussed in detail and coalesced into a Conceptual Framework for Agile Ethics Consulting. This framework constitutes an appropriate response to the research question and a guide for an agile future.

An agile organization is a Complex Adaptive System (CAS) that learns and acts in reaction to external changes through the instruments of feedback loops, self-organization, spontaneous emergence and non-linear interactions at the edge of chaos (Werder & Maedche, 2018). Despite the lessons learned from actions taken and the strides made in this organizational inquiry, Dealers R’Us does not currently self-organize, emerge spontaneously in reaction to changing contexts or operate at the edge of chaos as described in Section 4.3. On this basis, my organization has not yet attained an agile state when viewed through the lens of CAS theory.

Notwithstanding, I have shown through this study that the demand for a higher level of consulting agility at Ontario automotive dealerships can be adequately met. Generic ethical compliance manuals and ‘one size fits all’ consulting templates that do not meet the contextual needs of dealers or evolving automotive retail industry trends in Ontario can finally become historical relics. This inquiry paves the way for an era of agile and custom-tailored ethics and ethical compliance programs at Dealers R’Us. To that end, the Conceptual Framework for Agile Ethics Consulting codifies the agility-focused knowledge created in this study. It sets my firm’s ethics consulting practice on a path to agility by providing specific guidance on what must be done to continuously adapt to varied and evolving automotive industry needs.

9.0 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I draw the curtains on this thesis by reflecting on my scholar-practitioner journey. A transition in my leadership philosophy is one remarkable feature of this journey that I discuss at length. I also lay out epistemological and ontological transitions experienced in the course of my involvement as an organizational leader, Action Research facilitator, and co-contributor.

9.1 Authentic Leadership

‘Know Thyself’

The quote above is an ancient Greek saying that featured prominently in the work of Socrates and Plato (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). It is a call to authenticity and self-awareness through self-reflection. This Action Research inquiry within and outside Dealers R’Us afforded me the opportunity to reflect on my leadership style. More importantly, it surreptitiously exposed the impact of my leadership style on our consulting practice and in creating the non-collaborative silo culture that was in place prior to the intervention.

I am learning to practice reflection and reflexivity more often and to prod deeper as I question my own biases, motives, aspirations, ambitions and deepest fears. The result of this decision has been profound. I realize that I naturally gravitate towards individuals with whom I have an established relationship. It is my truest belief also that honest, open and respectful relationships should be the bedrock of a consulting firm like ours. Entrenching a management structure that prevented this from happening was never what I wished for or set out to accomplish. I care deeply about building a virile consulting business, irrespective of what power I would wield in the emergent organization. I reckon now that I was less deliberate in building the right kind of relationships with my subordinates, neither did I do enough to encourage Departmental Directors to do the same with

their direct reports. My legitimacy was derived from a perception of power and primacy as opposed to trust and a consultative leadership style.

The times are different, however. I am a changed leader. Through the Action Research phases, I made the inconvenient choice of shedding the cloak of inauthenticity. I am becoming more of an authentic leader by being true to my own ideals. This has led me to build genuine relationships with our consultants and Departmental Directors while promoting greater inclusivity in the decision making processes within our organization. In retrospect, I figure that Action Research was designed to do just that – empower the powerless, enlarge the decision-making circle without paralyzing decision making, democratize knowledge creation and action implementation while encouraging leaders to consider the impacts of their leadership on the led (Parsons & Harding, 2011).

Furthermore, I have come to the realization that employees are more engaged and perform at their best when they feel empowered by their leader(s). Building a sense of ownership in my team and encouraging members of the Action Research Group to commit to the higher ideal of building an agile consulting business that bodes well for all has yielded results that transformed my beliefs about leadership. I now believe that being open to examination and constructive critique by organizational members, irrespective of power status is good practice and I encourage it more often while demystifying title and hierarchy in the process.

9.2 Scholar-Practitioner Development

AR has not only resulted in change and lessons on creating an agile ethics and ethical compliance practice. It has also given me the opportunity to reflect on myself and the changes that I have undergone since this inquiry began. The most remarkable change borders on my epistemological and ontological leanings. In Chapter 1, I referenced my objectivist education. This resulted in epistemological conflicts as I went through the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program

that culminated in this thesis. After the taught component of the program, I became an armchair social constructivist with a veiled preference for objectivism.

The AR approach that my colleagues and I took in this research has firmed up my epistemological grounding in social constructivism, bequeathing a firm conviction that comprehensive and valid knowledge only comes into being through a social process that involves diverse descriptions of reality. In this inquiry, knowledge, and change were created by acting on the agglomeration of multiple worldviews and perceptions. Beyond a perfunctory leaning towards interpretivism, I am fully convinced that to restrict one's self to the unidimensional concept of truth in objectivism is tantamount to depriving one's self of a complete picture, possible only through the prism of social constructionism which is the basic foundation of Action Research.

The world as I see it today is not *white and black*. There are a million shades in the spectrum of truth. Mind and matter are not separate and unrelated. My mind and the biases that it carries actually determine how I define and interpret matter. In the past, I unknowingly brought my biases to bear on the construction of reality within my organization and jettisoned the social construction process. The scholar-practitioner that I have become knows better.

Furthermore, AR really exposed my prior inclination towards risk aversion and conservatism with respect to management philosophy. As we began to record changes in our intervention project, I thought about how unimaginable some of our actions would have been a year or two ago. Changing our market strategy altogether, changing our organizational structure and changing reporting lines within the company are broad far-reaching actions that I would not have considered without the instrumentality of AR and the support of the ARG. My approach to management had been based on protecting the status quo and only endorsing piecemeal changes where absolutely necessary. I often worried about the uncertainty of change and the associated costs of a potential failure. At this point, I am a leader more open to entertaining change and its potential gains (and failures), having experienced firsthand the advantages associated with breaking free from the inertia of the status quo. I am also beginning to tap into my inner capacity to forge a deeper professional connection with multiple stakeholders across different cadres within my organization.

During the numerous meetings of the ARG, I learned a lot about my situation in the complex organizational problem that this thesis is centered around. As described in Pedler (1996, p.20), I was indeed a *part of the problem and the problem was part of me*. As a facilitator at ARG meetings, helping to steer the focus group discussions, I also functioned as a co-contributor and respondent. Being able to switch roles and stay in character turned out to be tricky initially but I soon mastered the art by keeping a pulse of the group dynamics. Being a facilitator did not make me the leader or tie-breaker in our deliberations. This consciousness has begun to guide how I manage the daily affairs of Dealers R'Us.

