RESPONSIBILITY IN CONSULTANCY

FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF EMERGENT SOCIAL INTERACTION

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1. Abstract

A question about what it may mean to be a ‘responsible’ consultant is the central point of this thesis.

Traditional perceptions of responsibility in consultancy as well as in other professional fields have been individually situated. The autonomous consultant, whose agency is entirely a subjective matter, has after due deliberation undertaken a task and set the course of action, and is in the end the one to be blamed or praised in light of success or failure. We have been either ‘responsible’ or ‘irresponsible’.

This idea of individual responsibility has recently been countered by a perspective of relational responsibility, which focuses attention on the intelligibility of human agency in terms of movement and dialogue. Activities take place within interrelationships and have meaning or purpose only within that context. ‘Responsibility’ here is not a static concept, but rather fluid, its meaning arising in social interaction. However, agency is not easily identifiable in this paradigm, which doesn’t seem to take into account power differentials and conflict.

My emerging research focus is coming to challenge those two traditions. Instead of seeing responsibility as something reified – something we can take, give or have; and then act upon – in different time and space, I have in the course of research come to see responsibility as essentially emergent patterning processes of social interaction. Intrinsic to social interaction is interdependence and tension – understood as power relations and conflict – both as social aspect and as conceptual aspects.

I argue that the consultant is constantly at risk of ‘sacrificing’ or ‘betraying’ interlocutors in the struggle to be morally responsible in a broader sense. Whenever we try to be responsible, we are potentially acting in an irresponsible way. We can’t always accommodate all conflicting responsibilities at the same time, so eventually we have to choose. Choice relates to how we incorporate attitudes of the particular and the generalized other to our self-consciousness. And choice reflects how we are being responsible.

Contents

2. Introduction

This thesis is the result of more than two years of reflexive work. The work has been reflexive in the sense that my understanding of what I find myself doing has changed considerably in the course of my research, and consequently what I find myself doing has also changed.

The thesis consists of three papers, written successively, with the recent addition of a synopsis. In the synopsis, the themes and methodology that emerged in the writing of the papers are identified and reflected on afresh.

The substance of each paper has emerged from narratives describing my daily practice as a consultant cooperating with theatre people to help organizations meet change. There has been a rich source of potential narratives to pick from, since the very nature of my work is social. Though many experiences have faded from memory, those I have chosen to focus on in the papers are special enough to have stayed with me. On initial review, the client interactions I describe seemed to be successful, but closer examination has brought new and unexpected aspects to light.

I will present myself, my thinking and my practice to the reader throughout the papers and in the synopsis. The methodology section was the last section to be completed in this thesis, because I didn't know my methodology in advance – it has emerged throughout the journey. However, I invite the reader to start their journey by reading the methodology section, as a source of guidance for engaging with the rest of the thesis.

The first paper is reflective of both my experiences and the influences that drove me two years ago. The paper was finished in April 2005.

In the second paper, I concentrated on making sense of what it means to be in charge as a consultant working simultaneously with structure and improvisation. The paper was finished in November 2005.

In Paper 3, exploring the notion of responsibility became key. The paper was finished in June 2006.

Finally, the synopsis will draw together the emergent themes and present fresh reflections upon those themes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Presenting my thesis as a piece of research, I need to substantiate development of the method and to test validity of the method by rendering visible the rationale behind its application, while positioning this emergent rationale in the context of other methodologies.

The kind of research I have embarked on is qualitative rather than quantitative. This section will not debate the relative merits of each approach; this has been examined since the middle of the last century, with the result that qualitative research within the social sciences is now widely acknowledged and is rapidly changing. Several strands of qualitative research have developed, and my own approach may more or less consciously be informed – at least partially – by many of these.

In the next section I will set out my own approach to research. In subsequent sections I aim to position this approach within the wider tradition of qualitative research by examining some of the traditions that either partially resonate with, or depart from, my own approach.

3.2. My approach to research

> Empirical research in a reflective mode starts from a sceptical approach to what appear at a superficial glance as unproblematic replicas of the way reality functions, while at the same time maintaining the belief that the study of suitable excerpts from this reality can provide an important basis for a generation of knowledge that opens rather than closes…
>
> (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p.5)

Following this quote from Alvesson and Sköldberg, I think that what has slowly come to characterize my approach is to look out for opportunities rather than trying to establish truths. My research material is constituted in my direct experience of social interaction, which is often sensed at an instinctive, even physical, level rather than an intellectual process.

When I started on the D-Man programme I had a vague idea that the journey I was embarking on would reflect my own evolving practice, and that I would engage with being challenged by the complex responsive processes of relating perspective (Stacey et al. 2000). I was aware that it was my own experience that should be the fuel for the thesis.

This means that the research will be 'biased', in its fullest sense. Taking our subjective experience seriously also offers insights into organizations. Can such biased research be considered valid? Questions about validity, generalizability and reliability I will address in the last paragraph of this section.

At an early stage of my participation in the D-Man programme, I proposed that the main building block in the methodology will be my narration of current events I'm involved in. This narration will develop together with my reflections on themes of particular importance emerging in my own experience of participation with others. 'Researching from a complex responsive processes perspective is itself complex responsive processes and my research method becomes reflection on ordinary everyday experience' (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p.22). The narratives and reflections will get its life from my interaction with client organizations as a consultant cooperating with actors. My emergent exploration seeks to understand the paradox of enabling constraints, of cooperation and conflict.

This proposal has indeed taken effect, deepening as the reflections have developed into *reflexivity* – that is, ongoing reflected changes in my own identity, thinking and practice as aspects of the evolving research. As a consequence of researching from a complex responsive processes perspective, with focus on the local interaction of my own experience, I have myself become an object of my own research (ibid.).

In the course of my research, through critical engagement with narratives from my professional life, my learning set and others have challenged me to sharpen my focus through numerous iterations. This iterative reflexive process is individual and social at the same time, 'insofar as the narrator is making explicit the way of thinking that he or she is reflecting in the construction of the story… Social reflexivity requires to explicitly locate his or her way of thinking of the story being told in the traditions of thought of his or her society, differentiating between these traditions in a critically aware manner' (ibid., p.23). The reflexive process is simultaneously individual and social, in the sense that reflective conversations with oneself and others do contribute to changing the way we think and

write about our experience. It follows from this that when we are researching oneself and one's own practice, it is not possible to suspend personal emotions and subjectivity. Research, then, is conducted in a way that is simultaneously detached and involved (ibid., p.9).

The rationale behind the method that has developed in my research is characterized by the assumption that knowledge emerges in the history of social interaction. Rather than being developed inside the individual, new knowledge evolves from within various relations among people (ibid.).

In Paper 1, I engaged in a process of exploring my own life history to determine how this shapes the way I reflect upon experience. Already at this stage I came to realize that knowledge emerges in the history of social interaction, as I was challenged by my supervisor and the learning set in my attempts to examine my life in a relatively detached way. Initially I seemed to be writing in a way that did not question my own argument or conclusions – something that I eventually achieved in response to others' challenges,

Paper 2 proved to be difficult and unsettling for me to write. In retrospect, I believe I was merely trying to make sense of my methodology as consultant. Just as I struggled with making sense of my narrative, I also struggled with making sense of the gesture/response between myself and my supervisor. In my sense-making process, I had trouble making explicit the way of thinking that permeated the construction of the story. For my reflections, I would step outside the experience, adopting a particular perspective; then, to engage with the experience of interaction, I would step in again. Perhaps I was trying to explain what I was doing by constructing systems models, which were clearly different from the experience of direct interaction.

In Paper 3 I experienced a breakthrough when reflections on the narrative were woven into the developing story. I suddenly noticed new aspects of my practice and simultaneously understood aspects of the theory of complex responsive processes of relating. This again influenced development of my current practice, which in turn affected the way I understood the theory.

3.3. Positioning my emergent methodological approach within the wider tradition of qualitative research

As participant in a research-by-degree programme, I am of course trying to follow the structure and methodology set out in advance. The structure appears to sustain the possibility of an emergent personal methodology – in other words, the constraints of the programme enable a unique methodology to emerge through the felt experience of processes of human interdependence, where individual and social are seen as aspects of the same phenomenon rather than being distinguished at different levels. The methodology as described by Stacey and Griffin (2005) is one in which individuals give serious consideration to their own experience of social interaction in order to understand the nature of those processes, in which their identities are under perpetual construction.

Positivism and post-positivism operates with an understanding of the natural and social world existing separately from human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In this paradigm, e.g. in case study research as described by the founders of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researcher aims to remain detached, as the research is supposed to be value-free. The scope of the research is detailed in advance. This paradigm is very removed from my own approach to research, where individual and social are understood as aspects of the same process and where the theme of the research is not given in advance, but – by emerging through iterative narratives of my own felt experience – will inevitably be 'biased' in its fullest sense.

At first glance, the participative paradigm comes closest to what I feel that I do. There are many strands of participative inquiry. Action research, which I seek to explore in greater depth here, is best seen as an emergent, evolutionary and educational process of engaging with self, persons and communities, which needs to be sustained for a significant period of time. Action research is a practice for emergence of knowing and knowledge, but based in a rather different form from traditional academic research. It has different purposes; is based in different relationships; and has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) broadly define it as:

> …a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical

> knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview… It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.
>
> (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.1)

The participative/social notion, the notion of co-creation of theory and practice, are aspects of this approach that I can directly refer to my own methodology.

However, there are crucial points at which I have come to disagree with Reason and Bradbury. They describe the participative worldview as a whole consisting of interacting parts; they speak of individual and social as though these can be understood at different levels; they speak of ethics as a process of thought before action, reflecting an ideology that is inherent in the methodology and will be unfolded in the process; and, finally, they speak about reflexivity as essentially an individualist activity.

Two years ago, I would not have disagreed with any of their arguments; indeed, I would have seen my practice as reflective of their thinking.

However, I now see my methodology as being characterized by its emergent nature. It is reflexive in the understanding that my sense of self and other, and my practice – which relate to each other as aspects of the same process: as silent and public conversations, as human interdependence – influence who I am and what I do in unpredictable ways. I focus on my own bodily experience, which can hardly be separated from the critical exploration because it is through this written exploration that my experience is brought to the attention of myself and my readers. My method therefore does not separate action from research, nor theory from practice.

3.4. Validity – justification

Substantiation of a research approach normally involves validation of the way one has chosen to move forward. In this case I had some concerns regarding the ultimate validity of my research. Of course there can be no objective validity, in that the exploration is a subjective reflection on personal experience. But as I now reflect on how the research

material has emerged through iterations of silent and public negotiations with my community and with my supervisor and learning set, and when I reflect on the interlinked aspect of this movement of thought, I am less doubtful. The empirical seeds of this thesis are planted and harvested in a reflexive journey, which could not have been planned in advance. It presents accounts of ordinary experience from daily practice in organizations, trimmed with real emotions, such as shame, uncertainty and anxiety on the part of the researcher.

Why should the researcher expose his own vulnerability and mistakes if not with the purpose of dialectical feedback on intermediate processes of his movement of thought?

4. Paper 1 – April 2005

4.1. Being a consultant in the Dacapo Theatre

The Dacapo Theatre combines theatre with consultancy to facilitate change in organizations. I have been a consultant with them for more than four years, in which time our practice has evolved along with the changing needs of our clients and our own need to understand our practice.

Our clients come from organizations across both public and private sectors. We mostly help them handle issues around change and communicative interaction. We work with any size group, from entire organizations to selected staff or departments; sometimes there are ten participants, other times perhaps thousands. We usually work with clients for half a day or a whole day – seldom more – and are rarely employed in long-term contracts.

Our main source of inspiration within the theatre practice has been Augusto Boal, who invented forum theatre to empower oppressed people in Brazil (Boal, 2000). This form of theatre involves audience participation.

In my early days of consultancy, following Boal's tradition, the audience would be introduced to the 'joker' in a forum play – staged hundreds of times – about change and delegation of responsibility. The notion of self-managing teams is introduced in the organization (an industrial set-up) – and we follow three different approaches to this change within the work team, a fourth approach from the middle manager, and a fifth approach from the rest of the organization. The joker works with three actors, who take various roles in the play. This play lasts one hour; then the forum theatre starts, and lasts for two hours.

The pre-scripted play is enacted to a critical point, and then the joker invites the audience to comment on what they observed. Depending on who the audience members are, all of the characters in the play are identified with, some in a more oppressive role than others. So the audience members are now free to enact their proposal as to what should happen next – who should take action to move the story along in a new direction or maybe in a repetitive manner. A member of the audience is invited to try out their own proposals if the

joker thinks they are motivated for that. Otherwise they can tell the actor what to say in the situation and he will meet appropriate resistance/challenge from his co-actors.

Today, my work with forum theatre and consultancy has developed considerably. We still use plays with a predetermined story. But today the scripts are very often tailor-made to the organization we are working for. Further, rather than hour-long, well-rehearsed plays, we tend to have just 10 minutes of dramatic outlines to present the problems and focus on the dilemmas. Developing these in partnership with the clients helps us understand what is to be the focus of the day. But at the same time we cannot know or control, through any pre-designed mental schemas, what kind of reactions and proposals will come from the audience. This research and preparation is part of the consultancy in that the change process starts at the very first meeting. We meet with key players from the client organization to help them clarify the real questions they want to investigate and initiate a change process around.

As a consultant, I am responsible for this contact with the client organization and the process. Nevertheless the cross-disciplinary cooperation between consultant and actors is the key feature of our work. It simultaneously constrains and enables our work with the clients. The theatre opens a world of opportunities and different perspectives for discussion, and much of the audience communication goes through the consultant. Thus the ongoing negotiating relationship between the theatre/actors and the consultancy/consultant is right at the core of our developing practice.

This mixture of theatre and consultancy has in many surprising ways opened a world of opportunities, challenges and new constraints for me in helping client organizations meet change.

4.2. The journey until recently: emergent themes

My current practice, has, in retrospect, been influenced by some significant personal, social and professional shifts that have undoubtedly informed the way I think and work. In my search for meaning I have narrated many of these shifts in former drafts to this paper. Through kind and critical conversation and feedback within my learning set and with my supervisor, one major theme of interest is coming into focus: my desire, as both manager

and consultant, to help other people change and learn – by being in charge without being in control.

My journey starts with a transformative encounter with a teacher in public school who wasn't in control, but in charge. Later, my professional life moved through several disciplines, from management, to career counselling, to consulting. In each of them I found myself at odds with the ruling ethos. In retrospect I can see that in each situation I was involved in struggles over very similar issues. Broadly, these issues are to do with 'the expert' trying to control the worker or client, in order to determine the outcome of the engagement. So emerged my interest in developing a methodology of theatre and consultancy that does not try to control the outcomes.

The notion of learning is of particular importance to this paper. I see learning partly as an increasing ability to cope with personal, organizational and professional change and partly as being identical to change. My history with change and learning also follows a movement from a cognitivist to a constructivist – and, more recently, to a complex responsive processes – perspective of learning. Without excluding or preferring any of these approaches, I would like to explore the differences between them.

I will now trace this theme throughout my professional life, from the perspective of a participative and critical enquiry, to capture the spirit of my participation at each specific point in history. I will then critically reflect on the implicit 'there-and-then', taken-for-granted, world views.

4.2.1. Losing my innocence – a transformation

The first major shift in my approach to the world happened when I suddenly got serious about my own intellectual development. I stumbled upon a new Danish teacher – Miss Rasmussen. I used to be a very disruptive troublemaker in both primary and secondary school. I challenged teachers and pupils alike in a very counterproductive way. She didn't take my confrontational behaviour in the usual way, which was to see my invitation to conflict as a personal threat as well as a threat to authority in general. Instead, she got angry – but not in the usual personal authoritarian way: not for my offence to her, but for my offence against myself. It is very difficult in essence to describe what she did and how I made sense of it. But as I remember it, she asked me very worriedly to make sense of

what I was doing. She gently made me look into the mirror and asked me what I saw. I didn't like what I saw. I was worried too. Then she invited me to explore my personal and intellectual potential. A new world opened to me: without knowing exactly where to go, I felt a strong urge to go in a new direction.

4.2.1.1. Reflections on the transformation

What Miss Rasmussen did has stayed with me. I haven't until now thought of the incident as important. Looking back upon it now, it seems to have had a major impact on my life and the way I think today. As I reflect on the change and learning that she helped me encounter, I can see that she hoped to help me change, knowing that the current situation was destructive. But she wasn't prescribing what should replace my destructiveness. Had she done so, she would have taken a different approach, and I'm sure the outcome would have been quite different. I now see that she was improvising as a teacher and counsellor! She was in charge, but not in control.

I went to University to study classical philology, and married a law student in my second year. In my third year, my first child was born and I started to work part-time with the Royal Danish Mail Service as a mail sorter, since I had to provide for a living. I soon became aware of a fundamental conflict between my different roles and interests – as student, father, husband and mail service worker. This eventually led me to accept a position as a manager in the Mail Service and drop out of my studies.

4.2.2. Public administration

I started my career as a manager in the Royal Danish Mail Service, which in those days was rather tayloristic (Taylor, 1911) in its approach to organizational development and change.

I remember struggling with a very old-fashioned hierarchical and authoritarian management culture, along with the demands of an almost scientifically detailed documentation of the production at all levels. Perhaps my own motivation for being a manager was my main struggle. As I recall it, I was attracted by power and prestige to a management position, unconsciously substituting one set of ambitions (University studies) with another (managerial work). I was flattered that the mail service wanted to invest in my training as a manager. Another reason for the job's appeal was that I had experienced poor

management and I wanted to make a difference in the human interaction with the staff. I wanted to encourage employees' participation in decision-making and development; I didn't think that individuals liked to be pushed around like parts of machinery. But there was no room in the organization for individual choice – not even for the individual manager. The overall management set the rules and thereby had some kind[1] of autonomous choice; but neither staff nor individual managers were seen as human beings with choices in their own right, only as rule-obeying parts making up the whole organization.

4.2.2.1. Taylor

Frederick Winslow Taylor defined the double-edged problem with labour as manifested in its possession and control of knowledge about the methods of production and its capacity to exercise discretion in its exertion of work effort. To deal with this problem for the benefit of the owners, he developed his theory of scientific management. Skilled workers and foremen, rather than the owners, determined the organization and the pace of production. The owners had to depend on these employees to organize production in what they hoped was the most efficient manner. The ability to use knowledge as a source of power represented the first unique capacity of labour that scientific management targeted for attack. The second labour problem to be confronted:

> The problem before the management, then, may be briefly said to be that of obtaining the best initiative of every workman…..the workers believe it to be directly against their interests to give their employers their best initiative, and that instead of working hard to do the largest possible amount of work and best quality of work for their employers, they deliberately work as slowly as they dare while at the same time trying to make those over them believe that they are working fast.
>
> (Taylor, 1911, p.13-4)

Here Taylor is referring to what he called 'soldiering' by workers – that is, pretending to work while in reality loafing away. Taylor's challenge was to reduce labour to an object in the production process. When labour takes on the character of an object, it is more open to manipulation. The division of labour with the assignment of workers to specialized tasks was at the core of scientific management. Taylor's 'science' aimed to reduce the uncertainties associated with humans taking part in production, which again is

[1] The management was dependent on their political owners – who again were dependent on their voters…

accomplished by limiting the discretion and variability in human action through the application of engineering principles.

4.2.2.2. Critical reflections on Taylor

Taylor's thinking represents an extremely powerful way of controlling and managing the clear-cut objectives of the organization and the tasks laid out to achieve them – all based on rules. Keeping individuals within the perimeter of measurement and incentives for individual performance can have a strong impact when demand for the product is high, as with the Royal Danish Mail Service. The approach serves well, until conditions of uncertainty occur and the manager must make new rules to turn things around slowly. The manager takes an objective view of the organization as parts adding up to a whole, and is concerned with the causal rules that secure the maximum output. We are talking about a mechanistic, 'if–then' rationalist causality, which leaves no free choice with the individual, only with the top manager. This would not hold for long nowadays, when we think of creativity and innovation as crucial in the free market – requiring novelty and unpredictability that are stifled by a production process that is pre-planned, controlled and designed by the manager.

I tend to agree with Douglas Griffin (2002) in his argument about novelty and unpredictability:

> Most people nowadays seem to think that it is necessary to manage novelty by first formulating values and simple rules that create the 'right conditions' in which people will act to produce novel outcomes. However, since novelty is unpredictable, it is impossible to specify in advance any rules, simple or complicated, that will lead to the kind of future novelty anyone may have decided upon in advance.
>
> (Griffin, 2002, p. 213)

4.2.2.3. Critical reflections on my own approach at that time

Looking back, I can see the contradiction in my assuming that individuals were rational and had autonomous choice, while accepting that they were parts of a pre-designed system. I didn't realize how much my urge to encourage employees' participation in decision-making and development ran counter to the prevalent management ethos of the manager being in control.

My desire to help people develop in their career failed in the sense that I didn't recognize my own role in the system, as a manager. Further, in trying to give people a voice, I went against my own purpose as a manager and challenged the whole system. While this may have been a new approach to management in this context, I came under attack from the whole management team. I was thought of as a rebel and a trouble-maker and was frozen out of business.

Baffled by the power figurations I had provoked and become trapped within, I decided to back out. I gave up being a manager.

4.2.3. Career counselling and consultancy

The next step on my journey was career counselling. I struggled with the typical approach at that time, which was for the counsellor to decide what would be useful to the client and present them with limited options, effectively robbing the client of a chance to explore the unknown and 'choose'. Here, as in management, the counsellor tries to remain in control of the process. I felt that in interaction with the client, the counsellor should also be open to changing themselves and their working models. In examining this counselling step of the journey, I draw on the works of Argyris (1990, 1991) and Boutinet (1993).

I was granted a position as a career counsellor in a social employment department in a municipality. Over the next eight years, this introduced me to a new world of opportunities and different job positions within that professional field.

This counselling was within the employment sector, focused on career counselling. Like many counsellors in Denmark at that time, especially within that specific field, my training was primarily through 'learning by doing'. Of course, like others, I had some basic training, focused on the *outcome* of the counselling process rather than on the process itself. As a response to this training and the expectations of the 'system', I became increasingly preoccupied with the notion of helping people change and develop – within a framework that ultimately left them with sole responsibility for their own problem-solving and choices. Over those eight years I moved from being a career counsellor to developing training for careers counselling and working as a consultant for client organizations.

