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Understanding Stakeholders –
Towards a Theory of Responsiveness in Organizations

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December 2002
Für meine Eltern,
Elfriede und Manfred,
und meine Schwester
Susanne
Declaration

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Summary

This study investigates the nature of responsiveness in organizations and its relation to dialogue as a reflective mode of conversation. Responsiveness as a theme emerged from the practical experience of the author in an organization development project with a residential care provider for people with physical and sensory disabilities. While consulting strategy, stakeholder management and organizational learning literature acknowledges the relevance of responsiveness, none of the approaches proposes a comprehensive concept of responsiveness and its implications for communication with stakeholders. The implicit model of responsiveness in all three literatures consists in a reactive, behaviorist stimulus-response model. Therefore, it is suggested to explore dialogue as an appropriate conversational mode that holds promise to facilitate reflective conversations with and among stakeholders. The process quality of responsiveness and dialogue requires an interpretive case study approach as the outer frame and a participatory mode of inquiry as the inner frame of this investigation. Two research questions are addressed: What is the nature of responsiveness? What is the relation between dialogue and responsiveness?

By juxtaposing differences in conversational modes with differences in responsive qualities from the case study, it is suggested to conclude that responsiveness can be conceived of as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. Degrees of responsiveness can be distinguished regarding the three key dimensions of perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity. With regard to its relation to dialogue, it is suggested to conclude that responsiveness and dialogue are not related in a direct, linear manner. The contextual settings for conversations matter. Creating contexts in the form of conversational arenas that allow for reflective conversations can enhance responsiveness. If reflective conversations take place, it is more likely that productive answers to stakeholder demands can be found.

In terms of strategy, this research aims at contributing to an enhanced, active notion of responsiveness that contributes to a more fine-grained discussion of strategic thinking. With regard to stakeholder management, an active mode of responsiveness contributes to authentic participation as a guiding principle for stakeholder management. As for organizational learning, active responsiveness can contribute to avoid perceptive, reflective and adaptive myopia. In terms of practical implications it is suggested that the development of an active responsiveness means to create the conditions for the opportunity of dialogue. Finally, a philosophically inspired outlook intends to broaden the bandwidth of responsiveness. From a phenomenological viewpoint, responsiveness refers to encountering the foreign, which requires developing and inventing answers in the process of answering. Based on these considerations, responsiveness then translates into a new challenge.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following friends and colleagues who have helped me in exploring, developing and shaping the thoughts and ideas of this thesis:

David Coghlan, my supervisor, for his knowledgeable guidance and attentive support throughout the PhD-process, as well as for the best advices ever for selecting a research topic: "Start from your heart." and "Remember who you are."

Britta Lenders, for her invaluable support and advice throughout this three-year journey, by providing the vital conversational context for developing and shaping ideas;

Bernd Schwefing, for his detailed and knowledgeable scrutiny in discussing earlier drafts of this work;

Tobias Scheytt, for his precise conclusions and knowledgeable insights that allowed me refining and substantiating the argument;

Jörg Haslbeck, for peer reviewing and discussing the case material with nearly unlimited enthusiasm;

Nicola Krücken, a master in the art of designing contexts for conversations, for co-developing the workshop format, and for her determination in 1999 to encourage me to go back to academia;

Daniel Berger, Ralf Stalleker, and Klaudia Werth, for their very thoughtful and pragmatic critiques in the process of unfolding the thoughts of this thesis;

Martin Fellenz, in his capacity of ‘mentor’, for his crucial advice and support; without him I simply would not have been able to come to Trinity College Dublin in the first place;

Joseph McDonagh, in his capacity of reader, for his very detailed and challenging questions, which helped me in sharpening the argument in the final stages of the thesis;

Gemma Donnelly-Cox and Ekkehard Kappler, for encouraging me to develop the argument of this thesis even further during the examination process;

Edward Kasabov and Fiona Lombard for sharing the ‘roller coaster’ experience of a PhD;

Roisin Cooney, for transcribing the interviews; Fergus Dolan and Deborah Brennan for providing me with the necessary expertise in terms of language and culture;

My colleagues Dominic Coleman, Gwen Jaffro, Martin King, Belinda Moller, Mary Lee Rhodes; the members of the postgraduate action research seminar Mary Casey, Phil Hanlon, Verena
Keane, Phil Killeen, Pat Nolan and Michele Ryan; as well as the executive officers of the school, Valerie McCarthy and Joan Reidy;

I am grateful to those who have provided me with very useful insights that helped me to develop a ‘bigger picture’: Theodora Assimakou (Manchester Business School); Markus Becker (University of Southern Denmark); Michael Habersam (University of Innsbruck); Loizos Heracleous (National University of Singapore); Katrin Käufer (Society for Organizational Learning Boston); Wendelin Küpers (FernUniversität Hagen); Kazuma Matoba (Witten/Herdecke University); Claudia Meister-Scheytt (University of Innsbruck); Claus Otto Scharmer (Society for Organizational Learning Boston); Irma Schmincke-Blau and Martin Schnell (Witten/Herdecke University); Bernhard Waldenfels (University of Bochum).

I gratefully acknowledge the financial sponsorship by Gottlieb-Daimler-und-Karl-Benz-Stiftung and Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD).

I am deeply grateful to all residents, tenants, service users, staff, service managers, management committee members, volunteers, and the entire Head office team of the Omega foundation. The encounters and conversations with you have not only provided useful insights in terms of this research. They have made a difference to my life.

I am very grateful to these friends who have provided me with superb contexts for reading, writing and reflecting at the different stages of this research: Esther Amegashie, Andreas Böhler, Marie-Christin and Jochen Eisenbrand, Rainer Majcen, Jochen Marx, Silke Röder, Marc Schäfer, Jochen Schneider, Anja Weiland, Markus Wittmann, Kerstin Wolter, Birgit Zimmer, all in different places of the world, as well as

Manfred Wellendorf in Cologne; Anke Dingemann, Anne Floercken and Lotte Christensen in Witten; Barbara Backhaus, Regula Beer, Ronald Greber, Marco Beer and Jonny in Bern, as well as Cecilie and Margaret O’Flaherty in Monkstown – my Irish family.

Manuela – Thank you for our wonderful dialogue!
Introduction

1. Research Area: Responsive Aspects in Strategy, Stakeholder Management and Organizational Learning

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Introduction

Motivation and research topic: This study investigates the nature of responsiveness in organizations and its relation to dialogue as a reflective mode of conversation. The theme emerged from my encounters and conversations with participants in my capacity as facilitator in an organization development (OD) project with a residential care provider for people with physical and sensory disabilities. The project aimed at engaging different primary stakeholder groups of the organization into a reflective mode of conversation in the context of a wider strategy development process. It was within this OD project that participants explicitly referred to the notion of responsiveness as a capacity that they attributed to both the local unit as well as the overall organization. Hence, responsiveness as a phenomenon emerging from practice and its relation to dialogue became the subject of this investigation.

Focus and research questions: The conversational arenas of the project were designed to enable reflective conversations within and between different stakeholder groups. The process showed that these arenas provided a necessary space for stakeholders to voice, reflect on and make sense of the different viewpoints raised in the joint conversations. Dialogue conceived of as a reflective mode of conversation, and responsiveness here referred to as the ability of an organization to provide adequate answers for demands put to it, are therefore the two key dimensions of this research. Hence, in the light of the OD project, this research will investigate the nature of responsiveness in organizations and its relationship to dialogue by addressing the following research questions: What is the nature of responsiveness? What is the relationship between dialogue and responsiveness?

Aim and intended contribution: Responsiveness as a term has been used in the strategy literature in the context of an organization’s internal ability in terms of reaction time, but has rarely been conceptualized comprehensively in its communicative implications. Stakeholder management emphasizes the normative and instrumental benefit for adhering to stakeholder demands, but has not reflected on the conversational formats required for such a dialogical interaction. Organizational learning as a change in an organization’s response repertoire draws from a mechanistic model of responsiveness, which does not sufficiently address communicative consequences. Overall, the review of the literature shows that neither a comprehensive concept of responsiveness beyond a behaviorist model, nor the communicative implications, especially in terms of a reflective mode of conversation have been investigated. By investigating these aspects in the light of the OD project, this study aims to contribute to an enhanced understanding of responsiveness and its relationship to dialogue with regard to the three bodies of literature.
Organization of the argument and "road map": The argument of this thesis is illustrated in a ‘road map’ that outlines the line of argument below (see Figure 1). Each chapter addresses a particular question of the investigation and informs the overall argument.

1. Why responsiveness? Which responsive aspects can be discerned in the literature?

2. Which communicative approach allows for a reflective encounter with stakeholders?

3. How can I investigate into the research questions?

4. What's the story?

5. What sense can be made from the case in terms of the research questions?

6. What implications can be drawn for the communication theories discussed in Chapter 2?

7. What is the relevance of the propositions for theory, practice and research?

Figure 1: Organization of the thesis

1. Research Area: Responsive Aspects in Strategy, Stakeholder Management and Organizational Learning

This chapter consists of two parts: It identifies the notion of responsiveness as historically emerging from my facilitation practice and discerns responsive aspects in three bodies of management and organization studies literature.

Part 1: Why does responsiveness matter?

Responsiveness as a theme emerged from the process of the above-mentioned OD-project. The Learning through Listening Project was a 12-month OD-project with a residential care provider aiming at engaging stakeholders in reflective conversation as part of a wider strategy development process. The OD project and workshop design was mainly informed by dialogue and appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry assumes a ‘heliotropic’ evolution of organizations, i.e. that the appreciation of ‘what is’ invites people to develop images of ‘what might be’ and ‘what can be’. Dialogue as a reflective mode of conversation was considered to provide a meta-referent for conversations, aiming at mutual understanding of participants. The notion of responsiveness emerged on the one hand from the top of the organization in its
mission which states that the Omega foundation aims to become a modern, responsive service provider, and from individual stakeholders in local service units on the other, who claim that the organization should be more responsive and attentive to their needs. But what is ‘being responsive’ in terms of an organization? How does it relate to conversations and their settings?

Responsiveness as a theme emerged from the process of the OD project. As to start inquiring the notion of responsiveness analytically, I review literature on strategy, stakeholder management and organizational learning.

Part 2: Which responsive aspects can be discerned in strategy, stakeholder management and organizational learning literature?

The review of three major schools of strategy formation, i.e. design, planning and positioning school shows that all three consider responsiveness as strategic adaptation of vital importance to strategic management (Andrews, 1987; Ansoff et al., 1976; Porter, 1980). However, the implied model of responsiveness refers to a behaviorist stimulus-response model, whereby strategy is conceptualized as conditioned response from a given response repertoire. Predetermined environmental properties identified either by the CEO, planners or analysts trigger such a response. While emphasizing the relevance of an organization’s ability to respond to claims and demands put to it, no comprehensive concept of responsiveness and resulting communicative implications are addressed.

The two major strands of stakeholder management literature legitimize the requirement to adhere to stakeholder demands differently (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson, 1995; Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997). Whereas instrumental stakeholder literature holds that incorporating stakeholder views will enhance shareholder value in the long run, normative stakeholder literature grounds its argument in ethical considerations. Both agree on the legitimacy of stakeholder claims and their rights to voice their demands, interests, needs and claims. However, no consideration is given to the communicative process and means by which stakeholders could make their concerns heard, e.g. in which conversational setting or mode such communication could take place.

Organizational learning literature evolves around four main themes. Most concepts of organizational learning modes draw from a behaviorist, or at best cognitive individual learning model (Maier et al., 2001). In terms of learning levels, shared mental models, as socially constructed cognitive frameworks for perception, interpretation and sensemaking are suggested to link individual and organizational level (Kim, 1993). In contrast to single-loop learning, the learning type of double-loop learning does not only attempt to correct a detected error but to reflect critically on the cognitive frameworks that informed the error detection and correction strategy (Argyris & Schon, 1978). A generic learning process can be conceived of as being based on four sequences: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory (Huber, 1991). While acknowledging the relevance
of responsive aspects for each of the four themes implicitly, this body of literature does neither provide a comprehensive concept nor communicative implications of such responsiveness.

The review of the literature shows that responsiveness matters. Its relevance is mainly acknowledged implicitly. All three literatures employ a behaviorist stimulus-response model as referent. While acknowledging the relevance, none of the approaches comprises a comprehensive concept of responsiveness and its implications for conversational setting and mode of such responsiveness. Hence, which communicative format, i.e. conversational setting and mode could facilitate responsiveness, i.e. reflective encounters with stakeholders?

2. Research Focus: Responsiveness and Communication

Given that responsiveness matters, which communicative approach allows for a reflective encounter with stakeholders?

Conceiving of organizations as coalitions of interest, Cyert & March (1992) point to the pluralism of interests that results from the different viewpoints and needs of stakeholders. Such pluralism is based on and rooted in the original and derivative lifeworld and language games of stakeholders. In order to come to terms in that regard, an adequate communicative format is required. The theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1987; 1984) provides a conceptual referent in terms of communication theory. In contrast to strategic action that is characterized by the participants' orientation to success and pursuit of their individual interests, communicative action is conceptualized as a social action in which participants are oriented to reaching understanding by agreeing a joint definition of a state of affairs.

Enacting internal and external signals, incorporating them as equivocality and translating them into univocality is key to sensemaking in organizations (Weick, 1995). The settings in which such sensemaking tends to take place in organizations are meetings, which should be designed to allow for multiple perspectives to be voiced, exchanged and acknowledged.Arguing is suggested to be of the conversational mode in that regard.

The dialogue strand of organization studies (Schein, 1999; Isaacs, 1999; Scharmer, 2001) proposes dialogue as a reflective conversational mode aiming at mutual understanding. Its potential for engaging in reflective conversations with stakeholder lies in its goal of acknowledging differences and reflecting on one's own preconceptions. Dialogue seems to be an appropriate mode for putting sensemaking and communicative action in practice.

Responsiveness matters, as the literature review of Chapter 1 shows. Dialogue as discussed in this chapter holds promise to provide an adequate conversational mode for engaging in reflective conversation with stakeholders. Hence, I conclude the two research questions of this investigation: What is the nature of responsiveness? What is the relation between dialogue and responsiveness?
3. Methodology

Based on the research focus of the study, how can I now investigate into the research questions?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and define an appropriate research strategy and methodological foundation to operationalize the investigation into the research questions. By explicating my epistemological beliefs in terms of social constructionism (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996) and relating these to the characteristics of the research questions, I propose an interpretive, single case study approach as the outer frame for the investigation (Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994). As the process of responsiveness and dialogue can only be studied by participating in such a process that requires a high researcher involvement, I complement the case study approach with a participatory mode of inquiry as the inner frame of this investigation, i.e. action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001; Schein, 2001). In this chapter, I also discuss details of the research design and outline the steps of data collection, analysis and meaning generation from the case as well as ethical and quality considerations.

The process quality of responsiveness and dialogue require an interpretive case study as the outer frame and a participatory mode of inquiry as the inner frame of this investigation.

4. Case Report: The Learning through Listening Project

What was the process, structure and content of the case study and how does it inform the research?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of the project as it evolved in order to provide the basis and context for the next step of the analysis. I describe the story in as much detail as necessary and as concisely as possible. I provide a brief profile of the services, structure and mission of the Omega foundation as the organizational context of the project. Then, I describe the rationale, focus, ethos and design of the project.

At the core of the chapter is a detailed report of the process of the project in the participating centers.

5. Case analysis: Investigating Responsiveness and its Relation to Dialogue

What sense can be made from the case in terms of responsiveness and its relationship to dialogue?

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the relationship between conversations and responsiveness by tracing differences in and discerning patterns of conversational and responsive qualities from the case. By applying Scharmer's typology of conversational modes to the workshop sessions in the centers (Scharmer, 2001), I identify differences in conversations. In order to identify differences in responsive qualities, I developed a typology of responsiveness. Perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity are identified as key attributes of
responsiveness from the case analysis. These three aspects are the foundation for the typology of responsiveness, ranging from a low degree of responsiveness ("autistic reflex") to a very high degree of responsiveness ("vigilant answer"). This typology is then used to identify differences in responsive qualities of the process in the centers.

By juxtaposing differences in conversational modes with differences in responsive qualities, I suggest to conclude that responsiveness can be conceived of as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. Degrees of responsiveness can be distinguished regarding the three key attributes of perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity. Thereby, responses differ in their degree of relative innovativeness.