9.3 Conclusion

The opportunity to conduct an insider Action Research within Dealers R'Us brought about certain undeniable personal blessings. These came in the form of growth in my leadership abilities and the evolution of my scholarly underpinnings. The experience broadened my epistemological periscope and equipped me with an additional appetite for continuing the transformation of the firm. These changes will significantly influence the management and organization of Dealers R'Us going forward. They are also bound to impact the relationship dynamic between leaders and other organizational members within the firm. As the firm continues in its quest for agility, collaborative leadership and a democratized decision-making framework become even more critical necessities. Therefore, I am fortunate that this study has led to the acquisition of a leadership worldview and research philosophy that advance the organization's agile cause, one that extends beyond the timeline of this doctoral research.

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Mail - Femi Jegede - Outl X

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Dear Femi,

I am pleased to inform you that the DBA Ethics Committee has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below:

Committee Name: DBA Ethics Committee

Title of Study: **Ethics & Ethical Compliance : A phenomenological Study of the Perceptions of Automotive Dealers in Ontario, Canada**

Student Investigator: **Femi Jegede**

School/Institute: School of Management Approval Date: 20.11. 2017. The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

1. The researchers must obtain ethical approval from a local research ethics committee if this is an international study
2. University of Liverpool approval is subject to compliance with all relevant national legislative requirements if this is an international study.
3. All serious adverse events must be reported to the Sub-Committee within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the Research Integrity and Governance Officer (ethics@liv.ac.uk)
4. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Committee of the amendment.

This approval applies to the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Committee should be notified.

Kind regards,

Dr Meera Sarma

Femi Jegede, Ethics Approval 4

<Meera.Sarma@liverpool.ac.uk>
Wed 2017-11-29 7:09 PM
Jegede, Fe... +11 others

Ethics_Response_Form_May_2...
284 KB

Show all 2 attachments (462 KB) Download all

Save all to OneDrive - University Of Liverpool

Dear Femi,

I am writing to you on behalf of the DBA Research Ethics Committee. I am pleased to confirm that you have obtained research ethics approval for your work. By copy of this email I invite your Doctoral Thesis Supervisor to complete the associated section in the grade center of your Thesis BB class (please, see attached file with guidelines to complete the process, and if you have any questions do let me know). Additionally, I am attaching the formal approval from the research ethics committee for your records.

My best wishes for an interesting and successful DBA research project.

Best regards,
Meera

PAGE 1 OF 1 GIVE FEEDBACK TO MICROSOFT 100%

Femi Jegede, Ethics Appro... (No subject)

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DEALERS R'US

Automotive Business Consultants

7-90 Kennedy Road South
Brampton, ON
416-799-3850
www.dealersrus.com
consult@dealersrus.com

Research Ethics Office
University of Liverpool,
Liverpool, United Kingdom

July 11, 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

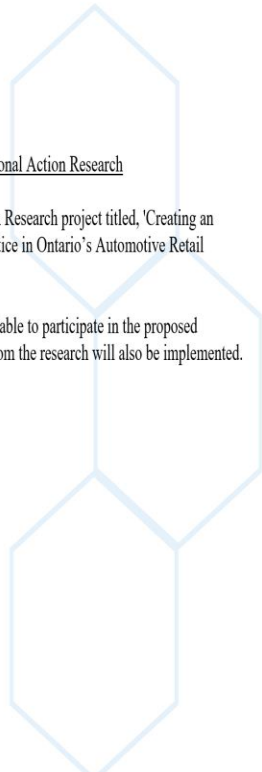
Local Approval for Organizational Action Research

I hereby approve the conduct of the proposed Action Research project titled, 'Creating an Agile Ethics & Ethical Compliance Consulting Practice in Ontario's Automotive Retail Industry'

Organizational resources and personnel will be available to participate in the proposed research as needed. Proposed changes emanating from the research will also be implemented.

Sincerely,

Femi Jegede
President & Principal Consultant





merged ethical approva X + v

file:///C:/Users/femi.jegade/Desktop/DBA/merged%20ethical%20approval%20documents.pdf

[Redacted]

The President,
Dealers R'Us Inc.,
Brampton, ON

August 21, 2017

Dear Mr. Jegede,

Approval For Proposed Doctoral Research

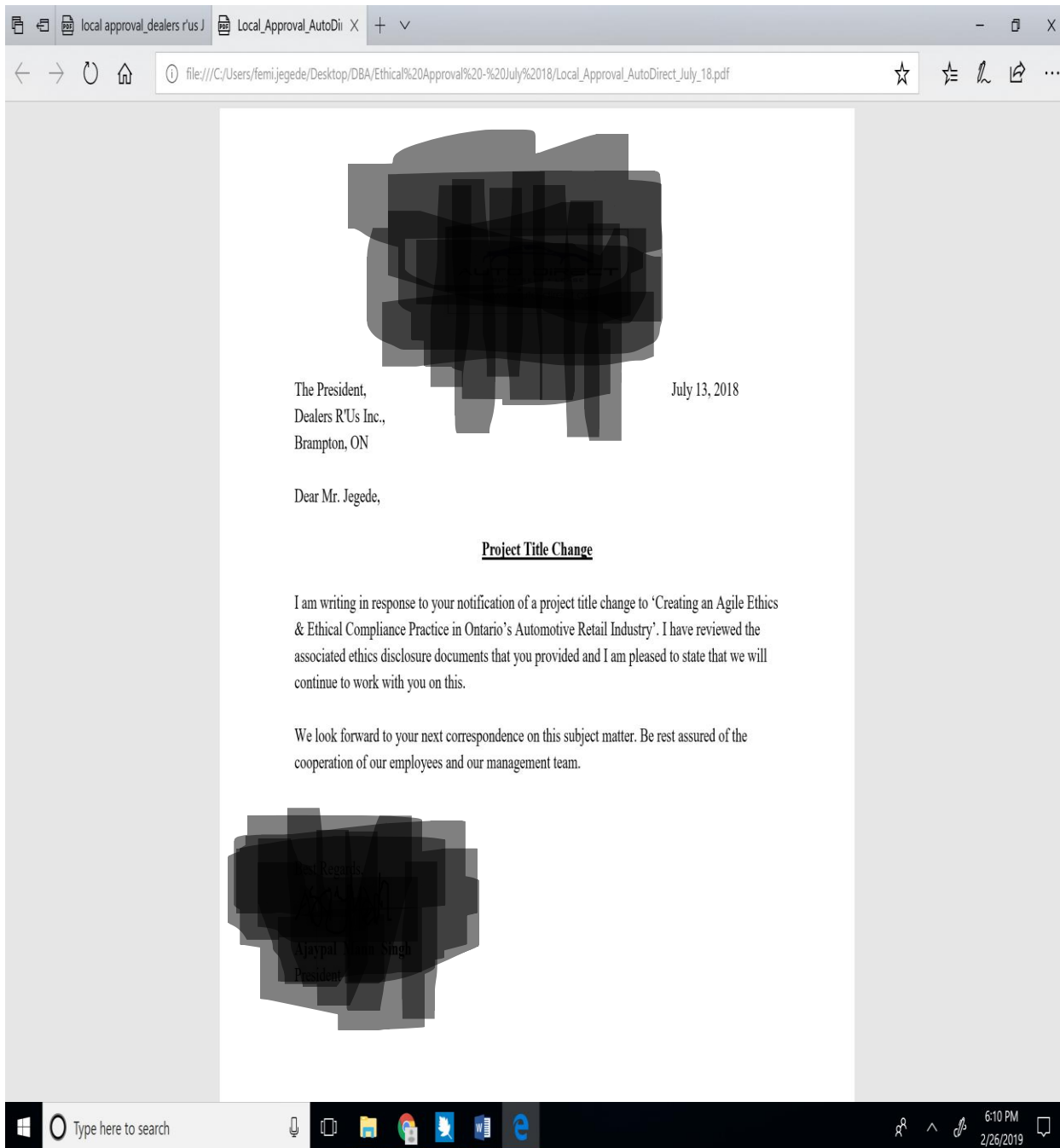
I am pleased to inform you that your recent application for Auto Direct to participate in your proposed research study titled, 'Ethics & Ethical Compliance: A Mixed Method Study of the Perceptions of Automotive Dealers in Ontario, Canada' is now approved.