In my practice, I set out to develop my own understanding of counselling. What I found both challenging and rewarding was the experience of entering into a problem-solving conversation with another person, rather than being an expert who is supposed to already have the solutions to problems. When I didn't succeed, when I was the one presenting the solutions to be decided upon, the challenge was to be able to question and adjust my own mental models. I didn't always take up this challenge, but over time I developed an understanding of myself as an improvisational counsellor and consultant, an expert in the areas of process, communication and language, but not in the life of the client.

For me counselling wasn't a relationship of domination, but a participatory relationship in which both client and counsellor contributed to a common goal: informing the client's choices. I felt that the counselling process should be a free exchange of information and ideas; solutions to the individual's problems should be invented uniquely each time, rather than being selected and applied from a pre-existing set of solutions or techniques.

I will now describe the ethos that dominated the field at that time, and how I regarded it. I will then re-examine my 'there-and-then' critique from the perspective of my current position.

4.2.3.1. The zeitgeist and my differences with it…

Here, I will explore how career counselling was conducted at that time. I will argue that the dominant approach proceeding was for the counsellor to decide what information the client might find useful, presenting them with limited option that effectively robbed the client of a chance to explore the unknown and 'choose'. I will argue that the counsellor remains in control of this process, and that it would be preferable for them to be equally open to changing themselves and their working models, in their interaction with the client.

During my first years in counselling I came to realize (from client expectations) that the prevailing attitude towards counselling and guidance in the professional career-counselling community at that time was that the counsellor should provide the space, but that the act of choosing should lie with the help-seeker. In practice, I saw something quite contrary to this expressed attitude. Most career counselling seemed to be based on providing the help-seekers with limited information or advice to inform their decisions and choices.

It would be useful here to make a distinction between choice and decision. At that time I saw choices as individual acts: the human, with autonomous free will, makes a choice and takes full responsibility for the consequences. Decisions, on the other hand, I saw as enfolded in the directions offered by the 'experts'. What was going on in the counselling was decision-making, not existential and autonomous choosing. The decision-making was based on the facts and possibilities presented by the counsellor to the help-seeker, rather than on authenticity, responsibility, courage and freedom to act, which from my point of view should characterize the human action domain. Further, there was minimal focus on process in the counselling.

To shed light on the difference in the expressed attitude of the career counsellor and what was really going on, I found Argyris (1991, p.127-38) useful. He distinguishes between theory of action and 'theories-in-use', the former meaning that the expert develops a theory of action: a set of rules that individuals use to design and implement their own behaviour as well as to understand the behaviour of others. The theory of action is often so widely accepted that people don't even realize they are using it. However, people seldom act according to their theories of action but according to their theory-in-use. Argyris argues that most theories-in-use rest on the same set of governing values:

- to remain in unilateral control
- to maximize winning and minimize losing
- to suppress negative feelings
- to be as rational as possible.

The purpose of all these values is to avoid embarrassment or threat, feeling vulnerable or incompetent. In Argyris's view this implies defensive reasoning, which in turn blocks learning.

Argyris's argument resonated very much with my thinking at that time. I saw counsellors – including myself – assuming that help-seekers needed assistance with making autonomous choices – which is the espoused theory of action. However, in practice the counsellors were trapped by their urge to stay in control of the situation and avoid conflicts by offering their rational, 'expert' knowledge for the help-seeker to decide upon. In effect, since they actually direct the client by deciding what knowledge is required, this is theory-in-use – forcing the client to make a decision based on the limited information that has been presented to him.

Argyris (1990) argues that the more skilled people are in designing certain actions, the greater the risk that they will not question what they are. This gives rise to the need for 'double-loop learning', in which people learn not only to adjust actions in the light of their consequences (as in 'single-loop learning'), but also to question and adjust the mental models that were used to design those actions in the first place.

I set out with the ambition to influence and change this contradictory discourse from within by developing a new concept for career counselling and for the training of career counsellors. I drew on Argyris (1990, 1991) and Boutinet (1993). This development took place in cooperation with my colleagues at RACU (The Regional Centre for Analyzing Training Activities in Vejle County), Jesper Kruse and Lisbeth Roepstorff, who had been researchers with RACU for several years. We developed a basic philosophy for counselling and training as we progressed with the project; our philosophy was that counsellors should be able to 'take their own medicine' by identifying, questioning and adjusting the mental models behind their own actions, setting new goals for their practice, and actually teaching the clients – in the counselling process – to do the same thing, with the client's whole life as the primary area of focus (Have, Kruse & Roepstorff, 1995).

In this process the work of Jean-Pierre Boutinet (1993) was a major source of inspiration with his very systematic project thinking. He speaks about life as an ongoing project, with adolescent, adult and senior phases. In analysing the adult's life, he speaks about the professional, the social and the personal project – we can have projects in these three areas simultaneously – with each project being developed in two main stages: conceptualisation and realisation.

The driving force in the project is the motivation for change – change being understood as development away from an unsatisfactory situation (e.g. unemployment) towards a desired situation. Boutinet speaks about motivation as an ability to set goals and justify these according to sensitive motives. I was very preoccupied with the link between sensitive motives and goals, in that I found that many help-seekers proposed unrealistic goals and were unable to connect these with their motives. I considered it imperative for help-seekers in the counselling process to learn to question this link between goals and motives, in order to have realistic and coherent projects.

Many of the help-seekers, and some of the counsellors, I set out to help change and develop actually did so. But I often experienced a simultaneous motivation for change and resistance to it.

Most help-seekers were dissatisfied with their current situation and wished to escape from it – thus having both a motive and a goal, which was useful to build on in the counselling process. But where to go, and why? In my view of career counselling, this was the essential question, which met with a lot of resistance. I worked hard through the tension between 'motivation away from' and 'motivation towards'. Once we had found real coherence between goals and motives, we could plan the project meticulously with objectives, tasks and a time schedule.

Many of the counsellors I encountered were embroiled in the there-and-then 'theories-in-use', with the focus on being in control. They were controlling the outcome of the counselling process, while at the same time thinking that the help-seekers had autonomous choice. In training, counsellors were required to question their own mental models – hence their resistance or defensiveness towards change. Yet they really believed their espoused theories of action, that the act of choosing should lie with their clients – hence their motivation for change. So a major motivational theme for these counsellors became to change their own practice. By doing this they were at the same time unconsciously adhering to a process that undermined the power relations in the counselling community. They were facing an ideological conflict to which the answer for some people became to defensively withdraw and do business as usual, while for others the result was a fundamental change of organizational setting; for a very few, it resulted in a change of power relations and practice from within. It was difficult in all three cases to explain what had really happened.

4.2.3.2. A critical reflection on eight years of counselling and consultancy

At that time, my critique of the there-and-then zeitgeist in the career-counselling community made sense to me, as did the career-counselling model that I developed.

From my current viewpoint I would say that Argyris and Boutinet operate on the individual level, speaking about individual learning and development being based on changes in mental models. The basic assumption of my work and their theoretical approach was that an individual's action is affected by the objectives, plans and tasks that they choose

according to their mental model: learning is the rational choice to change the mental model, and so the action.

Following Argyris and Boutinet, I assumed that individuals can learn in isolation. The individual and the social existed side by side – but in different times and spaces, thus allowing them to be treated separately, eliminating any inherent paradoxes. In my current definition of paradox, one cannot choose between two opposing ideas, since neither can be eliminated or resolved. At that time, I saw contradiction, tensions and dilemmas as resolvable, while also overlooking the significance of power relations. I also tended to ignore the fact that the future is unpredictable, by urging people to set goals and objectives and then meticulously plan how to reach them. I was actually suggesting that the future can be controlled.

4.2.4. From counselling to theatre

In the following I will describe the transition from counselling to theatre. What triggered this shift of arena? What methodology was used in my new professional environment? What were my struggles? Is forum theatre a new way of staying in control?

Toward the end of my career counselling, some of these questions started to rumble in my head in a very vague sort of a way. I had been using some forum theatre techniques (Boal, 1995 and Byreus, 1990) in my consultancy and thought that perhaps here was the key to a shift in my consultancy. I started to look around for companies working with forum theatre. I wasn't sure what I was looking for – yet with hindsight, I think I sought a professional context that viewed the individual and the social not as separate, but as two parts of the same process. This perspective, however, was not apparent to me at that time: I simply sought an arena to explore what happened in the communicative relations between people. When eventually I stumbled over the Dacapo Theatre, they were looking for a consultant. I applied for the position, and got it.

I remember struggling with my role as primarily a joker and secondly a consultant. I was a novice working with experienced forum actors; the company appeared (on the surface, at least) to have a fixed view on how a joker and an actor should behave, which paradoxically both constrained and enabled my development as a joker, in that I had to learn the basic rules of the game before I could start improvising and breaking them!

What I experienced was that the actors had a pattern of reaction – opposition and resistance – built into their characters and relations, which was very hard to break unless the audience's proposals followed certain tracks. Somehow the actors had a ready-prepared recipe to solve specific problems, dilemmas or tensions. The joker too, as process facilitator, had a fixed schedule of directions for the forum work. This framework was somehow a very safe platform from which to learn a new way of working as a consultant. Yet the complex web of rules of engagement – one web building upon another web of rules – could be frustrating. At first, I found forum theatre to be both a straitjacket and a development platform.

4.2.5. Boal and forum theatre

Forum theatre was invented by the Brazilian, Augusto Boal (Boal, 2000). His work at the Arena Theatre led to his experimentation with new forms of theatre that would have an extraordinary impact. Traditionally, audiences had been invited to discuss a play at the end of the performance. In so doing, Boal believed that they remained observers and 'reactors' to what had already taken place before them. In the 1960s he began inviting audience members to stop the performance and suggest different actions for the actors, who would then carry out the audience suggestions; as he said, 'the audience members gave the ideas – but we kept the power'. But in a now-legendary development, on one occasion a woman in the audience – irritated that the actor could not understand her suggestion – came onto the stage and demonstrated what she meant. *For Boal this was the birth of the 'spect-actor' and his theatre was transformed.* He began inviting audience members with suggestions for change onto the stage to carry out their ideas. In so doing, he discovered that through this participation the audience members became empowered not only to imagine change but also to actually practice that change, reflect collectively on the suggestion, and thereby become empowered to generate social action.

Boal introduced the joker as a kind of facilitator, whose role was to intervene and make space for the audience members to involve themselves in the play, engaging them in a dialogue about what they saw happen on the stage, .

Boal's forum theatre is called 'Theatre of the Oppressed', suggesting a drama between victim and oppressor – a classic conflict, with the more powerful twisting the less powerful. Boal's political intent was that theatre should empower the less powerful.

4.2.5.1 Reflections on the Dacapo approach with forum theatre four years ago

There are similarities, but also differences, between Boal's theatre and the Dacapo approach. Rather than only taking the perspective of the oppressed party, we also invited the audience to investigate the potential for shifting power configurations and explore different perspectives when playing the main character.

We were rarely surprised by what emerged on stage, which was already scripted when creating the character and designing the situation. In a sense this is similar to Boal's typical set-up, with oppressor and oppressed viewed from a systems thinking approach. We invited the audience to solve the contradictions, tensions and dilemmas portrayed, believing that these could be resolved. Perhaps what took place among the audience was single-loop learning (Argyris 1990), since we invited them to help solve problems in the fictitious set-up by drawing on their own experience and inspiring each other. We discover the problem, the cause is disclosed, a choice of corrective action is made, and action is taken. We ask what happened here. Maybe a slight change is discovered. Another round of discovery, disclosure and choice of action is taken. The audience members are discovering the consequences of their actions, and then in the next round adjusting their behaviour according to the discovery.

All this was taking place whether the proposals of the audience members were played through the actor or by the audience members. In retrospect I wonder if it was the same kind of learning that took place between the joker and the actors in the event and afterwards evaluating an event. What were the implications for helping the members of the client organization change and learn when we as facilitators had a fixed agenda of the way things would develop? What were the implications of referring to a specific set of evaluation criteria by which we chose to adjust our behaviour?

4.2.5.2. Boal and power

The notion of power is central to forum theatre. I will explore Boal's notion of power and then compare it to my own.

In the first residential, we discussed the difference between forum theatre and psychodrama. Boal describes sociodrama as the opposite of psychodrama. While psychodrama focuses on healing the individual, sociodrama focuses on improving conditions for the general audience; and forum theatre is intended to empower the audience. Also central to the effects of forum theatre is the 'neutral' role of the joker as a kind of midwife.

I question the realism of Boal's view of power relations between the joker and the audience. If the joker and the actors have intentions and certain pre-designed patterns of reactions to the proposals of the audience, then in effect they hold the power. There were similarities in Boal's and my understanding of power, since we saw this as residing with an individual or an institution. I now see power more as a dynamic inherent in the relation between people, which constantly shifts as conversation changes between legitimate themes and shadow themes (Stacey, 2003b).

4.2.6. What are the practical implications of working with theatre in my current consultancy?

I and the Dacapo Theatre team have based much of our consultancy practice around forum theatre. What were the key notions in this development, and how do I understand, reflect upon and question my current practice?

Of course, this development has been influenced by the changing needs of our clients and our own need to understand our practice in new ways. I'm also curious to explore to what extent our practice with forum theatre and consultancy, and the cooperation between actors and consultant, have simultaneously constrained and enabled our development (change and learning), and perhaps continues to do so.

Over the last three years our practice has undergone new leaps of development and change, whenever one of my actor colleagues or I dared do something unexpected. In doing this we have been challenging the accepted rules of engagement within forum theatre, both internally and with the client. A narrative example follows.

4.2.7. A story from real life, part one

We went to Copenhagen for a session with another client. We were supposed to have dinner with the CEO of the Institute for The Daffodil Addicts (ITDA) in Denmark before participating in their extraordinary joint council meeting. A week earlier we had had a meeting with three of their representatives in preparation for an event for the whole institute involving 150 employees. At that meeting we had learned that the institute was facing a very difficult situation. The CEO should have participated in that meeting, but called to say that he couldn't be there. The three who did attend were a middle manager and two shop stewards – one representing the teaching staff, the other representing the academic staff. They had recently cut down on staff. Now they were expected to enter a process of transformation, from being a service provider of education to being a knowledge-based consultancy, in order to adjust to the demands of the market and to keep professional resources within the organization.

They experienced a lot of resistance towards this change in the organization. I invited them to talk about what was at stake. They told us about a lot of situations that indicated significant communication problems – starting from the very top. They described a typical joint council meeting, where the CEO mainly communicates with the shop stewards to explain and defend decisions that have already been taken, while the middle managers keep silent. I felt that here we were touching upon the core of the organization's problems. Then I asked if it would make sense for us to participate in a joint council meeting, to give that vital part of the organization the opportunity to start talking about important matters in a novel way.

One of my actors, Tom, broke in and thought that he was supporting my suggestion when adding, 'The purpose of coming to this joint councils meeting is to give the Dacapo Theatre the opportunity to research more information and detail, to make us better equipped to do the event.' I really took him (and myself) by surprise by immediately responding, 'No I disagree, Tom! What I'm suggesting is actually to get into the heart of the organization to start a movement before the event.' He obviously didn't realize what I was saying and replied, 'No Claus – it actually serves to make us better equipped for the event.' Then I cut through as the one responsible for the process and explained for the third time what was on my mind – at the same time feeling some odd mixed emotions inside me.

4.2.7.1. Reflections on the narrative

I felt a breakthrough in my consultancy. The clients said, 'Yes, of course this makes sense to us, but we have to ask the CEO'. I had him on the phone the day after the meeting, and he was very keen to conduct an extraordinary joint council meeting. Something novel had surprised me in the relation with the client, and new insights had also come to them. I had not pre-planned in any detail how to conduct this meeting, except an agreement with the client and actors that this meeting – as such meetings usually did – should inspire us to write a play for the event to set the focus of the day. I guess that my mixed emotions had to do with my own revelation, and Tom's failure to see what had actually happened – seeing what he usually sees, and reacting to my not following the 'rules'. This suggests a power battle between Tom and me, which both constrained and enabled the movement in the situation. Without this power struggle, I'm not sure I would have insisted on my new way of seeing consultancy. It occurred to me that this kind of meeting with the client not only benefited the planning of the Dacapo performance, but was itself a form of consultancy, creating movement in the present among everybody in the room.

After the meeting we had extensive discussions within the team about what we were actually doing with our clients and how we understood our own cooperative approach – making sense of what had happened in the meeting. We were slowly realising that simultaneous improvisation among ourselves and our clients would add a new aspect to our practice. The conflict had opened a window to a new way of understanding our work, with a new practice emerging from an exploration of the conflict between actor and consultant.

4.2.7.2. Improvisation

When actors and consultants in the Dacapo Theatre discuss what is meant by improvisation in our line of theatre and consultancy work, our definitions vary. But I think that we agree on a basic definition of improvisation not as acting but *re-acting.* For the actors this differs from pre-scripted well-rehearsed plays; for the consultant it differs from having a set of detailed directions on where to lead the process. Instead, we act into the unknown, responding spontaneously to whatever gestures we meet, letting go of our fear of failing and abandoning our presumption that we can be in control; Johnstone (1981) has heavily influenced the Danish theatre approach with his emphasis on being simple and direct, rather than clever.

In practice we don't always succeed in letting go. It could be the consultant or one of the actors playing safe, or the whole ensemble – sticking to the basic rules of forum theatre, which aims to retain control. I have come to see improvisation as simultaneously having and lacking a schema or intention; both knowing and not knowing – having a direction and a framework to work within, yet allowing the spontaneous and unpredictable to happen. What are the implications of the audience's willingness to engage in improvising, when we alone are trying to stay in control? What happens if we stay in the paradoxical situation of being in control and out of control simultaneously?

4.2.7.3. A story from real life, part two

Building on the earlier narrative, this account is based on a real situation where I think we as ensemble came close to being in control and out of control at the same time. What happened in the ensemble improvisation, and how did this affect the clients?

The CEO of ITDA invites us to enter his office. So we find ourselves sitting in there – eating dinner – listening to him reflecting on where his organization is today and what kind of challenges they are facing. He's obviously aware of some of the challenges and is struggling to define his role. He explains that there has been a fine level of cooperation in the joint council in his two years of leadership, but the real decisions are taken outside of this forum and conversations in the council are stuck in a repetitive pattern. I make a deal with him that our participation in the joint council meeting should be seen as a way of changing the conversation in whatever direction it may take, as long as they start talking about an issue that makes sense to them.

At the meeting we had a round of presentations. Everyone was anxious about what would happen. I explained that I had no advance blueprint for the intervention I would choose. The CEO started talking about a crucial issue: the way the downsizing of the organization had been handled. He set out to justify his view of the process; the shop stewards criticized it from their perspective; and he responded by again seeking to justify it from his standpoint. This went on for some time, with the middle managers saying nothing. We were witnessing a linear communication: nobody was really responding to each other's gestures, as though they had become unaware of our presence. I intervened and split them into three groups – the shop stewards, the middle managers and the two top managers – to talk about how they felt the communication was flowing. How did they see their own contribution, and how did they see the contribution made by the other groups? Our three

actors split to join each of the groups. After talking in the groups for 15 minutes, I called a stop and asked each actor to represent the group they had joined and to start making sense of what they had heard, each with their own perspective in mind – that is, they were actually playing/improvising the perspectives – reacting to each other's gestures. After a while I stopped the actors and told the joint council to continue their meeting.

They were suddenly very curious towards each other and the conversation had totally changed. We now experienced 12 people, who had been very stuck in their communication, improvising/learning/changing beautifully right in front of us. What had happened?

4.2.7.4. Reflections on the narrative

This was not forum theatre, which would have been to enact a script in a controlled way. Here, we did something quite different. I think we were riding on the waves of the conflict between Tom and myself. We no longer needed to play it safe or know in advance how the process would work, as we would have done with forum theatre. I am beginning to think that conflict and power struggles between actors and consultant actually fuel the emergence of a new practice, as improvisation in the work with our clients. Nobody in the room knew in advance what kind of intervention and direction the process would take. I knew that I would make an intervention, because their communication was stuck. But I didn't know how I would do it until I could respond to the living gestures of the council. I'm sure the actors were surprised, first when joining the groups and then when asked to make sense of what they had heard. Here the actors surprised me and each other by actually playing the different perspectives, reacting to each other instead of just acting. The dynamics of improvisation reached the twelve people of the council – enabling them to start improvising themselves outside of their normal patterns of communication.

4.2.8. Emerging enquiry

In this paper I have touched on different theoretical approaches in following the gradual development of my own understanding of change and learning. This started with the rationalist (Taylor, 1911), focusing on the manager as the designer of change and development; then the cognitivist (Argyris, 1990, 1991) perspective of learning, with a sender–receiver communication model implying the possibility of 'single-loop and double-loop learning' based on mental models in individual heads. I then moved to the

constructivist perspective, in which individual minds actively select or enact their visions (Boutinet, 1993); then another systems approach with forum theatre (Boal, 2000), focusing on rules and control; and finally, an improvisational approach (Johnstone, 1981), which aims to relinquish control and re-act instead of acting.

Each way of understanding change has made sense to me at different times and in different roles. Through the doctoral programme I am now acquainted with a complex responsive processes perspective of change, where change is understood as the emerging shifts in the patterning of human communicative interaction and power relating and thereby is the emerging transformation of inseparable individual and collective identities (Stacey, 2003a). This way of thinking seems to resonate well with the improvisational approach that Johnstone (1981) advocates.

However, I realize that habitual ways of thinking and acting don't change unless properly challenged. The perspective of complex responsive processes of relating is starting to reshape my usual approach. I am beginning to shift the focus of research from my methodology as a consultant to the driving factors behind my thinking and actions, and how these can change.

I used to see myself as the one 'in charge' of different processes with clients and actors, and felt comfortable and confident when I was pulling the reins. This is clearly still a deeply rooted tendency. However, this is being challenged by a view of emergence and self-organization – and an improvisational approach. I sense an inclination to let go of some of my controlling attitude and replace it with something else – but with what?

In writing up the paper, I notice that the 'systems' I have worked with sought to establish predictability and control. Lately with the Dacapo Theatre I have experienced a shift toward thinking in terms of emergence and improvisation (Larsen 2005, Friis 2005). I am now examining this shift to see how the new approach can be integrated into my work with clients and actors. Yet I sense some resistance to leap straight into this without reflecting more on what it would mean to work improvisationally while also being in charge of the process.

So the question I think I may pursue in Paper 2 then relates to how my own current approach to work, based on forum theatre, understood as a kind of systems thinking and

practice, is simultaneously challenging and being challenged by an improvisational / complex responsive processes approach? How can tensions that potentially result from this challenge be understood?