With regard to its relation to dialogue, I would suggest to conclude that responsiveness and dialogue are not related in a direct, linear manner. The contextual settings for conversations matter. Creating contexts in the form of conversational arenas that allow for – but do not guarantee – reflective conversations, can enhance responsiveness. If reflective conversations take place, it is more likely that productive answers to stakeholder demands can be found.

6. Discussion: Responsiveness and Communication theory – Revisited

What implications can be drawn for the communication theories discussed in Chapter 2?

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the above propositions in the light of the three communication theories employed in Chapter 2 and to assess the relevance of my argument in that regard. Dialogue literature puts its conceptual emphasis on the perceptive and reflective dimension of responsiveness. In terms of the developed typology, such an approach would qualify as attentive inquiry. Communicative action and strategic action differ in their degree of responsiveness. The latter would at best qualify as a conditioned response, whereas the former holds promise for a vigilant answer. Similar to the dialogue literature, sensemaking makes a high claim on responsiveness. However, neither the suggested conversational setting nor the conversational mode allow for a vigilant answer in the light of this research.

Each of these perspectives makes a valuable contribution to the subject, however, all three approaches could also benefit from the suggested concept of active responsiveness. Dialogue literature could consider the relevance of conversational settings for the conversational mode. Communicative action could consider the assumption in terms of communicative abilities of participants. The sensemaking approach could consider whether both conversational setting and mode chosen in the current approach comply with the aspiration of sensemaking as a vigilant answer.
7. Conclusion: Responsiveness and Strategy, Stakeholder Management and Organizational Learning – Revisited

What is the relevance of the propositions of this investigation for theory, practice and research in management and organization studies?

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on and discuss the implications for these three areas in the light of this study as well as providing a philosophically informed outlook.

As for strategy, I would suggest that this investigation contributes to a more enhanced understanding of responsiveness in strategy towards an active notion of responsiveness. It can inform strategy literature at the conceptual level by having reconstructed the limitations of a behaviorist notion of responsiveness, and suggested an enhanced, active notion of responsiveness that contributes to a more fine-grained discussion of strategic thinking (Heracleous, 1998). The claim of strategic thinking to provide novel, imaginative strategies – in my terms: productive, vigilant responses – requires conversational arenas that allow for multiple perspectives to be voiced, differences to be acknowledged and mutual understanding to be reached on a certain state of affairs.

In terms of stakeholder management, I would suggest that reflective conversations with stakeholders of the organization has rendered visible issues, themes and problems that had never been communicated before within the organization. An active mode of responsiveness requires such opportunities and arenas for stakeholders to articulate their problem definitions, concerns and claims and which could then feed directly into the decision-making processes and systems of the organization. Authentic participation by stakeholders is considered the guiding principle of active responsiveness.

With regard to organizational learning, two generic motives can be distinguished: exploring new possibilities on the one hand, as opposed to exploiting old certainties on the other (March, 1991). Exploration of new possibilities refers to experimentation, which includes risk, ambiguity, innovation and discovery. Because the distance in time and space between the locus of learning and the locus of realization of benefits is generally greater in exploration, adaptive processes tend to favor and focus on exploitation rather than exploration. Especially with regard to learning as exploration, active responsiveness can contribute to avoid perceptive, reflective and adaptive myopia.

In terms of practical implications the most crucial insight that I would suggest is that only the necessary condition for responsiveness, i.e. creating conversational arenas for reflective conversation, can be directly managed. The sufficient condition is subject to the participants' communicative skills, abilities and orientation at reaching understanding in a reflective conversation. These skills can be developed and explored by training or other educational interventions, but even more so by involvement that might lead to participation. In summary, I would suggest to conclude that the development of an active responsiveness means to create the
conditions for the opportunity of dialogue. I will discuss the consequences of this suggestion for management, stakeholder and OD consultants.

As for implications for research, I would suggest in terms of strategy that strategy formation couldn’t be conducted as an autistic, conditioned reflex, but results from the process of developing a vigilant answer. Different contextual features as well as conversational modes and their impact on strategic thinking should be investigated in that regard as well. Regarding stakeholder management, the structural design of conversations but also the issue of incommensurability between different lifeworlds and language games of stakeholders should be investigated in more detail. Additional research on identifying these dynamics would give a better understanding of responsiveness in the context of the political struggles between stakeholder groups. In terms of organizational learning, research is needed to understand better the impact of responsiveness in the learning process and how the different conversational modes impact in that regard. Giving attention to the impact of responsiveness on organizational performance is another crucial route for research on responsiveness in organizations.

Finally, a philosophically inspired outlook might broaden the bandwidth of responsiveness even further. Conversation and encounters are far from being trivial or obvious. From a phenomenological point of view, I would suggest to conceive of them as encounters with something foreign to us. Encountering the foreign requires to develop and invent answers in the process of answering (Waldenfels, 1994). Based on these considerations, responsiveness then translates into a new challenge: How can organizations develop an organizational 'answerability'?
1. Research Area: Responsive Aspects in Strategy, Stakeholder Management and Organizational Learning

Introduction

Why responsiveness? - Which responsive aspects can be discerned in strategy, stakeholder management and the organizational learning literature?

The purpose of this chapter is to address these two questions by briefly outlining the relevance of responsiveness (1) as an issue emerging from practice, and (2) as a theme inherent to, but not explored by concepts in organization and management studies.

Firstly, I will briefly outline in a deliberately subjective, reflexive introduction how the theme of responsiveness emerged from my practical work as a project facilitator (1.1.). This should provide the reader with a more detailed understanding of the motivation of this research and frame the topic in the context of the project.

In the context of the project, the notion of responsiveness was linked to strategy and organizational issues as well as to stakeholder concerns. Each of the related literatures holds promise to provide a specific perspective on responsiveness. Furthermore, the choice of literature reviewed can be justified analytically as well.

Ansoff (1976) refers to responsiveness as an internal capability of an organization. Cyert & March (1992) view organizational learning as a capability of an organization to adapt, a view that is complemented by Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Weick (1998) who posit that organizational learning consists of a change in an organization’s response repertoire. Mintzberg et al. (1998) conceive of strategy as the mediating force between an organization and its environment. Finally, Dill (1976) holds that one of the key strategic challenges, put to the organization by its environment, consists of acknowledging and understanding the demands of its stakeholders.

Therefore, I will review three prescriptive schools of strategy formation (Andrews, 1987; Ansoff, 1987; Porter, 1980) and contrast them with an alternative view on strategy (Mintzberg et al., 1998) in section 1.2. as to discern responsive aspects as well as opportunities for that matter.

In section 1.3., I will explore responsive aspects in stakeholder management concepts by reviewing contributions of two major strands of the fields, i.e. instrumental stakeholder theory (e.g. Freeman, 1984; 1999) and normative stakeholder theory (Boatright, 1994; Clarkson, 1995; Deetz, 1995).

The third body of literature to be examined in terms of responsive aspects consists of the broad area of organizational learning (1.4.). By employing Pawlowsky’s (2001) structure, I will
identify responsive aspects in terms of learning modes (Maier et al., 2001), learning levels (Kim, 1993), learning types (Argyris et al., 1978) and learning process (Huber, 1991).

In the final section of this chapter (1.5.), I will provide a summary and conclusion of the review. Responsive aspects can be discerned in most concepts of the reviewed literature, in terms of a reactive, behaviorist stimulus-response model. While implicitly acknowledging the relevance of responsiveness, none of the reviewed approaches provides us with a comprehensive concept of responsiveness, nor with reflections or suggestions for an adequate communicative format.

1.1. Why Responsiveness? – An Issue Emerging from Practice

Why responsiveness? The initial motivation and interest for a research subject is rarely made explicit and can hardly be rationalized – at best in an *ex post* effort to do so. However, I would like to explicate where and how my interest in responsiveness and dialogue initially came from. Beyond the analytical dimension of this study, a historical perspective on the genesis of the topic might provide the reader with a broader frame for reading this study. My interest in responsiveness and dialogue can be discerned from my biography on the one hand, and from the practical experience as facilitator and process consultant in the Organization Development (OD) project called “Learning through Listening” on the other.

**Biographical Context**

In my studies of business and economics at Witten/Herdecke University, which I completed in 1998, I had focused on studying organization change and development as well as strategic management. The role of communication was very prominent in our discussions and reflections in the different seminars, as communication rather than structural aspects of organizations were considered key for any change initiatives in that regard.

At the time, I worked as a part time management consultant, employing process consultation and OD as referents. The projects that I was engaged in focused on organizational change as well as strategic development. It was within these projects that I developed a curiosity on the notion of dialogue, or reflective conversation, within organizations in general and in OD projects in particular. The communicative breakdowns and shortcomings in competitive modes of conversations within these projects made a strong indication that different conversational modes were required if sustained change was at stake. Involvement and participation of lower levels in the hierarchy proved crucial in that regard. The key for accessing these lifeworlds consisted in attentive listening to the different stories and narratives that did not have to be
amalgamated in a fuzzy form of consensus. The quality that made a difference to these processes was – as I would now refer to with hindsight – responsiveness.

When working in the Organization and Management Development division of an international top management consultancy in Germany having completed my studies, it was within several projects with major German companies that I was able to revisit these findings and to confirm the relevance of dialogue in that regard. Within the projects but also within the consultancy organization, the theory-in-use on breakdowns in communication assumed that a participant was either mad or bad for not being able or not willing to understand a certain argument. My conclusion differed somewhat, as my default assumption was that of equivocality, i.e. each voice has equal value in a communication to be voiced and heard. It is within a communication then that validity and plausibility claims are to be confirmed or disconfirmed. But moreover, the contextual aspects for any conversation proved crucial, i.e. the physical and mental setting of participants when engaging in conversations.

Equipped with these practical experiences as well as an implicit ‘theory of practice’, I started my work as a PhD-candidate at the School of Business Studies in Trinity College Dublin in 1999. In one of my first encounters with my supervisor, we discussed these interests and experiences extensively. We also reflected on possibilities of how these themes could inform or even shape my research. An adequate research site that would allow me to investigate these aspects had to meet several requirements. Ideally, it should be initiated by the client, it should employ an OD framework and content wise, it should allow for investigating into my research interest.

The Learning Through Listening Project

In May 2000, my supervisor introduced me to the Omega foundation with which he had been working for a long time. The CEO and my supervisor in his capacity of senior researcher to the project had developed an OD project called ‘Learning through Listening’.

In the initial meeting with the CEO and OD manager of the organization, I was introduced to the Omega foundation and the rationale of Head Office staff for conducting such a project. The foundation provides residential care in 14 centers for people with physical and sensory disabilities and has currently about 300 places in its centers with a total number of staff of around 400. The focus of the service provision consists of long-term supported accommodation service which was until recently based on a traditional residential care model. However, this has been about to change. Both internal and external forces for change were discussed and served as rationale for the design of such an OD project.

In terms of its mission, the CEO explained that the foundation aims at “becoming a modern, responsive service-providing organisation capable of delivering service which meet the needs of individual service users” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 9 ; my emphasis) and “Our
mission is to become a service provider which listens to people with disabilities and responds to their wishes and needs in ways that respect individuality and maximise opportunities for choice.” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 10; my emphasis). In the light of these aspirations, two directions for change were discussed: (1) Centralization: From local autonomy to central accountability and governance; (2) Professionalization: From a benevolent, paternalistic care model to a modern professional residential care service provider. Internally, this resulted in a change in governance structure, in policies and procedure, employment and funding operations. A major internal force for change was identified in the service users’ changing needs and expectations with regard to the service provided by Omega. Externally, a government report called “Towards an Independent Future - On Health and Personal Social Services for People with Physical and Sensory Disabilities” by the (Department of Health, 1996) explicated the future policy for people with physical and sensory disabilities and its implications for service providers.

In order to address both internal and external forces for change, the foundation engaged in a strategy and organization development process. The Learning through Listening project was conceived of as an initial and integral part of this process. It was designed as a 12-month OD project. Its agreed objective was to build “the capacity for change through creating a shared learning experience for participants which would be grounded in Omega values and mission enabling it to develop capabilities and processes for continued organisational learning and change” (Coghlan, 2000: 5).

In my view, this project aims at contributing to continuous organizational change – in contrast to an episodic change model (Weick & Quin, 1999). Episodic change is described as infrequent, discontinuous, dramatic, and intentional, occurring within periods in which an organization shifts towards new equilibrium conditions, and the role of change agent are those of prime movers (Weick et al., 1999: 365). The underlying change model refers to a traditional Lewinian sequence of unfreeze-transition-refreeze.

In contrast, continuous change consists in ongoing, evolving, cumulative, emergent processes of change in which the role of a change agent becomes one of managing language, dialogue, and identity (Weick et al., 1999: 381). This stems from a view that organizations evolve around ideas of improvisation, translation and learning, and are by nature unable to remain stable. Hence, when change is continuous, unfreezing might not be the problem. It is rather advisable to freeze, i.e. to reflect and render visible certain patterns of what is going on. Based on multiple interpretations of what is going on, a univocal, shared interpretation might be reached that allows rebalancing and resequencing the identified patterns and their dynamics. Finally, Weick (1999) suggests that unfreezing means to resume translation, improvisation, and learning “that are now more mindful of sequences, more resilient to anomalies, and more flexible in their execution.” (Weick et al., 1999: 380). Hence, I would conceive of the Learning through Listening project certainly as an intentional change intervention, however, the
The underlying motive for it is firmly rooted in the metaphor of continuous change as suggested by Weick (1999).

In that regard, the CEO had hoped that “everything that would bring the organisation forward is worthwhile” (personal communication). Moreover, “through the experience of the project, we will all see that listening is one of the keys to true learning and that this principle should be reflected in how the foundation carries out its work both nationally and in each Home/Center.” (Omega Foundation, 1999b: 1). The aspiration of the organization to become a responsive organization was reflected in the title of project: “Learning through listening”. A special logo designed for communications of the project showed the founder of Omega listening to a young adult in a wheelchair.

Between the initial proposal of the project in 1997 and the start of the project 2 years had expired due to changes in the project team as well as changes in the priorities of the organization. The general idea of the project had to be operationalized into a workable project structure and process. The generic structure consisted of a process that was based on having three separate days spread over a period of several months in which the different primary stakeholders of each center would engage in reflective conversations and were invited to listen to each other. Based on the initial discussion between the senior researcher and the CEO, we designed the project as an Organization Development (OD) project.

Among the various and diverse definitions of OD, e.g.

- OD as an application of behavioral science insights to enhance organization effectiveness (Cummings & Worley, 2001);
- OD as a long-term effort to improve an organization’s visioning, empowerment, learning and problem-solving processes (French & Bell, 1999);
- OD as a planned change in an organizational culture (Burke, 1994);
- OD as an attempt to expand the candidness of organizational members (Neilsen, 1984);
- OD as a response to change in beliefs, attitudes, values and structures of organizations (Bennis, 1969);

I would ground my understanding of OD in Beckhard’s (1969) classic definition, i.e.

- OD as “an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization’s processes using behavioral science knowledge” (Beckhard, 1969: 9).

With regard to this project, Beckhard’s (1969) characteristics can be discerned as follows. It was (1) planned by the CEO, the senior researcher as well as myself, as (2) an intervention involving the entire organization, that (3) would be managed from a national steering
committee, (4) in order to build the capacity for change by developing a culture of reflective conversation, and was mainly informed (5) by the concepts of dialogue (e.g. Scharmer, 2001; Schein, 1993) and appreciative inquiry (e.g. Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

We agreed to use dialogue as one key concept, as the contribution of dialogue to an OD process consists in its potential for people to acknowledge differences and to critically review privately held assumptions: “The most basic mechanisms of acquiring new information that leads to cognitive restructuring is to discover in a conversational process that the interpretation that someone else puts on a concept is different from one’s own.” (Schein, 1996: 31). In our discussions, we discovered that appreciative inquiry would complement the dialogue concept very well, as it takes its inspiration “from the current state of ‘what is’ and seeks a comprehensive understanding of the factors and forces of organizing that serve to heighten the total potential of an organization.” (Cooperrider et al., 1987: 160).

Based on the concept of dialogue and appreciative inquiry, three questions as to structure the workshop sessions were agreed by the national steering committee of the project, as they would allow to address requirements of psychological safety as well as agenda-setting by participants.

1. What do you really like about (your life, your work) in this center/home?
As most people in the organization had not been familiar with any type of group work, it would allow them to participate in a conversation that would start off in a positive, friendly mode.