We look forward to your next correspondence on this subject matter. Be rest assured of the cooperation of our employees and our management team.

[Redacted Signature]

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EXTERNAL RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE – PRE-INTERVENTION PHASE

Research Topic:	Creating an Agile Ethics and Ethical Compliance Consulting Practice in Ontario's Automotive Retail Industry	
Locality:	Ontario, Canada	Ethics committee ref.:
Principal investigator:	Femi Jegede	Contact phone number: 647-864-0076

Section A: Demographic Variables

Please provide the requested information below by ticking the appropriate box

TICK HERE

Age	18-30 years	
	31-40 years	
	41-50 years	
	51-60 years	
	> 60 years	
Gender	Female	
	Male	
Industry Experience	2 - 10 years	
	11 - 20 years	
	21 - 30 years	
	> 30 years	

Section B: Service Feedback

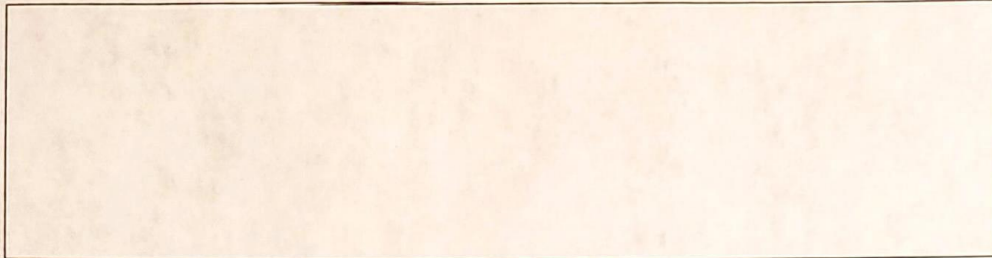
Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your experience with Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program in your automotive dealership as well as your knowledge of the automotive retail industry in Ontario, Canada.

Definitions: * Agile - Ability to respond quickly and appropriately when faced with a change in conditions/contexts. Flexibility and nimbleness in response to the varied and unique ethics and ethical compliance needs of each automotive dealership.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program is agile* and responsive to varied and evolving ethical compliance needs in Ontario's automotive retail industry					
Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Compliance program is tailored to meet the specific compliance needs of my automotive dealership					
I will recommend Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Compliance program to other automotive dealerships					

SECTION C: COMMENTS

Instruction: You can provide comments explaining your response in Section B in the box below. If you need additional space, please use an extra sheet of paper

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to provide comments explaining their response in Section B. The box is currently blank.

EXTERNAL RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE – POST-INTERVENTION PHASE

Research Topic:	Creating an Agile Ethics and Ethical Compliance Consulting Practice in Ontario's Automotive Retail Industry	
Locality:	Ontario, Canada	Ethics committee ref.:
Principal investigator:	Femi Jegede	Contact phone number: 647-864-0076

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Please provide the requested information below by ticking the appropriate box

TICK HERE

Age	18-30 years	
	31-40 years	
	41-50 years	
	51-60 years	
	> 60 years	
Gender	Female	
	Male	
Industry Experience	2 - 10 years	
	11 - 20 years	
	21 - 30 years	
	> 30 years	

Section B: General Service Feedback

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your recent experience with Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program in your automotive dealership as well as your knowledge of the automotive retail industry in Ontario, Canada.

Definitions: * Agile - Ability to respond quickly and appropriately when faced with a change in conditions/contexts in the Ontario automotive retail industry. Ability to meet the varied and unique ethics and ethical compliance needs of automotive dealerships.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Dealers R'Us' ethics and ethical compliance program is agile* and responsive to varied and evolving ethical compliance needs in Ontario's automotive retail industry					
Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Compliance program is tailored to meet the specific compliance needs of my automotive dealership					
I will recommend Dealers R'Us' Ethics & Compliance program to other automotive dealerships					

Section C: Knowledge Gaps

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your understanding of your recent experience with the ethical advisory practice at Dealers R'Us.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Dealers R'Us' consultants demonstrated adequate industry-specific ethics knowledge in the course of their duties					
Dealers R'Us consultants relied on each other for discipline specific knowledge requirements in the course of their duties					
Dealers R'Us consultants demonstrated knowledge proficiency specific to my automotive dealership size, type, makeup, ownership and goals					
Dealers R'Us' consultants demonstrated knowledge of factors affecting ethical decision making and moral choices at automotive					

dealerships in Ontario					
Dealers R'Us' consultants showed an eagerness to learn about my automotive dealership and gain knowledge about its people, processes and operations					

Section D: Collaboration

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your understanding of recent changes made to the ethical advisory practice at Dealers R'Us.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Dealers R'Us consultants worked well with each other as a team during the field deployment at my automotive dealership					
The activities of all consultants were in sync during the field deployment at my automotive dealership					
Consultants relied on each other's skills and expertise to help my automotive dealership					
There was clear					

communication on the roles and areas of responsibilities of each consultant by the Dealers R'Us team at the start of the consulting project					
Having all team members onsite together at the same time makes it easier to collaborate.					