5. Paper 2 – November 2005

5.1 Prelude

In beginning Paper 2, I am struggling with the questions of my research proposal. My colleagues Larsen (2005) and Friis (2005) have submitted theses for the doctorate. They both understand organizational change in the light of theatre improvisation (Johnstone, 1981) and complex responsive processes (Stacey et al., 2000). Larsen argues for a shift from forum theatre to theatre improvisation, and he applies the improvisational thinking – further inspired by Patricia Shaw (Shaw, 2002) – to the role of the consultant as one who is always participating in ensemble improvisation with the actors and the clients (Larsen, 2005, p.74).

I don't disagree with any of their thinking – on the contrary. But Larsen concentrates more on the theatre part of the consultancy, rather than on the role of the consultant using theatre – not as a tool, but as a contribution within the consultancy process. A key issue in developing my consultancy practice is making sense of being in charge working simultaneously with structure and improvisation. Larsen doesn't speak in these terms; he argues that intention is an idea or plan of how to proceed. The initial intention is potentially changed by the interweaving of other people's intentions, understood as improvisation (Larsen, 2005, p.38).

I do experience those dynamics in my work – not surprisingly, as we are colleagues engaged in the same area of consultancy. However, I find that structure is as vital to my work as improvisation. And structure seems to be more than just intention. So the notion of tension arising from engaging in a simultaneously structured and an open-ended approach seems central to the movement of thinking in my consultancy practice. It is interesting to examine, through a narrative commentary, how I am beginning to define the notions of structure and improvisation, and how these two concepts potentially influence my consultancy – my being in charge.

5.2. Narrative of a public school in conflict

5.2.1. The telephone enquiry

Mrs. X, deputy head of a public school in Denmark, rang me to ask the Dacapo Theatre to create a 24-hour event for the management team and the team of teachers of the oldest pupils. She explained about their mutual communicative difficulties. The teacher's team didn't perform well enough compared to the rest of the school. She said that communication from the management didn't have any positive impact on the teachers – rather the contrary. I sensed on the phone that this was not going to be an easy assignment. I really felt attracted to the potential for working in new ways – a real departure from well-rehearsed and pre-scripted models and concepts.

The full 24-hour event that she proposed would have been the optimal solution, but cost was inevitably an issue; so, to my regret, we settled for a 4 hour-session, including a preparation meeting with her and her headmaster, Mr. Y.

5.2.2. The preparation meeting

A few weeks later I met with Mrs. X and Mr. Y. As they entered the room I could see from their body language that Mrs. X felt more comfortable with the situation than Mr. Y. He avoided eye contact, and she was the one who started talking. I wondered whose idea it had been to make the original inquiry to the Dacapo Theatre.

To help put him at ease, I started with small-talk about the island they came from. How did they end up working there? We discussed the prices of real estate, the reliability of construction workers (both Mr. Y and I were rebuilding our houses), and so on. An atmosphere of mutual acknowledgement and common ground developed.

We could have carried on with the small-talk, but we had other business. However, I also sensed a wish in them to avoid the main issues. So I slowly switched the subject to the school world. We then spoke pleasantly about the challenges in their world and in the school world in general. Mr. Y then couldn't help picking up the subject of the teachers' poor performance. I kept asking him how he experienced this in the daily life of the school. It seemed difficult for him to explain in detail what he meant. He circled around a general

view of the teachers not meeting the individual learning demands of the pupils, and a perception that the teacher's team didn't work well enough together. He became increasingly agitated, yet refused to specify what he had experienced.

I suggested that some incident must have triggered his dissatisfaction; he must have had some interaction with the teacher's group that had made him so emotional about the situation. He acknowledged that there had been many incidents. I asked him to describe the most recent situation of significance. He then calmed down and began explaining about being a member of a committee whose task it was to ensure optimal quality of the teaching and learning. The committee members included a politician, the head of the school board and the CEO of education from the municipality. The committee launched a survey among all the parents, and found that this particular team was not functioning well. It seemed that they were not able to involve the students and that there was little cooperation within the team.

In a letter responding to this survey, Mr. Y had conceded poor staff performance, and promised that this would be improved. This response was conveyed to the teachers just before the letter went out to the parents and other relevant parties. This caused a major conflict between Mr. Y and the teachers' group, who felt betrayed by his actions. According to Mr. Y, the content of the answer could not be altered due to the tight time constraint.

When I asked him if he might have altered the letter had there been time, he became agitated once again and said he didn't think so. He felt the teachers were unjustly angry. While the teachers claimed they had not been heard and consulted about the results of the survey or the potential answer, Mr. Y felt it was right to act as required by the politicians. Afterwards he tried to explain his course of action at a staff meeting: he had had to fire off the answer in a very short space of time; there had been no time to include the teachers in answering to the survey; so he had decided that it was his duty to give a quick and objective answer. At this meeting, he certainly didn't succeed in getting the teachers to understand his reasons. The conflict escalated. He felt that the teachers didn't listen to him; nor, in his view, were they performing well enough.

As he spoke, I intuited that the involved parties had at no point had a mutual discussion of the actual basis of the dissatisfaction felt by Mr. Y and the parents. So as I listened to Mr.

Y, it became very clear to me that he was telling the story from his angle, without connecting with the teachers' perspectives. He agreed fully with the parents' response to the survey, but felt intimidated by the teacher's reactions. I conveyed my thoughts, which were that he didn't take account of the teachers' perspective in his narrative. Though he listened, I could see that he did not quite understand.

Assessing how to proceed, a similar situation from my own professional life as a manager came to my mind. I decided to tell him about it, as I thought it might help him to reflect differently on his own situation. Nevertheless, I felt I was taking a risk by bringing my own personal issues into the professional relationship. As I told my story, Mr. Y's breathing intensified, and he was on the edge of his seat as he listened. I asked what sense he made of the story. In his response there was a lot of recognition, but also some very crucial questions. I was relieved and excited when he asked questions like 'How can I become aware of my own role in the interaction with the teachers?'

I took these questions as an invitation to talk with him and Mrs. X about improvisation and gesture–response, explaining that you can have an intention and improvise at the same time; that you can make sense of your own gestures by paying attention to the responses; that you can't stand outside the interaction as an objective observer.

Mr. Y seemed to resonate with this way of thinking about the situation. But as it turned out, he didn't strike the chords I expected as we spoke. Instead, he turned attention to the teachers' actions. He expected them to be fully aware of the individual learning demands of the pupils. He questioned their approach to the kids – they were not meeting the kids on their individual learning terms; they were certainly not questioning their own teaching or how they worked together in teaching teams.

I could understand what he was saying, I told him. But in that moment I really felt obliged to fix the spotlight on him and Mrs. X as managers. So I asked them what sense they made of their own management performance with the teachers. At first the question seemed simple enough – then, as they began to discuss the answer, they suddenly seemed to begin to realize that they themselves had been playing a very active part in the conflict. They themselves, in their management roles, had not been responding to the teachers or listening to their perspectives. In that moment, they seemed to consent to enter into an open-ended

approach, where they were ready to take the risk of losing face and a potential shift in power relations.

We wrapped up the meeting by sketching out a raw draft of the session with the teachers. A key agreement was that I might take the opportunity to interview them both in front of the teachers, to give them an opportunity to set the direction of the day – inviting the teachers to take the risk of a new dialogue with them. We agreed upon an overall direction for the interview, but not the exact questions that would be posed. Basically I would challenge them on their performance as managers, based on their recent reflections on their way of managing and working together as a management team. We felt that the event should be an open-ended session, with the possibility of certain structured refuges – understood as a time and place to take off some of the heat – to support the evolving dialogue.

5.2.3. The 4-hour session

As we sit having introductions in the large group circle, I sense a distance between the management and the teachers – and also differences within the group of teachers, with some expressing suspicion and others showing interest in the day. I also sense some distance between the managers and myself – at this stage not spoken, but in their bodily language – sitting either side of me, avoiding any eye contact. The teachers keep pointing to the managers as the powerful ones. They claim that the management always takes decisions without consulting the teachers. Even concerning this event, the teachers have not been asked for their opinion of its appropriateness.

The managers at this stage don't respond directly to the attacks of the teachers, but I can see from the colour in Mr. Y's face that he is becoming more agitated. There is nothing I can do to prevent such conflict from arising. As it takes place, I feel a certain ambivalence: I want to avoid the conflict, yet feel positively drawn to it. So it is with these mixed emotions that I listen to the teachers and the managers expressing their expectations and the teachers' doubts concerning the purpose of the day. I assume that the managers are holding back in the introductory round due to our agreement that they would be interviewed about their own view. So instead of inviting them to respond directly to the teacher's gestures, I decide it is time for the managers to get the chance to respond through

an interview. But having taken that decision, I wonder how successful I was in preparing the managers. This could be difficult.

5.2.4. The interview

I start the interview by inviting the two managers to make sense of why we're here. What led them to arrange these two days?

Instead of sticking to the agreed agenda and general direction, Mr. Y keeps speaking of the teachers as impossible children who don't know how to behave properly. I sit wondering what has become of his insightful self-reflections of the previous meeting. In that moment he seems to be 'spoiling' everything. I can sense the harsh opposition from the teachers. I can even sense it from my actors. And not least from myself: at this moment, I feel no sympathy for the man. What a mess! My impulse is to leave, as the managers are not sticking to the agreement. I had not anticipated finding myself in such a crude conflict between two injured parties.

I'm sitting right in the middle of a bitter conflict, and I suddenly come to realize that I'm enjoying it. The tension in the room, the pulsating scenario around me, actually makes me feel alive. I reflect on what makes me feel paradoxically engaged and yet disengaged. At one level, this is not my conflict at all; and yet on another level, I can't step outside the conflict and play the role of the objective observer. I suddenly find myself describing the tension I feel inside me, which is actually that I have become aware right now, to my surprise, that I am as much part of the conflict as they are. I invite others to contribute their own observations. A can of worms regarding conflict has been opened – I cannot control it, but nevertheless I'm trying to be in charge of the process; or maybe a better way to put it is *facilitating* the process. I convey to the participants what I see and hear: that both parties are escalating the conflict. Meanwhile, the actors seem to be just observing what's going on. The high tension in the room is sustained.

Progress is slow in the current set-up. Positions are still too fixed. I decide to ease the tension and re-introduce it in a new scenario, to explore the conflict. I explain this to the participants. They are invited to see some theatre – a piece of fiction – which has many echoes with their current predicament. So instead of sitting in the circle facing each other, they change positions to face the stage and the theatre.

In other words, I play my ‘safe card’, as I see it in retrospect. However, at that time it felt as though I was taking a risk by suggesting a change of direction. I did not know whether the participants would cooperate. If they bought into the new set-up, the pre-scripted theatre would be safe ground for me, the actors and the participants – giving us all a few minutes’ breather. I hoped to work with their conflict using the theatre as a filter between fiction and reality, so that they would use their own experience to deal with the dilemmas enacted.

5.2.5. From large group to theatre

Now we play a scene for them. The scene takes place in a fictitious public school. Conflicts are building within the teacher’s team. Three teachers have totally different approaches to handling the level of engagement among the pupils. One of the three teachers (the youngest) argues that the team should share responsibility for disengaged pupils. Two boys in particular are currently his problem. The two other teachers see this explicitly as his problem – they don’t have any trouble worth speaking of with those kids. ‘So how can we be of service to you?’ This is where the play ends. Then I invite the audience to reflect on the dilemmas and problems they have seen in the play. This is a typical way of using forum theatre in my practice.

What unfolds next sheds light on what happens in a teacher’s team. Somehow the scene strikes many chords of recognition within the audience. They are keen to elaborate on the story. Many different perspectives on the dilemmas and problems are unfolded, and more suggestions of possible ways to handle the difficult situations are proposed. The initial heavy focus on the live conflict between the teachers and the management has temporarily lost ground in favour of the recognizable fiction. In fact the age mix in the audience is mirrored in theatre, as there is one young teacher among the audience – the rest are middle-aged. The audience clearly recognize themselves in the three characters. I invite them to speculate on each character’s motives, thoughts, feelings and actions. The audience draw upon their own experience to explore this, working progressively. We play many of their suggestions. The hardliners from the initial set-up are beginning to loosen up and participate on a voluntary basis. They have moved from being critically disengaged to being positively engaged.

The tension increases again as Mr. Y goes on stage – at my invitation – to try out an idea of how the younger teacher could approach his manager for help in the actual situation. He takes the part of the manager and one of the actors plays the part of the young teacher. I am conscious of taking a big risk with this step, and that Mr. Y is vulnerable. I can anticipate how he will approach the task, but I don't know how the actor will react to his gestures. Mr. Y has been on thin ice many times today, but never more so than now. The actor, too, is on dangerous ground: should he protect Mr. Y or challenge him as he wishes?

On stage, the young teacher approaches the manager to get his advice on the difficult situation (Mr. Y's proposal). The manager, played by Mr. Y, is preoccupied with the bad team work/spirit, and keeps nagging about the young teacher's colleagues. As he does so, I see that he is working live, not acting; and just being himself, not playing a part. He ends up suggesting a meeting with the entire team to take care of the problem. The young teacher becomes more and more silent and withdrawn. Here I stop the interplay… and ask the audience what the young teacher (the actor-in-role) is thinking right now. They express his thoughts and the actor repeats them one by one. 'He feels totally bullied', 'I'm going to apply for a new job', 'This was not what I was asking his help for', 'He doesn't listen to me at all'.

Mr. Y is stunned when he hears these reactions from his teachers. I ask him to make sense of what he has heard. He explains that the young teacher's reaction, represented by the thoughts of the audience, was not at all his intention with the interplay. He keeps justifying his own intentions and neglecting the responses of the audience (that is, of his teachers), just as he has been neglecting the response of the actor in the interplay. He really seems stunned when nobody expresses any understanding of his perspective.

Right now, I sense that Mr. Y is suffering – it's time to give him a break. I also feel that behind his obvious neglect of the teachers' responses, there is a dawning recognition of their perspective. He looks more and more fragile – and yet he seems very strong; in the sense that he reminds me of a rush that is bent by the heavy wind, but certainly won't crack. The teachers don't seem to understand Mr. Y's responses. I believe that we are stuck in a communicative impasse. It is suddenly clear that both parties are letting out their own gestures as responses to what they think they have heard, without listening to the next response. They don't have the capacity to acknowledge the depth of response from the

adversary. They see the response as nothing more than a misinterpretation on the other's part.

I ponder how to move forward – I could describe what I see; or ask the audience what they see; or invite them to talk about difficult situations from their own practice concerning communication and cooperation, which the actors could then play on stage. This should allow us to approach the conflict from yet another angle.

While the participants are still talking through what had happened on stage, I briefly discuss our options with the actors. They choose the last option: involving people in dealing directly with their own situation, using theatre as the framework – as a very thin filter between fiction and reality.

I tell the audience how I'm planning to proceed. They seem to agree; at least, they don't contradict me.

5.2.6. The impro-session

When opening an impro-session, I usually divide people randomly into groups. But, since the participants have already been debating vigorously in groups of three or four, I let them choose their own groupings.

They are to tell each other about a difficult situation from their professional life regarding communication and cooperation. The situation can take place within the teacher's team; or between the teacher's team and the management team; or between the school and the parents. There are four groups. The two managers are in the same group. In this group I sense some disagreement. In the other three groups, I sense agitated consensus.

When they have finished their story-telling, I ask them to choose one situation that they would consider useful to play in the theatre. All four groups are eager to tell their story. I have to choose one. I invite the first group to tell their story: as we listen to the introduction, I see recognition from the other three groups and suspect they have chosen the same situation. It is the very situation that Mr. Y described in our planning meeting a month ago. This time the story is told from a teacher's perspective. And it appears to be quite a different story! I can sense that Mr. Y is jumping in his seat as the story is told. He

certainly doesn't agree. There is a lot of emotion in the story. A lot of frustration and anger are directed towards Mr. Y, and it is supported by the bodily language of the rest of the teachers' group.

With the staff's version on the table, we are now entering into the heart of the conflict. I thank them for the story, and pose a few questions to establish the dramatic set-up, as the actors are going to play the story on stage seen from the perspective of the teacher. As I ask questions, I don't know exactly what to do with the play/story, but I sense a significant opportunity to work live with their communication and cooperation. People from the other groups are keen to fill in details from their perspective. When the group has finished telling their story, I reiterate the dramatic set-up and ask the actors if they are ready.

After the story has been played, I ask everyone what dilemmas they have observed. In spite of the teachers' former consensus, they seem surprised by each other's varied interpretations. Even the two managers have different interpretations. Encouraged by this diversity of opinions and attitudes among the audience, I suggest that we elaborate on this story immediately and very directly, instead of choosing other stories to be played and explored. I feel that the conflict is moving and that we may work directly with it through the theatre.

I now sense considerable great risk, for myself and the actors. The actors are usually protected by the fiction, and I can't know their response to my suggestion. We are heading in a novel direction with our work. To my great satisfaction, they are just as fascinated by the situation as I am. So they seem more than ready to engage with the conflict, and we continue working directly with the audience's reality.

Here, the actors seem to be tools in the hands of myself and the audience, whose every word and suggestion is played at face value – not as interpreted by the actor, as we would usually do. I'm not saying the actors are like robots or machines. On the contrary: they have made a deliberate choice based on hearing my intentions for this section of the day. Without expecting them to make this choice, I count on them to do whatever is needed in the situation.

I stop the play many times to let the audience adjust, reflect, and give new directions on where to go next. They keep playing from their chairs, through the actors. Suddenly it

occurs to me that – without conscious effort – they seem to have started to explore the conflict from the other's perspective. They need to engage and negotiate with each other's varying perspectives in order to start telling a new common story. Through the process of this negotiation, each perspective will subtly change and the power relations shift back and forth. It is fascinating to be in the middle of this exchange.

5.3. First reflections concerning the research question

Already in the first reading of this 'finished' narrative, I find myself remembering certain events differently from the way they are depicted here. A narrative never ceases to grow and alter, as I myself change with time. I have been struggling with two tracks of ongoing correction. One concerns the way I'm writing, the other concerns the content of what I'm writing; but I will confine my exploration to the narrative as it stands.

Before reflecting afresh on the narrative, it seems appropriate to start with a working definition of three key elements in my research question: what does it mean to *be in charge* in the tension of *structure* and *improvisation?* This working definition will come to serve as a lens through which I will reflect critically on the narrative, and on authors I will involve to support research.

I have come to see *structure* as a fixed framework that can consciously be applied to a helper/client relation before an interaction takes place; and I also see structure as a working model which, as a consultant, I bring into the helping relationship more or less consciously. Thirdly, I also think that structure can emerge within the interaction between people. The latter can't be known in advance and can't be pre-planned, except in the sense of creating a predetermined framework for it to happen in, which has the potential to both enable and constrain the emergent interaction. I don't at this point see a contradiction between the two.

I understand *improvisation* as a process of communicative interaction that arises spontaneously between two persons or more. Something totally new can emerge, or a variation on something they have done before. It could be perceived as something good, or as something bad. The two persons are re-acting or responding to each other, instead of only acting (Johnstone, 1981). Both bring intentions with them into the relation, but these can change within the improvisation. Mead (1934) talks about gesture–response in the

social act. Meaning is explained not as something located in the past or in the future, but as something that emerges in what is called the endless gesture and response patterns – through which the past will inevitably be revisited, while allowing the possibility of unpredictable change.

My initial view of *being in charge* is that as a consultant I take responsibility, throughout interaction with the client, for a successful process and outcome; so I find myself continually facilitating processes and relationships. At the same time I feel an increasing demand from myself, my professional community and the clients to be able to juggle artistically and creatively with structure and improvisation. Right now, I'm not sure what to make of *being in charge* in such tension. I feel that being in charge using structure is like playing with known cards: not taking any risks. Being in charge working with emergent structures is more like playing with known and unknown cards at the same time; and being in charge engaging in improvisation is comparable to playing with known and unknown cards at the same time, with potential risks of changes in power relations and identity.

Having established these *preliminary definitions* of the key elements of the research question, the following questions will serve as the framework for a critical reflection on the narrative, drawing upon miscellaneous authors' theories:

What does it mean to 'be in charge' working with structure?

What does it mean to 'be in charge' engaging in improvisation?

5.3.1. 'Being in charge' working with structure

It is first helpful to review at what point in the narrative I seem to work with structure in my consultancy. At first glance, fixed structures are apparent in the fact that both the preparation meeting and the 4-hour session had time-frames and locations that had been determined in advance by myself and the client. The theme to be dealt with was also in place from the beginning, and was my guideline in the entire helping relationship.

Within that framework is another set of fixed structures relating to the processes between the clients and myself, and between myself and the actors. Regarding the preparation

meeting, those structures can be related to my entire professional knowledge and methodology as a consultant. They are fixed in the understanding that basically I don't deviate greatly from my working model when I find myself in a helping relationship with a client. I stick to a model that requires me to open the meeting in some way. In this particular meeting, I had the intention of getting straight to the point, but the intention was changed in the moment I stood face-to-face with the client's intention.

I tend to follow the process of establishing a manageable working model to go on with, before the meeting is over – even if I have to rush things a bit. The narrative shows that before this preparation meeting, having considered the nature of the conflict between the management and the group of teachers, based on my belief that a conflict has two parties and at least two different perspectives, I assumed that both the management and the teachers must have contributed to the conflict more or less consciously. This basic assumption is my fixed structure, understood as a working model throughout the preparation meeting and also throughout the 4-hour session.

For example, in the preparation meeting when I kept drawing attention to the fact that Mr. Y didn't take the teacher's perspective into account, I simply had to make him understand my point. I even told him a story from my own professional life to open his eyes, to give him the opportunity to mirror himself. This is precisely the way that I use theatre in the 4-hour session. Encouraged by his response to my story, I took the opportunity to talk about my understanding of communicative interaction, which I think can also be understood as applying structure to the relationship, in the sense that I was trying to frame the kind of communicative interaction we were engaging in. Towards the end of the meeting, I carried my basic assumption out to the extreme – in order to get things done – by pinning the two managers down and forcing them to recognize their own roles in the conflict.

As I described earlier, we ended the meeting agreeing that the 4-hour event should basically be an open-ended session with the possibility of certain structured refuges to support the evolving dialogue. This reveals another basic assumption concerning the methodology of my consultancy. Although I may devise structured refuges before the interaction, they are neither sequentially scheduled nor predetermined in terms of precise content – except in the sense of allowing the use of pre-rehearsed plays, which are subject to different interpretations by the participants and thus unpredictable.