2. What could be done even better?
Based on the confidence built in the conversation around question 1., it was expected that participants would then speak up more freely with regard to opportunities for change.

3. How do we get there?
Finally, concrete suggestions in terms of goals and action steps to be taken would follow from the discussion of question 3.

As to define my different roles in this research, it is necessary to distinguish the PhD-project, which consists in the process of conducting research on the OD-Project. The role in that regard is that of a researcher. Within the OD project, my role oscillated between that of facilitator and process consultant roles that both require a high involvement with the client system. In the workshop sessions, it was clearly the facilitating aspects that dominated. However, in formal and informal conversation with members from the organization I was perceived and referred to as a process consultant. Especially conversations outside the workshops with service users, staff members, local as well as national managers, were as consulting and managing the project dynamics with the people involved. Schein (2001) refers to client-driven projects with a high involvement of the researcher as ‘process consulting’, whereas
researcher-driven projects with a high researcher involvement denotes ‘traditional action research’. I would argue that roles and their attributes change within social interaction and therefore suggest that the overall project was initiated by the client and hence, can be conceived of a process consulting context. However, while still being helpful, when investigating the notion of responsiveness in group as well as individual interviews at a later stage of the process, the agenda was certainly more influenced by my research concerns.

Responsiveness – Emerging from the field

In the very first session that I held with residents of one center, that I had enthusiastically prepared with all OD- and facilitation gadgets available, such as sitting in a circle, having a check-in, collecting expectations, establishing ground rules etc., that I was confronted with the most surprising response – silence.

About fifteen wheelchair users sat opposite to me. The room was too small and hence, I felt somewhat stuck. No resident in the session would speak. I had put the three questions to them and invited them to discuss question 1, i.e. what they really liked about their center. It was only after a while that one resident said: “Look Claus, we have seen many people like you coming to this place. Doing projects and research and so on. Nothing has ever made a difference. You have to convince us why this project is worthwhile participating.” With this single reply, all the OD intervention seemed to be unnecessary.

However, I realized that to ask for trust and conviction would be the wrong route. So I asked what other projects there had been and why they felt that nothing had happened. We started a very detailed discussion on the sincerity and honesty of certain projects, which in their view were simple window-dressing endeavours. “Nobody is aware of our needs. Nobody really listens. The manager talks a lot – but she doesn’t listen.” And we explored that her management style, while appearing very entrepreneurial at first sight – did not allow for a detailed comprehension and understanding of what the actual problem for individuals or groups of people could be. “You have to make her sit down and force her to listen. But you can’t do that all the time. And some people do not have the ability or the guts to do so.”

Another resident then spoke up and pointed to the limited understanding from staff. “You know, they are doing a great job. But they don’t listen either. They think they know us. But they don’t. They have to be more responsive. Omega has to become more responsive.” I asked why residents would not give them immediate feedback on how they felt, on how they perceived the quality of care. With hindsight, this might sound naïve, so again – silence.

After a while the same resident replied obviously not without some anxiety. “You know, we depend on these people. There are subtle rules in this place – unwritten. You can’t make them explicit. Everybody knows them. The fear of people getting back at you makes us happy people. You don’t rock the boat with the people that you rely on! It’s a dilemma.”
We discussed this dilemma in more detail and concluded that the fact of not being able to give honest feedback restricts both staff and management from learning from their practice. Even if staff would like to get honest feedback, they simply would get a clean-washed version due to the anxiety of service users from repercussion. Moreover, the undiscussability of the service quality itself becomes undiscussable. Hence, people felt stuck. With the most elaborate market research instrument, you wouldn’t get the information necessary to cater the needs of these people. To render this dilemma visible and to make people comfortable enough to discuss it is in itself - regardless of the research dimension - a proof of concept. An issue that had never been addressed in this organization surfaced in the project and has become discussable since.

What it took was a conversational format and mode that allowed for people to feel safe enough to speak up. One additional feature in that regard would have been myself as facilitator, engaging in this conversation without any micro-political package and bias. It became obvious that the ability both individually as well as organizationally to perceive, understand and eventually respond to the requests of service users was of critical relevance to this project as well as this organization. In addition, my ability of being responsive enough to skip the workshop format rather than ignoring the initial discomfort of participants proved crucial.

Conclusions

On reflection, many themes emerged from this and subsequent encounters. Within the centers, there didn’t seem to be a culture of communicating outside the direct care interaction. Within constituencies, most centers didn’t have regular meetings. If they had, they were traditional coordination focused business meetings that did not allow for reflection. At the national level, the managers’ meeting while providing a certain context for conversation has not been used to develop reflective practice. Finally, head office claimed that communication with centers was inefficient, slow and usually of low quality. The linking pin between the different parts of the organization seemed to be missing. For the time of the project, I served as a substitute for the missing linking pin, as I had talked and listened to nearly everybody in the organization.

My conclusion from these encounters was that participants of the project were desperately asking and looking for a quality of encounter occasionally at the individual but moreover at the organizational level that they themselves referred to as ‘being responsive’.

But what is responsiveness? What does it mean in the context of an organization? How come that it emerged from this project with its focus on dialogue? How does an organization aspiring to become responsive put this in practice? What is the link between organizational learning and responsiveness? How can this organization develop the linking pin sustainably for itself? What is the link between strategy and organization? How does one ensure that a project design as well the way it is carried out is considered responsive? How does one engage in
conversations with stakeholders that allows for reflective conversation in order to understand each other?

From the confusing bulk of questions, only very few of them are to be addressed in this research. Two of the most critical ones, however, have become my research questions – (1) exploring the nature of responsiveness in organizations and (2) its relation to dialogue.

1.1.1. Choice of Literature and Purpose of Review

Having identified responsiveness as an issue emerging from practice in the Learning Through Listening project, which bodies of literature should I review now to start to develop an analytical perspective on the phenomenon?

In his approach to strategic management, Ansoff (1976) refers to external responsiveness as an organization’s “aggressiveness in competition, its responsiveness to customers, its product leadership, its penetration of new markets”, and internally, he views responsiveness being determined by “the time perspective of decision making, the skills of managers and workers, by the capacities of the organization, by responsiveness to problems, the flexibility of structure etc. etc.” Both link up to responsiveness as “a function of an organization’s internal capability” (Ansoff et al., 1976: 50).

The adaptive quality implied in Ansoff’s (1976) concept of responsiveness is reflected in Cyert and March’s (1992) behaviorist concept of organizational learning as adaptation. They describe three different phases of the decision-making process: adaptation of goals, adaptation in attention rules, and adaptation in search rules. It is the aspect of adapting in attention rules – i.e. the socio-cognitive selection criteria through which signals of relevance in the environment of the organization are identified and processed – that corresponds to the notion of responsiveness.

From an organizational learning perspective, responsiveness is inherent in learning processes. Sitkin et al. refer to learning as “a change in an organization’s response repertoire” (Sitkin et al., 1998: 72). An argument by Mintzberg et al. (1998) provides a conceptual link between the two above dimensions and adds a third dimension. They conceive of strategy as the “mediating force between organization and environment” (Mintzberg et al., 1998: 16). Taking Mintzberg et al.’s (1998) definition as a referent, the organization’s environmental dimension should be covered in the literature review as well.

But what is the ‘environment’? Dill (1976) translates the abstract concept of environment into the notion stakeholders in suggesting that it is “the challenge of coping with an active, intrusive environment that not only presents enterprises with challenges and opportunities, but which is made up of individuals and organizations kibitzing and seeking direct influence on enterprises’ strategic decisions. Each enterprise has a broad aggregation of people ... call them
stakeholders ... who have ideas about what the economic and social performance of the enterprise should include.” (Dill, 1976: 126).

Based on the above arguments, I would expect that (1) strategy literature, (2) organizational learning literature, and (3) stakeholder management literature, provide a robust foundation for the investigation of responsiveness in organizations. The purpose for reviewing the three bodies of literature is to discern responsive aspects.

By consulting these bodies of literature, I should be in the position to identify conceptual opportunities. Based on these, I will then develop and specify the focus of this investigation as well as the intended contribution the proposition of a theory of responsiveness in organizations can make to these bodies of literature.

1.2. Responsive Aspects in Strategy

What is strategy? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, strategy is defined as “In (theoretical) circumstances of competition or conflict ... a plan for successful action based on the rationality and interdependence of the moves of the opposing participants” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Thus, a strategy is responsive by nature: Anticipating, observing, interpreting your opponents' moves in order to respond appropriately is at the core of strategic thinking in the light of this definition. So how has this 'responsive aspect' of strategy been conceptualized in the different schools of thought of strategy formation?

In order to discern responsive aspects in strategy, I will examine three major schools of thought in strategy formation: the design school (e.g. Andrews, 1987; Chandler, 1962; Christensen et al., 1987; Power et al., 1986), the planning school (e.g. Ansoff, 1984; Ansoff, 1987; Ansoff et al., 1976), and the positioning school (e.g. Porter, 1980; Porter, 1985). Any standard textbook on strategy refers to these approaches as referents when theorizing on strategy. They all provide a prescriptive theory of strategy formation and are therefore considered to have been dominating the discourse on strategy (e.g. De Wit & Meyer, 2001; Mintzberg et al., 1998). I will briefly outline the conceptual cornerstones of each approach and then reflect on the implications along the above guiding questions so as to carve out the responsive aspects of the particular approach.

By contrasting the three above approaches with an alternative approach on strategy formation, i.e. strategy as process of transformation (e.g. Mintzberg, 1987a, 1987b, 1994; Mintzberg et al., 1988; Mintzberg et al., 1998), I will then be in the position to draw a comparative, temporary conclusion on the responsive aspects of the reviewed strategy formation concepts.
1.2.1. Prescriptive Schools of Strategy Formation

Strategy as a process of conception

The Design school (e.g. Andrews, 1987; Chandler, 1962; Christensen et al., 1987; Power et al., 1986) proposes strategy as a process of conception that aims at attaining a fit between internal capabilities of the organization and external opportunities in its environment: “Economic strategy will be seen as the match between qualifications and opportunity that positions a firm in its environment.” (Christensen et al., 1987: 164). Andrews (1987) defines strategy as follows:

“Corporate strategy is the pattern of decisions in a company that determines and reveals its objectives, purposes, or goals, produces the principal policies and plans for achieving those goals, and defines the range of business the company is to pursue ... Corporate strategy defines the businesses in which a company will compete, preferably in a way that focuses resources to convert distinctive competence into competitive advantage.” (Andrews, 1987: 13).

The strategy formation as the most prominent decision to be made, should be a deliberate process of conscious thought, carried out by the chief executive officer. Key to strategy formation are internal and external appraisals with regard to organizational strengths and weaknesses and environmental opportunities and threats (SWOT-analysis). Internally, an organization should know about its strengths and weaknesses – both at the individual and collective level. Variables in this context are Marketing (product quality, market share), Research and Development, Management Information System (speed and quality), Management Team (Skills, team spirit), Operations (raw materials, capacity), Finance (finance leverage, operational leverage), and finally, Human Resources (employee capabilities, staff turnover) (Power et al., 1986: 37). Regarding environmental threats and opportunities, variables such as society (population trends, customer preferences), government (legislation, enforcement), economy (interest and exchange rates), competition (technology, competitors, prices), supplier (structure, costs) and market (new product, new markets) are to be observed (Power et al., 1986: 38).

The strategy creation itself is assumed to be a creative act by the CEO based on these appraisals. The resulting strategy of this informal process is supposed to be a complete, unique strategy that distinguishes the organization from its competitors. The CEO is the strategic, perceptual and creative device of the organization in this school of strategy formation. His cognitive and judgmental capabilities are assumed such as to provide a simple strategy that then can be implemented by the hierarchical levels below. Strategy formulation precedes its implementation, i.e. thinking and action are two distinct sequences of strategy formation (Andrews, 1987; Chandler, 1962).
Discerning responsive aspects

Conceptually, this approach on strategy formation aims at attaining a match between internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. Identification, perception and interpretation are a matter of gathering the appropriate information. Hence, responsiveness is implicitly conceptualized as information quality on internal and external signals of relevance to the strategy formation by the CEO.

Responsive aspects in terms of perception, interpretation and adaptation are hardly addressed as intelligibility of environmental and organizational properties is not supposed to pose a problem: properties of the environment are implicitly assumed to be delineable and stable, hence, predictable and controllable, and properties of the internal capabilities are assumed to be knowable, accessible and assessable.

The process to which responsive aspects are attached to is the strategy formation by the CEO. His perceptual, entrepreneurial and strategic capabilities are assumed to provide the organization with the correct strategy. The CEO is conceptualized as the single perceptual device in an entirely sequential process of strategy formation.

The suggested practical application of this approach of strategy formation is strictly hierarchical. Strategy formation by the CEO precedes implementation by the organization. The organization is the vehicle for carrying out the strategic concepts of top management. The CEO is characterized as the architect of strategy and hence, attributed the capability of perceiving strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats adequately and then assessing them correctly. The responsive competence lies entirely with the CEO – it is up to him or her to identify stimuli and define adequate responses in the form of strategies – thereby limiting the organization’s perceptual, interpretive and adaptive options and opportunities.

Strategy as formal process

The planning school builds on most the design school’s conceptual assumptions. The major difference lies in the planning process that is supposed to be highly formalized. It is assumed that planning as a strategic process can be decomposed in distinct analytical and hierarchical steps, that can then be delineated by checklists and finally broken down into objectives, budgets, programs and so on. In contrast to the design school, the task of strategic planning should be done by strategic planner rather than the senior management (e.g. Ansoff, 1984, 1987; Ansoff et al., 1976).

Ansoff (1976) conceives of strategic planning as a rational approach for assessing and managing the links between the firm and its business and societal environment (Ansoff et al., 1976). Both the business and societal environment are represented by a firm’s groups of internal and external stakeholders. The overall purpose of the firm, however, is to maximize the return on resources employed in the long run. Hence, strategy is seen as a set of independent
investment decisions and hence, budgeting and programming are key processes in strategic planning (Ansoff, 1987).

Similar to the design school, the objective setting stage is followed by external and internal appraisal. Externally, based on forecasts, the firm should assess its environment and external factors that affect its viability and profitability. Scanning techniques should allow recognizing weak signals of the environment as to enable top management to identify strategic issues. Internally, strengths and weaknesses should formally be assessed as to identify distinctive competencies. Highly formalized techniques such as checklists that attempt to cover every conceivable aspect should enable top management and planners to judge on an organization’s capabilities and competencies. In a next stage, the decomposed strategies or objectives are operationalized in several hierarchies of objectives, budgets and programs for business units and other subsystems of the firm. Finally, the entire process is embedded in a timeframe that sets milestones both in terms of planning as well as control. Strategy formulation and implementation remain two distinct and hierarchical sequences. Overall accountability for the process remains the CEO, whereas responsibility for the process lies with the strategic planners (Ansoff, 1987).

The firm as a resource converter can employ strategic planning as a device through which top management can discern external possibilities and bring about the appropriate changes in terms of internal capability transformation. As stated earlier, he refers to responsiveness as a function of an organization’s internal capability which is reflected externally by a firm’s competitive abilities and internally by its time-to-market, flexibility and overall capacities of the organization (Ansoff et al., 1976: 50).

**Discerning responsive aspects**

In conceptual terms, Ansoff’s (1976) notion links in with his overall approach to strategic planning and management as regards to environmental scanning, weak signal and strategic issue identification. His approach holds that the better an organization is in detecting SWOT’s, the better the firm’s performance in the long run. Responsiveness as an internal capability refers to the ability of the organization to produce intelligence for planning processes.

The responsive aspects implied in the planning school approach to strategy formation can be identified stimuli, i.e. data and information to be provided as to feed into the overall planning process. Forecasting is of prominent relevance in that regard.

The process to which these aspects are attached and attributed are these external and internal data gathering processes. External properties are assumed to be predictable, controllable or in short; stable. Internal properties, represented and captured by suggested checklists, are only as creative and responsive as the author who produces them. Accessibility to the
environment and the different intra-organizational subsystems is assumed to be a technical problem of information gathering not one of cognition or meaning creation.

Responsiveness, i.e. identification and assessment of signals or stimuli, lies with the strategic planners or the strategic planning department. The perceptual surface of the firm is limited to the ability of these actors and their perceptual competencies. The more stable the environment, the better the planning process. But it is also plausible to assume that the need for a responsive planning process increases with the degree of ambiguity and turbulence an organization is confronted with.