Section E: Service Design

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your experience with changes in the design of Dealers R'Us ethics advisory service.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Dealers R'Us consultants were more effective in the field working directly with my automotive dealership					
The onsite implementation of solutions with my automotive dealership by Dealers R'Us consultants led to better ethical compliance outcomes					
The implementation of solutions in short cycles and the request for instant					

feedback led to better ethical compliance outcomes					
Dealers R'Us consultants were more agile and responsive to the contextual needs of my automotive dealership by virtue of their colocation.					
Having an interdisciplinary team onsite led to a more productive consulting experience for me					

Section F: Additional Comments

Instruction: You can provide additional comments explaining your response in Section B, C, D and E in the box below. If you need additional space, please use an extra sheet of paper

INTERNAL RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE: POST-INTERVENTION PHASE

Research Topic:	Creating an Agile Ethics and Ethical Compliance Consulting Practice in Ontario's Automotive Retail Industry		
Locality:	Ontario, Canada	Ethics committee ref.:	
Principal investigator:	Femi Jegede	Contact phone number:	647-864-0076

Section A: Knowledge Gaps

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your understanding of recent changes made to the ethical advisory practice at Dealers R'Us.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am more likely to share knowledge/market intelligence with colleagues from other disciplines than I was a year ago.					
I have learnt something new about our industry from a colleague in a different discipline in the last couple of months.					
I have gained fresh industry perspectives and increased my ethical awareness as a					

result of the ethics training program at Dealers R'Us.					
Ethics training programs should be sustained to keep our organization agile in the face of evolving market trends.					
I am better prepared to serve automotive dealerships in Ontario because of the knowledge I gained from the Industry Talk Sessions					

Section B: Internal Collaboration

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your understanding of recent changes made to the ethical advisory practice at Dealers R'Us.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The matrix organizational structure and the formation of interdisciplinary teams have led to increased internal collaboration					
I have collaborated with colleagues from other disciplines at least once in the last couple of months.					

I feel empowered to collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines					
A sense of equality and oneness with my peers in other departments is making it easier to collaborate with them					
Increased collaboration between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us has increased the responsiveness and adaptiveness of its ethics and ethical compliance practice					

Section C: Interpersonal Relationships

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your experience with changes in the interpersonal relationships of internal stakeholders at Dealers R'Us.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Team bonding activities have improved the relationships between internal stakeholders at Dealers R'Us					
Increased communication between stakeholders has led to an improvement of					

the interpersonal relationships between them					
A reduction of political inequality in addition to focus on equal legitimacy and access for all stakeholders have improved the interpersonal relationships at Dealers R'Us.					
An improvement of interpersonal relationships between stakeholders at Dealers R'Us has contributed to the creation of a responsive and adaptive ethics and ethical compliance practice					
The formation of interdisciplinary teams and close field collaboration between consultants from other departments has resulted in improved interpersonal relations					

Section D: Organizational Structure

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your experience with changes in the organizational structure at Dealers R'Us.

	Strongly	Agree	Neutral/I don't	Disagree	Strongly
--	----------	-------	-----------------	----------	----------

	Agree		know		Disagree
A matrix organizational structure resulted in better face to face communication and collaboration between consultants from different disciplines					
The matrix organization created a sense of equality, equal access and common identity in my organization					
The matrix organization increased the odds of higher ethical compliance rates at client sites					
A matrix organization is better suited for an adaptive and responsive ethics and ethical compliance practice compared to a functional hierarchical organization					
I experienced/witnessed loyalty conflicts – struggle to maintain a balance between reporting to discipline supervisor and company management					

Section E: Service Design

Instruction: Please rank the following statements based on your experience with changes in the design of Dealers R'Us ethics advisory service.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was more effective in the field working directly with clients.					
Implementing solutions onsite with clients led to better ethical compliance outcomes					
Implementing solutions in short cycles and asking clients for instant feedback led to better ethical compliance outcomes					
I was more agile and responsive to changing and contextual client needs by virtue of my colocation with our client.					
Close field collaboration with colleagues from other disciplines in an interdisciplinary team setting created better compliance outcomes for the client.					

Section F: Additional Comments

Instruction: You can provide additional comments explaining your response in Section A, B & C in the box below. If you need additional space, please use an extra sheet of paper

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THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE MARKET SURVEY DATA (PRE-INTERVENTION PHASE)

Sorting Initial Codes

Color Codes	Initial Codes	Categorized Excerpts
Red	Situational/environmental context	You folks didn't realize that they are all paid on a commission basis and when they hear compliance, they are worried about how it will impact their pay cheques (1); Some of us who have been around for a while see ethics differently we could have gotten a much more tailored plan (13); I need a custom compliance program (23)
Light Green	Sync between consultants	One did not know what the other was doing. They should have collaborated (13); one consultant from the Digital marketing and another from Software Solutions on different parts of the same project and they seemed uncoordinated (9);

Light Blue	Spend time with client	spend time on taking a critical look at our people, our processes and our business (11); need to spend more time at our dealership (18);
Purple	Lack of Communication	did not communicate much with each other (40);
Brown	Knowledge	did not seem to understand the nuances of our industry and what motivates dealers to comply (30); still don't understand some complex parts of the MVDA (28);
Yellow	Positive experience	I like our current compliance policy, I would not change a thing (32); inching towards 100% compliance on all our digital documentation(16)
Pink	Price	except for the consulting fee (32); I don't have the resources to maintain the ethical compliance program you prepared for me. 45); The bill you send us (47); except for the consulting fee (32).
Deep Blue	Power and politics	senior people here think they don't have to comply to the letter. They make ethical compliance about politics and who is closest to the General Manager (29);
Cyan	Non-sustained gains	Our salespeople went back to their old ways after 3 months (1);
Deep Green	Client needs Training	will like your consultants to coach us (37); a proactive ethics training would have been very beneficial (17)
Lemon	Poor Interpersonal relations	the IT guy threw in a smart comment that suggested he was not a fan of his colleague (40); they don't like each other very much (27)
Lilac	Organizational structure	first consultant was explaining your internal process and organizational structure to me. But truth is, i dont care about what you guys do internally (9);

Theme Definition & Refinement

Color Codes	Initial Codes		Initial Theme		Refined Theme
Red	Situational/environmental context				
	+				
Pink	Price is	=	Low Value Perception/Billing Issues		
			+		
Deep Blue	Power and Politics	=	Consulting in the dark/Don't know clients enough		
	+				
Deep Green	Client needs Training		+	=	Knowledge Gaps
Brown	Knowledge	=	Consultants are out of touch		
Light Blue	Spend time with client	=	Service offering needs a rethink		
			+	=	Service Redesign
Cyan	Non-sustained gains	=	Outcome #1 - Low Ethical Compliance Rates		
Purple	Lack of Communication				
	+	=	Internal Collaboration Issues/Bad blood between some stakeholders	=	Internal Collaboration

Light Green	No sync between consultants				
Lemon	Poor Interpersonal relations	=	Poor Interpersonal Relationships	=	Interpersonal Relationships
Lilac	Organizational structure	=	Organizational Structure	=	Organizational Structure
Yellow	Positive experience	=	Outcome#2 - Silver Lining		

INTERNAL DATA COLLECTION IN THE POST-INTERVENTION ERA

A – Demographic Variables

Age	18 - 30 Years	2
	31 - 40 Years	12
	41 - 50 Years	5
	51 - 60 Years	1
	> 60 Years	0
	Choose not to disclose	0