The notion of a refuge is a metaphor for a space removed from the heat of the pulsating interaction, where thoughts and emotions can be composed for the next round of interaction. If the participants in a heated conversation are at a point where they can't see any way out – if they are stuck and still very much engaged, intellectually and emotionally – as the consultant 'in charge' I can introduce a story from my own life, as I did in the preparation meeting, with the intention of bringing the conversation one step further. Or I can introduce the interview with the managers into the session, with the same intention. Or I can introduce a piece of fiction – theatre; not to take the focus away from the theme of the session, but as an enabling constraint. Or I can introduce the notion of the participants' own stories being played in the theatre.

On closer examination of working with structure in the use of theatre in the session, I think that the introduction of theatre is in itself, despite its spontaneous nature, an application of structure. I know in advance that the scene has potential for the conflict to evolve on-stage at the same time as it evolves among the audience, which constrains the actual conflict from either getting stuck or living its own life. But at the same time, I know that the introduction of theatre enables the audience to deal with their conflict in a way they couldn't have done if we had not been there to introduce the structure. Within this structure I introduce another preconceived structure when I invite the audience to reflect in pairs on the dilemmas they have seen in the play and then ask them what they have been talking about. And yet another preconceived structure when I ask them to propose possible new ways of dealing with the difficult situation in the team.

The layers of pre-fixed structures unfold as the audience then decide which of the team members should take the next step, and what that step should be. I then have a choice between letting the actor play the proposal or inviting the audience member to do it. If the actor plays the proposal, there's a whole package of structures – unspoken rules of engagement between myself and the actors, and among the actors – that enters into effect. Another package of structures/rules is initiated if the audience member goes on stage; for example, their proposal must not be critiqued by the rest of the audience, who should stick to describing how the actors reacted to it.

Through this close examination of the theatre practice I conduct, I mean to demonstrate that there are many layers of preconceived structure in the way I work with the theatre as a consultant. The unfolding structures are part of my/our methodology. Though they unfold

almost automatically in response to the gestures of the client, there are nevertheless intentions connected with each structure. I will return to explore those intentions later in this section, and link them to the notion of 'being in charge'.

Emergent structure also becomes apparent a few times in the narrative. In the communicative interaction, structure – understood as new patterns of meaning – arises, for example, when the managers go against the direction that was agreed in our preparation meeting. The intention with the interview was to create an invitation to the teachers for a new kind of dialogue, with an opening from the managers; this was the fixed structure that should pave the way for emergent structure of the 'positive' kind. Instead, Mr. Y in particular is very narrowly focused in the interview – speaking not to the teachers, but to me about the teachers. I think that the interview and Mr. Y's reactions in the interview created emergent structures. Those reactions were in themselves self-emergent structures, as I don't suppose that Mr. Y had had his outrage planned ahead of the interview. Instead, the constraints of the interview enabled Mr. Y to give spontaneous expression to his rage.

My reaction to this was not preconceived: it was not part of my professional 'vocabulary'. What happened was that I, in my own private dialogue, experienced the emergence of new patterns of meaning with regard to my own participation in the session. Prompted by the realization that I had strong emotions involved in the interaction, I further realized that I was indeed part of the conflict, not just an impartial observer – which suddenly made me feel very much alive.

I will draw attention to another sequence in the narrative, which I think points to emergent structure; it is near the end of the impro-session. I get a sense of something extraordinary happening. The audience were not just exchanging perspectives, but negotiating these from both sides. Though the emergent structures might be different for each of them, they were suddenly engaged in creating a new common story, with new and unplanned patterns of meaning.

New patterns of meaning also arose for myself within this interaction. I suddenly realized that I was taking part in something novel for my own consultancy. I still held the basic assumption that the participants needed to recognize each other's perspectives, and at the same time I could see that they were dealing with the task at a very high level of self-

organization in the framework of the theatre. The emergent structure was that they didn't need any structured refuges in order to move on together.

How, then, do I work with emergent structure? If I use the two situations described above as starting-points in answering the question, I think that in the former situation I was acutely aware of having been influenced by the emerging new patterns of meaning. In my next communicative interaction, rather than dwelling on the need to abandon the old fixed structure of the interview, I committed to my new understanding of the situation: shifting from objective facilitator to participating facilitator. In the past I might successfully – and with just cause – have applied structure to what was going on, to enhance the learning of the audience; but in this case, the emergent structure/meaning was that of self-organization taking place at a very high level. Had I imposed structure upon the process, I could have killed what was actually emerging between the participants.

5.3.1.1. What does it mean to 'be in charge' working with structure?

I will attempt a preliminary answer to the question as it pervades the narrative. Working with pre-fixed structures, whether they are consciously or unconsciously applied to the helping relationship, seems to me to be very much about power. When I reflect on the way I attempt to be in charge in the narrative working with structure, I come to see my role as very much the consultant trying to be in control of the process and the outcome – with a few exceptions, e.g. when I take the emergent structures seriously. So in terms of the entire narrative, I think that I consciously and unconsciously use structure to try to stay in control and stick to the preconceived theme and outcome. I consciously apply constraints to the process to assist the desired outcome, which is that the participants are able to talk about and deal with their conflict in a mutually responsible way.

Throughout the narrative I really seem to be struggling to stay in power, with more or less success. In the preparation meeting, I seem to get my own way with the managers. But as it turns out in the course of the 4-hour session, the apparent success of this initial agreement suddenly seems to have been reversed, threatening imminent failure. Yet even when I sense imminent failure, I still apply the preconceived structure to the relationship. I initiate the interview. I don't take the emergent structure seriously. I don't reflect in the action. I think what happens is a shift in the power figurations. The manager is more or less consciously challenging my preconceived structure, and there is nothing I can do to prevent it from happening.

The German sociologist Norbert Elias takes a functional perspective on power as an alternative to the traditional view, where power is reified and associated with individuals and institutions:

> Another person's power is to be feared: he can compel us to do a particular thing whether we want to or not. Power is suspect: people use it to exploit others for their own ends. Power seems unethical: everyone ought to be in a position to make all their own decisions… One may say that someone 'has' power and leave it at that, although such usage, which implies that power is a thing, leads down a blind alley. A more adequate solution to problems of power depends on power being understood unequivocally as a structural characteristic of a relationship, all-pervading, and as a structural characteristic, neither good nor bad. It may be both. We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far that we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more directed by others than they are by us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status or career, or simply for excitement.
>
> (Elias, 1970, p.93)

Elias points out that all relating can be understood as power relating. In order to maintain a relation to another person, we inevitably engage in a mutually constraining communication, which limits our action space while simultaneously providing other opportunities. In terms of the narrative, this seems to make sense as new structures are emerging in the communicative interaction. The manager is initially limiting my action space with his reactions, but at the same time those constraints are enabling my reflections on my own position in the interaction, which I think wouldn't have happened if I had kept insisting on the pre-agreed agenda. My dependency on the participants became an issue to me. Of course I couldn't withdraw from the contract at this stage. Money, status, career and excitement were at stake.

So 'being in charge' working with structure seems to be more than just conceiving a plan for a helping relationship and steering it through in accordance with your methodology and basic assumptions. It also seems to be about taking seriously the understanding that new

structures are emerging in the process – unforeseen patterns of meaning. Taking such emergent structures seriously depends on whether and how we seize those opportunities, which in turn is closely linked to the notion of engaging in *improvisation*. Basic assumptions can change, as can preconceived methodology – each impacting on one's role and identity as a consultant.

5.3.2. 'Being in charge' engaging in improvisation

To answer this question, I will locate moments in the narrative where I engage in improvisation as understood by my preliminary working definition.

When Mr. Y arrived at our preliminary meeting looking very uncomfortable with the situation, I responded by spontaneously changing my intention of getting down to business right away. He spontaneously accepted my invitation to small-talk. I hadn't changed my overall intention with the helping relationship, just my intention in the initial interaction. The emergent structure was that of Mr. Y being uncomfortable for various reasons, which I couldn't know. I feel that I seized the opportunity offered by the emergent structure, and did so by taking the attitude of the other. Mead (1934) calls this social intelligence:

> …what is often called social intelligence depends on the given individual's ability to take the roles of others or 'put himself in the place of' the other individuals implicated with him in given social situations, and upon his consequent sensitivity to their attitudes towards himself and toward one another.
>
> (Mead, 1934, p.141)

Inherent in Mead's thinking is the notion that an individual can carry on a conversation of gestures with himself. Mead talks about private and public role-plays, defining mind as the private role-play consisting of gestures made by a body to itself, while social relationships are the gestures made by bodies to other bodies; thus the private and the public role-play are basically the same process, which Mead sees as occurring simultaneously. I wonder if there is a link between the emergent structures and the private role-play, and between improvisation and the public role-play – a question that I shall return to in my conclusion.

I next experience myself engaged in improvisation when I spontaneously introduce my own personal issues in the preparation meeting. The emergent structure was that of Mr. Y on the one hand needing understanding and recognition from me; and on the other hand, my basic assumption that he needed to understand the perspective of his teachers. I took his attitude in and responded with a story that was new, even to my self. But I didn't give up my basic assumption. Bringing myself into the conversation was an uncalculated risk, a departure from my usual methodology.

More improvisation is apparent in the middle of the interview, where it emerges that everybody is angry – including me. Then, in my private role-play, I am prompted to take my own participation and my own emotions seriously. I took the attitude of the others in the room, and my spontaneous reaction was to speak about the tension I felt within me.

The last incident I will pick out is the situation at the end of the narrative, where it emerges that the participants don't need any structured refuges to move forward together. The improvisation consists in taking the attitude of the participants and letting them continue within the very loose framework, while at the same time withdrawing from my inclination to introduce a learning platform/structure. I only contribute directly into the process when asked to. This is a new approach for me as a consultant – I could call it a new methodology. I even think that my basic assumption that those people needed to understand each other's perspective was outpaced by the emergent structures, showing that they were actually negotiating perspectives in order to tell a new common story.

5.3.2.1. What does it mean to 'be in charge' engaging in improvisation?

Basically, I think that it is about letting go of the urge to try to control the entire interaction in detail. The narrative demonstrates the impossibility of remaining under the illusion that anyone is controlling the process, from the overall picture to the local interaction; we can only be alert to the detail of the communicative interaction we find ourselves in.

The question could be expressed as: how do we retain responsibility while improvising? Engaging in improvisation potentially changes power relations between me and my client, which potentially changes my identity as a consultant. At the same time, I must honour – ethically and formally – my contractual responsibility to guide the process toward a certain outcome.

Perhaps being in charge while engaging in improvisation means balancing delicately between those two apparent opposites. To start moving consciously in tension of known and unknown at the same time seems to be a huge challenge.

5.4. Involving other authors' thinking about the questions

The questions about being in charge working with structure or engaging in improvisation can be explored and answered from within different traditions of thinking. I see *two ideologies* at play in the narrative – one to do with being *on top of* the situation and one to do with being *in* the situation. In order to highlight those different ideologies from a theoretical perspective, I have chosen two very different ways of speaking.

Firstly I would like to introduce Edgar Schein, who is considered mainstream and prominent regarding the development of general theory and methodology around the role of the consultant and the helping relationship between consultant and client (Schein, 1999). Schein see the consultant as standing at the border of the interaction – not in the middle of it.

Secondly, I would like to introduce another tradition that speaks of the consultant as partaker in participative self-organization and ensemble improvisation. Representative of this tradition are Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000), who have developed the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, drawing on the tradition of Mead, Elias and Hegel to find analogies within the complexity sciences for the relationship/psychological domain of human interaction. Essentially they see complex responsive processes of relating as *temporal* processes of interaction between human bodies in the medium of symbols patterning themselves as themes in communicative action that is understood as *participative self-organization.* The themes emerging in the communicative interaction are also to be understood as *enabling constraints*, which they equate with *power and power relations*.

As this theory of complex responsive processes of relating is also the dawning methodology of my research, I feel very much challenged by it both in theory and practice.

5.4.1 Schein and process consultancy

In 1999, Schein published a book that takes his 40 years of experience as a practitioner into account. The book, *Process Consultation Revisited,* focuses on the role of the consultant and the relationship between consultant and client.

Schein argues that process consultation is a philosophy about, and attitude toward, the process of helping individuals, groups, organizations and communities. He bases the philosophy on the central assumption that one can only help a human system to help itself.

Schein describes human exchange as drama (Schein, 1999, p.107). He applies this analogy to the scene of the relationship between consultant and client. He argues that 'help' is defined by whether or not the client feels helped, not by whether or not the helper asserts that he or she has provided help:

> ...helping as theatre of improvisation requires not only the basic skills of acting and knowing something about audience response, but also improvisational skills and spontaneity. As pointed out earlier, the consultant 'must go with the flow' but, at the same time, be prepared to 'seize targets of opportunity.'
>
> (Schein, 1999, p.108)

He stays within the analogy as he describes the initial relationship between the consultant and the client as a reciprocal play, in which the help-seeker is initially the actor and the helper is the audience. He then argues that, after the delivery of the 'problem-package' lines from the client, the consultant should stay in the process consultation (PC) mode and refuse to take the stage – keeping the client centre-stage. The consultant should force or manipulate – in a benign way, of course – the client to start working on his own problem. The consultant should stay in the coach/audience role, watching with interest and supporting the efforts of the client in working on his own problem.

> Therefore, one of the critical skills that effective consultants must learn is how to create the right scenes and to manage the dramatic process toward desirable outcomes.
>
> (Schein, 1999, p.108)

Schein also focuses on the power differential between the consultant and the client. He takes us through the major psychodynamic issues of the helping relationship by describing and analyzing the initial psychological situation in the person seeking help, in the potential helper, and in the initial interaction between them. His conclusion is that there has to be a workable psychological contract – a situation in which each party gives and receives more or less what each expects. The dilemma of creating a workable helping relationship is that both parties have to learn about each other; and at the same time, the consultant has a responsibility to create a safe environment for the client to start telling his story.

Speaking about power, the client is – according to Schein – initially more vulnerable and dependent than the helper. He argues that the helper should try to equilibrate the status relationship between himself and the client, to ensure that the client doesn't block the necessary cooperation. Schein argues further that the strategic goal of the helping relationship is to achieve a psychological state in which there is a workable psychological contract, a relationship in which both parties contribute to the evolving exploration of the client's problem.

The picture that emerges of process and participation in Schein's work as a consultant is that of a participant-observer. He moves in and out of the two roles sequentially. He identifies patterns of communication, conveys his findings to the client, and coaches the client to learn to intervene to find and establish new patterns of communication. This way of communicating is well known as the sender–receiver model, in which an individual's mind is thought of as a mental model. In this tradition, relating is a process, in which one party thinks first, transforms an idea into language, chooses an action, and transmits the mental contents to the receiving party in one way or another. The receiving party then processes the information and chooses a response, which it then sends back. If the interaction goes on without change in mental models, single-loop learning can take place; but if there is change in the mental models in the interaction, double-loop learning has been achieved. Schein (ibid; 19) exemplifies this by comparing the doctor/expert model with the adaptive learning, whereas PC engages the client in generative learning.

5.4.1.1. What does it mean to 'be in charge' working with structure in Schein's terms?
As I read Schein, the structure inherent in the interaction between the consultant and the client seems to be located in the consultant observing; thinking, then setting the stage; and

keeping the client centre-stage, which according to Schein allows the client to move forward and take responsibility for his own situation. This kind of structure should be applied to the relationship at the consultant's choosing.

Schein also draws attention to another kind of structure, which is constituted in the constraints of the cultural rules distinctive of the interaction. This structure is initially hidden, but should be observed and mapped by the consultant as guides to action as the helping relationship evolves.

Yet another structure to be mapped is the psychodynamic aspect of the relationship. It is important to locate the conscious and unconscious aspects of the relationship, and define the explicit and implicit psychological contract.

I think that in Schein's terms, being in charge working with structure means that the consultant must really be in control of as many details as possible, in order to give the client the space to tell his story. The consultant should even equilibrate the power differentials between himself and the client, in order to achieve the strategic goal of the helping relationship.

5.4.1.2. What does it mean to 'be in charge' engaging in improvisation in Schein's terms?
The improvisational approach is constituted in the consultant's ability to read and respond to the client within the above-mentioned cultural constraints; and in the ability to let the client's feelings and his own reactions guide him towards the next steps, rather than falling back on arbitrary rules of how a consultation should evolve (ibid., p.39).

Being in charge engaging in improvisation is, in Schein's terms, equal to the consultant 'going with the flow' while at the same time being prepared to seize targets of opportunity.

5.4.1.3. Reflections on Schein's understanding of being in charge working with structure and engaging in improvisation
Schein notes a dilemma for the consultant, as being in charge of creating a safe environment to help the client tell his story involves a need for the client and the consultant to get to know each other more in depth. He draws attention to the natural initial power differentials between consultant and client, and goes on to argue that the consultant should always try to equilibrate those power differentials to facilitate a fruitful helping

relationship. By doing this, I think that Schein is trying to resolve his perceived dilemma, which is that on the one hand he is applying structure to the helping process, while on the other hand he is inviting improvisation. He argues that the consultant should be in charge of creating the safe environment while taking part in the emerging mutual exploration, in order to establish an equilibration of the power and status differentials in the relationship.

The dilemma as perceived by Schein can be resolved. However, I see a potentially paradoxical situation of two mutually contradictory approaches in play at the same time. Paradox can't be resolved – only lived with. But to Schein, 'to be in charge working with structure' and 'to be in charge engaging in improvisation' are obviously two different and independent approaches to be chosen between by the consultant. The former is closely related to the notion of power residing with the consultant, and the latter is linked to the notion of equality. If the consultant isn't aware of the power differentials, he will have difficulty deciding which approach to choose in a given situation.

I think that Schein sees the role of the PC consultant as both structured and improvisational: responsible for setting the stage and managing the drama towards desirable outcomes, yet always ready to rewrite the script. In this exchange of one script for another he doesn't engage with the paradox of juggling with structure and improvisation simultaneously, meaning that human rational autonomy is split off from the self-organizing system applied to human joint action.

Schein is, according to Patricia Shaw (2002), thinking and acting from a systems perspective. The consultant is a participant-observer. As she describes it:

> We participate, we pause, we observe, and assess ourselves retrospectively, we make adjustments and we continue. The assumption is that in the process of reflection we can learn to design with increasing self-consciousness the patterns that it will prove useful to find ourselves in next time we pause to reflect.
>
> (Shaw, 2002, p.9)

Shaw criticizes Schein for wanting to structure the interaction yet always looking for surprising patterns – ascribing this to the cybernetic tradition of using feedback loops to keep a system from drifting off-course. Instead she argues that conversation is a process of

communicative action that has the intrinsic capacity to pattern itself. No one controls the meaning that emerges. Still, we are between us shaping and being shaped by those forms from within the flow of our responsive relating.

5.4.2. Stacey et al. and complex responsive processes of relating

In describing complex responsive processes of relating, I'm in danger of simplifying a very complex theoretical construct, which is in essence developed by Ralph Stacey (2000, 2001, 2003), Patricia Shaw (2002, 2005/6) and Douglas Griffin (2000, 2002). Nevertheless, I will attempt a limited summary of essential elements of the theory, and then pick out those that seem relevant to answering the two questions.

Basically, the theory is concerned with processes of communicative interaction in local situations. Those processes are characterized by a gesture-response structure of the living present. In this micro-temporal structure, meaning is reproduced and potentially transformed. Shaw (2002) points to conversation as being a process of communicative interaction, which has the intrinsic capacity to pattern itself as themes understood as participative self-organization. Griffin (2002) explains one of the characteristics of participative self-organization:

> …it posits a process of interactive participation between self-conscious embodied subjects who are observers and participants, subjects and objects at the same time…
>
> (Griffin, 2002, p.14)

Another key aspect of the theory of complex responsive processes of relating is the notion of themes emerging in the communicative interaction understood as *enabling constraints*. Those enabling constraints should be understood as patterns of *power relations*, as patterns of communicating that both enable and constrain the participants in a relationship.

This position on power builds on the views of the sociologist Elias (1970), who is quoted above. Like Mead (1934), he defined individuals as interdependent people in the singular, and in society as interdependent people in the plural. He sees the individual and the social as two aspects of the same phenomenon, which is essential to the ethos of complex responsive processes of relating. Here Stacey (2001) argues that the private role-play of

mind is the same relational or communicative process as the public social process. From this, it follows that different voices in the private role-play both constrain and enable each other. The complex responsive process perspective strongly suggests that critical degrees of power difference and diversity impart the capacity for emergent novelty.

Stacey (2001, p.214) argues that power relations in organizations arise in ideologically patterned talking, creating the dynamics of who is 'in' and who is 'out'. Those who can master the prevailing code of conduct are 'in' and those who don't are 'out':

> Organizational change is a shift in patterns of communicating and power relating, a shift in patterns of inclusion and exclusion. It is in this process that organizational identity emerges, that is, the purposes and inspirations for carrying on being together are continually reproduced and potentially transformed, causing themselves.
>
> (Stacey 2001, p.214)

With this short introduction of some of the ideas in the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, I will now try to define answers to the working questions based on this tradition of thought.

5.4.2.1. What does it mean to 'be in charge' working with structure and to 'be in charge' engaging in improvisation in Stacey et al.'s terms?

Streatfield (2001) has written one of the books in the series concerning complexity and emergence in organizations. His particular focus is on the manager living with the paradox of 'being in control' and 'not being in control' at the same time. I think that in terms of an analogy, to his thinking the key ability of the consultant being in charge working with structures is to participate interactively in the formation of transient emergent structures understood as meaning.

> The perspective I'm proposing focuses attention on the wider self-organizing dynamic in which managers participatively construct meaning and in which intention emerges. Some of the tools they use in this process are systems of control. However, the essential management capacity is the courage to participate in the construction of meaning in spite of not being 'in control'.
>
> (Streatfield, 2001, p.136)

Stacey et al. see power relations as both constraining and enabling. Those enabling constraints should be understood as patterns of power relations, and also as patterns of communication that both enable and constrain the participants in a relationship. They speak about interdependence between humans, which reflects the natural constraints in the communicative interaction between people. The concept of enabling constraints seems to me to be equal to both the application of fixed structures and emergent structures.