The three assumptions of strategic planning, i.e. (a) the environment as predetermined, (b) detaching strategists from operations and implementation, and (c) the focus on formalized processes reduce the responsive potential of strategy formation significantly. Meaning is supposed to be inherent to data and can be gathered through fine-tuned checklists. Formalization by its very nature produces perceptual devices that allow only responding to identified same stimuli that are responded to by the same responses.

**Strategy as an analytical process**

The positioning school approach suggests that by a detailed formalized analysis of a firm’s competitive environment, the relative strategic position can be defined. The leap from the current market position to a planned position can be made by choosing one of three generic strategic options. The key player in this strategy formation school is the analyst who holds the key to match industry analysis with the appropriate generic strategy (e.g. Porter, 1980, 1985). This view is echoed by Porter’s (1985) definition of strategy:

“Competitive strategy is the search for a favorable competitive position in an industry, the fundamental arena in which competition occurs. Competitive strategy aims to establish a profitable and sustainable position against the forces that determine industry competition.”

(Porter, 1985: 1).

Strategy formation is conceptualized as a sequential analysis. In the first step, a firm’s environment, conceived of as the industry in which it operates, is to be assessed. An industry is defined as “the group of firms producing products that are close substitutes for each other” (Porter, 1985: 272). The intensity of competition in an industry is mainly influenced by five forces: (1) rivalry among existing firms, (2) threat of substitute products, (3) bargaining power of buyers and (4) suppliers, as well as (5) the threat of new entrants to the industry. The goal of a competitive strategy then is to find a position where the company can best defend itself (Porter, 1985).

The analysis should provide quantifiable data for choosing one of three generic strategic options: Overall cost leadership, differentiation and focus. Internal capabilities have then to be assessed and adjusted as to meet the requirements for any strategic shift. The CEO is assisted in
this endeavor by analysts that might be members of staff but are often business consultants (Porter, 1985).

**Discerning responsive aspects**

Strategy formation in this school is conceptualized as an analytical, systematic and deliberate process using a predetermined framework of environmental descriptor, i.e. the five forces, in order to then choose one of three generic strategic options. The analysis assumes that the predetermined framework of the five forces is sufficient as to describe and analyze an organization’s environment. Complemented by an analysis of the internal capabilities, this would then provide a ‘stimulus-response’ situation, whereby the predetermined properties of the stimulus quasi-automatically lead to the identification of a strategic response that is taken from a given response repertoire, i.e. the three generic strategic options. This implies a rather mechanistic concept of responsiveness.

The properties of the environment are determined by the five forces: new entrants, suppliers, substitutes, buyers and competitors. However, the environmental situation overall is considered to be stable, mature, well structured and quantifiable in terms of the five forces that drive competition. Intra-organizational capabilities have a lower priority in this school, and hence are subsumed under the quantitative analytical approach. Accessibility and intelligibility are non-issues as the approach stems from an information-processing model. Any contingency, be it in stimuli, i.e. industry configurations not captured by this model, or be it in responses outside the generic three strategic options, is not allowed for in this approach.

A mechanistic responsiveness model is at the core of strategy formation in this approach. A certain stimulus configuration, i.e. results from industry analysis and competencies assessment, predetermines a certain response, i.e. one of three generic strategic options.

Such an approach, it is suggested, can be put in practice by again clearly distinguishing between strategy formation and implementation. Key actors are business analysts that provide the CEO with the necessary data. They serve as the organization’s perceptual and interpretive device. The strategic choice then is made by the CEO; however, the application of this model reduces the responsive repertoire for business analysts as outlined above. A fundamental assumption for this approach to become practical is a rather stable, controllable environment.

**Summary**

In all three prescriptive approaches, I would suggest to discern similar patterns of responsive aspects. Depending on the conceptual focus, responsiveness implicitly conceived of as a behaviorist stimulus-response model. Thereby, the approaches differ in (1) how a stimulus is to be identified (CEO’s, planners or analysts abilities) and (2) how the response is produced (CEO’s genius, planners or analysts correctness). In all three cases, the internal and external
contexts are supposed to be accessible and intelligible so that the data necessary for any
planning or analysis are provided. Meaning is inherent in data. Moreover, the internal and
external contexts seem to be delineable, stable, and hence, predictable. Given that the stimuli
portfolio is limited, the response repertoire will then be developed accordingly. Strategy
formation and implementation are dichotomous sequences that are hierarchically organized:
CEO, planners or analysts issue a strategy that has then to be implemented by the organization.
The underlying concept of responsiveness is of mechanistic nature: same stimuli result in same
responses. Whether such an approach holds true for turbulent, changing environments is subject
to consideration.

1.2.2. An Alternative approach to Strategy Formation

Strategy as a process of transformation

In his critique of the three prescriptive schools of strategy formation, especially the
planning school, Mintzberg has identified four fallacies: (1) fallacy of predetermination and
predictability of current and future properties of the internal and external context of the firm, (2)
fallacy of detachment, i.e. separating thinking from action in a Taylorist manner, (3) fallacy of
formalization, i.e. the tendency to assume that a formalized strategy making process will result
in superior strategies. All three lead to the “grand fallacy”: “Because analysis is not synthesis,
strategic planning is not strategy formation.” (Mintzberg et al., 1998: 77).

His proposition of strategy formation holds that organizational change, rather than
evolving or happening incrementally, happens in a quantum leap, revolutionary manner. The
characteristics of these changes differ from the different configurations the organizations is
starting from and attempting to land. Mintzberg (1988) conceives of organizations as
configurations that undergo processes of transformations that are referred to as strategy making.
In his view, transformation inevitably induces changes in configuration (Mintzberg et al., 1988:
518).

The metaphor of equilibrium is at the core of this approach: Organizational phases of
relative stability in terms of structural and behavioral characteristics of an organization, i.e.
different states or configurations, are occasionally interrupted by periods of radical, quantum
leap changes, i.e. strategic change or transformation. Transformation means the shift from one
organizational configuration that was determined by and adapted to the historic conditions
towards a new organizational configuration adaptable to the current environmental conditions.
Mintzberg proposes seven configurations, ideal archetypes or even caricatures of real
organizations (entrepreneurial, machine-type, professional, diversified, ad-hocracy, missionary
and political organization) (Mintzberg et al., 1998).
Each of the seven configurations represents an organizational state that is assumed to be relatively stable and discerned from its environmental conditions. Transformation, i.e. strategic change, occurs when an organization due to internal and external forces of change is required to shift from one state to another. Or, “at some point the configuration falls out of synchronization with its environment. … In effect, the organization tries to leap to a new stability to reestablish as quickly as possible an integrated posture among a new set of strategies, structures and culture – in other words, a new configuration.” (Mintzberg et al., 1998: 314). How the new configuration is to be achieved, which of the new configurations should be chosen or which factors force an organization into transformation is up to the change agents, that deal and cope with the local, specific characteristics of each organization.

**Discerning responsive aspects**

In terms of predictability and predetermination, internal and external context of an organization are assumed to be complex, unpredictable, unstable and therefore hardly knowable and controllable. Environmental, competitive contingencies are assumed to vary across sectors and over time. Surprises and discontinuities are to be expected, but cannot be anticipated in their specificities. Hence, strategy as a coherent, stabilizing concept sets direction and provides a frame for cognition, but might blind the organization at the same time: “[s]trategies are to organizations what blinders are to horses: they keep them going in a straight line, but impeded the use of peripheral vision.” (Mintzberg, 1987b: 31).

Consequently, the configuration school emphasized the need for ‘peripheral vision’ in the strategy making process. Responsive aspects are conceptualized from a constructionist position: characteristics and properties of internal and external environment are attributed by different members at different levels of the organization. Senior management has a prominent role in that regard. In order to provide a vision, that cannot be deferred from strategic programming, multiple perspectives on internal and external contexts are essential: That is “capturing what the manager learns from all sources … both the soft insights from his or her personal experiences and the experiences of other throughout the organization and the hard data from market research and the like” (Mintzberg, 1994: 217).

Rather than programming and planning, strategy is made through a organization-wide strategic thinking: “messy processes of informal learning that must necessarily be carried out by people at various levels who are deeply involved with the specific issues at hand” (Mintzberg, 1994: 218). Involvement and detailed knowledge are required, as not to rearrange established, but inventing new categories of perception. Or, put differently: ‘Vision is unavailable to those who cannot ‘see’ with their own eyes. Real strategists get their hands dirty digging for ideas, and real strategies are built from the occasional nuggets they uncover. These are not people who abstract themselves from the daily details; they are the ones who immerse themselves in them.
while being able to abstract the strategic messages from them. The big picture is painted with little strokes.” (Mintzberg, 1994: 221).

He pleads for a pluralism of perspectives and contexts in order to access internal and external context, which enhances both the quality and quantity of perceptual devices of the organization: “Planners can snoop around places they might not normally visit to find patterns amid the noise of failed experiments, seemingly random activities and messy learning. They can discover new ways of doing or perceiving things, for example, spotting newly uncovered markets and understanding their implied new products.” (Mintzberg, 1994: 224). On a similar line of argument, Heracleous (1998) suggests to conceive of strategic management as comprised of a formal aspect, i.e. strategic planning, and a creative, innovative aspect, i.e. strategic thinking.

1.2.3. Conclusion: Responsive Aspects in Strategy Formation

Based on this review, I would suggest discerning the following responsive aspects in the strategy literature. Table 1 summarizes the findings in that regard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy School</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Configuration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization as</td>
<td>Machine</td>
<td>Machine</td>
<td>Machine</td>
<td>Configuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy formation as</td>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Formal plan</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive aspects in concept</td>
<td>Fit stimulus and response</td>
<td>Formalize stimulus and response</td>
<td>Analyze stimulus and response</td>
<td>Transform stimulus and response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties of environment</td>
<td>Delineable, stable, controllable</td>
<td>Predetermined, stable, foreseeable</td>
<td>Five forces framework</td>
<td>Complex, unstable, unpredictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual device</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Planners</td>
<td>Analysts</td>
<td>Organizational members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy made /implemented by</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Planners Organization</td>
<td>Analysts Organization</td>
<td>Organization Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness model</td>
<td>Mechanistic Structure follows strategy</td>
<td>Mechanistic Strategy follows forecast</td>
<td>Mechanistic Strategy follows industry analysis</td>
<td>Organic Emerging strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Responsive aspects in strategy
1. Responsiveness matters with regard to strategy formation so as to provide adequate responses to strategic challenges from the environment in general, and from competitors in particular.

2. The prescriptive schools of strategy formation imply a behaviorist concept of responsiveness.

3. Referring to strategies as emergent, responsiveness as an internal capability of the organization becomes even more important.

4. Practical implications in terms of adequate communicative formats for responsiveness are not provided.

Having accomplished the review of the strategy literature, two other perspectives remain to be examined with regard to their responsive aspects. Given that strategy is the mediating force between an organization and its environment (Mintzberg, 1998), and that the environment consists of groups and individuals seeking to influence an organization’s strategic choices (Dill, 1976), I will now turn to stakeholder management literature and also address the four guiding questions in order to discern responsive aspects.

1.3. Responsive Aspects in Stakeholder Management

What is responsive about stakeholder management? As Dill (1976) has pointed out, stakeholders are those groups or individuals that not only ‘kibitz’ into the organization, but also seek to directly influence an organization’s strategic decisions. Strategic management, then, “must wrestle with the desire of outside stakeholders for consideration and participation” (Dill, 1976: 135). It is this supposed ‘wrestle’ to identify, acknowledge and adhere to stakeholder interests, claims, needs and demands, that might shed light on responsiveness as an important aspect of this body of literature.

It was in his book Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach in which Freeman (1984) provided a comprehensive theoretical framework for stakeholder management and in which he conceptualized stakeholders as those constituencies and interest groups that have a stake in the organization, i.e. “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984: 46). Stakeholder management has since grown to a diverse and various field of research (e.g. Academy of Management Journal, 1999; Academy of Management Review, 1999). In their attempt to provide a comprehensive structure for the field of stakeholder research, Donaldson and Preston (1995) distinguish two major strands of stakeholder theory.
On the one hand, instrumental stakeholder theory, that posits that certain outcomes will obtain if legitimate claims of stakeholders are attended to (e.g. Berman et al., 1999; Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson, 1999; Dyer & Singh, 1998; Freeman, 1984, 1999; Jones, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997; Preston & Donaldson, 1999). Freeman summarizes this approach by stating that “To maximize shareholder value over an uncertain time frame, managers ought to pay attention to key stakeholder relationships” (Freeman, 1999: 235).

On the other, proponents of normative stakeholder theory ground their argument in ethical considerations: Managers ought to pay attention to key stakeholder relationships because of certain moral obligations that the theory strives to identify (e.g. Boatright, 1994; Clarkson, 1995; Freeman & Evan, 1990; Freeman & Gilbert, 1988; Goodpaster, 1991). This strand tends to use interpretive methodologies and explicitly attempts to offer ethical guidelines why managers should attend to stakeholder interests.

Consensus exists with regard to the fact that stakeholder interests should be incorporated. Both hold that stakeholder management would enhance organizational performance. The fundamental agreement with regard to the performance enhancing qualities of stakeholder management is based on a congruence of ethical and business considerations: “When ethical judgments and choices become issues of survival, the management of ethics and ethics programs in a corporation becomes a matter of strategic importance.” (Clarkson, 1995: 113).

Berman et al. (1999) empirically tested the two theoretical approaches using longitudinal data. The results provide support for a strategic stakeholder management model, i.e. instrumental approach, but hardly any support for an intrinsic stakeholder commitment model (normative approach). In their findings, only two of five variables, i.e. employees and product safety/quality, directly affected financial performance. Overall, relationships with stakeholders have a direct impact on financial performance, as stakeholder relationships and resource allocation are inseparable. The effects of these decisions on sets of variables relevant to stakeholder affect firm financial performance. Managers not considering these findings might be at a competitive disadvantage: “The current results support the idea that managerial attention to multiple stakeholder interests can affect firm financial performance” (Berman, 1999: 503).

Hillman et al.’s analysis would support these findings: Better relations with primary stakeholders leads to increased shareholder wealth. Attending to interests of employees, suppliers, customers and communities helps to develop relational assets that hold the potential of competitive advantages. These propositions were tested with data from S&P 500 firms and “evidence is found that stakeholder management leads to improved shareholder value” (2001: 125). Preston and Donaldson point to these intangible, relational assets to back up their proposition that stakeholder relationships can enhance organizational wealth. These relational assets can consist in successful interfirm collaborations, value-creating potential of long term, experienced employees, mediated and fostered team production, organizational knowledge and
competencies and implicit normative agreements to reduce opportunism. However, the two approaches differ in the justification for doing so, legitimacy and intrinsic value of stakeholder claims therefore are subjects to debate between the two perspectives.

What makes a stakeholder? The variety of stakeholder definitions shows some common ground. Freeman’s (1984) criterion of affectedness is echoed by Donaldson and Preston’s (1995) definition of stakeholders as “persons or groups with legitimate interests towards procedural and/or substantive aspects of organizational activities.” (Donaldson, 1995: 67).

Clarkson (1995) points to legitimacy and survival when he refers to stakeholders as “persons or groups that have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future. Such claimed rights or interests are the result of transactions with, or actions taken by, the corporation, and may be legal or moral, individual or collective.” (Clarkson, 1995: 106). Based on this definition, he proposes to distinguish between primary and secondary stakeholder. A constituency qualifies as primary if without its “continuing participation the corporation cannot survive as a going concern.” (Clarkson, 1995: 106). Typical examples are shareholders and investors, employees, customers, and suppliers, governments and communities. Secondary stakeholder groups are defined as “those who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the corporation and are not essential for its survival.” (Clarkson, 1995: 107).

Drawing from Coase’s (1937) notion of the firm as a “nexus of contracts”, stakeholder theory views the firm as “a series of multilateral contracts among all stakeholders” (Freeman et al., 1990: 354). Hence, Jones (1995) characterizes the firm as having relationships, i.e. implicit or explicit contracts, with many constituencies. The firm establishes contracts between itself and its stakeholders. Managers have a prominent and unique role in that regard. They are the only stakeholder group to contract with all other stakeholders: “Managers administer contracts among employees, owners, suppliers, customers, and the community. Since each of these groups can invest in asset specific transactions which affect the other groups, methods of conflict resolution, or safeguards must be found.” (Freeman et al., 1990: 352). Their dual role, being a stakeholder group themselves while contracting on behalf of the firm with all other stakeholders, puts them in a strategically important as well as powerful position in the nexus.