Gender	Female	5
	Male	15
	Choose not to disclose	0

Industry Experience	< 2 Years	0
	2 - 10 Years	5
	11 - 20 Years	14
	21 - 30 Years	1
	> 30 Years	0
	Choose not to disclose	0

Section A – Knowledge Gaps

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	19	16%	53%	21%	11%	0%	3.74
Statement 2	16	19%	56%	13%	13%	0%	3.81
Statement 3	19	16%	79%	5%	0%	0%	4.11
Statement 4	17	35%	59%	6%	0%	0%	4.29
Statement 5	17	12%	65%	24%	0%	0%	3.88

* Scale: 5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Neutral/I don't know, 2 – Disagree, 1 – Strongly Disagree

Section B – Internal Collaboration

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	17	29%	59%	12%	0%	0%	4.18
Statement 2	19	11%	68%	5%	16%	0%	3.74
Statement 3	20	25%	65%	10%	0%	0%	4.15
Statement 4	17	18%	47%	29%	6%	0%	3.76
Statement 5	18	28%	67%	6%	0%	0%	4.22

Section C – Interpersonal Relationships

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	17	24%	65%	12%	0%	0%	4.12
Statement 2	19	11%	58%	26%	5%	0%	3.74
Statement 3	18	11%	61%	22%	6%	0%	3.78
Statement 4	18	17%	72%	11%	0%	0%	4.06
Statement 5	16	19%	63%	19%	0%	0%	4.00

Section D – Organizational Structure

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	19	32%	63%	5%	0%	0%	4.26%
Statement 2	19	16%	53%	26%	5%	0%	3.79%
Statement 3	19	11%	74%	11%	5%	0%	3.89%
Statement 4	20	35%	55%	5%	5%	0%	4.2%

Statement 5	19	0%	11%	21%	53%	16%	2.26%
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Section E – Service Design

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	15	27%	67%	7%	0%	0%	4.2%
Statement 2	15	33%	60%	7%	0%	0%	4.27%
Statement 3	14	29%	57%	14%	0%	0%	4.14%
Statement 4	15	20%	60%	13%	7%	0%	3.93%
Statement 5	16	31%	63%	6%	0%	0%	4.25%

EXTERNAL DATA COLLECTION IN THE POST-INTERVENTION ERA

Section B – General Service Feedback

Statement #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	23	17%	70%	13%	0%	0%	4.04
Statement 2	24	25%	67%	8%	0%	0%	4.17
Statement 3	20	15%	70%	10%	5%	0%	3.95

Section C – Knowledge Gaps

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	23	22%	61%	13%	4%	0%	4.0
Statement 2	18	0%	44%	56%	0%	0%	3.44
Statement 3	23	17%	70%	9%	4%	0%	4.0
Statement 4	20	10%	60%	30%	0%	0%	3.8
Statement 5	23	22%	70%	9%	0%	0%	4.13

Section D – Collaboration

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	21	0%	52%	48%	0%	0%	3.52
Statement 2	21	10%	86%	5%	0%	0%	4.05
Statement 3	23	13%	48%	39%	0%	0%	3.74
Statement 4	24	0%	13%	4%	50%	33%	1.96
Statement 5	20	10%	90%	0%	0%	0%	4.1

Section E – Service Design

Respondent #	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral/I don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Weighted Average Score*
Statement 1	23	30%	57%	13%	0%	0%	4.17
Statement 2	22	23%	68%	9%	0%	0%	4.14
Statement 3	20	25%	75%	0%	0%	0%	4.25
Statement 4	22	27%	64%	5%	5%	0%	4.14
Statement 5	17	24%	71%	0%	6%	0%	4.12

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE MARKET SURVEY DATA (POST-INTERVENTION PHASE)

	Initial Codes	Categorized Excerpts	Emergent Themes
Red	Spend time with client/Engaged client	spent quite a bit of time with us this time and that was a key success driver (1) involved us in the process (2); Coming in to observe us and develop a plan just for our dealership is the best thing (7); explain any of the concepts to me (7); Face to face contact is great (8); sought our feedback on several segments of the solution and you did that frequently (10);	
	+	=	Dedicated onsite consultation; Data Proximity; Active listening and observation; Establish active feedback channels; Execute solutions in segments; Define problems in conjunction with clients and jointly implement solutions
Light Green	Go beyond the surface/Make a dedicated effort	figure us out and really dig deep into the key root causes of non-compliance (1); showed a genuine interest in knowing me beyond my employee badge ID (2);	

Purple	Provided learning/knowledge	learnt a lot about how to manage the ethical perception of different personality types within my team (8); knew the Code of Ethics and all laws inside out (15);	Context-specific knowledge competency is a prerequisite; Continuous learning matters
Brown	Future hopes	wonder what the situation may be next year or the year after. We need to stay on top of things (1); hope to keep the gains made (3); implement the competitive repositioning plan next year (3);	No complacency, embrace continuous learning, reflection and improvement;
		>>>>>>>> Split 'Apprehension/Future Hopes' Code. Create new Code - 'Apprehension'	
Pink	Professionalism/Depth	depth of the recommendations and the professionalism (1); professionalism of your consultants and the efficacy of the processes (3); Your consultants were credible in front of my staff members. They earned respect from day 1 (15)	
	+	=	High solution fit equates to consultant credibility and high compliance rates; Service design must match identified challenges; Continuous learning and reflection
Light Blue	Offered customized solutions	specifically crafted for us (3); custom, adapted to our specific situation and specific to the problem (7); broke it down to our level (15)	

		+	
Magenta	Context-specific solution		<p>the former, very generic and didn't really address our context (3) ; created a custom training program for us (7); The 360 degrees ethics review positions our company to continue to reflect on internal actions and on how they impact our compliance culture(9); measure and evaluate ethical compliance on every deal (16); also have a financial incentive to comply with all the regulations (16)</p>
Beige	Relationships		<p>We built a good relationship with them (1); That way, it was easier for you guys were able to build a relationship with our employees (8);</p>
		+	=
			<p>A strong consultant-client stakeholder interpersonal relationships is important; interventions can have serious repercussions for existing intra-client stakeholder relationships</p>

Deep Blue	Resultant relationship problems	we had built a great working relationship together. You guys came in and he was gone (6); I bumped heads with your team a few times (9); you changed the relationships we have built here for years (12);	
Cyan	Negative Outcomes	felt intrusive at first (1); fueled rumours and anxiety (5); Your company took a lot of resources . Felt like I didn't have enough time to do my real work (12)	
		>>>>>> Move 'The start of the project was confusing (5)' to 'Apprehension' Code	
	+	=	Expect resistance; Interventions are inconvenient; Early and continuous communication is crucial; Poor onboarding creates anxiety
Sky Blue	Apprehension	We didn't know who or what was coming and that was disconcerting (5); came from a place of initial concern about where you were taking us (9); The start of the project was confusing (5)	