I think that in terms of complex responsive processes, both fixed structures and emergent structures are to be treated by the consultant as a paradox that is to be lived with and taken seriously. To take the emergent structures seriously is closely linked to the notion of '*being in charge' engaging in improvisation*, which means to have the courage to move into the unknown, risking change in your identity and power relations, responding to what has happened.

In her book *Changing Conversations in Organizations*, Patricia Shaw describes organizational change as ensemble improvisation:

> I want to help us appreciate ourselves as fellow improvisers in ensemble work, constantly constructing the future and our part in it as daily activity as we convene or join or unexpectedly find ourselves in conversations. I have called this a craft because, just as we can learn to conceptualise, to design, to communicate and persuade, we can also learn to participate with imaginative concreteness as co-narrators, joint authors, co-improvisors, and in so doing, locate our competence as leaders differently.
>
> (Shaw, 2002, p.172-3)

From the perspective of complex responsive processes, improvisation seems to be understood in terms of temporality and movement.

5.4.2.2. Critical reflection on the complexity model

I searched hard for something that even approached a recognition of fixed structures – understood as systems tools in Streatfield's (2001) book. Not even Griffin's (2002) definition of participative self-organization can take my doubts away. If a helping relationship is a process of participative self-organization, I don't see why the consultant

shouldn’t have the power to determine the many layers of preconceived structure in advance, and then of course be open to altering the course of interaction within those layers of structure as power relations shift and new structures emerge.

The rest of my critical reflection on the complexity model will emerge in the last section of the paper. What do I take from it in answering the research question?

5.5. What does it mean ‘to be charge’ in tension of ‘working with structure’ and ‘engaging in improvisation’?

Inspired by the narrative, and informed by the thinking of Stacey et al. (2002), I feel it is vital to think of tension as paradoxical rather than as the dilemma that Schein (1988, 1999) suggests. The two modalities do not appear sequentially, but simultaneously.

How does it work if we take the paradox seriously? I think that a few times in the narrative, I succeeded in participating from within the interaction rather than as an autonomous individual trying to adjust the course of interaction to achieve a pre-fixed goal. I took the emergent structures seriously and engaged in improvisation. By the end of the narrative, my basic assumption did actually shift as a result of the simultaneous private and public role-play.

I think that tension is located in the paradox of working with fixed structures and engaging in improvisation. Being in charge means being able to balance in tension of the two opposites; to be conscious of this paradox, meeting formal obligations at the same time as participating in the interaction from within.

Having reached the end of this paper, I still have no unequivocal answer to my research question, but I have become even more curious about participating from within the communicative interaction. And new questions have arisen, to be dealt with in future papers…

6. Paper 3 – June 2006

6.1. Introduction

In Papers 1 and 2, I attempted to explain why I end up doing what I do. So far, I have been examining the detail of my interaction with actors and clients. In the introduction to Paper 1, I wrote the following statement:

> As a consultant I am the one who is responsible for the contact with the client organization and the process. Nevertheless the cross-disciplinary cooperation between consultant and actors is the key feature of our work. It is at the same time constraining and enabling our work with the clients. The theatre opens a world of opportunities and different perspectives to talk about. At the same time much of the communication with the audience goes through the consultant. What follows is that the ongoing negotiating relationship between the theatre/the actors and the consultancy/the consultant is right at the core of our developing practice.
>
> (Introduction, Paper 1)

I explored this statement in both papers by writing from within my practice as a consultant. Especially in Paper 2, I concentrated on what it actually means to be in charge working in tension of structure and improvisation.

> I think the question can be pinned down to; how you can stick with your responsibility when at the same time improvising. You have to be able to engage in improvisation that potentially changes power relations between you and your client, and that potentially changes your identity as a consultant. At the same time, you must take seriously that you have a contractual responsibility, both ethically and formally, to take the process towards a certain outcome.
>
> (Excerpt from Paper 2)

Responsibility is clearly a key theme in my practice. Here, I will examine this concept in more depth.

Almost every time I approach a client as a consultant, I notice conflicts of interest at different stages of the consultancy process. In initial negotiations, there can be conflict between my own interests, those of the client, and even those of my company. And further conflicts can arise in subsequent processes involving other members of the client organization and my actor colleagues, as well as administrative staff of the Dacapo Theatre.

I have never reflected on, nor accounted to anyone else for, the way I deal with such conflicts. The various responsibilities compete so subtly that I am not consciously aware of them in the interactions at the time, as I am focused on my work. Nevertheless, I must be continually managing these tensions and arriving at subliminal decisions. Here, I would like to make this process explicit – not to attempt a definition of best practice, but simply to gain a better understanding of what informs the many decisions I take in my daily practice as a consultant, and to make new sense of how I manage competing responsibilities.

The question I intend to investigate, then, is: as the consultant, how do I manage tension between competing sets of responsibility?

The narrative will relate an evolving client relation, from first contact until an appropriate point in the evolving drama. First, it may help to set the political context and introduce the players.

6.2. Setting the context of the narrative

The Danish government has directed the country's municipalities to merge into larger units – arguably the most significant change process to have taken place in the public sector. Implementing this decision began two years ago and is meant to be completed by the end of 2006. It has resulted in a mixture of confusion, anxiety, commitment and competition among the staff – especially with managers at different levels. Those most affected by the merger are the administrative staff working at the town hall. But people working in institutions like schools and kindergartens will obviously also be affected when the changes resulting from the merger come into play. It should also be noted that Denmark has a decreasing population growth, so the number of children has reduced.

The municipality featured in this narrative is in the middle of a merger with two other municipalities, whose administration is differently organized and whose level of service to the citizens also varies. During the time-span of the narrative, elections are held for the city council. The new council will set service levels and appoint a new CEO to the merged municipality, who again will take steps to appoint new executive directors of larger merged units, etc.. All employees of the municipality have been promised that no one will be made redundant by the merger.

We will meet staff from a specific administrative department in the municipality – the children and youngster's administrative department. The administrative staff are especially affected by the situation, as no one at any level knows what their future position in the organization will be. All players are given a pseudonym to anonymize the organizational setting.

There are 22 kindergartens operating directly under this administrative department. Each kindergarten has a manager. The executive director of the department, Mrs. Daffodil, took up position two years ago. She has introduced the notion of organizing these kindergartens somewhat like private companies. Further, she has recently introduced the notion of corporate plans for each kindergarten and a dialogue agreement for each manager, as well as instructing each kindergarten to create its own website.

The dialogue agreement is intended to secure the best performance from the managers. Key performance indicators are central to each agreement, which has to be negotiated directly with the executive director.

A political aspect of special interest in this municipality is that taxpayers are granted the right to free choice between the different kindergartens. This is not the norm in Denmark, and indicates that there is competition among the kindergartens for taking new children in: as the birth rate decreases, some kindergartens are threatened with closure. They need to make themselves attractive to the target group, to ensure their own survival. During the two-year period of Mrs. Daffodil's executive directorship, four kindergartens have closed down.

Mrs. Daffodil has two HR consultants, Floyd and Andrew, who are supposed to deal with everyday management concerns, but without direct staff management responsibilities.

Before Mrs. Daffodil, the administration was organized differently: Andrew was the executive officer, with staff responsibility to the managers.

Floyd is the contact person within this organization. He heads a planning group that is responsible for arranging a session with the Dacapo Theatre. Andrew is also part of the planning group, together with two of the kindergarten managers, Ralph and Gertrud.

6.2.1 The first approach and negotiation with the client

The theatre has an administration department with four full-time employees. Two of these answer the phones. If they get a potential client on the phone, they request contact details and some idea of the nature of the inquiry and pass it on to one of the theatre's consultants. When Floyd called the theatre, he answered the usual questions and, in return, asked how much an event would cost. He was given a rough price, although it was explained that this depended on factors such as the length of the potential assignment and time spent with meetings and preparation. I was notified by email that I had a new client; I called him the next day, knowing nothing other than that he wanted to have an event with the focus on good management performance.

In the initial conversation, we probe why the client has approached the Dacapo Theatre rather than some other consultancy company with a more traditional approach. We also like to know what they anticipate we will contribute to their process. Floyd spoke for half an hour about his own position, his relation to his manager Mrs. Daffodil, and the challenges he was supposed to support the managers of the kindergartens in facing. He had spent two years now supporting and listening to the managers' different victories and defeats. He declared, passionately: 'I know so much about each of these people – I know what's at stake among them – and one thing I know for certain is that I can't just gather them together, tell them what I have heard or seen, and expect them to start to act more responsibly towards each other as a result. I can't tell Mrs. Daffodil in detail about the personal stuff of concern to each of the managers. Because of confidentiality, I can only hand it to her in general terms.' He went on: 'We need to have a common focus on good managerial performance. But there seems to be a lot of competition among the managers. There are a few who are setting the agenda, while the rest seem to be pretty lost at the moment.' Then he told me about the dialogue agreement, the corporate thinking and the notion of a website for each kindergarten; and the implications of the decreasing birth rate.

The managers clearly needed to cooperate with each other to make the kindergartens work better on a broader scale. So this was what he wanted us to help the municipality to deal with.

Having listened to him, asking a few questions, I described the challenges I saw: primarily that the kindergartens were being asked to cooperate with each other even though they were required to compete with each other for children. And then, of course, also the challenge of getting the kindergartens as smoothly as possible and with as much weight as possible into the merger with the other municipalities, at a time where there were many more questions than answers regarding how this could be achieved. The immediate challenge was to get the managers to speak openly about their worries and expectations, to create a framework for new patterns of communicative interaction between them. I mentioned that I was interested by this opportunity to work in a field where conflict of interest was potentially disruptive.

His response showed me that I was on the right track. 'These are new ways of looking at our situation that you have introduced, Claus. Your notion of paradoxical thinking really makes sense to me. How would you suggest that you could contribute in a session for all the players?' I then sketched out a few options for how we could start dealing with their situation. These ideas were very loosely formulated; generally I spoke about the notion of conversational inquiry (Shaw, 2005 and 2006) inspired by theatre and interview.

I strongly encouraged him to come to Odense for a meeting to discuss further options with some of the key players in the organization. He initially declined this invitation, instead prompting me for a model and a fixed price for an event where we would deal with the questions he had outlined. This rejection of my invitation to further mutual inquiry didn't strike me as a lack of motivation, but merely a reflection of his position within his own organization. He seemed to be the one who had had the original idea of using the Dacapo Theatre in their change process. But he did not have the authority to act alone as an autonomous individual: he had obligations to his base – especially to Mrs. Daffodil. So what I understood – without him actually saying it – was that he was constrained by his need for a rather tight schedule for the event, and by the price.

I was reluctant to give him those details, as I felt it inadvisable to decide on a process before having had an opportunity to look into the more detailed and complex web of

dilemmas and relational controversies amongst their organizational members. At the same time, my professional curiosity was roused – I didn't want to miss this opportunity to do something that could be on the edge[2] of my competencies as a consultant. I had to balance my response to stay on the knife-edge of getting the contract due to the needs of the client and doing a job that was consistent with my need for professional development and Dacapo's need for income.

'OK,' I said, 'I will sketch out two or three models, which can fit your needs with different pricing scales. I will start with the model that I find will have the optimum effect. First of all, I think that you will have to meet for at least 24 hours – away from your work place.' 'We have already booked a place for the event,' he said. 'Very well then,' I continued, 'you will need to become very clear as to which thematic issues you want raised and dealt with in the event. The way we can deal with those issues is by initiating and maintaining a process of dialogue and 'working live' with the changes that happen in the living present – inspired by theatre, story-telling, interviews and music [I explained here how I felt we could employ those different approaches to working with change, which is a longer story]. I will facilitate the process throughout the 24 hours. This setup demands a meeting in Odense between you and some of those people who are involved in the hurly-burly of everyday managerial life of the kindergartens in your municipality. The price for this whole thing is xx.xxx kr.' 'Thank you very much,' he said, 'This is more than enough. It sounds really great to me – this is just what we need. I will get back to you in a few days.' He hung up before I could tell him that there might be other models with different pricing and which would have a different impact on his organization.

6.2.2. Reflections on the conversation with Floyd

What strikes me about this encounter is that for both Floyd and myself, there seem to be many different responsibilities in play at once, competing for our attention.

It would be useful here to provide a working definition of what 'responsibility' implies, and see what questions arise from my reflection on this.

[2] 'On the edge of my competencies' implies that I was thinking about the challenge of the assignment as something rather different from what I usually do as a consultant. In that moment I wasn't able to see clearly what the challenges might be – but I had a strong sense that the project would be remarkably different from my usual practice, which very much incorporates theatre…

6.2.3. Working definition of ‘responsibility’

Etymologically, the word derives from Latin and describes the ability to *respond*. The Latin root, *respondeo,* is not just giving a plain answer to someone’s gesture; there are ethical connotations of promising or saying something in return for something else. So responsibility is not generated within any individual alone: there is a relation, there is interdependence. This is crucial to an understanding of what responsibility might mean in terms of my practice, since responsibility seems to result from a kind of barter between two interdependent parties, rather than being a simple sender–receiver model where the individual and the social are separated**.**

I may consciously experience interdependence in a conversation with someone – as with Floyd in the narrative. At the same time, I may find myself fairly unconsciously experiencing a complex web of interplaying factors – interdependence with my company, my actor colleagues and even with myself. It is important to understand this interplay when exploring how I take decisions in my daily practice, and in what way I am being responsible. The importance is stressed by a felt difficulty in reconciling the need to feel fully responsible for my practice, with the understanding that much of the process itself can be unconscious and influenced by factors beyond my personal control.

When I look for different responsibilities in my practice, two aspects are apparent: while I carry overall (global) responsibility for the interaction with the client, the detail of this is hard to pinpoint – the (local) micro-responsibility is likely to shift all the time as I engage in communicative interaction.

Power is an intrinsic feature of interdependence, since all relating can be understood as power relating. To maintain a relation to another person we inevitably engage in a mutually constraining communication, which limits our action space but also provides us with other opportunities. Communicative interaction is a process in which people account for their actions and negotiate their next steps.

Thus, four questions arose from my investigation of the notion of responsibility: what are the implications for understanding responsibility if *individual* and *social* are not separated? How can *unconscious* influence *conscious,* and vice versa? How could shifts in *local*

responsibilities influence a perception of *global* responsibility, and vice versa? What are the implications for understanding responsibility if it is seen in the light of *power relating*?

6.2.4. Reflections on the conversation: individual and social, local and global

Floyd and I were initially carried by our professional interests into a very open-ended conversation of mutual inquiry. This became limited by Floyd's need to secure a tight schedule and a fixed price. My response to this was to accommodate his wish with a compromise – simultaneously trying to keep things as open-ended as possible and giving him what I think he wants.

We are both acting with reference to some preconceived overall responsibility, and acknowledge this to a degree in the conversation. We are both striving to fulfil our own professional goals, the primary motivational factor in our work. However, we pursue those goals within a specific context: ethically, we are not operating out of self-interest, since we also represent our respective organizations. I have responsibility for ensuring that client relationships are satisfactory, both qualitatively and financially. While not expressed as clearly as the financial expectations, the qualitative expectations are significant, and in meeting them I rely on my own intuition. For his part, Floyd both supports the kindergarten managers and acts as advisor to Mrs. Daffodil. In our current situation, it appears that Floyd has already negotiated his task with Mrs. Daffodil and so his mandate is clear, whereas mine is open for negotiation between the client and myself.

So why did I compromise on what I thought would be the best way for the client? How did I come to take that decision?

First of all, I think that Floyd and I quickly established a relation of mutual confidence, built on respect for each other's professionalism. Together we explored and made sense of what was at stake in his organization. When suddenly he interrupted this exploration by pressing for a fixed model, my immediate sense was disappointment that I might be about to lose this exciting opportunity, or at best see it turned into a 'traditional' process.[3] As I write this, I can understand Floyd's agenda, as he is acting according to a mandate given to

[3] A traditional process with the client is to be understood as the client calling the theatre with a theme they want us to highlight in an event. They want a model and a price as quickly as possible, and the preparation should be as low-key as possible involving typically, a three-hour planning meeting with people from the client's organization. The duration of such an event is usually 3-4 hours of process with the client.

him or negotiated with his boss. But in the actual situation I was taken by surprise and initially I tried to insist on and argue for a very open-ended inquiry. I didn't at first really understand the perspective from which Floyd was speaking. Then it occurred to me – not altogether consciously – that he had changed his focus. This forced me to change my focus too. Now I was no longer just giving advice: we were slowly starting to negotiate the contract. Was it possible to convert the complexity of our conversation into a fixed model with a fixed price? What might have happened if I had declined his wish? Had I done so, I am certain that he would have said: 'All right. Nice speaking to you. We will find another way. Goodbye.' In that case, nobody would have been happy. When this negotiation started, I had many concerns in my mind and the client may not have been the primary concern: a sense of financial opportunity and potential loss was equally dominant, and I calculated that my own professional interests could still be satisfied to a certain degree in a less ambitious model. The actors also needed to be used, a cost factor that could not be overlooked.

Anyway, I chose to present the far most ambitious model out of three as the first one. What else could I have done? I certainly could have presented the 'discount' model, which I have done in similar situations many times and got the green light from the client; in other situations, the client has declined the offer, yet had they accepted it I feel the event might have been very successful. However, in this instance I took a different course of action, which might be considered a risk for several reasons: firstly, because what I had suggested to Floyd was really at the edge of my competencies and I couldn't know in advance if I would be able to deliver as promised; secondly, it was only the second time in my career that I had suggested this kind of demanding set-up to a client, so I could not be certain from experience that this was the right solution for the client; thirdly, I knew in advance that my actor colleagues would worry – and with good reason – about the role of the theatre in such an open-ended process; fourthly, there was a fair amount of money at stake in my offer, and I felt sure that it was a matter of the whole package or nothing; fifthly, what I had suggested to Floyd would only be some of the building blocks for development over the course of the 24-hour session, but to him it immediately seemed to be a blueprint of what was going to happen in the event. I don't think that I was consciously aware of these risks, or considered them in our conversation. My decision was taken in a matter of a few seconds, yet it encompassed many aspects of interest and had I been following my individual choice alone, I might have advised a different course of action.

Was the responsibility for this decision individual or social – or both at the same time? Considering all the risks, I don't think my decision was made in my individual mind alone. Somehow I seemed to be in dialogue with many different voices at the same time; and those voices influenced my decision, although many of the conversations were silent and unconscious – which makes me think that responsibility is not a fixed thing. Instead, its very nature seems to be constantly changing in communicative interaction, whether this be public or silent conversation. Responsibility seems to be socially produced through the relation and negotiation between interlocutors. In this narrative, I seem to be under the illusion that it is my responsibility alone to design and facilitate the whole process. The open-ended conversation between Floyd and myself proves not to be a product of my expertise alone, but in essence a common effort – a common responsibility that changes the whole time as we gesture and respond to each other. I get a sense that we are forming or influencing each other simultaneously, casting new light on responsibility as a paradox of forming and being formed at the same time.

When Floyd introduced the notion of the fixed price and model, many different sets of responsibility were negotiated simultaneously. Floyd's responsibilities towards Mrs. Daffodil, himself and his organization, and my responsibility towards Floyd and his organization, were in play at once – as well as my responsibilities towards the interests of Dacapo, the actors and myself. I think that I more or less spontaneously responded to the risk that Floyd had taken by confiding in me, by taking a similar risk myself. Although in retrospect what happened between me and Floyd seems improvised, I believe this kind of improvisation is more than a conversation just between us two: other, inaudible, 'voices' also contribute throughout.

I seemed to hit the right chord on this occasion; he got back to me that same day. 'I have the go-ahead from Mrs. Daffodil and I've already booked the conference centre,' he said. We then settled the details of the contract between the Dacapo Theatre and the municipality. Eventually we agreed on a meeting in Odense to set the focus of the 24-hour session. The contract was signed on the basis of those telephone conversations. The contractual obligation for the Dacapo Theatre was to work for 24 hours with this group of managers, dealing with the theme 'Good management performance in times of change'.

So far our interaction suggests that the traditional split between the individual and the social, with mind residing inside a person and the social residing in a system outside the

individual, is a limited – and possibly illusory – way of seeing things, though it may sometimes represent the way I think about responsibility in my consultancy. In the encounter with Floyd, it is only in retrospect that I have come to reflect upon the notion of the paradox of forming and being formed at the same time. It is obvious that in the moment-to-moment interaction, I tend to be taken by surprise. Floyd is reaching for responsibility or starts negotiating an agreement between us. I think that my surprise is deeply rooted in a traditional way of seeing responsibility as arising and residing within the individual. When I try to see the individual and the social as two sides of the same coin, it has far-reaching consequences for the way I see responsibility. It suggests that, although the individual should be responsible for their own actions, responsibility also arises in the relation between people, and thus develops and changes continuously as interaction evolves.

Another strand of thought has emerged from this process of reflection: two different aspects of responsibility – global and local. Each aspect seems to influence the other at the same time. I often walk around with a sense of having overall pre-defined responsibility for the process and the outcome in a client relationship. But the nature of this global responsibility seems to shift continually as I engage simultaneously in public conversation with the client and silent conversation with myself, my actors and the theatre. As soon as I think that I have grasped what this overall responsibility is about, some local interaction changes it.

I always feel anxious to ensure that I do my job by taking control 'properly', perhaps suggesting that I am exploring what 'doing my job properly' means. And I find myself beginning to feel that the only way to do the job sensitively is to yield some power and allow others to participate in the process.

In this section I have touched on two questions posed in the initial examination of responsibility: the separation of individual and social, and the question of mutual influence between local and global responsibility. In trying to answer both questions I have found that the paradox of forming and being formed at the same time is right at the core of understanding what's going on in communicative interaction.

As the narrative evolves I will revisit these two questions – individual vs social, global vs local – and address the two other questions that were posed earlier: conscious vs unconscious, and the nature of power relations.

In the next section I will attempt to give a critical account of other authors' thinking with regard to the notion of responsibility and the question of the individual and the social. Each of the authors I have chosen lends considerable weight to the relational side; they each lend varying weight to the notion of individual agency. Two of them (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) are breaking very explicitly away from the traditional discourse of responsibility in which the individual serves as the critical endpoint, and emphasize the relational aspects of responsibility. The third author (Shotter, 1984, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1999) offers a similar account but differs in his orientation on agency.

The reason for choosing those authors is that, although their opinions would appear to be consistent with my own, there are crucial differences. By examining the similarities and the differences in our approaches, I aim to clarify my own stance.