Proponents of normative stakeholder research propose that stakeholder claims are of intrinsic value, i.e. each group merits consideration for its own sake (Donaldson, 1995). Moreover, equality should be assumed among the various stakeholder groups: no set of interests should dominate others (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson, 1995; Jones & Wicks, 1999). In terms of stakeholder identification, Mitchell has proposed a concept to distinguish between stakeholders and non-stakeholders (e.g. Mitchell et al., 1997). They propose a practical theory of stakeholder salience which considers three attributes of stakeholders: the stakeholder’s power to influence the firm, the legitimacy of a stakeholder’s claim, and the urgency of a stakeholder’s claim. This
should allow identifying “those entities to whom managers should pay attention.” (Mitchell et al., 1997: 854). Building upon this typology, they develop a theory of stakeholder salience in which they suggest a dynamic model “that permits the explicit recognition of situational uniqueness and managerial perception to explain how managers prioritize stakeholder relationships”

The concept of stakeholder salience should allow managers to prioritize the relative importance of a stakeholder claim or issue. In order to specify a descriptive theory of stakeholder salience, stakeholder-manager relationship need to be evaluated in terms of absence/presence of the three above mentioned attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency. The typology of stakeholders allows distinguishing: Low salience, i.e. latent stakeholders, moderate salience, i.e. expectant stakeholders, and high salience, i.e. definitive stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997). This model has been empirically tested and confirmed by Agle (1999).

1.3.1. Conclusion: Responsive Aspects in Stakeholder Literature

Given that stakeholder interests, claims and demands are of strategic relevance to the organization, then there is a “need to make stakeholders understand better how and why strategic decisions are being made” and that “greater stakeholder understanding ... means ‘opening the kimono’ more: more willingness to have what the enterprise is doing and what it is planning” as Dill (1976: 133) suggests. Especially managers “who understand what these stakeholders want can no more decide without consulting them and inviting their participation than they can plan on purely internal matters without consulting and inviting participation from many of their employees.” (Dill, 1976: 135).

From a normative viewpoint, Deetz (1995) makes an evenly strong case for stakeholder involvement and participation. He claims that “management cannot be left as the head of a company that opposes stakeholders; management must lead the company for the stakeholders. Stakeholder interests are not limits to corporate goal accomplishment, they are to be considered as the corporation’s goals”... stakeholders cannot enter the situation with fixed goals somehow to be won. As we know from other decision-making contexts, creativity and mutual satisfaction are based on commitment to a codeterminative process, not preconceived goal accomplishment.” (Deetz, 1995: 49).

Prior to the question and mode of involving stakeholders is the issue of identifying and prioritizing stakeholder requests. The stakeholder salience model of Mitchell et al. (1997) exemplifies the conceptual link to responsiveness: What and who really counts? Who determines this? Power, legitimacy and urgency are not characteristics inherent to a stakeholder issue, but are attributes to the issue. Hence, stakeholder salience is in the eye of the beholder – and therefore becomes an issue of identification, judgment and relative political power.
1. Responsiveness matters regarding stakeholder literature as to provide adequate responses to claims and demands of stakeholders put to the organization.

2. Responsiveness conceptualized as accessing and understanding the interests, needs and demands of stakeholders is vital for organizational performance and survival.

3. While acknowledging the legitimacy of taking stakeholder views into account, stakeholder theory does not provide any consideration of communicative implications for practice.

With the following section, I will complete the literature review by reviewing organizational learning literature.

1.4. Responsive Aspects in Organizational Learning

What is responsive about organizational learning? From a strategic perspective, the ability of an organization to constructively deal with internal and external forces for change is crucial to its survival and sustained competitiveness, as strategy aims at bridging the gap between organization and environment. Organizational learning is considered a competitive advantage, as “being a learning organization is not enough; a company must be capable of learning more efficiently than its competitors” (Hamel & Prahalad, 1993: 80).

A variety of attempts have been made to define organizational learning, e.g. as the “process by which the organizational knowledge base is developed and shaped.” (Shrivastava, 1983: 15), or as the “process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985: 803), or it could be considered “the ways firms build, supplement and organize knowledge and routines around their activities and within their culture” (Dodgson, 1993: 377). Other proponents of the field conceptualize the learning of organizations “by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior.” (Levitt & March, 1988: 320), or if through information processing its “range of its potential behaviors is changed” (Huber, 1991: 89). Organizational learning, Sitkin et al. (1998) hold, is “a change in an organization’s response repertoire” (1998: 72). Despite the diversity, some pattern, as not to call it schools of thought, seem to evolve.

In their behavioral approach of the firm, Cyert and March (1992) conceptualize organizational learning as an adaptation process, whereby learning is triggered by external shocks the call for adaptation. Learning occurs in standard operating procedures that result from experiencing stimulus-response combinations over time. Learning does not result in an increased knowledge of its members. In sum, rather than seeing learning as related to cognition
or knowledge, learning is seen as reactive adaptation in line with stimulus-response learning principles. In contrast, March and Olsen (1975) suggest that organizational learning results from experiential learning cycle based on cognition and preferences of the organizational actors. Crucial to organizational learning are the individual capabilities of correctly interpreting environmental ambiguity, thereby relying on cognitive processes – including their limitations. This approach represents a developed S-R model by incorporating and acknowledging social psychological factors as well as cognitive structures. The idea of experiential learning is further developed by Levitt and March (1988) who suggest organizations learn "by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior" (1988: 320). Routines encompass forms, rules, proceedings and conventions as well as “the structure of beliefs, frameworks, paradigms, codes, cultures and knowledge that buttress, elaborate and contradict formal routines” (1988: 320). In sum, this body of literature started off from mechanistic, behavioral adaptation (Cyert et al., 1992), then integrated socio-psychological and cognitive factors of experiential learning processes (March et al., 1975) and further developed the idea of experiential learning that results in routines as collective bases of organizational knowledge (Levitt et al., 1988).

The organizational cognition and knowledge perspective on organizational learning posits cognition as the basis for all deliberate action. Organizational members as interpreters of reality according to their cognitive systems become conscious actors in individual and collective learning processes: "Learning enables organizations to build an understanding and interpretation of their environment … It results in associations, cognitive systems, and memories that are developed and shared by members of the organization. " (Fiol et al., 1985: 804). The structural approach to cognitive learning focuses on information processing activities and structural characteristics of the cognitive system. Structures of individual knowledge systems differ in terms of differentiation (dimensionality in the cognitive and semantic space) and integration (flexible relationships among various dimensions with regard to specific stimulation). At a collective level, “groups learn to evaluate and discuss in a more differentiated and integrated way than in the past if they have a number of ways of interpreting and reflecting on topics or of observing processes from different angles” (Pawlowsky, 2001: 71). Complementing and contrasting this view, the corporate epistemology approach focuses on interpretation processes and cognitive construction of reality in terms of learning (e.g. Daft & Weick, 1984; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Rather than seeing knowledge as an objective, neutral reflection, it is conceptualized as coexisting and conflicting interpretation of reality rooted in experiences of each member of a joint knowledge system. In this view, environment is not an objective, external reality; “the human creates the environment to which the system then adapts. The human actor does not react to an environment, he enacts it." (Weick, 1969: 64). Subjective construction and creation of meaning is based on symbols and language; organizational reality is created through interaction of organizational members developing a joint interpretation. Knowledge and learning then are results of self-productive, autopoietic processes (Maturana...
and Varela, 1987). The cognitive view is close to but not identical with approaches that focus on knowledge. Hamel and Prahalad (1993) assume that knowledge and skills of an organization in a distinct area represents a comparative competitive advantage that then can be capitalized. Knowledge in this view exists primarily in explicit and implicit form. Whereas explicit knowledge consists in insights that can be articulated and transferred through language, tacit knowledge stems from individual experience that cannot be articulated and transferred easily unless an appropriate setting is provided. Nonaka (1995) bases his approach on knowledge creation on the iterative process ("knowledge spiral") of mobilizing the tacit, implicit dimension of knowledge and transferring it to organizational and group levels.

The cultural perspective on learning complements the cognitive approach insofar as it considers reality being constructed. Furthermore, focusing on the collective level, this approach assumes that members of organizations create sets of intersubjective meanings, that are represented and evaluated by artifacts (such as symbols, metaphors, rituals) and tied together by values, beliefs and emotions. Organizational learning is considered as a change in defensive routines, as a development of a learning culture (Argyris et al., 1978). Schein (1992) considers culture a shared, common learning output. Argyris and Schon (1978) distinguish two types of learning culture: Model I theory in use that results in defensive routines (bypassing embarrassment and threat, face saving, cover up, data and information manipulation) and reasoning as it promotes unilateral control, necessity to win, avoidance to upset people. In contrast, Model II theory in use promotes valid information, informed choice, responsibility on the quality of implementation; factors that are assumed contribute to a learning culture. In sum, culture is both context and outcome of learning processes as joint interpretation and meaning creation processes of organizational members (Schein, 1992; Smircich, 1983).

Several attempts to structure the field have been made (e.g. Easterby-Smith, 1997; Huber, 1991; Pawlowsky, 2001). In my review, I will draw from Pawlowsky (2001) who suggests that organizational learning literature has been evolving around four major themes: Learning modes, learning levels, learning types and learning process.

1.4.1. Learning Modes

Most theories of organizational learning hold an implicit psychological view on learning. Firstly, organizational learning conceived of as an analogy of individual learning, in its misunderstood version resulting in an anthropomorphization of the organization as an acting entity. Secondly, individual learning as the basis of organizational learning, i.e. increases in organizational knowledge is based on an increased knowledge acquisition by individual members of the organization. The former by juxtaposing findings from individual learning to organizational learning; the latter by identifying ways to promote organizational learning by enhancing individual learning capabilities. From a pure evolutionary perspective, learning as
behavioral adaptation to environmental conditions can emerge either by evolutionary adaptation, i.e. inheriting behavioral features that are crucial for a species' survival, or by adaptation through learning, i.e. learning and adopting of new, optimal behavior for survival. The trade-off between the two consists in a limited flexibility of the former in times of changing environments, and in increased risk as optimizing behavior works in a trial-and-error mode for the individual (Maier et al., 2001).

Psychology distinguishes two major frameworks of learning: behavioral and cognitive approaches. Behavioral learning theories hold that the acquisition of new behavior stems from forming associations between stimuli and responses. In classical conditioning, learning consists in “successive pairing of an unconditioned stimulus and a conditioned stimulus, the unconditioned stimulus ... elicits a conditioned response” (Maier et al., 2001: 17). The example of Pavlov’s dogs showed that pairing food (unconditioned stimulus) with the steps of the dog’s keeper (conditioned stimulus) several times, leads eventually to salivation (conditioned response) through the unconditioned stimulus only. Shifting from behavioral to cognitive theories of learning, the information-processing approach examines processes of encoding, storing and retrieving of external information. Encoding contains “processes of perception and interpretation that are necessary for transforming external stimuli into cognitive representations of those stimuli.” (Maier et al., 2001: 19). As opposed to bottom-up perception, i.e. analysis driven by external stimuli only, top-down processes of perception take existing knowledge into account that is stored in cognitive frameworks of schemata and scripts. The trade-off between relatively effortless selective perception and interpretation consists in an increased imprecision and ignorance to new data. Storage refers to the way “in which encoded cognitive representations are depicted in the memory” (Maier et al., 2001: 20). Semantic knowledge is stored according to its semantic context, i.e. the more similar elements are the closer the relation when it comes to storage. Finally, retrieval refers to the active “process of recalling cognitive representations stored in memory” which is governed by schemata and the resulting storage patterns (Maier et al., 2001: 20).

Organizational learning literature relies implicitly or explicitly on behavioral or cognitive learning approaches at the individual levels or socio-cognitive learning at the group or organizational level. The difficulties resulting from this are among others, a lack explanation of the mutual effects of individual and collective learning processes, as well as the danger of anthropomorphizing the organization. Using individual learning as an analogy or metaphor allows identifying commonalities but even more important differences of the levels of learning. Hence, learning as a construct should to be examined with its specific characteristics at each level. Another finding consists in dissociating learning from success or performance. One of the major shortcomings in that regard has been identified to investigate “the conditions under which individual or group knowledge becomes shared knowledge in an organization.” (Maier et al., 2001: 29).
1.4.2. Learning Levels

A persistent issue organizational learning is the link between individual and organizational learning. One position holds that organizational learning is a learning process distinct from individual learning (Weick, 1991), the other position would see organizational learning as the aggregate and synergies of individual learning in organizations (Simon, 1991). Kim (1993) has attempted to conceptually merge the two positions to a comprehensive framework.

Starting from an individual learning perspective, Kim defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” which aims at “increasing one’s capacity to take effective action” (Kim, 1993: 38). Organizational learning, according to Kim, is not a mere magnification of individual learning, it is fundamentally different to individual learning. “A model of organizational learning has to resolve the dilemma of importing intelligence and learning capabilities to a nonhuman entity without anthropomorphizing it.” (Kim, 1993: 40). At an organizational level, standard operating procedures and routines provide devices of memory (e.g. Hedberg, 1981).

Taken into account the findings of individual learning, Kim proposes to view organizational learning as increasing an organization’s capacity to take effective action. Furthermore, he suggests that routines and standard operating procedures can be conceived of as the organizations ‘autopilot reflexes’ which allow to respond to routine needs in predictable ways (Kim, 1993: 45). However, this mechanism is insufficient for an integrative model of organizational learning. In this context, Schein points to the relevance of organizational culture in terms of developing shared understanding, organizational culture being defined as “basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken for granted’ fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group’s problems of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration.” (Schein, 1992: 6).

Kim proposes these shared mental models as the ‘missing link’ between individual and organizational learning: “Organizational learning is dependent on individuals improving their mental models; making those mental models explicit is crucial to new shared models.” (Kim, 1993: 44). In his model, individual learning feeds into organizational learning which in turn feeds back into individual learning. The link between the two are shared cognitive frameworks that if agreed result in a shared Weltanschauung.
1.4.3. Learning Types

The proposition that learning can be conceived of as a logical hierarchy of learning levels has been incorporated in most organizational learning concepts (Argyris et al., 1978). This view stems from the work of Bateson (1972), who identifies four levels of learning.

- Learning O is characterized by effective reaction of refinement that does not change. All acts that are not subject to trial-and-error processes are based on Learning O.
- Learning I (proto-learning) refers to mechanistic learning such as classical or instrumental conditioning which both require a repeatable learning context.
- Learning II (learning to learn) can be conceived of as a change in the process of Learning I, which describes the development of certain habits.
- Learning III can be characterized as a change in Learning II, which refers to the conscious acknowledgment and critical examination of habits and that deliberate changes in habits are achievable. This type of learning results in the ability to react differently to similar situations and to develop creativity and alternative distinctions.

In many organizational learning concepts, this fundamental logical hierarchy has been modified and integrated in different ways, while keeping the assumption that learning can be distinguished in its range and degree of self-referentiality (see Table 2; adapted from Pawlowsky, 2001: 77).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Learning type 1</th>
<th>Learning type 2</th>
<th>Learning type 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argyris and Schon (1978)</td>
<td>Single loop</td>
<td>Double loop</td>
<td>Deutero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedberg (1981)</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>Turnaround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrivastava (1983)</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Assumption sharing</td>
<td>Knowledge base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiol and Lyles (1985)</td>
<td>Lower level</td>
<td>Higher level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senge (1990)</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Generative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bateson (1972)</td>
<td>Learning O and I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Types of learning

As to elaborate on probably the most prominent example in that regard, Argyris and Schon (1978) distinguish three types of organizational learning, defined as detection and correction of error. Single loop learning, detection and correction of organizational errors takes place within the context of its current policies and objectives. “Organizational learning involves the detection and correction of error. When the error is detected and corrected permits the organization to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives, then that error-detection-and-correction process is single-loop learning. Double-loop learning occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization’s underlying norms, policies and objectives.” (Argyris et al., 1978: 3).
Through double-loop learning an organization is enabled to detect and correct errors by reflection and modification of its norms, policies and objectives. Deutero learning denotes a learning type in which the learning system and practices at the two previous levels are inquired into as parts of the entire learning system of error detection and correction. "When an organization engages in deutero-learning, its members learn about previous contexts of learning. They reflect on and inquire into previous episodes of organizational learning, or failure to learn. They discover what they did that facilitated or inhibited learning, they invent new strategies for learning, they produce these strategies, and they evaluate and generalize what they have produced." (Argyris et al., 1978: 4).