<p>Deep Green</p>	<p>Collaboration between consultants/Interdisciplinary Teamwork</p>	<p>The team worked well together (9); ethics consultant worked closely with the software consultant (9); Both consultants were also in close collaboration with the marketing consultant(9); Having a team comprising of different specialists in my office building was the best (10)</p>	<p>Interdisciplinary consulting teams collaborate better</p>
<p>Yellow</p>	<p>Positive Outcomes/Desired ethical compliance outcome</p>	<p>achieved 100% compliance (1); difference between your previous ethical compliance program and the new one - day and night (3); My dealership has become ethically compliant (3); Your company is doing things differently now (7); first time we actually got something out of hiring an external consultant (8); I am glad I was wrong. It all worked out. (9); Everything worked like clock work (9); That worked really well (10); The former definitely guarantees a higher chance of success with ethical compliance at my dealership (10); saved me a lot of time and energy (10); I don't have to bend the rules to earn a pay check (16); My customers are noticing and the responses have been positive (16)</p>	<p>Higher Ethical Compliance Rates; Positive customer feedback; adaptive ethical compliance program</p>

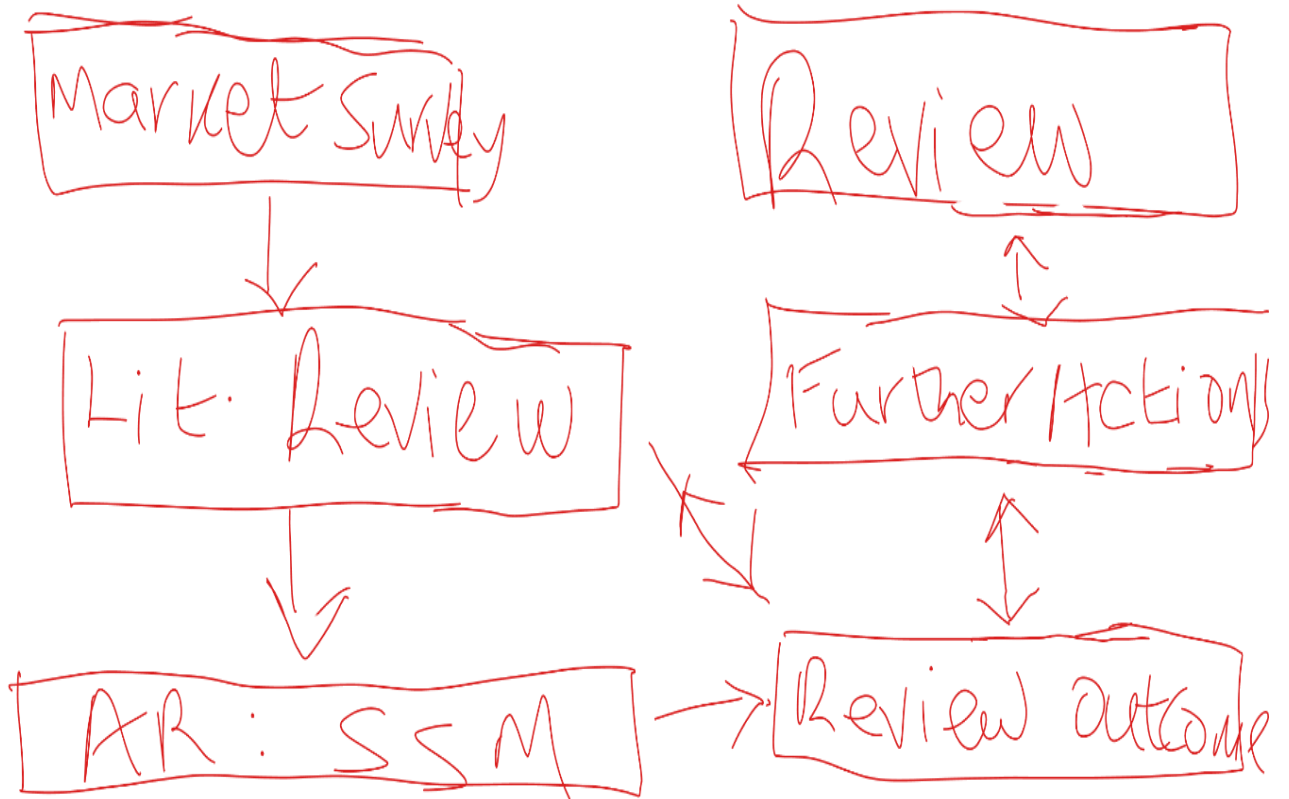


Figure 21: Rough sketch of research road map that I developed during this workplace intervention

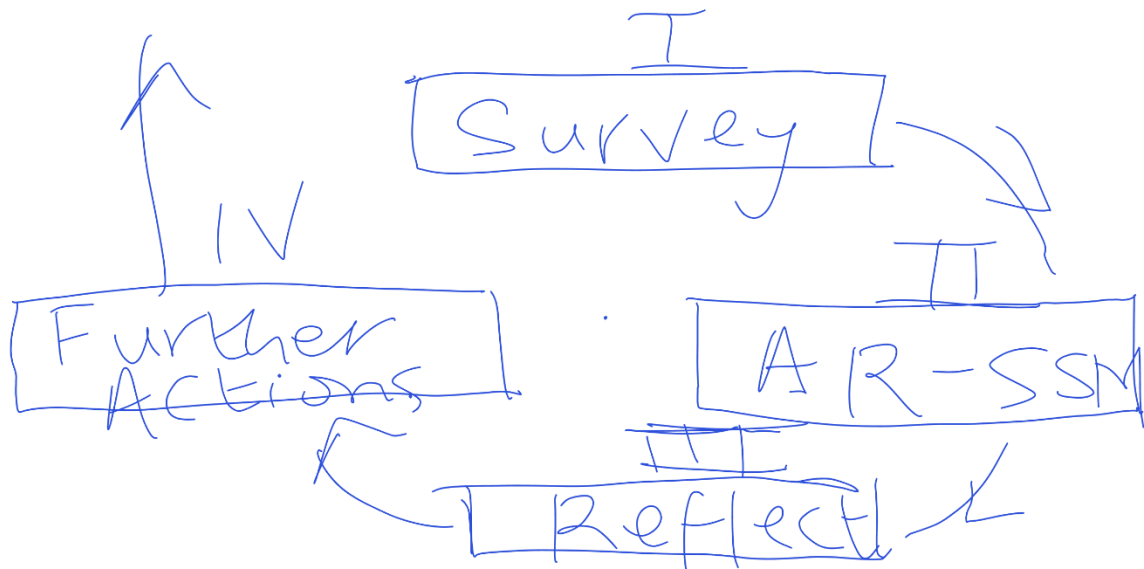


Figure 22: Visual representation of spiral research design developed by members of the Action Research Group as documented in my meeting notes