6.3. Other authors on 'responsibility' – individual and social

6.3.1. John Shotter

John Shotter (1984, 1993, 1994, 1999, and 2005) represents a relational responsive view on responsibility – advocating relational responsibility rather than placing sole agency within the individual.

> Yet, the flow of activity between us cannot be understood as a sequence of intended *actions* either, for, to the extent that everything done by us, is done in spontaneous response to each other's activities, neither one of us, individually, can be held wholly responsible for what occurs here today.
>
> (Shotter, 1999, p.1)

He introduces the notion of 'joint action' Shotter (1993, p.38) as a third kind of knowing, with a different meaning from 'knowing that' or 'knowing how': knowing from within. He also departs from the notion of retrospective explanation and justification, proposing that what emerges in interaction in the moment is the intertwining of various individual

intentions to produce utterances of a novel and spontaneous character. In terms of my own practice I find it is more helpful to allow for this kind of flexibility rather than insisting on a more 'traditional', controlling, approach.

Shotter refers to his version of social constructionism as a rhetorical–responsive one. By this he seems to mean that all our linguistic abilities – even our ability as individuals, for instance, to speak representationally, and to depict or describe states of affairs in our surroundings – arise primarily from our verbal and bodily responses to others around us, including the gestural character of our voices. We must continually justify our conduct and the way we speak to others around us. Shotter is particularly occupied with the self/other relationship and the ways in which people spontaneously coordinate their everyday activities with each other. He is concerned with what it is like to be a particular person living within a network of relations with others, a person positioned or situated in relation to others in different ways at different times. He calls this self/other dimension of interaction 'joint action,' saying: 'all actions by human beings involved with others in a social group in this fashion are dialogically or responsively linked in some way, both to previous, already executed actions and to anticipated, next possible actions' (Shotter, 1984, p.52).

Shotter is preoccupied with the notion of spontaneity as a kind of unconscious response to an utterance from the other. Yet he draws attention to the ethics of responsibility: individual obligation to account for and learn from those responses. I agree with him that unless we respond in a way that makes sense to our interlocutor, we are not acting responsibly.

He speaks of 'mind-talk', which, by describing the 'movement' of one's own mind, can also 'move the mind' of another. He draws on Mead (1934, p.44, p.78) to say that it is in the actual, practical interplay of voices in an everyday concrete circumstance that practical meanings are made.

> They [practical meanings] are made … by the way in which an utterance of a second person is not only 'linked' or 'connected' as a response to an utterance of a first, but also 'linked' or 'connected' in some way with the circumstances of its utterance … It is this that provides us with a method. For the self-same ways of talking that serve to draw our attention ordinarily to the

> connections between our utterances and their circumstances, can be used extraordinarily, to draw our attention to how we do in fact make such connections.
>
> (Shotter, 1994, p.4)

This may explain how we connect the unconscious and the conscious in our bodily communication. As we try to account for an interaction with another person, we tend to describe what has appeared in the direct bodily gestures of the interlocutors and also to make the connection between aspects of the different circumstances that seem to furnish the interaction. But how do we make such connections in the first place? I think this question has a bearing on understanding how responsibility is undertaken in the relation between people. Shotter poses the question, but he doesn't give a straightforward answer to it – he seems to let it dangle in the air for the reader to find his own answers. I will try to answer his question through my critical reflections later in the paper.

The kind of social constructionism that Shotter (1994) outlines is concerned with the special set of problems raised by an attempt to investigate and articulate the nature of disorderly, conversational activities, and the influences at work in that interactive moment when the people involved jointly make their own connections –rather than using those supplied by others – that link them both to each other and to their circumstances. This suggests that Shotter advocates individual responsibility; yet he also describes communicative interaction as a complex situation of many simultaneous voices, implying that the overall outcome of any exchange cannot be traced back to the intentions of any of the individuals involved; the 'dialogical reality or space' constructed between them is experienced as an 'external reality' – as a 'third agency' (Shotter, 2005).

I find myself agreeing with Shotter, whilst feeling that something is missing. He seems to think that in one moment the agency is individual, in the next moment relational, and finally even a 'third agency'. I have come to think that agency is simultaneously individual and social, which gives a different framework than Shotter's to explain how we come to 'make connections'. The idea of the 'third agency' seems rather too convenient a box for all the inexplicable aspects of agency – one that I reject, as I will later demonstrate that there are ways of keeping track of people's intentions and how they interact.

6.3.2. McNamee and Gergen

Another way to consider responsibility is explored in the writings of McNamee and Gergen (1999). In their *Relational Responsibility, Resources for Sustainable Dialogue,* they invite a movement beyond the dominant way of seeing responsibility as residing with the individual, who serves as the critical end-station of either blame and guilt, or praise for its own sake. Instead, they propose a process of relational responsibility to augment the existing tradition. Like Shotter, they retain the framework of social constructionism, but go further to deny individual agency in relation to the notion of responsibility.

> As we shall propose, the discourse of individual responsibility (and its outcomes in action) is severely limited – intellectually, ideologically, and pragmatically.
>
> (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p.3)

As a framework for understanding relational responsibility, they introduce four paradigms that counter the individual approach; *Internal Others* suggests that we are each constituted by others, who are themselves constituted in turn. They go on to mention Mead (1934) and Cooley (1992), who talk of incorporating the other as role-taking, or social imitation, respectively. Vygotsky (1978) portrays individual thought as arising from social interchange: we hear our own bodily voice, but the content of our thoughts derives from a myriad of other voices. *Conjoint Relations* suggests that meaning arises in the patterned interaction between humans. Shotter (1993, p.39) for instance speaks of 'joint action' when he refers to relational patterns in which each constituent action depends on its intelligibility to the other, e.g. sexual intercourse. Similarly, Gergen (1994) showed how 'actions in themselves have no meaning; they acquire meaning only as they are supplemented by the actions of others' (1999, p.14).

They argue very much like Mead (1934) when they give examples of different gesture–response situations; e.g. a hostile action does not constitute hostility until another treats it as such. *Relations among Groups* expands the language of individuals relating to each other to that of groups. They do not advocate the relief of individual responsibility, but introduce another dimension in talking about responsibility: considering the 'I' as inevitably a part of a group. 'We may, for example, see that the very act that we term "theft" is so by virtue of our privileged place in the class structure, and that within the

framework of those engaged in action, its definition is otherwise (e.g. heroism, self-preservation)' (1999, p.15). *Systemic Process* argues in terms of full relatedness between actors in a systemic 'soup'. If we are part of a systemic totality, we could argue that there are no events to which we have not contributed. So the field of interconnected parts of the system is infinite.

McNamee and Gergen seem to downplay the agency of individual responsibility while promoting a communal perspective in their emphasis on individual language deriving from some sort of group. They describe conflict and disharmony as a natural outcome of social existence, but see this social existence in a broader picture:

> We are thus left with the irony that the very sources of conflict in a relationship are also the wellsprings of its strength. To hold the individual responsible for his or her ill doing is not only to blind oneself to the broader processes in which a relationship is embedded but is tantamount to solipsism…
>
> (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p.24-5)

To McNamee and Gergen the process of relational responsibility is not only a matter of practicing responsibility, but also a matter of how we describe it and account for what we are doing. I agree with their view of individual responsibility as severely limited, but feel that they are mistaken in placing sole agency within the relational field. Like Shotter, they don't acknowledge that individual and social agency might be in play at the same time when 'practicing responsibility'. They are relieving the individual from being the critical endpoint of responsibility, but do this by separating the individual and the social, thus making responsibility difficult to track. To substantiate my reflections on this, I will later (in *The Planning Meeting*) use the narrative to further investigate the question of individual vs social.

6.4. The first approach and negotiation – conscious and unconscious conversations

As I have already noted above, in conversation with Floyd I found myself in dialogue with voices other than his: the 'voices' of my company, myself, and even my actors. This alternate dialogue was not conscious or deliberate, but became apparent only when I later

try to recall what happened in our interaction. How do the unconscious conversations influence the conscious ones, and vice versa?

Shotter (1994) speaks about how we may connect the unconscious and the conscious in our bodily communication by trying to get to it from within the experience. He describes making connections between aspects of different circumstances furnishing the direct interaction. In the moment of the interaction, I don't think that those connections on a broader scale are made consciously. But some of the connections he describes become apparent when I narrate the interaction with the client. There's the connection between Floyd being the one who had the original idea of engaging with the Dacapo Theatre, and his obligation to report to his superior. There's also the connection between me being an employee earning as much money as possible in a qualitative way for the theatre; and in addition, my own professional ambitions. There's also the connection between working in an improvisational way and the client's need for structure. Perhaps I can also uncover how I make those connections, which is what I find myself doing when reflecting from within experience of communicative interaction.

McNamee and Gergen (1999) would say that conversations such as the one I had with Floyd 'are scarcely his or hers alone but bear the mark of myriad others' (1999, p.12). They would say that Floyd's utterances were not manifestations of a unified and autonomous self, but remnants of many different relations (as were mine): in entering into a new relationship, we draw on the vast and multiple resources born of our relational histories. The two interlocutors hear their own voices, but those words are influenced by others. There may be conflict between the different voices (1999, p.23), some of which will be heard and others silenced.

I agree with McNamee and Gergen in their argument about 'your voice bearing the mark of many others'. I sometimes catch myself in saying a phrase that I have borrowed from someone else, as I do in writing this paper. But I don't agree that this relieves me of my individual responsibilities; I still feel morally responsible to my interlocutors, exactly because I am conscious of mixing the influence of others with my own experience – creating my own authentic blend. I consciously allow this to happen, for reasons that I have chosen – e.g. wanting to involve the clients and actors in order to develop the opportunity to transform things, rather than repeat old patterns... even though the microscopic process of allowing this to happen can be largely unconscious.

Stacey (2003b) speaks about consciousness and unconsciousness as aspects of the narrative and propositional themes that pattern experience of being together. For the individual, unconscious processes are forms of communication of the body with itself, and take the same form as social processes.

> As individual bodies interact communicatively with each other, each simultaneously acts communicatively towards him or herself. In other words, as individuals engage in public, vocal conversation with each other, they simultaneously engage in private, silent conversation with themselves.
>
> (Stacey, 2003b, p.75)

As Shotter (1994) describes connections around communicative interaction to be unpacked, Stacey (2003b) describes the communicative episode, whether silent or public, as having a history of experience. This history has patterned private and public role-playing of each individual in simultaneously constraining and enabling ways.

Though Floyd has a history that I can bear in mind in our interaction, I can only guess the details. I too bring various histories into the relation, and of these I am consciously aware of only a few in the moment-to-moment interaction. The rest of the histories in play – although not apparent to me or to the client – nevertheless seem simultaneously to contribute to, and influence, patterning of communicative experience.

To make sense of this influence, I shall consider the nature of the silent conversation that I had with my actor colleagues during the public conversation with Floyd. What kind of history concerning my relations with the actors did I bring to the conversation? One history dominates: our company traditionally has its roots in theatre, while also using different aspects of consultancy to facilitate reflection and dialogue with our customers. Our practice has increasingly shifted to have its basis in consultancy, using different aspects of theatre to inspire the dialogue. To deal with this shift in greater detail would require a whole new line of inquiry, which I cannot pursue here. I therefore limit my inquiry to considering the impact this history could have had on the decision I took when making my offer to Floyd, and also considering how and whether the history was influenced or changed by my anticipation of the future.

Based on discussions I've had with the actors over the years, I entered the conversation with Floyd aware that I and the actors had differences about our perception of our role. During the conversation, I did not consciously consider the potential conflict that those differences might create with the direction in which my negotiations with Floyd was heading. But as I look at the encounter afresh, I think that the differences with the actors may have influenced my decision considerably. I didn't have a history of facilitating 24-hour sessions – to date I had only done one session of similar length. It's therefore possible that one reason for my introducing the notion of such an intensive and extended session was that I needed to compensate the actors. Of course theatre was mentioned as a major building block in the package, but I sensed that the role of theatre would become secondary in the session unless I insisted on using it. And I couldn't predict what would happen in the session – we could do no more than agree on a sketchy plan to give everyone a rough direction.

I anticipate a future working with the actors, rather than individually as a consultant; but a future where I can draw on the resources of the theatre whenever it fits into whatever I'm doing. Sadly this is a rather asymmetric relation, since my actor colleagues do not invite me to use my consultancy skills in their new initiatives. Nevertheless, this history must have impacted on my decision, while this anticipation of the future also influenced the history – from an initial view of the actors as troublesome and annoying, to considering them as vital partners in the kind of work I undertake. This kind of conscious and unconscious thinking is enormously influential in what I find myself doing and communicating in the living present. The unconscious seems to form, and be formed by, the conscious at the same time.

I have demonstrated here that whenever two persons engage in mutual conversation and negotiation, they each bring a history of experience into the interaction. This experience may not be apparent to ourselves or each other, but does influence the way we speak – how the patterning of communicative interaction takes place. It influences the way intentions are played out in the situation. I have introduced the notion of paradox: seeing conscious and unconscious as simultaneous, resulting in a patterning of communicative interaction that is hugely different from the 'traditional' way of separating the two.

6.5. The planning meeting – individual and social revisited

Before the 24-hour session, we had a planning meeting. The group comprised Floyd, Gertrud (an older female manager of a kindergarten with years of experience in the municipality), Ralph (a male manager of a kindergarten with relatively limited experience), and the former principal to Floyd, Andrew (they had recently become equals as Mrs. Daffodil entered the organization and lifted out a level of management in the administration). I attended with a female actor colleague.

Although the meeting took place in my office, Floyd initially took a strong lead. I was slightly mystified by this, wondering what his agenda was. Why did he feel the need to take control? Could it be to show off to me and/or to his colleagues? I imagined he had been assigned to this task to ensure that the process would not go wrong at any stage. So perhaps he was trying to control the meeting from the start, by defining the agenda and objectives. At the time, I interpreted his approach as an unnecessary and unproductive power display, to which I felt the need to respond in a way that would open up the process instead of closing it down from the beginning. My response was to agree with him that this meeting had to end with mutual agreement on X and Y; and suggested that since we were all aware of the need to keep X and Y in continuous focus, it might be useful to start the meeting in a more open-ended way and somehow let the agenda emerge as we were speaking. Floyd seemed to respond with relief. He then participated enthusiastically – and with no particular urge to dominate – throughout the rest of the meeting.

In describing this experience, I feel each of us acted from different views of our respective responsibilities as the conversation evolved. Initially, preoccupied with our individual obligations, Floyd and I seemed to compete for overall responsibility for the outcome – so our sets of responsibility were clearly not compatible. Individual and social were separated. Suddenly, as though miraculously, we find ourselves pulling together. How did this happen?

Mead (1934) sheds useful light on this when he argues that linking the attitude of specific and generalized others with the idea of a ‘me’ tends to assume that the others’ gestures are responding to a single subject, the ‘I’. Yet the self is actually the relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. An awareness of that self is self-consciousness, but this does not change the unpredictable nature of the ‘I’s response to the gesture of the ‘me’. The implications of

Mead's thinking applied to the narrative are to say that my expectations of, and reaction to, the attitude of the other changed in the course of our interaction. I became more or less aware of the attitudes towards me, which triggered a response from me (the 'I') to do with letting go of trying to control the session and to do with not taking up a power battle with Floyd. This response from me (the 'I') actually surprised myself.

Continuing along these lines of thinking, there is no split between the individual and the social, as we have seen with McNamee/Gergen and Shotter when Stacey (2001) argues that:

> If one has the capacity to call forth the attitude of the other in oneself, the capacity for private role play and silent conversation, the capacity for thought and reflection, then one has the duty to account for one's actions to others even if one cannot know what the consequences of these actions will be. Moral responsibility is simultaneously individual and social.
>
> (Stacey, 2001, p.92)

I see the individual and the social as aspects of the same process. The individual's mind is paradoxically both forming and being formed by the social – implying that responsibility may be socially produced, but we are still individually responsible for our own actions. We cannot plan how and to whom we wish to be responsible, because we can't know in advance the other's gestures and responses, so cannot predict our own responses. Of course individual intentions exist, but they will always emerge in relationships between people rather than arising within the individual alone.

The communication between Floyd and myself could have been played out in many different ways. I could have reacted to Floyd's gestures in ways I have reacted in similar situations in the past: by snarling back at the dog snarling at me – taking charge in a controlling way. But in this case I may have had a sense that there was more to Floyd's gestures than him just trying to control affairs: maybe an invitation to negotiate responsibility, maybe an attempt to find out whether I could match their needs for consultancy. I can't possibly know for sure if one or the other is the case. Or both. Or none. But I feel certain that the sudden impact of a mutual sense of interdependence between the two of us has co-created this significant shift in responsibility. This sense of interdependence didn't arise within each of us individually, but was socially produced.

Clearly, I am not suggesting that we discussed all the elements interdependently, then agreed what it was all about. None of the public conversation touched directly on the notion of interdependence. The interdependence arose from non-verbal communication between bodies, and from our own private role-play.

Responsibility may originate in the same way: arising not in a conscious, verbalized and mutually agreed form, but being implicit in the bodily conversation between people. It is socially produced and negotiated; but ultimately the individual chooses how to act upon it.

I have now shown that responsibility can be unpredictable in both its generation and its execution. It depends on how the interdependence between the two responsible parties is perceived by each. Individually we can have intentions of how and to whom we wish to be responsible. Our own intentions can change in social interaction as they meet the gestures of our counterpart; and their gestures can also change as they are faced with our intentions**.**

This unpredictability is simultaneously to be found in the individual and the social. While past patterns can be repeated, there is also the potential for transformation.

In the next section I will use two fragments of the session with the 24 managers to reflect on the question of what the implications are for understanding responsibility when considered in the light of *power relating*.

6.6. Fragments from the 24-hour session – power relations

6.6.1. Prelude from the session

The day began with a magnificent Christmas lunch; we then grouped in a large circle, and each introduced ourselves with a short presentation in which we also described what we saw as the features of good leadership in times of change. I had decided to make this an obligatory round in order to give everyone a chance to speak and be heard in the large group. Fortunately, everybody seemed to be open to hearing each other's contributions. It was fascinating to listen to the diversity of opinions and attitudes towards leadership. At the same time, I was intrigued to see which of the participants dominated the group discourse. There was certainly enormous difference in status within the group. It was sometimes hard to tell whether they were addressing Mrs. Daffodil, each other, or both; but

there seemed to be some competition among the managers, along with a dawning sympathetic curiosity, an initial desire to cooperate on whatever the agenda was.

I sat beside Mrs. Daffodil, who was the last person to speak. Instead of letting her choose the subject, I decided to risk challenging her on her position. This intention emerged as I listened to the managers speaking. They had each addressed the subject of good leadership from their own viewpoint and in general terms, without addressing Mrs. Daffodil's or each other's leadership styles directly. Although they were getting some idea of why they were together in this session, I sensed a lot of unspoken questions. I wanted to speed up the process of asking these and obtaining answers. I wouldn't normally challenge the top manager in an organization, without warning, to give a personal response to the statements of their employees. But here, I responded to the tension in the room by bringing the participants' silent conversations into the open.

As I introduced my intention, Mrs. Daffodil's body language went from 'don't do this to me' to 'OK, let's get going'. In the interview I think that we touched on a lot of the 'unsayable' questions and she seemed surprised by her own answers, which were, among other things: 'We are in a position where I don't know my own future and I don't know the future of the managers. I think they will have to cooperate to maintain a strong position in the merged municipality. At the same time I acknowledge that they are also competitors for my attention, the attention of the parents and the attention of each other – survival is at stake. I can sense a certain anxiety in myself when I am trying to cooperate with other managers in equal positions as my own in the other municipalities in the merger. I know that all four of us are competing for one office, and still we have committed ourselves to make the merger succeed.' What came out of her mouth was something she hadn't even heard herself express before. We seemed to be sharing the responsibility and the risk. It was as if responsibility and risk went hand in hand. She took the risk of being spontaneous in here response to my spontaneous gesture. Together we took responsibility out of its familiar context and into the improvisational domain, where risk and potential lie.

Following this interview, the participants reflected in groups of three. Their feedback showed that they felt encouraged and surprised by what they had heard and discussed; they had never heard their CEO and colleagues speaking as frankly as this. The interview and group reflections certainly influenced my own understanding: I found that an energising shift had happened in the way I was responsible.

6.6.2. Coffee break and encounter with the actors

Time went fast: suddenly, it was time for a coffee break. In the initial round of presentations I had also invited the actors and the musician to give us their thoughts on what constitutes good management. When I now try to account for my unusual decision to include them I have come to think that it must have surprised them. I think this was not pre-planned, but simply a split-second response to the people in the circle. In retrospect, perhaps I wanted to convey the idea that we were also part of the process, not just there as observers or process consultants, but as participants with special responsibilities. Both the actors and the musician, though surprised, seemed to welcome the initiative as it helped them feel included and responsible in this initial session. The other participants seemed to respond with genuine curiosity, as well as a kind of relief that no one was there simply to observe or facilitate.

The next building block in the process I had discussed in advance with the actors and our musician: the musician should introduce an exercise in teamwork – teaching the participants to sing a song in different voices at the same time.

However, during the break the actors displayed a great impatience to get to the theatre part of the session. I was reluctantly persuaded by their arguments that the participants needed to get to the real business of the gathering. My feeling in that moment was that we were right in the middle of the real business of conversational inquiry (Shaw, 2005/6). I thought that the actors eventually had come to feel a little lost in the initial large group session. They now needed action, which included the application of their professional skills. A play had been rehearsed in advance, which they of course saw as the main ingredient in the session. Usually I consider theatre to be the main building block in the process with our clients, but in those moments during the coffee break I had my doubts about the specific process we were engaged in. I was not able to articulate my doubts precisely in words; it was merely a sense that the participants didn't want the fiction as a filter or lever to help them deal with their situation. So instead of following my own instinct on how to proceed, I took the actors seriously.

6.6.3. Reflecting on the encounter with the actors – power relations

In this section I will try to use the question about power relations to reflect on the encounter with the actors, as I have come to believe that the notion of power relations is critical to understanding how responsibility is continuously negotiated between the interlocutors. Again, I feel that neither of the two concepts is fixed in isolation: on the contrary, they seem to mutually influence each other and are thus subject to continuous change.

The interdependence between the actors and me is an issue to McNamee and Gergen as concerns the consensual progression, and idealistically I find myself agreeing with them, but at the same time I also find their account somehow too naïve. Their starting point is two equal parties who are moving together towards joint achievement, although they are competitors. They don't acknowledge the paradox of the parties being competitors and cooperating partners at the same time. To me it seems obvious that conflict understood as power relations plays a central role in this interaction, and I will turn to an author who deals with this aspect of human relating.