1.4.4. Learning Process

In terms of phases of the learning process, Huber (1991) identifies four elements or sequences.

Knowledge acquisition, as the process by which knowledge or information is acquired obtained, is divided into five subprocesses. Congenital learning occurs when creating or starting up new enterprises by individuals or organizations that will pass on their knowledge in this phase to new members. The basic set of specific knowledge at this stage of an organization's development will determine future search-, interpretation-, and experiential strategies. Experiential learning as the acquisition of knowledge through direct experience can result from intentional or unintentional effort or experience. Vicarious learning means to draw from other entities, individuals or organizations, in terms of observing and imitating their strategies, practices and/or technologies. New hired members to the organization will contribute their knowledge and skills to the organizational base of knowledge. Finally, deliberate searching and scanning of internal and external sources of data are considered a fifth form of knowledge acquisition. On a similar note, Cohen and Levinthal propose to refer to the capability of combining existing knowledge with potentially relevant knowledge, as absorptive capacity, which they define as "an organization's ability to recognize the value of new and external knowledge, assimilate it, and use it for commercial purposes" (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990: 128).

Information distribution as the process providing and sharing information from the above mentioned sources is considered an important procedural step to new information and understanding. Knowledge distribution refers to an entire body of literature itself. The implications from Hayek's (1945) famous proposition, that (1) the most relevant type of knowledge is context-specific, dispersed and property of local actors, that (2) cannot be systematically concentrated or integrated in any way by a central entity – resulting in coordination problems – is echoed and complemented by Polanyi's (1967) concept of the tacit dimension of knowledge, i.e. knowledge that cannot be explicated and formalized. The bottom line of his concept is that "[w]e know more than we can tell and we can know nothing without
relying upon those things which we are not able to tell.” (Polanyi, 1967: 23). The tacit/explicit distinction has provided as strong explanatory framework for knowledge creation and transfer processes. For example, Nonaka distinguished four modes of knowledge conversion/transfer are distinguished in that regard (1) socialization, which refers to sharing of tacit knowledge; (2) externalization which denotes the transfer from tacit to explicit knowledge; (3) combination which points to the linkage of explicit form of knowledge; and (4) internalization which refers to the process of embodying explicit knowledge in tacit knowledge (Nonaka et al., 1995).

The process of distribution is highly linked to that of information interpretation. Sharing information parallels the process of collectively interpreting information that might result in shared interpretations and meanings. Interpretation of information is affected by five variables: uniformity of prior cognitive maps used by organizational units, uniformity of the framing of information, richness of the media employed, information overload relative to interpretation capacities, and the degree to which unlearning is required prior to new interpretations (Huber, 1991). Daft and Weick (1984) propose a model of organizations as interpretation systems. Interpretation in their view as a process through which information is given meaning and actions are chosen, distinguishes organizations from lower level systems. Their approach is based on four assumptions: (1) Organizations as open social systems, processing uncertain and ambiguous environmental information, have to develop information processing mechanisms that enable them to detect trends, markets, technologies that are relevant to their survival. (2) Even though individuals are key in the development of these mechanisms, organizations develop cognitive maps and memories over time. (3) Managers concerned with strategy formation at the top of the hierarchy formulate and validate an organization’s interpretation for the entire system. (4) Organizational and environmental characteristics will produce differences in interpretation modes and processes in different organizations (Daft et al., 1984).

Finally, Huber proposes organizational memory as the means by which knowledge is being stored for application in the future. Storing and retrieving of information influences the effectiveness of organizational memory, which contains the basis for decision-making processes, which usually are memorized in organizational routines. Routines include “the forms, rules, procedures, conventions, strategies, and technologies around which organizations are constructed and through which they operate. It also includes the structure of beliefs, frameworks, paradigms, codes, cultures and knowledge that buttress, elaborate, and contradict the formal routine.” (Levitt et al., 1988: 320). Routines contain organizational memories and operationalize an organization’s knowledge base. Rather than exploring new knowledge (‘learning by doing’) they reproduce present validated knowledge (‘remembering by doing’) (Nelson & Winter, 1982). Within the process of learning the ability to communicate, the validity of knowledge and the ability to integrate knowledge into action outcome-relationships is crucial so that “the overall knowledge base emerges out of this process of exchange, evaluation, and integration of knowledge” (Duncan & Weiss, 1979: 118).
1.4.5. Conclusion: Discerning responsive aspects in organizational learning

In terms of the four major themes that I have employed to structure this review, I will reflect on the relevance of responsiveness for each of them separately:

Regarding responsive aspects in organizational learning modes, I would suggest to conclude that most concepts are rooted in a behaviorist individual learning model. Such a model in its extreme form would view learning as a conditioned reflex, whereby same stimuli are responded to same responses. To draw from a cognitive theory of individual learning does not change much in terms of responsiveness. The automatic reflex of a conditioned reflex is replaced by certain rules of information processing that again will result in a same-stimulus same-response configuration.

In terms of learning levels, responsive aspects with regard to the collective, social dimension of learning become visible. The potential myopia and maladaptive learning through persistent routines and mental model can best be prevented by an ongoing process of incorporating different perspectives and mental models in the learning process. Hence, responsiveness would then refer to a sensitivity for and an acknowledgment of such enriching alternative viewpoints. If shared mental models are considered the missing link between an individual and collective learning, the process of sharing and consequently of adequate conversational settings occurs. However, “neither the ‘sharing’ of tacit knowledge in groups nor the ‘suspension’ that is necessary for true dialogue has a chance if people are afraid to lose in such as process.” (Pawlowsky, 2001: 76). This is an important dimension for responsiveness to bear in mind with regard to the conversational mode that people choose when engaging in conversations.

With regard to learning types, responsive aspects can be discerned in each of the suggested types of learning. Single-loop learning as a simple error-detection and correction would correspond to a conditioned reflex whereby the governing variables of the problem-solving strategy remain unchanged. Double-loop learning could be conceived of as having a higher degree of responsiveness, as the governing variables of the problem-solving are critically reflected and changed. Hence, a different mode of error-detection might result as well as a change in correction strategy. Either aspect would enhance the stimulus-detection and error-response repertoire.

Each of the four steps of the learning process deserves specific attention in terms of responsive aspects: (a) Acquisition and identification of data - Second cybernetics perspective shows how important responsiveness in terms of identification processes is. The awareness and acknowledgment of our blind spots is an inherent quality of responsiveness. (b) Distribution, transfer and diffusion of knowledge – Conceiving of knowledge not as a physical good, but a communicative event, the conversational setting in which validity claims are tested, confirmed and shared meaning might occur becomes crucial. (c) Interpretation and integration of
knowledge into current knowledge systems—"No indication without distinction. ... No distinction without motive." (Brown, 1969: 1). We cannot perceive anything unless we have a perception strategy or motive. The cognitive maps that guide our perception and framework stem from our prior knowledge. Interpretation as sensemaking, both individually, but even more importantly in a social context relies on plausibility checks between members. Again, the setting in which this interpretation takes places can be considered an important contextual factor in the sensemaking process. (d) Transformation of new knowledge into action and/or memory. – The instrumental character of knowledge potentially jeopardizes the above-mentioned aspects of responsiveness. If knowledge is acquired for instrumental purposes of an organization only, potentially relevant opportunities and threats might not be seen. In this context March (1991) suggests distinguishing two motives for learning, exploitation of old certainties versus exploration of new opportunities.

An additional argument on the relevance of responsive aspects in organizational learning is Weick's (1991) finding that most concepts of organizational learning are based on a traditional theory of learning that views learning as "a shift in performance when the stimulus situation remains essentially the same" (Weick, 1991: 116). In contrast, stimulus situations in organizations are rarely stable and predictable: "This instability makes it hard to establish sufficient stimulus similarity so that it becomes possible to make a different response. ... When there is flux, there is both no stimulus and a changing stimulus, but there is seldom the same stimulus." (Weick, 1991: 117).

1. Responsiveness matters regarding organizational learning literature.

2. Most organizational learning theories draw from a learning theory as quasi-conditioned adaptation (Cyert et al., 1992) which implies a behaviorist concept of responsiveness.

3. While concept of this mechanistic model of responsiveness has been described by some authors (e.g. Weick, 1991; Hedberg, 2001), no practical, communicative considerations regarding responsiveness are provided by the literature.
1.5. Conclusion: Responsive aspects in the Reviewed Literature

The following synopsis summarizes the findings of the literature review that aimed at discerning responsive aspects in the literature, as well as identifying conceptual shortcomings in that regard.

**Strategy literature:**

1. Responsiveness matters with regard to strategy formation as to provide adequate responses to strategic challenges from environment in general, and from competitors in particular.
2. The prescriptive schools of strategy formation imply a behaviorist concept of responsiveness.
3. Referring to strategies as emergent, responsiveness as an internal capability of the organization becomes even more important.
4. Practical implications in terms of adequate communicative formats for responsiveness are not provided.

**Stakeholder management literature:**

1. Responsiveness matters regarding stakeholder literature as to provide adequate responses to claims and demands of stakeholders put to the organization.
2. Responsiveness conceptualized as accessing and understanding the interests, needs and demands of stakeholders is vital for organizational performance and survival.
3. While acknowledging the legitimacy of taking stakeholder views into account, stakeholder theory does not provide any consideration of communicative implications for practice.
Organizational learning literature:

1. Responsiveness matters regarding organizational learning literature.

2. Most organizational learning theories draw from a learning theory as quasi-conditioned adaptation (Cyert et al., 1992) which implies a behaviorist concept of responsiveness.

3. While concept of this mechanistic model of responsiveness has been described by some authors (e.g. Weick, 1991; Hedberg, 2001), no practical, communicative considerations regarding responsiveness are provided by the literature.

Overall, responsiveness is inherent to most concepts of the reviewed literature, i.e. responsiveness matters. None of the reviewed approaches has neither provided a comprehensive concept of responsiveness, nor with suggestions of how to put it in practice. The conclusions from the review lead me to ask two questions: (1) How can we conceive of and conceptualize responsiveness beyond a reactive, behaviorist approach? (2) Which communicative requirements allow for such a concept of responsiveness?

Hence, by addressing these two questions in the process of this study my intended contribution to the reviewed literature at the two levels implied in the above questions:

1. Conceptual level: Develop an enhanced understanding of responsiveness in organizations that informs the three bodies of literature.

2. Practical level: Develop suggestions inductively derived from experience for a practical and pragmatic concept of responsiveness.

As responsiveness matters in and for organizations, but no practical, communicative suggestions are provided by the reviewed literature, the next analytical step consists of identifying and assessing different communicative options. I will therefore examine in the following section three communication approaches regarding their conceptual suggestions in terms of conversational modes and conversational settings.
2. Research Focus: Responsiveness and Communication

Introduction

Given that responsiveness matters, which communicative approach allows for a responsive encounter with stakeholders?

The purpose of this chapter is to examine and assess different communication alternatives and their possible contribution for a concept of responsiveness. I will proceed in this chapter as follows:

First, I will refer to the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987) as a meta-framework for theorizing on communication in general (2.1.). Communicative action holds promise to contribute to this investigation as it denotes a conversation in which participants are supposed to ground their arguments in an orientation to reaching understanding.

Secondly, I will draw from Weick's (1995; 1979) concept of sensemaking for reflecting on communication and meaning-creation in organizations in particular. The concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1979, 1995) does not assume an 'easy way' of reaching understanding. Sensemaking holds that an organization as well as its environment are phenomena enacted and reproduced through discursive interaction. Multiple perspectives and equivocality make adequate conversational setting and modes for sensemaking necessary (2.2.).

Thirdly, the dialogue literature in organization studies (e.g. Schein, 1993; Schein, 1999), (Isaacs, 1993, 1999; Scharmer, 1999, 2001; Senge, 1990, 1994) proposes dialogue as a practical mode of conversation allowing for reflection, mutual understanding and creating shared meaning (2.3.). Dialogue as a mode of sensemaking holds promise for providing a workable communicative strategy to engage in conversations with stakeholders as to understand their claims, interests and demands.

Finally, I will conclude by defining the research questions of this research (2.4.).

2.1. Communicative Action in Organizations

2.1.1. Pluralism of Lifeworlds and Language Games within and around Organizations

Conceiving of organizations as coalitions of interests (Cyert et al., 1992), policy making is at the core of organizational processes of decision-making. The means of moderating
organizational conflicts are political arenas that allow for the different coalitions to voice and support their concerns and interests. Whereas a complete political arena, that would encompass the totality of primary, secondary, definitive and potential stakeholders, might jeopardize the organization's ability to act, participation of those affected by organizational decisions and outcomes allows them to adhere adequately to their interests and values. This holds the potential of innovativeness as established values, interests and arguments in the decision making process are challenged and have to be critically reviewed (Kirsch, 1991). Participants of an organization, i.e. its members and stakeholders, will develop individual or group interests that represent their goals for the organization. The goals of the organization, however, are defined in formal or informal conversational arenas.

The plural interests of stakeholders emerge from and are embedded in specific lifeworlds and language games of participants that exist 'within and around' the organization, i.e. subcultures within an organization (e.g. a department, a subunit) as well as social configurations in the private life of stakeholders. Drawing from Habermas (1984, 1987), lifeworlds are defined as areas of social interaction that are enacted and constituted by language games, i.e. rules of behavior and language that are learned and developed by participants of these contexts. These rules provide a 'grammar' of the specific lifeworld and provide a framework for cognition and sensemaking. Consequently, members of different lifeworlds will have difficulties to communicate easily. The agony of translation is a strong indication of incommensurability: “Members of a community of context will have less difficulties to communicate with and among each other than they have when communicating with externals.” (Kirsch, 1991: 120-121; my translation).

Adequate conversational arenas can provide the space and platform for voicing claims, interests and needs in the light of each specific lifeworld. This would require an increased participation and inclusion of perspectives and viewpoints in the decision-making processes. One of the main concerns regarding participation is the potential threat to take action, e.g. a lack of or a delay of a decision. However, involvement and participation, a shared understanding of a state of affairs, or at least an acknowledgment of differences, might increase acceptance for a decision (Kirsch, 1991: 167). Participation holds the potential of an authentic articulation and representation of stakeholder needs as it acknowledges the local and context specific qualities of lifeworld and language. Accessing various and diverse lifeworlds is a challenge for and in an organization. Communicative action as a conversational mode that aims at mutual understanding holds the potential to get – however limited – access to a context foreign to our own.
2.1.2. Communicative Action, System and Lifeworld

Theory of Communicative Action

Two propositions of Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action matter for this investigation: (1) Coordination of social action can be achieved through rational argumentation (communicative action) or non-linguistics steering media such as administrative power or money (strategic action). (2) Communicative action (an orientation to reaching understanding) prevails in the lifeworld of an actor, whereas strategic action (an orientation to success) dominates the formal organized systems (Habermas, 1984: xlii).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action orientation/Action situation</th>
<th>Orientation to success</th>
<th>Orientation to reaching understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-social action situation</td>
<td>Instrumental action</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social action situation</td>
<td>Strategic action</td>
<td>Communicative action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Types of action (Habermas, 1984: 285)

The distinction between strategic and communicative action depends on how an actor handles the perceived interdependence with other actors. Strategic action results from an orientation to success, and other actors are conceived of as ‘objects’ in an interaction. Communicative action is based on an orientation to reaching understanding, whereby other actors are considered ‘co-subjects’ of the interaction with which the actor attempts to agree on a shared situation definition. The difference consists in their propositions for coordinating social action: either by manipulation or by a rationally motivated agreement among actors. Habermas’s fundamental thesis is that these mechanisms have to be distinguished in terms of the different orientations of the actors. Influence and manipulation represent an orientation to success, whereas rational agreement represents an orientation to reaching understanding:

"The concept of communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of interpretation refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus.” (Habermas, 1984: 86).

The conditions for such rational argumentation in communicative action and the possibility to reach consensus are examined in his analysis of validity claims that are raised in speech-acts and that might be accepted or rejected by other participants. Understanding then can be conceived of as a mode of agreeing on the validity of propositions, i.e. the intersubjective
acknowledgment and acceptance (or rejection) of validity claims. Habermas distinguishes three types of implicit or explicit validity claims. Comprehensible and well formed speech-acts make an objective claim to truth, a normative claim to rightness, and expressive and evaluative claims to authenticity and sincerity (Habermas, 1984: 319-328). In communicative action, validity claims are the "currency" of interaction. They are intersubjectively testable and confirmable or rejectable. Confirmed validity claims resulting from an unforced consensus lead to a shared definition of a situation or problem.