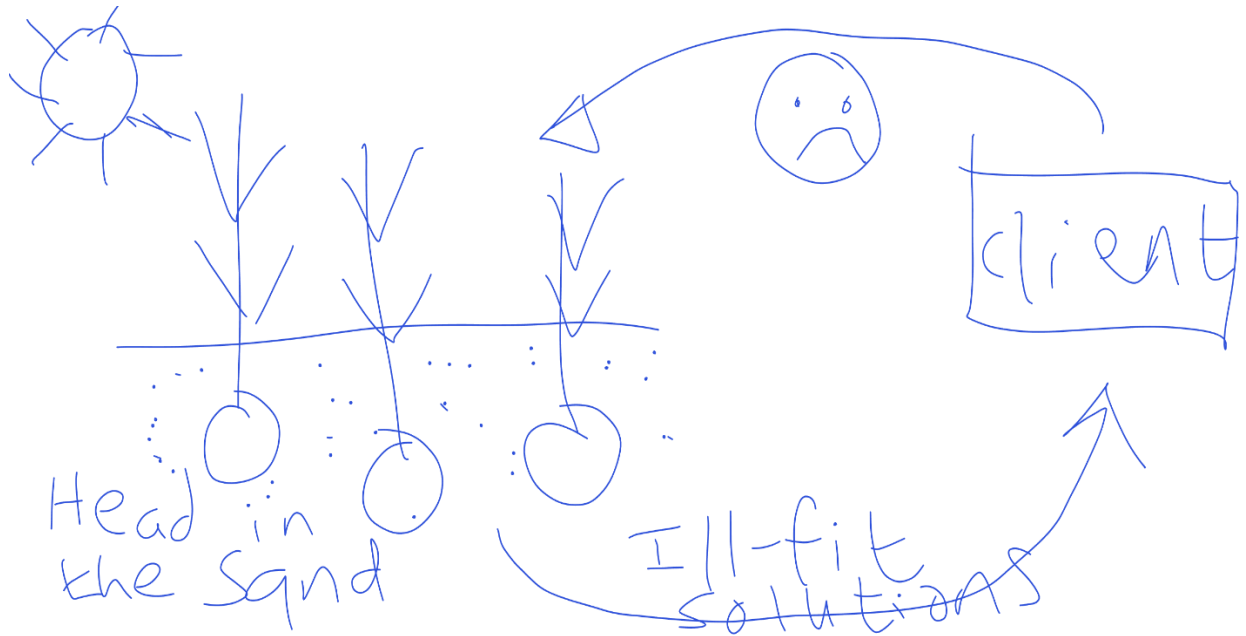


Figure 23: Visual representation of conceptual model developed by members of the Action Research Group as documented in my meeting notes

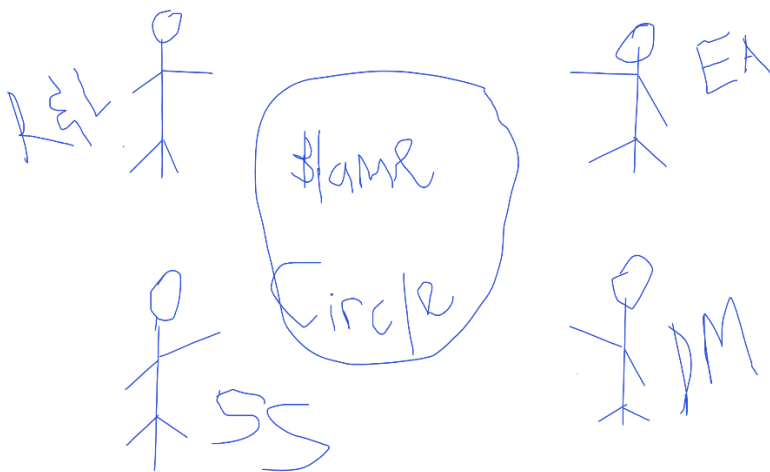


Figure 24: Visual representation of blame circle within the organization as documented in my focus group meeting notes

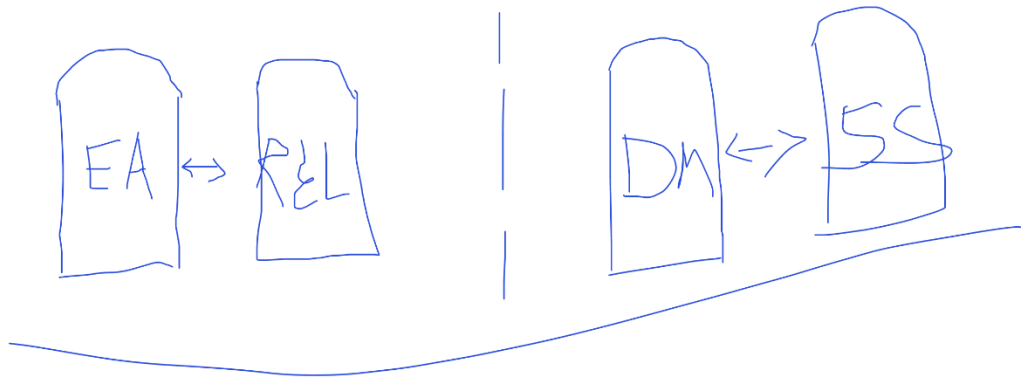


Figure 25: Visual representation of silo culture within Dealers R'Us, developed by Action Research Group Members during a focus group meeting and documented in my meeting notes

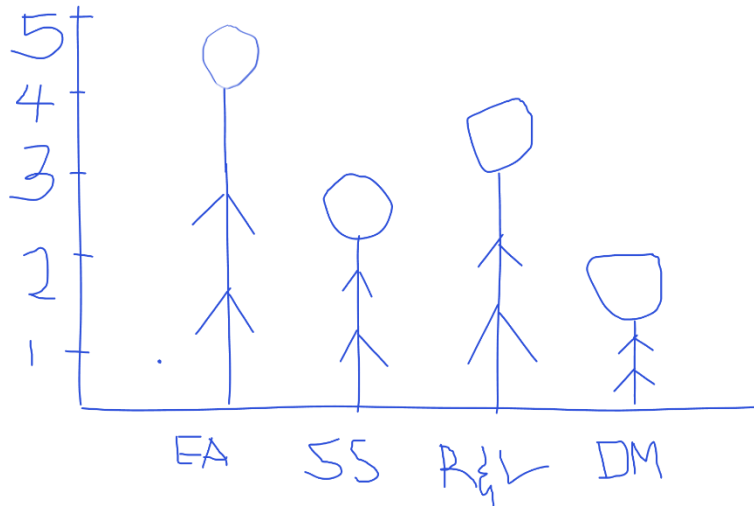


Figure 26: Visual representation of political relevance chart, developed by Action Research Group Members during a focus group meeting and documented in my meeting notes