As mentioned in Paper 2, the sociologist Norbert Elias (1970) adopts a functional perspective on power as an alternative to the traditional view, where power is reified and associated with individuals and institutions.

> Another person's power is to be feared: he can compel us to do a particular thing whether we want to or not. Power is suspect: people use it to exploit others for their own ends. Power seems unethical… We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far that we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more directed by others than they are by us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status or career, or simply for excitement.
>
> (Elias, 1970, p.93)

He points out that all relating can be understood as power relating. In order to maintain a relation to another person we inevitably engage in a mutually constraining communication, which limits our action space but at the same time provides us with other opportunities.

Communicative interaction is a process in which people account for their actions and negotiate their next steps.

In terms of my narrative here, this seems to make sense, as new patterns are emerging in the communicative interaction. The utterances from the actors are something they wouldn't normally have said. Nor could I have foreseen my own response. The power figurations between the actors and myself are shifting. I seem to be dependent on their skills, as they depend on mine. Each of us enables the other to do what we couldn't have done alone, but at the same time there are actions that the individual is precluded from carrying out. In this moment of negotiation they are taking an unexpected step, which is undermining the usual power relations.

I wonder what made them take this unusual step of insisting on theatre, when we were in the middle of an important progression. In that moment I was genuinely surprised and my initial silent reaction was to withdraw from any negotiation with the actors and to just carry on as I pleased. There could be several reasons for this inclination; one reason being the historical power configuration between actor and consultant in the Dacapo Theatre – the actors shouldn't take a major part of the responsibility for the overall process, interfering with the key areas of the consultant; another reason being that I actually had strong ideas of my own about the direction we should take.

I think that two main elements made the actors take this initiative: first of all, their sense that theatre is generally being more and more downplayed in our processes with the client; secondly, I think that on this occasion they really felt very responsible for the whole process, because they had been more closely engaged than usual in the afternoon session; they had been invited to participate not only as observers, but with their whole selves. So somehow I think that they were showing me great confidence in challenging current power relations. This reconfiguration of power relations simultaneously changed nature of global and local responsibility. Although I did not feel relieved of my responsibility, I undoubtedly noticed a shift.

The same kind of explanation may fits with an encounter I had later in the evening with Floyd and the planning group.

6.6.4. Encounter with the planning group

We have just concluded a wonderful evening meal. I have started to reload the batteries for the evening session, confident that everything will work out fine. Suddenly one of the actors approaches me. She is breathlessly telling me that she has been speaking with members of the planning group, who have concluded that they can't take the responsibility for moving forward on the following day as previously agreed. They are obviously anxious.

My first thought is that they are not supposed to take this kind of responsibility. I am the one responsible. Then my next thought is that they actually are taking an admirable, but disturbing ownership of the entire process, which is what I will respond to. I ask the actor where the planning group is assembled. I then approach the group to get their anxiety sorted out or lived with. I am going to account for my intentions.

As I approach the planning group, I think about the contact person's obvious need to know what's going to happen and maybe also to control it. How can I accommodate their need to be in control and still keep the door open for whatever may arise? I ask them what they have been talking about. They say that they have been discussing how the participants won't be ready to tell about any relevant dilemmas from their managerial practice the next day. This is what I have agreed with the planning group should be the main building block on the second day: the participants explaining what's at stake for them, and us staging their situations in the theatre. I ask the planning group how they have experienced the day until now. They are very happy that all the participants have spoken in the large group; they are also happy with the interview with the CEO and the following reflections. They emphasize that the theatre session they have been involved in has been very relevant and engaging. However, they think that the participants have not yet been sufficiently provoked – they have not been unwrapping their anxieties and conflicts sufficiently.

In this moment I somehow get the feeling that they are holding me responsible for not creating the required provocative environment. My response is to say that I think it takes time to open up for the kind of rawness that they are seeking, and I also ask them if they are prepared to take part in a really rough conflict. I then sense their eagerness to engage with what really matters – to cut to the bone. There's a lot of previously unattended business to be attended to. They think that there are a lot of bodies in the closet. They are

in a position where they paradoxically want the filter that the theatre offers and at the same time they want to have their conflicts and power battles displayed and dealt with directly and openly.

In this moment I can't help thinking that what went on with the planning group was very similar to my earlier exchange with the actors. The exchange with the actors might even have paved the way for the planning group's intervention. The crucial moment of novelty arising in the interaction with the planning group was when I seemed to think they were holding me responsible for not creating the appropriate conditions for change soon enough. I think it occurred to me in this conversation that they wanted to be taken seriously as responsible partners in the process and that they wanted to share the responsibility. Their gesture changed my anticipation of the future – a future where I would autonomously be taking all the decisions on how to proceed – to a rather different future of mutual recognition. But my view of the future simultaneously changed my experience of the past. And I think that my response to them also changed their anticipation of the future and then also their interpretation of the past. This encounter was certainly characterized by the power relations shifting back and forth. There were strong signs of interdependence, as I was dependent on their ownership towards the further process and they were dependent on me to facilitate it. We were continuously constraining and enabling each other in moving forward in ways we couldn't have moved individually.

In this section, I have found that responsibility is based on simultaneously constraining and enabling social relations – power relations. I have also found that there is a strong interdependence – not only as an aspect of people organising – but also between the concept of responsibility and power. It seems that it is the perception of responsibility and the position your find your self in to enact your responsibility that forms the power relation in the first place. Then the potential shifts in the power relations are due to the negotiation of responsibility and the understanding of responsibility as social in nature.

6.7. Discussion

What are implications for understanding responsibility if *individual* and *social* are not separated? How can *unconscious* influence *conscious* and vice versa? How might shifts in *local* responsibilities influence perception of *global* responsibility, and vice versa? What are implications for understanding responsibility if it is seen in light of *power relating*?

Those questions were thrown up at the beginning of the paper, and have been used to reflect on the evolving narrative. It has been difficult to try to answer them separately, because they seem to be interlinked. However, as this paper draws to a conclusion I will discuss my findings once again and try to sort out where they differ from mainstream thought in this field.

In trying to understand the notion of responsibility, does it matter whether individual and social are separated?

I have argued that the traditional split between individual and social – with mind residing inside a person, and social residing in a system outside individual – is a limited, and possibly illusory, way of seeing things. I have further argued that when I try to see individual and social as two sides of the same coin, this has important consequences for how I see responsibility, because then responsibility arises from relation between people and it develops and changes continuously as interaction evolves. Nevertheless, we are all responsible for our individual actions.

McNamee and Gergen (1999) for their part have strongly advocated a relational understanding of responsibility as a question of non-conflictual interdependence between interlocutors. Our notions of agency and responsibility are socially produced, in situations that are beyond our control. This is what McNamee and Gergen call ‘conjoint relations’, suggesting that they downplay the individual’s ability and moral obligation to answer for his actions in communicative interaction. They combine individual and social in a relational ‘soup’ where nobody can be held responsible for his acts.

Shotter (1984, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2005) seems to agree with McNamee and Gergen as he speaks about communicative interaction as a complex situation of many simultaneous voices, by which he seems to mean that the overall outcome of any exchange cannot be

traced back to intentions of any one of individuals involved; the 'dialogical reality or space' constructed between them is experienced as an 'external reality' – as a 'third agency'. However, I think Shotter is hedging his bets in his attempt to explain responsibility, and somehow his argument diffuses the nature of responsibility beyond recognition.

Regarding individual and social, I have further argued that responsibility may be unpredictable in both its generation and its execution. It depends on how interdependence between two responsible parties is perceived by each. Intentions of individuals potentially evolve in course of social interaction, as they encounter and respond to gestures of counterparts; and the counterpart's gestures potentially change as they are confronted by the individual's intentions. Such a level of unpredictability is to be found simultaneously in individual and social.

Shotter similarly speaks about the notion of spontaneity as a kind of unconscious response to an utterance from the other. But I think he is ignoring the paradox of the individual forming and being formed by the social at the same time, which seems to me to be crucial to our understanding of the notion of responsibility. Stacey (2001, p.92) supports this argument when he says that if one has the capacity to call forth the attitude of the other in oneself, the capacity for private role-play and silent conversation, the capacity for thought and reflection, then one has the duty to account for one's actions to others even if one cannot know what the consequences of those actions will be. Moral responsibility is simultaneously individual and social.

A brief answer to the question whether it matters if individual and social are separated would be – yes. It matters simply because you can't sufficiently explain what is going on in communicative interaction between people if you take individual and social at separate levels; in that case it won't be possible to reach the detail of gesture-response of both private and public conversation. Interdependence between individual and social is right at the core of understanding communication and responsibility. If you take interdependence seriously there can be no such split. The individual is simultaneously forming and being formed by the social. I think that you still contribute towards the evolving situation through your individual intent, even though you allow that intent to be subject to spontaneous changes in response to social interaction.

Concerning the second question about how *unconscious* may influence *conscious* and vice versa, I have shown that whenever two persons engage in mutual conversation and negotiation they both bring a history of experience into the interaction. This experience is not necessarily apparent to themselves or to each other. However, it does influence ways we speak and how patterning of communicative interaction takes place. It influences ways intentions are played out in the situation. Unconscious forms, and is simultaneously formed by, conscious. Shotter (1994) takes a similar approach when he speaks of connections made between aspects of different circumstances as furnishing direct interaction. McNamee and Gergen (1999) would say that what we do and say in a specific conversation 'are scarcely his or hers alone but bear the mark of myriad others' (1999, p.12). They would say that these utterances are not manifestations of a unified and autonomous self, but remnants of many different relations. So the two interlocutors may be hearing their own voices, but their words are influenced by others. McNamee and Gergen argue that when two persons enter into a new relationship they must necessarily draw on vast and multiple resources born of their relational histories. Some of the voices will be heard, and others will be silenced.

I agree completely with McNamee/Gergen and Shotter in their arguments about unconscious influencing communicative interaction. But I feel that one essential component is missing, and that is the reverse: how does conscious influence unconscious? Stacey (2003b) touches on this question when he speaks of consciousness and unconsciousness as being aspects of narrative and propositional themes that pattern experience of being together. With regard to individuals, unconscious processes are forms of communication of body with itself, and take the same form as social processes.

Stacey (2003b) speaks about the communicative episode, whether it is silent or public conversation, as having a history of experience. This history has patterned the private and public role-playing of each individual in simultaneous constraining and enabling ways.

I have come to think that there's interdependence between conscious and unconscious as both notions seem to simultaneously influence each other. This interdependence is crucial to understand how responsibility is arising and developing. In this thinking there's no split between the two, instead the two opposites are interlinked in a paradoxical sense making process.

Concerning the third question about how shifts in *local* responsibilities may influence perception of *global* responsibility and vice versa, I have shown that both aspects seem to influence the other at the same time (see p. 14-6). If you constantly find yourself walking around with a sense of having an overall pre-defined responsibility for the process and the outcome in a client relationship, you will experience (more or less consciously) that the nature of this overall responsibility seems to be continually shifting as you simultaneously engage in public conversation with the client, as well as in silent conversation with yourself and others. As soon as you think that you have grasped what this overall responsibility is about, some local interaction may change it. And as it changes, local responsibility changes simultaneously. Global affects local, as well as vice versa – i.e. you don't just get enmeshed in local micro-interaction and let yourself be led wherever it goes, but your global sense of responsibility means you constantly review whether certain objectives are being met and how.

Concerning the fourth question about what the implications are for understanding responsibility if it is seen in the light of *power relating*, I have argued that responsibility is based on simultaneously constraining and enabling social relations – power relations. In communicative interaction, we have to account for our actions and negotiate our next steps in order to maintain a relationship with the other. It has become obvious to me that when power relations are reconfigured, responsibilities may change simultaneously, from both a micro and a macro perspective and vice versa. I am not speaking of a linear process, but of a circular and paradoxical way of thinking of change. Change in responsibilities may affect power configurations and change in power configurations may simultaneously affect ways responsibility is perceived.

With regard to power and power relations, McNamee and Gergen (1999) do not address the paradox of simultaneous constraints and enablement in the interdependence between people and the inherent conflicts. Instead, they seem to emphasize the consensual dance between equals. Shotter (1984, 1993, 1994, 1999, 2005) doesn't pay much attention to the notion of conflict and power relations either. Elias (1970), on the other hand, argues that all relating is to be understood as a form of power relating. The power configuration is continuously shifting between interlocutors as to how dependence/responsibility is experienced and negotiated between the two.

To sum up the discussion so far, I think that understanding the notion of interdependence between people is key to understanding the concept of responsibility. Inherent in my view of interdependence are notions of power; absence of any split between individual and social; interplay of conscious and unconscious; and paradox of global versus local. The consequences for my understanding of responsibility are far-reaching. Stacey (2001) pinpoints the essence of my understanding when he argues that if you have capacity to call forth the attitude of the other in yourself, capacity for private role-play and silent conversation, and capacity for thought and reflection, then you have duty to account for your actions to others even if you cannot know what consequences of these actions will be. Moral responsibility is simultaneously individual and social.

This understanding is far removed from current mainstream thinking about responsibility, which focuses very much on either the individual or the systems approach – it is a question of where to put the blame if something goes wrong. In this paper I haven't dealt with mainstream thinkers such as Bateson (1973) or Argyris (1990) or Schein (1999), who all in their thinking about responsibility seem to be focusing on the individual approach from a view of the past – instead of a view on what's emerging in communicative interaction. I have chosen to move beyond working critically with those mainstream thinkers, because I have been interested in reflecting critically on authors who have more diverse thought on this subject matter. Nevertheless I seem indirectly to come to critique the 'mainstream' as I myself – as demonstrated in the narrative – represent this view on the subject of responsibility. The authors I have chosen to review all offer different approaches to matters that touch on the notions of interdependence and responsibility. I think that I have found my own voice with the help of these thinkers both as an aspect of emerging ideas and as an aspect of people organising.

6.8. Conclusion

My initial intention with this paper was to find a way of making more explicit how I manage to take decisions in the tension between competing sets of responsibility in my consultancy. The purpose of my inquiry was to find a way to understand and explain from within my practice how I in particular deal with responsibility and at the same time focus on changing my practice. Through critical reflection on a narrative of engagement with a client, I have come a bit closer to understanding what the notion of responsibility means

for me in my consultancy. My understanding has shifted remarkably in the course of writing and reflecting. And so has my practice.

As I looked back on Papers 1 and 2, I could see that I was circling around the tensions of responsibility most of the time, but without really dealing with the matter. I can now understand why I left it alone. Responsibilities are shifting all the time. It is a difficult concept to grasp. From one moment to the next, the mental picture we have of our own responsibilities can change: this seems to be all about interdependence. We are simultaneously part of so many interdependencies, each of which has a call on us while we simultaneously have a call on them. If a change happens in one of the relations, it may have consequences for all the other relations.

When I started out on this paper, I didn't see clearly the interdependence between myself and the people I'm interacting with. I had a tendency to define for myself what I was responsible for and to whom, which becomes very clear throughout the narrative. Because I am so focused on my own sense of responsibility, I seem to be genuinely surprised every time one of my interlocutors plays his part in the responsibility set-up, making responsibility open to negotiation. It seems that my interlocutors have to fight their way into my territory to first of all negotiate what the responsibility is all about and secondly to share it. The invitation for negotiation and sharing doesn't initially come from me. I have been in the habit of sticking with the 'mainstream' thinking of individual responsibility.

By examining my own interdependencies and reflecting on the questions raised in this paper, I feel that I have reached some useful understandings for my own practice. I don't manage to take decisions all by myself. All the decisions I take are based on interdependencies that may be competing with each other. All those interdependencies constrain each other, whilst at the same time enabling what couldn't have been achieved outside of this interdependence. So the decisions are generated within the relational field, but I am still responsible – even to myself – for the impact of my decisions. I believe that responsibility is unpredictable by nature, since it depends on the gesture-response of both the public and silent conversation, which are beyond our direct control.

In the course of working with this paper, I feel that I have developed a practical and theoretical alertness to the paradox of conscious/unconscious, individual/social, global/local and of power, in my efforts to understand what is going on in the moment-to-

moment interaction. This alertness has provided me with the insight to increasingly encourage both risk and responsibility to be in play at the same time. By inviting my interlocutors to share the risk of not knowing – by participating without knowing their response in advance, and without knowing my own response to their gestures – I am simultaneously inviting them to share responsibility for the outcome.

An awareness of shared participation is not a question of avoiding my own responsibility. Engaging with others and taking their competing needs into account means that I am not just imposing my own will but taking part in a dynamic interaction with a fluid outcome, adjusting my own expectations constantly in order to accommodate those of others. From the perspective of global responsibility, I now understand that being sensitive to others' needs and expectations – while maintaining focus on what I hope to achieve – is the best way to ensure the optimal outcome for everyone involved. Although the process of sharing responsibility involves social interaction in which local responsibilities and power relating unconsciously influence me and the outcome of what I do, nevertheless my readiness to allow this process is the result of a conscious individual choice, so that my sense of responsibility for the outcome is not diminished.

7. Synopsis

7.1. Introduction

> …practitioners in the arts have an acute sense of the paradox of 'being in charge but not in control' as we strive to play out creatively the evolution of our interdependence and conflicting responsibilities and aspirations, forming and being formed in the process.
>
> (Shaw, 2002, p.117).

Having completed three consecutive papers over a period of two years, the time has come to start tracking where and how potential movement in my thinking and practice as a consultant shows.

The quote above from Patricia Shaw captures where I think I am right now in my thinking and in my practice. As a consultant working with actors, I have come to find that a perspective of ensemble improvisation (Shaw, 2002) – understood as self organising social interaction – is a very helpful way to understand and embark on organizational change. It is helpful in the sense that it focuses attention on emergence in the midst of *interdependence* of and *conflicting responsibilities* between different players – sometimes as repetitive patterns, sometimes as improvisation in organizational change – so that as a player we are simultaneously forming and being formed in the process. It highlights constraints of the player's various interacting intentions and responsibilities, and it highlights the notion of 'improvisation' as something new being created from within the act; not before, or after. The notion of 'ensemble' underpins improvisational acts as social interaction between different players.

7.1.1. Addressing clients and fellow consultants

As a consultant working with organizational change I understand that clients increasingly seek open-ended facilitation, while at the same time requiring a well-planned agenda for the roll-out of the process, to ensure that we are on the right track. From my own perspective, I also find it increasingly useful and desirable to facilitate in open-ended ways, but at the same time I also tend to try to monitor processes in more structured terms in order to 'get things right'.

However, as a consultant in charge of facilitation, I have become aware that we cannot really control where the situations we are in charge of are heading. So although as an individual we are contractually and morally engaged to be in charge, we can't autonomously decide the direction situations will take. We are part of many interdependencies that are influencing our work.

How can we then – in light of this paradox – make sense of a notion of being in charge in responsible ways?

Answers to this question depend very much on how we pay attention to the paradoxical nature of situations where we are in charge but not in control. When the notion of being in charge and the notion of not being in control are seen as simultaneously opposing and interacting forces, creative tension emerges. It is our next thoughts that count: whether we decide to try to resolve or eliminate paradox by placing opposites in different times and places, or whether we decide to stay with the tension of opposites to let something potentially novel emerge.

7.2. Key themes

In this section I aim to recapture and reconsider key themes that have emerged in my exploration and, over a span of two years, have contributed to changes in my thinking, practice and identity.

When I re-read Paper 1, I seem to have been having an un-reflected and somehow subliminal sense of tension of interdependence linked to the notion of being 'in charge and but not in control'.

In the writing, I seem to keep focusing unilaterally on the developing improvisational part of my work, and not particularly on the role of the consultant being in charge. Writing in this way – trying to suppress inherent tension – illustrates a way of thinking in dichotomies, which is to divide wholes in either black or white in order to be able to cope with the situation. I was obviously not critically aware of interdependencies and conflicting responsibilities linked to taking the paradox of 'being in charge, but not in control' seriously. Tension was there in the first place, but I didn't really see it.

I think that my reluctance at this stage to consciously connect with inherent tension may be explained by a struggle to retain my sense of self in relation to others, and to retain a sense of order, which Streatfield (2001) says may be linked to an urge to dampen anxieties of disorder and unpredictability. So although a notion of improvisation and unpredictability permeates the narrative, I can't help thinking that I was trying to control reflection. I had a story to tell, but I didn't reflect on underlying issues, which might have changed the story and potentially my perception of practice.

In Paper 2 I set out to explore what it might mean to *be in charge* in the tension of working simultaneously with *structure* and *improvisation.* This exploration was undoubtedly prompted by a dawning realization that as a consultant I was supposed to be in charge of open-ended processes with clients, while at the same time I couldn't possibly be in control. The narrative – about the public school in conflict – shows clearly that in my practice I have been trying to keep things on a tight rein in order to get things done in the best possible way for the client; and at the same time it shows clearly that I have not at all been 'successful' in attempting this form of unilateral control.

Tension emerges in the paper as encounters between known and unknown – between intention and emergence (Shaw, 2002). Tension potentially produces new meaning. I manage to identify a few instances in the narrative where, in the living present, I am conscious of tension, and by taking tension seriously let new meaning emerge.

There are several examples in the paper of intentions as simultaneous aspects of the same process. I have the overall purpose of the intervention clear in my mind: it is agreed with the client; it is morally inviolable. I also have intentions of how to proceed in local interaction with the client. However, intention potentially shifts as I encounter the intentions of the client. The clash of differing intentions produces tension.

The paper proved difficult to write. As I now reflect on the difficulties I seemed to be facing, I think I was merely trying to make sense of my methodology as consultant. Tension as an aspect of people interacting is not really picked up in a reflexive way in the paper, probably because it is a difficult concept to grasp and because dealing seriously with it means dealing with my sense of self and other; risking shifts in identity.

Paper 3 then necessarily points to the people aspect. I set out to explore how I manage to take decisions in tension between competing sets of responsibility. This exploration quickly took me into the domain of responsibility as the key theme. In reflecting on the notion of responsibility, it then became apparent to me that *interdependence* (Elias, [1939] 2000) – understood as power relations and conflicting responsibilities – is at the core of my emerging understanding of communicative interaction and of what it may mean to be a responsible consultant.