According to Habermas, rationality refers to the way actors acquire and use knowledge (1984: 8-22, 168-185). Moreover, in Habermas's concept of rationality, the possibility to criticize is key: "Knowledge can be criticized as unreliable. The close relation between knowledge and rationality suggests that the rationality of an expression depends on the reliability of the knowledge embodied in it. ... The rationality of ... expressions is assessed in light of the internal relations between the semantic content of these expressions, their conditions of validity, and the reasons (which could be provided, if necessary) for the truth of statements or for the effectiveness of actions." (Habermas, 1984: 8-9). In this sense, rather than an external, a priori referent, rationality is subject to the communicative interaction itself. This type of rationality is referred to as 'communicative rationality'.

In summary, communicative action can be conceived of as a process by which participants intersubjectively test the validity of comprehensible speech-acts in terms of truth (i.e. accuracy), rightness (i.e. moral appropriateness), and sincerity (i.e. truthfulness or authenticity). According to Habermas, it is through the unforced assent only, that validity claims are considered binding for the participants.

System and lifeworld

Habermas's approach is based on a distinction between world and lifeworld: World is what an actor addresses and constitutes in a concrete situation through social interaction, which is always embedded in a lifeworld background of the actor. A lifeworld provides a joint point of reference for participants in terms of implicit, valid knowledge through which action in this context can be coordinated (1987: 119-52). Lifeworld is the context of any process of reaching understanding or definition of a situation. This context consists of implicit knowledge, which cannot be explicated and fully represented through propositions. It is not consciously created and can be questioned only to a limited extent. In the light of this implicit lifeworld knowledge, actor will define and address situations by drawing from and referring to this knowledge. Aspects feeding into the situation definition as a constituting element of an objective, social and/or subjective world, are drawn from this implicit lifeworld knowledge:

"Situations do not get 'defined' in the sense of being sharply delimited. They always have a horizon that shifts with the theme. A situation is a segment of lifeworld contexts of relevance
... that is thrown into relief by themes and articulated through goals and plans of action” (Habermas, 1987: 122).

Consequently, no problem or situation definition can be formulated detached from the context of a lifeworld. The meaning of individual contributions to the situation definition is also inextricably linked to the lifeworld context and its implicit knowledge. Lifeworld then is conceived of as a vehicle of and resource for interpretation and sensemaking:

“With the formal world-concepts, speakers and hearers can qualify the possible referents of their speech acts so that they can relate to something objective, normative or subjective. The lifeworld by contrast, does not allow for analogous assignments; speakers and hearers cannot refer by means of it to something as ‘something intersubjective’. Communicative actors are always moving within the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it. As interpreters, they themselves belong to the lifeworld, along with their speech acts, but they cannot refer to ‘something in the lifeworld’ in the same way as they can to facts, norms, or experiences. The structures of the lifeworld lay down the forms of the intersubjectivity of possible understanding.” (Habermas, 1987: 125-126).

Habermas contrasts the notion of lifeworld with that of ‘system’, i.e. the area of social interaction to sustain the material resources for survival that need to be controlled through successful environmental interventions (1987: 338-343). From a systems perspective, the domain of lifeworld is complemented by organizational and institutional structures, which are primarily oriented at attaining particular goals. These systems operate mainly through strategic action oriented to success. Goals have to be defined as well as the criteria against which progress is measurable and targets that determine what counts as success. Efficiency then is determined by the ratio of inputs and outcomes in that regard. Functioning of the system in terms of efficient goal attainment is the main concern within systems.

System and lifeworld employ different coordinating and steering media: Whereas in lifeworld, actions are coordinated through communicative action aimed at understanding, in system steering media such as money and power prevail and ensure functional efficiency. Coordinating actions through the latter steering media provides a coordination strategy by avoiding the constant threat of dissent, and consequently allow for faster decision-making, as consensus reaching is not a necessary prerequisite for taking action. Coordination through money and power aim at successfully, profit-oriented organizing production and exchange of goods and at forming institutional arrangements of efficient bureaucracy. Consequently, system coordination through money and power leads to high levels of productivity and efficiency as these media can cope with dissent, as consensus is not an intended possibility (Habermas, 1987: 318-331).
2.1.3. Communicative and Strategic Action in Organizations

How does this concept of communicative action relate to organization theory and practice? Agency as one fundamental practice in organizations would be conceived of as instrumental, i.e. aimed at the successful realization of specific goals. Or in short, organizations as systems are assumed to be coordinated mainly by strategic action. Even though episodes of communicative action might occur, they are not vital for the organization that can – worst case – refer to formal rules and procedures of coordination. This is no news as such, as it reflects the mainstream approach within economic organization theory. Individual rational actors optimize their individual benefits, employing an instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1987: 460). What are instances in organizations to shift from an efficient mode of coordination to a – supposedly – less efficient mode, i.e. to an orientation towards mutual understanding?

Communicative action occurs in everyday episodes of action. The actors aim at the achievement of certain goals and are under a certain pressure to take action. Coordination with other actors can be efficient in terms of time if the different actors can refer to a shared knowledge base of a joint lifeworld. It is for the specific details and elements of a situation only that intersubjective situation definition is required. This if efficient insofar if the shared basis of knowledge and theories of the lifeworld remains unquestioned and if the aim is to bring all actors to the same level of information. Doubts might be triggered by the possibility to question the validity claims of an actor. It might not always be possible in everyday situations under a certain pressure to take action to clarify all doubts and questions in detail. Thus, conversations could be conceived of as interactions that (1) on the one hand are characterized by a certain ordinary everyday aspects and certain restrictions (which links it back to communicative action), but (2) are not necessarily under the pressure to take action on the other. The relief of the pressure to take action might have different motives, such as relaxing atmosphere, joy of conversation whereby these conversation and argumentations should not be limited to factual statements only; it is plausible to assume that a context of interaction without pressure to take action can include the agreement of norms and expression (Kirsch & Knyphausen, 1993).

When examining the empirical relevance of communicative action, it is plausible to refer to these interactions as communicative or decision making episodes in organizations. Episodes of decision and action then constitute those contexts of interaction that one would characterize as everyday episodes that are under pressure to take action. It is likely to assume that these episodes are dominated by strategic action oriented to success. Purposive action to efficiently allocate scarce resources certainly feeds into the pressure to take (strategic) action. Conversations allow actors that are oriented to reaching understanding do not a priori know about the validity and validability of their claims. It is useful and fruitful to leave these validity claims open in order to reflect creatively “outside the box” of validation aspects. This might allow for new opportunities to be identified. It is their potential for understanding and
innovativeness that communicative action, i.e. conversations become relevant types of interaction in business organizations (Kirsch et al., 1993: 224).

2.1.4. Conclusion

The concept of communicative action provides a useful meta-framework for reflecting on communication. System and lifeworld differing in their employed mode of coordination (the former by money and administrative power, the latter by communication aiming at a common definition of a state of affairs) point to different approaches of rationality and vocality in each area. Communicative action as an orientation of actors in a conversation aiming at reaching understanding, however, remains a very abstract concept.

Reaching understanding of a certain state of affairs in an organizational context can be conceived of as sensemaking in organizations. In a next step, I will examine Weick’s (1995) concept for contributions to a communicative strategy of responsiveness.

2.2. Conversations 'Make Sense'

Taking a procedural approach, Weick (1995, 1979) conceives of organizations as systems translating information from their environment into equivocal information, trying to make sense of these, and then using what was learned for the future. Hence, Weick considers organizations as systems of interpretation and construction of reality (Daft et al., 1984). As to ensure survival, organizations have to find means and ways to interpret signals and events as to stabilize their environments in order to render them more predictable, i.e. reduce ambiguity and uncertainty. Therefore, a central concern for Weick is to understand how people construct meaning – and thereby social reality – and to explore how such an enacted reality serves as a context for action. Sensemaking – in contrast to interpretation – he holds refers to the ways people generate what they interpret: “What sensemaking does is address how the text is constructed as well as how it is read.” (Weick, 1995: 7).

2.2.1. Sensemaking – From Equivocality to Univocality

Sensemaking is induced by a change in the environment that creates distortion in the routines or flow of experience engaging the people of an organization. It is these distortions, differences and discontinuities that provide the raw data from the environment that the organization and its members have to make sense of. Sensemaking means to interpret the environment in a sequential process of enactment, selection and retention: Enactment can be
conceived of as the process by which people convert raw data from the environment into equivocal data to be interpreted (from data to equivocality). In doing so, people actively construct the environments that provide the raw data for bracketing and rearranging in the light of past experiences. *Selection* refers to the process by which people attribute meanings to equivocal data by drawing from past interpretations as templates to the current event or experience. This process produces an enacted environment that generates meaning in providing cause-effect explanation or cause-effect-assumptions on the current state of affairs (from equivocality to univocality). *Retention* refers to the process by which organizations store the outcomes and products of successful sensemaking, i.e. enacted or meaningful interpretations, that can be retrieved in the future (Weick, 1979).

Such processes are based on what he calls double interacts, i.e. a statement, a response and a response that adjusts the first statement and is thereby a response to the response. He distinguishes 7 properties of sensemaking: Sensemaking is (1) grounded in the construction of individual and organizational identity, (2) retrospective in nature, (3) based on enacting "sensible" environments to deal with, (4) fundamentally a social, not an individual process, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on cues in the environment and focused by cues in the environment, (7) driven by the plausibility of possible interpretations (Weick, 1995).

He further distinguishes organizational sensemaking as either driven by beliefs or by actions: Sensemaking as *belief-driven* processes refers to processes whereby people draw from an initial set of beliefs that are clear, plausible and stable as to provides nodes to connect additional information into these larger structures of meaning. Beliefs can then serve as to guide the choice of plausible interpretations or as subjects to debate and argument about their relevancy to current experience when beliefs and cues are contradictory. Sensemaking as *action-driven* processes refers to processes whereby people reflect on their actions in order to grow and modify the structures of meaning as to give significance to these actions. Generating meaning on 'committing actions' that are visible, deliberate and irreversible, aims at justifying these actions whereas generating meaning from 'manipulating actions' addresses action that have been taken to induce changes in the environment (Weick, 1995: 133-162).

### 2.2.2. Ambiguity and Uncertainty – Two Occasions for Sensemaking

Ambiguity and uncertainty are two fundamental occasions for sensemaking (see Table 4). Uncertainty refers to a situation where future consequences of present action cannot precisely be estimated. Reducing uncertainty means reducing ignorance by adding adequate pieces of information. Uncertainty is a problem of ignorance that can be remedied by more information. In contrast, ambiguity as confusion refers to a situation in which several different interpretations at the same time emerge and persist so that additional information cannot resolve the confusion, i.e. imperfect understanding of the world. Multiple interpretations and meanings that create
confusion call for social construction and invention in adequate conversational modes and settings (Weick, 1995: 91-94).

Ambiguity is characterized by a situation where too many interpretations exist, whereas uncertainty refers to a situation in which alternative interpretations to the single existing one are ignored. A complementing distinction is drawn whether people refer to situations or state of affairs as problems or issues. The former refers to a state of affairs whereby additional information allows solving the problem. Issues in contrast are characterized by the fact that they recur and thereby change their form of appearance, but they cannot be solved once and for all. To conceive of challenges as problems or issues then results in different strategies to address them (Weick, 1995: 95-100).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensemaking occasion</th>
<th>Problem characteristic</th>
<th>Epistemological mode</th>
<th>Organizing mode</th>
<th>&quot;Therapy&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Problem of ignorance</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Problems To be resolved</td>
<td>Reduce ignorance Get the data Fix the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Problem of confusion</td>
<td>Invention</td>
<td>Issues Recurring in different forms</td>
<td>Reduce confusion Negotiate an understanding out of multiple interpretations Find formats that allow issues to recur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Ambiguity and uncertainty (Based on Weick, 1995: 91, 187)

Hence, ambiguity handling would refer to a sensemaking practice that allows for multiple interpretations to be voiced and heard as to come to shared understanding of what the actual situation is: "If the sensible in times of uncertainty, ambiguity, and surprise is seldom sensible, then practices and maxims that begin to correct this imbalance should be welcome and have an impact." (Weick, 1995: 182).

2.2.3. Arguing as a Conversational Mode for Sensemaking

Language and words in that regard are considered the building blocs of any interaction (Weick, 1995: 106). Because believing is seeing, the choice of words matters. Rich vocabularies allow producing and understanding a variety of images of actions that are the ‘currency’ of sensemaking (Weick, 1995: 183). “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” – In this recipe, only a monological view of sensemaking is represented. The need for discursive interaction with others however, is crucial for any sensemaking. Weick proposes arguing, i.e. debate and discussion as the adequate mode of sensemaking, because individual reasoning “is
embedded in social controversy." Arguing is conceived of as "a vehicle for sensemaking" (Weick, 1995: 137).

Within arguing, rather than voicing appreciations, descriptions, or classifications, explanations are the most helpful contributions in such speech-acts. "Explanations create sense by connecting concrete experience and more general concepts. These connections tend to be inductive operations. ... In the process of developing and criticizing explanation, people often discover new explanations, which is why argument can produce adaptive sensemaking." (Weick, 1995: 139).

A similar line of argument is provided by Ford & Ford (1995) on the relevance of conversations in the context of intentional change in organizations. They propose that "[C]ommunication is the generative mechanism of change that gives people the reality in which they live rather than serving as simply a tool for representing and transmitting people's understanding and knowledge. ... Rather than observing change as something that occurs 'out there' as a result of some underlying dynamic ... we believe that change is created, sustained, and managed in and by communications." (1995: 560).

2.2.4. Meetings as Settings for Sensemaking

It is the text discussed as much as the context that matters for conversations. In organizations, the typical contexts for arguing are meetings. Weick refers to meetings as conversational episodes with several participants that regulate conversations by specific agreed conventions. Conversations in such meetings are "sense makers", as they generate and maintain an organization's entity and identity (Weick, 1995: 143). Referring to Schwartzman (1989), Weick even proposes that meetings are what organizations are all about (Weick, 1995: 142). Agreements and consensus should not be assumed as the dominant orientation of participants. Conflict and contradiction are equally strong motives for participants. Contradiction is important for sensemaking, as it renders visible differences and minority viewpoints (Weick, 1995: 144). Acknowledging frustrating meeting experiences, Weick still suggests, "People need to meet more often." Meetings, in his view, allow for equivocality and thereby for an adequate ambiguity handling. Organizations tend to phrase situations as problems of ignorance that could be resolved with additional information. Ambiguity as I have outlined cannot be remedied by an ever sophisticated information technology: "People whose specialities are engineering, information systems, finance, accounting, and production tend to endorse the idea that the problem is ignorance because the technologies they control are the right media to reduce it. What gets lost in this scenario is the fact in a changing world, it is not just the old answers that are suspect. It is also the old questions. And once people are uncertain what questions to ask, then they are put in the position where they have to negotiate some understanding of what they face and what a solution would look like." (Weick, 1995: 185). Puzzles and confusion are the
most appropriate situations in which people can learn to handle and cope with ambiguity: “What will help them is a setting where they can argue, using rich data pulled from a variety of media, to construct fresh frameworks of action-outcome linkages that include their multiple interpretations. The variety of data needed to pull off this difficult task are most available in variants of the face to face meeting.” (Weick, 1995: 196).

2.2.5. Conclusion

Weick’s (1995) approach of sensemaking is grounded in social constructionism. The bottom line of his approach is that ‘conversations make sense’ by allowing for multiple interpretations and viewpoints to be argued in social controversy. However, Weick’s (1995) suggestion that arguing might be an appropriate conversational mode for sensemaking has to be examined more closely, especially regarding practical considerations. Arguing conceived of as a rather controversial, competitive mode of conversation might not be the preferred mode of sensemaking.

In contrast, dialogue as a reflective mode of conversation that allows for and is based on participants’ orientation to reaching understanding might broaden the bandwidth of conversational mode. Therefore, in the following section I will examine the concept of dialogue in its potential to provide an adequate conversational mode in which stakeholders can engage in conversations of sensemaking.