Figure 27: Visual representation of declining revenues, developed by Action Research Group Members during a focus group meeting and documented in my meeting notes

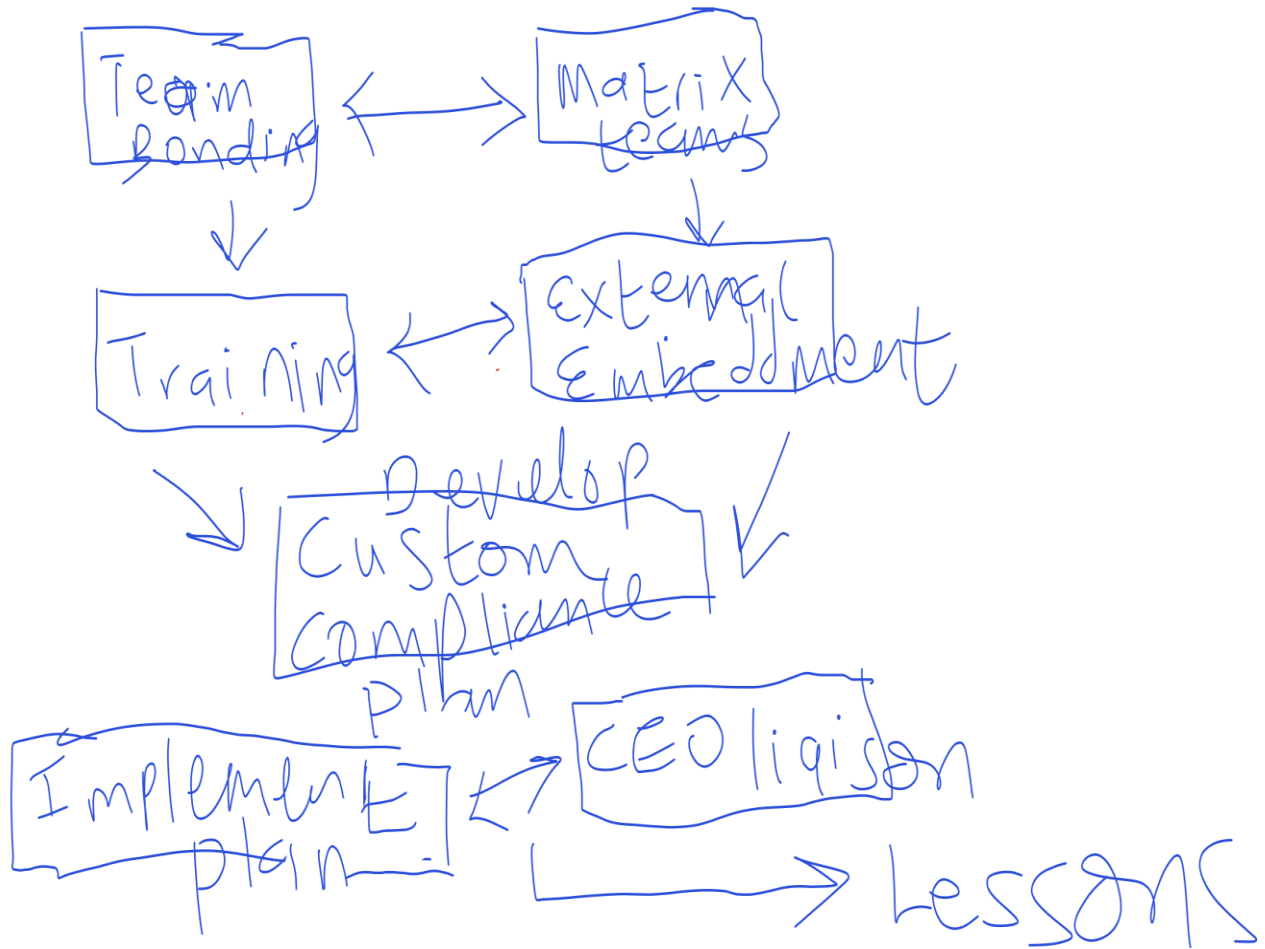


Figure 28: Visual representation of conceptual model developed by members of the Action Research Group as documented in my meeting notes



Figure 28: New Matrix Organizational Structure developed by members of the Action Research Group as documented in my meeting notes

Article	CAS Concept
Trochim, Cabrera, Milstein, Gallagher & Leischow (2006); Paley (2007); Bleakley (2010); Dattee & Barlow (2010); Martin & Kasperski (2010); Pelrine (2011); Daley (2012); Xiao, Zhao, Bishai & Peter (2013); Lichtenstein (2016)	Emergence
Leischow, Best & Trochim (2008); Ford (2009); Brannon, Kemper & Barry. (2009); Nesse, Kutcher, Wood & Rummans (2010); van Beurden, Kia & Hughes (2011); Kräkel (2017); Hoda & Murugesan (2016); Anzola, Barbrook-Johnson, & Cano (2017)	Self Organization
Forbes-Thompson et al. (2007); Cramp & Carson (2009); Ssengooba, McPake & Palmer (2012); Agyepong, Kodua, Adjei & Adam (2012); Strathausen, (2015); Jeffrey, Kate, Janet, Louise & Jessica (2018)	Non-Linearity & Unpredictability
Janssen (1998); Simon (2005); Rikvold (2006); Rammel, Wilfing & Stagl (2007); Vidgen & Wang (2009); Durrani, (2011); Sofitra, Takahashi & Morikawa (2015); Bale, Varga, & Foxon (2015).	Co-evolution
Tussey (2005); Galatzer-Levy, (2016); Battistella, & De Toni (2018); Zekai & Selman (2017); Khanyile (2017); Coetzee & Van Niekerk (2018)	Edge of Chaos
Cooksey (2001); Matutinović (2001); John & Scott (2009); Page (2011); Claudia & Mihaela (2013); Brook et al. (2014); Baldrian (2017)	Diversity
Wilson, Holt & Greenhalgh (2001); Plsek & Wilson (2001); Stroebel et al. (2005); do Amaral, Dias, & Lopes (2007); Windisch, Waiswa, Neuhann, Scheibe & de Savigny (2011); Young, Borland & Coghill (2012)	Interdependence
Alvine (2005); Smith, Minyard, Parker, Van Valkenburg, & Shoemaker (2007); Boustani et al. (2010); Dattee & Barlow (2010); Alvaro, Jackson & Kirk (2011); Proches & Bodhanya (2014); Peter, Fien, Fleur, & Demi (2018)	Multi Stakeholder Interactions
Paley (2007); Palmberg (2009); Balijepally, (2009) Desailharvey (2010); Keshavarz, Nutbeam, Rowling, Khavarpour (2010); Beverly & Stuart (2011); Moreira (2017); Lawrenz et al, (2018)	Feedback & Learning

Table 7: A Review of Agile Literature Depicting the Widespread Adoption of Complex Adaptive System (CAS) Perspective