In my attempts to explain what went on in communicative interaction I realized that the absence of any split between individual and social (Stacey, 2001), and the influence of the notions of power (Elias, 1970) and emergence (Mead, 1934, Elias, [1939] 2000) are key. Shaw (2002) suggests that conversation is a process of communicative interaction that has intrinsic capacity to pattern itself. No one has control over emergent meaning. Still, between us we are shaping and being shaped by what emerges from within the flow of our responsive relating.

What is not taken up in any of the papers is the notion of emotion linked to the tension of responsibility. As I reflect on key themes of the thesis, I have come to have a strong sense of emotion – such as shame, although it has not explicitly been dealt with. The paradox of simultaneous responsibility and irresponsibility produces tension. I am very seldom consciously aware of this tension in the living present, nor even in hindsight. Emotions – shame – are even less accessible.

7.2.1. Summary of key themes

Below is a summary of two key themes upon which I will elaborate and reflect afresh, tracing movement of my thinking and substantiating my emergent understanding of the notion of responsibility over the course of writing.

In charge but not in control – paradox of individual and social

- I have experienced a shift *from* living a perspective of the autonomous individual, usually understanding myself to be in control in social interaction, *to* understanding a perspective of the individual in which person and subject are given content only by social institutions. Social process influences behaviour of individuals involved

in it and simultaneously individual behaviour influences social process. Individual and social are aspects of the same process.

Responsibility as emergent patterning processes of social interaction

- I have experienced a shift in understanding what it may mean to be in charge and be responsible as a consultant. Instead of a spatial understanding of responsibility as something we have, give or take, I have come to see responsibility as essentially responsive process; as emergent patterning processes of social interaction, which we can't control. We have an intention as to what we are responsible for, and to whom. At the same time emergent social interaction determines the nature of responsibility. Intrinsic to social interaction is interdependence and tension – understood as power relations and conflict – both as an aspect of people organising and as an aspect of emerging ideas. Whenever we try to be responsible, we may paradoxically be acting in an irresponsible way. Shame as emotion is closely linked to tension of responsibility. We can't always accommodate all conflicting responsibilities at the same time, so eventually we have to choose. Choice relates to how we incorporate attitudes of the particular and the generalized other to our self-consciousness. And choice reflects how we are being responsible.

7.3. In charge but not in control – paradox of individual and social

Patricia Shaw (2002) argues in her book *Changing Conversations in Organizations* that practitioners in the arts have an acute sense of the paradox of 'being in charge but not in control'. She contrasts this sense with how agency in human affairs is largely conceived in organizations, which is to be seen in our tendency to focus on leadership and influence in terms of how we articulate expected future states, and how we potentially may account for ourselves in these terms.

When I started to write Paper 1 I seemed to be consciously aware of the notion of 'being in charge but not in control'. I had been reading about it and tasting it. But the lived experience – acuteness of tension of interdependence – is initially not at all disclosed explicitly.

Two years ago, when I took stock of the influences and experiences that informed my practice, back then I recounted theoretical and practical approaches, which were rooted in

cognitive psychology and rationalist teleology. Basically they focus on the autonomous individual. Relations with other humans are seen as actions that might affect the individual's mind, but have no real share in its construction. The individual mind is understood as a system, which can be observed and changed by the owner. Argyris (1990, 1991) speaks about 'double-loop learning' as a choice of someone standing outside the system (individual mind) to make fundamental changes to the system (mental models in individual minds).

As I see it now, my lever and way of challenging went through a cognitivist approach with inspiration from Argyris (1990, 1991) and Schein (1988, 1999). I saw change as a matter of changing mental models within the individual, and the system changing as a consequence of this. I then became acquainted with social constructivism (Boutinet, 1993 and Peavy, 1997) during my work as a counsellor. They propose a perspective in which individual minds actively select or enact perceptions and perpetually construct patterns of meaning.

Obviously these approaches locate causality, or agency, solely in the individual. This idea I find problematic and I will later in the Paper develop an alternative idea of agency as emergent in the relation between people.

In Paper 2 I try to make sense of the notion of 'being in charge but not in control' by creating a frame of understanding experience of communicative interaction and my role in it as being in charge of simultaneously structured and improvisational process. I argue that structure and improvisation, as opposites, are aspects of the same process, in play at the same time. I am trying to make sense of the paradoxical nature of my work. However, it seems that I am splitting individual and social to exist at different levels, when I speak about fixed structures, emergent structures and improvisation. The three notions are treated as if they appear in linear-time perspective. And the way I speak about them seems to construe them as spatial metaphors. My role is that of an observer/participant, switching between the two roles: in and out. So although I strongly advocate staying with tension of opposites, I seem – at least in the writing – to come to dissipate tension; to separate experience of theory and practice.

7.3.1. Participation in systems and process thinking

The above-described way of understanding participation in communicative interaction seems to link to what Stacey (2003c) and Griffin (2002) refer to as 'systems thinking', in which one kind of causality applies to the inside and another kind to the outside. There always has to be something outside the systems that is drawing the boundary around it; and what that something is may eventually be a mystery.

They refer to Kantian dialectic (Kant, [1790] 1987) as the mother of systems thinking. Kant suggested different causal frameworks applied to nature and to human action. In nature, organisms can be seen as systems in which parts interact with each other to form the whole. Organisms as systems are reflective of formative teleology: self-organization is a process of unfolding an already enfolded form of the whole. Formative self-organising process produces both stability and change, but the pattern of change is predetermined. In Kant's view this formative idea could never be applied to human interaction. Humans, according to Kant, have to be understood in completely different terms: as acting toward autonomously chosen goals and futures. Rationalist teleology applies to this idea.

However, current systems thinking has adopted the Kantian split to describe the way humans organize. We are *both* free to choose *and* we are part of and subject to the system. We refer to different causalities (Stacey et al., 2000) at different times and in different spaces. In social science there have been many attempts to overcome the paradoxical nature of this split. With second-order thinking, Bateson (1973) introduced the notion of level 1, 2 and 3 learning, which is a question of continuously redrawing boundaries and varying levels of describing change. But this is not adequate to explain how novelty emerges. With critical systems thinking, Jackson (2000) and Midgley (2000) introduced the notion of the consultant intervening in the activities of the people who constitute the system. The consultant takes a pluralist view on the problem situation. He interacts with the organization as an outsider – intentionally applying pre-given methodologies and then motivating people to interact. In communities of practice perspective (Wenger, 1998), the consultant formulates a design for learning.

To sum up so far, participation in the realm of systems thinking seems to mean that the consultant makes choices about how to operate upon the system as whole and assumes that he can determine in advance the response his gesture may call forth. If the response is different from what he has anticipated, he will step back from the heat of interaction and

define a new strategy to move forward, before returning to interaction. He will retain an illusion of being in control – individual and social will be forever split.

This description fits nicely with the way I set out to explain my own participation in the narrative in Paper 2. After having handed in the paper to my supervisors and learning set, it occurred to me that I was in the middle of a transformation process full of tension. When I looked at the paper with the eyes of the community (the theatre and my learning community) I was part of, I realized that what permeated the writing didn't reflect what had 'really' been going on in communicative interaction. Instead it spoke about invention of systems tools, and focus remained on those tools instead of the direct experience.

In doing so we are implicitly distinguishing between what we are now doing in our explaining and what we were doing at that time or will do as future acts (Stacey, 2003c). I 'suffered' this tension (shame) until in course of writing Paper 3 I came to reflect on how responsibility arises; then, suddenly I spoke differently of experience, and so participation came to mean something differently. What prompted this difference was ongoing communicative interaction with my learning community in a conversational process of evoking and provoking responses in which thematic patterning was emerging. Theory and practice suddenly was aspects of the same process.

When I started to think about the notion of responsibility, it became clear to me that interdependence in Elias' ([1939] 2000) understanding is at the core of how responsibility emerges. As the moves of interdependent players intertwine, no single player or group of players acting alone can determine the course of the game, no matter how powerful they may be. It involves a partly self-regulating change in a partly self-organising and self-reproducing figuration of interdependent people, with whole processes tending in a certain direction (Elias, 1970). Elias defined individuals as interdependent people in the singular, and society as interdependent people in the plural. He sees the individual and the social as two aspects of the same phenomenon.

Mead (1934) suggests a similar approach to understand the notion of individual and social. This is a view of individuals in relationships of gesturing and responding. Each gesture by one individual calls forth a response from the other, and together gesture and response constitute a social act. The meaning of the gesture does not lie in the gesture alone, but in the gesture taken together with the responses to it. The reaction of the individual in a conversation of gestures influences the social process itself. The individual obtains the

attitude of the other toward his own stimulus, and in doing so he finds it modified in that his response becomes a different one, which leads in turn to further changes. Individual forms social and social forms individual.

Stacey (2003b) speaks about individual bodies interacting communicatively with each other; each simultaneously acts communicatively towards him or herself. In other words, as individuals engage in public, vocal conversation with each other, they simultaneously engage in private, silent conversation with themselves.

To me, individual and social have come to be aspects of the same process. The individual's mind is paradoxically both forming and being formed by the social at the same time. A notion of power relations (Elias, 1970) is intrinsic to the particularization of this paradox. Agency may be socially produced, but we are still individually accountable for our own actions (Mead, 1934). I don't think that we can pre-design how and to whom we wish to be responsible, because we can't know in advance the gestures and responses from the other, so cannot predict the responses from our self. Of course individual intentions exist, but they will always emerge and potentially change in relationships between people rather than arising within the individual alone.

7.3.2. Contribution to understanding responsibility

In this section participation – in terms of systems and process thinking – has been reviewed in the wake of movement of my thinking. One paradigm is characterized by splitting individual and social – seeing participation as deliberate and voluntary, involving a detached participant who can step back to design and then participate. At certain times he is in control and at other times he is together with the rest of the system unfolding what has already been designed. In the other paradigm, individual and social are seen as aspects of the same process. No participant can stand outside an organization and decide how it is to operate. He may have intentions, designs, visions or strategies, but those notions do not arise within the individual, but in conversations with others. Furthermore he can't design and predict the responses to his gestures. So in this understanding, participation may be seen as paradoxical, since individual is forming social at the same time as social is forming individual.

I think that first of all my understanding has shifted because I started to consider the importance and meaning of responsibility. In the first two papers I spoke about responsibility as something we may have, take or give at one level (rational), abstracted from another level where we are part of a systemic negotiation process that potentially changes responsibility but only towards already enfolded forms (formative level). In terms of this understanding of responsibility, agency is seen to be *both* rational *and* formative, but in a different time and space. I remained under the illusion that I could safely stick to my predefined responsibility – that I was in control – while not acknowledging that local interaction inevitably changes the nature of responsibility.

Another way of understanding responsibility involves the notion of interdependence. Responsibility is a kind of barter between interdependent people, implying anticipation of mutual commitment. If the notion of interdependence is valid, it is indeed difficult to understand responsibility outside of this patterning relationship. No one has control over emergent meaning. Between us, we shape and are shaped by what emerges from within the flow of our responsive relating.

As I interpret Mead (1925, p.267) he thinks along the same lines when he argues that ‘an offer is what it is because the presentation is a stimulus to give. One cannot exchange otherwise than by putting one's self in the attitude of the other party to the bargain. Property becomes a tangible object, because all essential phases of property appear in the actions of all those involved in exchange, and appear as essential features of the individual's action.

Regardless of interdependence, emergence, responsiveness and lack of control, I will argue that a consultant will always act with intent, plan, structure, and systems models. However, firstly, intention doesn’t arise from within individuals, but in social interaction; and secondly, it is impossible to predict the response of others to a gesture. Nevertheless I believe that an idea of personal accountability is inescapable, since in the end it is our own choice to do whatever we do.

This gives rise to the argument that responsibility can be understood as essentially emergent patterning processes of social interaction in the living present, and that this idea doesn’t contradict the notion of human freedom. I will explore this argument in the next section.

7.4. Responsibility as emergent patterning processes of social interaction

In this section I will explore how I have come to understand 'responsibility as emergent patterning processes of social interaction' by drawing on insights from Elias' social theory and Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism, notions that I have already touched on in the previous section.

In Papers 1 and 2, responsibility was a thing to be had and dealt with. It was given in advance, and it never changed in the course of interaction and writing. This may be because, as mentioned in the previous section, lived experience and writing were treated as though they were separate levels of experience. I never consciously recognized that shifts in local communicative interaction may have affected my own and others' sense of responsibility. Emergence of change was due to the consultant stepping out of the heat to re-arrange the set-up and install a new structure in order to fulfil his obligations.

This way of understanding responsibility became challenged in Paper 3 as I tried to make sense of how I managed to be responsible within the tension of conflicting responsibilities. Mead (1934) describes how we each seem to bring a history of different and potentially conflicting interdependencies into our direct experience of social interaction. I believe that these interdependencies are paradoxically forming and being formed by each other at the same time in conscious and unconscious processes of interaction. The emergent patterning of interaction is unpredictable and only creates further patterning.

> It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way… It is the order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, the social order, which determines the course of historical change; it underlies the civilizing process.
>
> (Elias, [1939] 2000, p.366)

What Elias draws attention to in this introductory quote is the self-organizing and emergent nature of change. Interdependent people interact with each other with intentions and plans. People may plan their own actions, but when it comes to the interplay of intentions of interdependent people, intentions have the potential to be modified along with shifting power relations (Elias, 1970). What results from this interplay is unpredictable by nature.

He argues that shifts in local patterns of interaction simultaneously affect global patterns and so are emergent.

In Paper 3 I came to a personal understanding of the paradox that Elias points to, as I re-experienced conversations with clients and actors. I would argue that Elias's idea of the self-organising and emergent nature of change is analogous to the emergent and self-organizing nature of responsibility.

To substantiate my argument, I will draw attention to one experience in particular, which is the encounter with the planning group towards the end of Paper 3. In my re-experience and reflections on the interaction, I pointed to a shift from an initial 'nanosecond' attitude, which was of a defensive nature, to responding in a much more sophisticated way than I could have imagined in advance. Normally I might have tried to hold on to what I perceived to be my responsibility, insisting on proceeding according to the course I had laid out. Instead I more or less consciously took the attitude of the other, which simultaneously changed my attitude towards myself; in turn, my response changed the attitude of the planning group towards me. Patterning of social interaction created further patterning, and within this patterning the nature of responsibility continuously changed.

In my view there is a notion of agency and personal freedom linked to being responsible. How can this notion be defined within an understanding of responsibility as emergent patterning processes of social interaction? We enter into any interaction with intention, which then meets the intentions of others – and from this encounter, novel patterns of intention emerge.

Given that the intentions of interlocutors intertwine in a social dance in the living present, they are not derivative of the individual alone. They 'bear the mark of myriad others', as McNamee and Gergen (1999) remark. Both Shotter (1994) and Stacey (2003b) examine closely how such intentions arise. Both focus attention on the detail of human relating. Shotter (1994) speaks of connections around the communicative interaction to be unpacked; Stacey (2003c) speaks about the communicative episode, whether it is a silent or a public conversation, as having a history of experience – a history that has patterned the private and public role-playing of each individual in simultaneous constraining and enabling ways.

Stacey represents the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, which suggests that the future is under perpetual construction and that the past is continuously re-created in the living present. Stacey argues further that it ultimately seems that human freedom and the possibility of novelty and transformation lie in the individual's capacity to become aware through the group process and make choices. However, he claims that a response to a gesture is never simply an intentional choice or simply due to gesture. Nevertheless as a self-conscious human being with the capacity for thought and reflection, we each have a duty to account for our actions, even when we cannot know their consequences.

Shotter (1984, 1993, 1994, 1999, and 2005) essentially represents a social constructionist perspective, which moves away from the idea of the autonomous individual to focus sharply on processes of social interaction. What he advocates is ethical accountability in people's interactions. He also views individual and social as two separate levels, the social being elevated above the individual. Shotter (1993) agrees with his fellow social constructionist Gergen (1994, 1999) that, if human action is joint, no individual can be held accountable. Implicit in his idea of human action is a split between joint action and individual action. He seems to understand the two notions at different levels, so although he retains a notion of individual agency, it seems to disintegrate. He seems to think that in one moment agency is individual, in the next relational, and finally there could also be a mystical 'third agency' involved.

When I reflect on Paper 3 I can see that, along with a growing sensitivity to and awareness of interdependence and tension in communicative interaction, I have developed a new understanding of how intention and agency arise and of the implications of such thinking for practice – especially in terms of understanding the notion of responsibility.

7.4.1. Contribution to understanding responsibility – intention and agency

Intention (understood as a propositional theme or a narrative theme) and *agency* (understood as expression of human free will) seem to be key components in my emerging understanding of responsibility in process terms. I will argue that both notions arise in emergent patterning processes of social interaction. I don't understand the two notions at different levels, but as aspects of the same emergent patterning process.

Intention is communication between people. Intention evokes and provokes responses, which cannot be known in advance. Agency is human free will, which is constrained by the history of relationships with others. At the same time this interaction enables the individual to respond in various ways that would not otherwise have been possible. The individual is aware of having choices, or at least of being confronted with situations that require choices to be made. While an individual may not feel constrained by their surroundings, there is a sense of the world presenting obstacles that can be responded to in a finite yet variable number of ways.

In light of the thoughts in the above section, my idea of responsibility has moved from a perspective with its roots in systems thinking to an understanding based on process thinking. Moving away from the idea of trying to adjust the course of action whenever faced with challenges, and then sticking with what we perceive to be our overall responsibility, my thinking has gradually come to favour the idea of responsibility as self-organizing processes of social interaction that cannot be controlled. The notion of responsibility is transformed in the temporal social process of sense-making in the living present, as Mead (1934) argued; anticipation of the future changes perceptions of the past, and simultaneously the changed perception of the past changes the anticipation of the future – all in the living present.

I will argue that although the notion of responsibility is transformed by being viewed as subject to the living present, this does not remove the tension of interdependence regarding conflicting responsibilities. Such a shift in the nature of responsibility does not relieve us of the obligation to choose which responsibilities should be accommodated and which will eventually be rejected. Thus an increased awareness of our experience of the details of direct social interaction may not be a pleasant experience, as it may leave us in a more vulnerable position.

To substantiate my argument I will briefly recount an episode from Paper 1. I describe a joint council meeting in the ITDA (see page 30). I had suggested that three actors and myself should take part in an extraordinary joint council meeting, to help change patterns of conversation in this forum and successively in the rest of the organization. Everybody in the council agreed to this agenda. Subsequently I managed to facilitate an improvisational intervention that contributed to changing patterns of conversation in the joint council. Patterns – understood as power relations – shifted from the CEO ‘succeeding’ with an oppressive and controlling attitude towards the rest of the organization (the joint council

members), to a situation in which members apparently were taking the attitudes of others (Mead, 1934).

Whether the intervention was a success or a failure – or something of both – may depend on the subjective judgement of the various players. Most would consider it successful; others, not at all. However, the question that repeatedly poses itself is whether I acted responsibly in the process or not. Or did I act responsibly and irresponsibly at the same time?

Less than a year after the intervention, the CEO was made redundant, which has left me with a sense of having let him down. Although I in retrospect did what I could to get him to understand the kind of process we were in the middle of.

But in the course of interaction and shifting power relations, I eventually seemed to respond simultaneously to what Mead (1934, p.158) calls the 'particular other' and the 'generalized other':

The process of simultaneously taking the attitude of the 'particular other' and the 'generalized other' is not without tension – especially not when in hindsight we realize that the attitude of one or several of particular others are of a defensive and withdrawing character. Here I speak about the perspective of forming groups through processes of inclusion or exclusion, as proposed by Elias and Scotson ([1965] 1994). Dalal (1998, 2002) argues that those groups get their 'we' identities from these groupings, and that the power balance is sustained by ideology. People are largely unconscious of this process. Those established within a group are, according to Dalal (1998, 2002), able to ascribe charisma to themselves and impute stigma to the outsiders.

I am certain that the impression I made as either insider or outsider contributed to individual interpretations of my success or failure. To those who considered me an insider, I undoubtedly acted responsibly in sustaining their ideology. But in the back of the outsider's mind, I must have acted irresponsibly.

The French philosopher Derrida (1995) argues that any exercise of responsibility potentially carries within it the antipoles – irresponsibility and responsibility – and

therefore also potential ‘betrayal’ or ‘sacrifice’, which may be experienced more or less consciously.

Every time we interact with someone, conflicting responsibilities occur; very often, we are neither consciously aware of conflicts and tensions in the living present, nor in retrospect as life goes rapidly on. At other times, ‘sacrifices’ are well calculated and may be justified.

Right now, many past incidences of such tensions from interactions with audiences and clients are flashing through my mind and my conscience is being tested to the limit.

Retzinger and Scheff (2000) speak about *shame* as a key component of conscience; as the moral instinct, since it signals moral transgression even without thoughts or words. Shame is our moral gyroscope. Shame arises in an elemental situation in which there is a real or imagined threat to our *bonds*; it signals trouble in a relationship.

That we should aim to satisfy and include everybody, so as to comply with principles of equality and ethics, does appeal to my somewhat naïve sense of justice and morality. But notions of equality and consensus don’t correspond with my sense of how *change* emerges. In this specific situation, the task was to help *change* patterns of conversation in the council to become more inclusive of each other’s perspectives, which fits well in my ideological vocabulary. When change is emerging in social interaction among interdependent people, conflict and power relations are key drivers in the process, since people have different intentions and aspirations (Griffin, 2002); and despite being ‘in charge’, as individuals we cannot control the outcome of interaction.

Thus, in the light of this episode and many other past episodes where as consultants we have been in charge of facilitating change processes in organizations, the question repeatedly posed is: Have we been responsible to every single individual in the organization; to only a ‘fortunate’ few; or to as many as possible? Or even to myself?

If we view responsibility as emergent patterning processes of social interaction, I would argue that although the sense of responsibility has transformed in the living present, this does not alleviate the tension of interdependence regarding conflicting responsibilities. This shift in the nature of responsibility cannot relieve us of our obligation to choose, consciously or unconsciously, which responsibilities to accommodate and which we will

eventually overlook – even though choice is also an emergent social process. If choice is merely unconscious I would argue that this may make life easier, but the quality of responsibility is poorer. So an increased awareness of our experience of the details of direct social interaction may not be a pleasant experience, as it may leave us in a more vulnerable position; but the quality of responsibility is increased considerably when choices are due to conscious reflexive thinking in the living present.

Shame as a moral concept can stimulate us to more closely approximate our ideals, as long as they do not demand impossible perfection. A sense of shame may help us avoid ethically dubious behaviour in the future.

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