2.3. Dialogue as a Reflective Mode of Conversation

Why dialogue? In organization and management studies dialogue is conceived of as a concept and practical organization development tool for reaching understanding and consensus through reflective mode of conversation (e.g. Isaacs, 1993, 1999; Scharmer, 1999, 2001; Schein, 1993, 1999; Senge, 1990, 1994).

2.3.1. Dialogue as Valid Cross-cultural Communication

Schein (1993) diagnoses an increasing differentiation in organizations that results in a pluralism of cultures and contexts: “The subunits of organizations are more and more likely to develop their own subcultures (implying different languages and different assumptions about reality, i.e. different mental models) because of their shared core technologies and their different learning experiences.”(Schein, 1993: 40). In his view, cross-cultural communication can be fostered by dialogue which has “considerable promise as problem-formulation and problem-
Valid cross-cultural communication across subcultural boundaries is key for integrating and developing "an overarching common language and mental model." (Schein, 1993: 41). He proposes dialogue as a technology and mechanism that makes it possible to discover the differences in language games and mental models so that the limits of learned social constructions of reality can be rendered visible and intelligible (Schein, 1993: 43).

In his view, dialogue starts off acknowledging different assumptions, background, lifeworlds and language games. Rather than proposing dialogue as a "most esoteric experience" (Schein, 1993: 43), he proposes that dialogue can be thought of as "a form of conversation that makes it possible, even likely, for participants to become aware of some of the hidden and tacit assumptions that derive from our cultural learning, our language, and our psychological makeup" (Schein, 1993: 200).

The dialogue concept presented by Schein holds that an increased consciousness regarding our thought processes will lead to an increasing appreciation of the inherent complexity of communication that might allow for collective thought processes. An important goal of dialogue is "to enable the group to reach a higher level of consciousness and creativity through the gradual creation of a shared set of meanings and a 'common' thinking process." (Schein, 1999: 203). Another important aspect is an awareness of the nature and limitations of our cognitive maps or mental models as linguistic, context-specific constructs: "As we get more reflective in a dialogue group, we begin to see some of the arbitrary ways in which we perceive external reality and realize that others in the group may slice up their external reality differently." (Schein, 1999: 204).

An important element of dialogue in his view would be to encourage suspension. Instead of immediately following our 'natural' way of confronting disconfirming speech acts, Schein proposes to develop an awareness of these moments and use them to critically reflect on the triggers of our anger or anxiety which are likely to be found in our mental models. Suspensions allow us to double-check the 'data' of disconfirmation with our emotions triggered by a statement in the light of our mental models. He proposes the moments of disconfirmation as a first fundamental choice within a conversation that determines or at least influences the further development of that conversation. In becoming more observant and reflective, people might realize how their perception can be colored by expectations based on our culturally determined mental models: "What we perceive is often based on our needs, our expectations, our projections, our psychological defenses and, most of all, our culturally learned assumptions and thought categories. It is this process of becoming reflective that makes us realize that the first problem of listening to others is to identify the distortions and biases that filter our own cognitive processes. We have to learn to listen to ourselves before we can really understand others" (Schein, 1999: 209).
Schein suggests two generic paths that conversation can develop into based on the fundamental choice participants make in terms of dealing with conflict, disconfirmation or disagreement. The first path would be to actively check our perception by double-checking with the person that made the statement in question, further explaining ourselves, or in short confronting the situation that usually results in a polarized conversation around a few people and a few issues (Schein, 1999: 209). This path results in discussions that represent a competitive mode of conversation that ultimately leads to debates, i.e. resolving issues by formal logic and ‘beating down’ of arguments. The alternative choice to the former is to suspend. Suspension means that the disconfirming statement or perception that triggered our discomfort rests for a moment to see where the group will take that specific point. Individually, the pay-off might not immediately be visible, however, it is “when a number of members of the group discover some value in suspending their own reactions that the group begins to go down the dialogue path” (Schein, 1999: 210).

Schein does not suggest a superiority of dialogue regardless of the specific requirements or goals of a conversation. He acknowledges the value of the discussion/debate mode as a valid-problem solving and decision-making process. In his view, to benefit from the advantages of discussion and debate, participants have to understand each other well enough and should be able to share the rules and vocabulary of the same language game. Consequently, a shared language game requires a dialogue mode at some stage prior to the discussion/debate session in order to prevent ‘false consensus’ and its resulting misunderstandings (Schein, 1999: 211). However, Schein points to the potential of dialogue to build common understanding by way of suspending our privately held meanings and acknowledging those of others. Thereby, we might get access to our biases and subtleties. This results in a shift from convincing each other to a building a shared experience base for learning: “The more the group has achieved such collective understanding, the easier it becomes to reach decisions, and the more likely it will be that the decision will be implemented in the way the group meant it.” (Schein, 1999: 211).

In sum, Schein outlines the relevance of dialogue in the process of developing an organizational responsiveness: “[I]f any new organizational responses are needed that involve changes in cultural assumptions or learning across subcultural boundaries, dialogue must be viewed as an essential component of such learning.” (Schein, 1993: 51). His concept of dialogue can be seen as ‘good communication’. The criteria for goodness are the orientation to reaching understanding and the exchange of views in a meaningful way.
2.3.2. Dialogue as “The Art of Collective Thinking”

Isaacs (1999; 1993) proposes dialogue as a conversational mode for collective thinking, i.e. to develop the capacity of people to think together. He identifies increasing complexity and fragmentation as the key challenge of social and organizational contexts which jeopardizes the ability for collective thinking and action. He proposes that dialogue as a “discipline of collective thinking and inquiry” would allow us to develop new possibilities for collective thinking and action in that regard (Isaacs, 1993: 24).

Most forms of organizational forms of group talk take place in a confronting mode such as discussion or debate. This competitive mode of conversation results in a strategy of participants to maintain their certainties, which suppresses deeper inquiry into the root, causes of problems. In contrast, dialogue is considered “a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it.” (Isaacs, 1993: 24-25). In his view, the traditional way to coordinate social action is to reach agreement on a certain problem definition and furthermore on an action plan. He proposes dialogue as a means to coordinate action that does not necessarily require this rational planning. Authentic participation in a dialogue represents a very powerful form of coordination that leaves certain validity claims open. The central purpose of a dialogue session is seen in establishing a container, i.e. “a field of genuine meeting and inquiry ... a setting in which people can allow a free flow of meaning and vigorous exploration of the collective background of their thought, their personal predispositions, the nature of their shared attention, and the rigid features of their individual and collective assumptions.” (Isaacs, 1993: 25).

As opposed to other techniques of consensus building, where people seek rational means to limit options to those acceptable to most people, dialogue points to the relevance of altering the fundamental patterns that lead people to disagree at the outset. Hence, consensus approaches do not encourage participants to explore underlying patterns of meaning (Isaacs, 1993: 26). Rather than focusing on producing results, the key aspect of dialogue consists in its potential to allow people to participate in the creation of shared meaning. In terms of the process of conversations, Isaacs distinguishes the dialogue from the debate path. The development toward dialogue is at every step of the process model jeopardized by a crisis that once overcome leads into the new quality of conversation. The notion of the ‘container’ refers to “the sum of the collective assumptions, shared intentions, and beliefs of a group.” (Isaacs, 1993: 34).

Dialogue evolves and unfolds through and within different stages whereby participants have to face individual and collective crises (Isaacs, 1999: 252).

1. Instability of the container: The wide range of tacit differences in paradigms and perspectives results jeopardize the creation and stability of the container (‘initiatory crisis’). Acknowledging differences rather than neglecting them is considered a first step to stabilizing the container.
2. Instability in the container: Groups seem to oscillate between suspension and discussion of views. This process renders the underlying fragmentation and incoherence visible to the discomfort of most participants. This 'crisis of suspension' is experienced by most people as disorientation and marginalization of their views.

3. Inquiry in the container: Having overcome the crisis of suspension, Isaacs predicts the conversation to flow in a new way, i.e. people begin to inquire together as a collective. The intensity and openness of this stage might result in the 'crisis of collective pain'.

4. Creativity in the container. Having navigated the former crisis, again a new level of awareness is suggested. Based on the experience of having mastered previous crises, people start to create a pool of common meaning ('metalogue').

In summary, Isaac's concept points to three key aspects of dialogue. He suggests that dialogue allows advancing organizational double-loop learning; he even claims that dialogue represents triple-loop learning. On a different note, dialogue is considered to provide managers with skills to set up fields of conversation within learning can take place. To collectively observe patterns of collective thinking and thought is an additional feature. Finally, Isaacs suggests that dialogue holds promise regarding team learning and team inquiry. Structured problem-solving approaches might be complemented by an exploration of more fundamental assumptions. Isaac's critique of consensus approaches however, does neglect the inherent claim towards consensus in his own approach.

2.3.3. Dialogue as a Reflective Mode of Conversation

Scharmer (2001) distinguishes speech acts along two dimensions: (1) degree of reflection of speech act (reflective/non-reflective) and (2) orientation of speech act (primacy of social whole or parts). The 2x2 matrix that can be generated from these fundamental distinction of speech acts provides four generic stages and field-logics of languaging that points to the different levels of conversational complexity that people use referring and relating to each other in conversations.

A brief review of the word origins already points to some of these differences (Simpson et al., 1989):

- **Discuss;** Lat. Discut-ere: to dash or shake to pieces, agitate, disperse, dispel, drive away; to drive away, dispel; to examine or investigate; to decide; to investigate or examine by argument, to sift the considerations for and against; to debate
- **Debate;** Lat. De-battere to fight (e.g. battle, combat); to fight, contend, strive, quarrel, wrangle; to contest, dispute, to contend or fight for; to fight for, defend, protect; to dispute about, argue, discuss; to engage in discussion or argument
**Dialogue:** Grk. Dia-logos: through words; a conversation carried on between two or more persons; verbal interchange of thought between two or more persons; a literary work in the form of a conversation; dialogue de sourds: a discussion, meeting in which neither side understands or makes allowance for the point of view of the other.

Scharmer proposes an archetype of conversation, which describes four generic stages, and fields of languaging (talking nice, discussion/debate, reflective dialogue, generative dialogue). In each of the four generic fields speech acts differ in their relation to “the rules of the language game in which they operate” (Scharmer, 2001: 148). Reflective dialogue then would denote a conversation in which participants “shift from advocating their own opinions to inquiring into the assumptions that underlie them” (Scharmer, 2001: 149).

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**Figure 2: Process archetype of conversation (Scharmer, 2001)**

Scharmer suggests that conversation moves through these four fields. In each field, the conversational mode differs in terms of their relation to the rules of the language game. The challenge then is to create conditions under which organizations and teams can get unstuck from Field I, in which traditional modes of talking nice prevail (Scharmer, 2001: 148).

While shifting from one conversational field to the next, he proposes different interventions that enable participants and the group to allow dialogue to evolve. From polite
interaction in which we do not say what we think and feel toward talking tough, requires suspending traditional manners of communicating: “In other words, say what you think; confront other actors with obvious contradictions between what they say and what they do” (Scharmer, 2001: 148).

Attempting to shift a conversation from debate (II) to reflective dialogue (III) requires suspending the ‘communicative reflex’ of advocating one’s view. “That shift involves redirecting the collective attention from exterior to inner sources and assumptions. ... The principal leverage for the facilitator/intervenor is to reconnect what people think and say with what they see and do.” (Scharmer, 2001: 149). Isaacs (1999) has provided a very detailed description of each of the conversational fields in that regard.

Field I: “Talking nice” – Shared monologues of politeness

First meetings regardless of whether members know each other or not, do not provide a container that could absorb intensity and pressure. The mode for people to interact in such circumstances seems to be determined by inherited norms about how to interact. People have their own mental models of what should happen in such a meeting. It is the well-learned patterns of interacting and communicating that are reproduced in these conversations. Expectations, assumptions and differences are not made explicit. People tend to bring a very influential set of given, taken-for-granted assumptions to such initial conversations that are not reflected upon (Isaacs, 1999).

Differences in mental models, viewpoints and expectations are rarely discussed. The differing agendas and assumptions usually do not come out until the container provides a psychological safety that allows people to speak up. The default mode to work around these aspects seems to be politeness, cooperation, harmony and choosing non-threatening topics for conversation. People tend to tell stories, making jokes and complain about the stakeholder groups that are not present. Isaacs refers to this phenomenon as “instability of the container” which refers to the little capacity of such a conversational field to hold a more intense conversation. On the same note, Scharmer (2001) refers to this field as a rule following or rule reproducing mode. The language used remains with the experienced and well-established social norms that have been established in the particular context. Communicating within established social norms by using the conventional language games will lead to a polite conversation. In this conversational field, people rarely express what they “really” think and feel. The unexamined, taken-for-granted rules dominate the conversation by focusing on the whole as primary to any other individual considerations.

Despite the frustration of not voicing the differences, people refrained from addressing the issues as well as the differences. According to Isaacs, this is typical for field-I conversation: “Through a range of taken-for-granted and socially generated norms are present, people do not
either see them or know what to do about them, and operate as best they can, following the prevailing rules.” (Isaacs, 1999: 260). Scharmer (2001) suggests that this conversation lacks a key feature, i.e. reflection. The reflection, however, does take place in side conversations or conversations outside the meeting: “What I really meant to say...”. Another feature that might trigger politeness and harmony is fear. Especially a setting where implicit issues of power and micro-politics are present, people choose to play safe, i.e. play according to the established rules.

Face-saving is another very fundamental aspect of the rule-conforming behavior in such conversations. Schein (1999) points to the complexity and energy that people put into protecting their image of themselves as well as protecting other participants’ images as well. Or, as Isaacs puts it: “Field I is general the space of civility” (Isaacs, 1999: 262). Despite the fact that the face-saving, fear of confrontation and other threatening behavior limit the content and quality of the conversation, it is an essential field for the development of conversational flow. This field should not be underestimated as it provides the entry to a conversational flow that holds the potential for discussion or even dialogue. Especially people experiencing fear in public spheres will find the non-threatening mode helpful to learning to speak up and have their voice in a larger group.

Field II: “Talking tough” – Discussion/Debate

When people move from the polite mode of conversation by playing by the accepted norms, they start talking about what they “really” think. Rule revealing becomes the dominant feature of this type of conversation. People start realizing that harmony, or the family metaphor does not hold as soon as intensity of conversation increases. Differences and fragmentation of the group become visible. Isaacs holds that the container at this stage is able to hold intensity and pressure of the conversation (Isaacs, 1999).

Scharmer suggests that in Field II, the social whole is no longer the point of reference of statements. It is rather the parts that become object of primary attention. People talk from their particularistic standpoints and try to convince other of the rightness of their views. In this collision of interests, viewpoints and arguments, standpoints are being negotiated in a competitive mode. The overall goal is to win the conversation rather than understanding opposing viewpoints. Compromises and frustration hinder the conversation to shift into a reflective mode. Personal discomfort and trouble are experienced which leads people to get involved and not to be concerned that much with face-saving than “telling it like it is”.

The challenge of this conversational field is to reveal the rules that had been taken for granted. However, the dominant mode remains anger and frustration as the experienced differences and fragmentation of viewpoints leave people with a feeling of not being understood. Whether this is a question of will or ability is thereby irrelevant. The default
assumption is the lack of willingness to listen and understand that hinders people to refer to others viewpoints in a comprehensive way. The experience of the frustration is a collective one. This in itself provides the basis either to continue the conversation within this field or to shift it to a more reflective mode when the frustrations are shared and addressed. It is mainly the degree of reflection that is limiting the quality of the conversation. People consider themselves advocates for their viewpoints and rarely inquire into the implicit assumptions and mental models that they employ. The main concern is to express the viewpoint, to argue for its superiority to others and thereby to win the conversation debate and discussion. Worst case, this conversation turns into blaming mode (Isaacs, 1999).

Field III: Inquiry – Reflective dialogue

Dialogue as a reflective mode of conversation is mainly characterized by people not referring to others, or speaking for the group but rather referring to themselves and speaking for themselves: There is a shift from ‘third person data’ to ‘first person data’. The difference to the field-II logic is that people do not simply and only stand their position but they give additional data on their statements as well as their rationales and mental models and assumptions. Isaacs characterizes this field by a “spirit of curiosity”, i.e. people acknowledge the limitations of their viewpoints by referring to certain degrees of ignorance that they are willing to admit. People experience the limitations of their knowledge as well as the claim to have answers for all questions. Surprises are another key characteristic of this conversational mode. People are not necessarily and not only surprised to hear others’ views but they realize to their surprise the implicit assumptions made with every statement that they contribute (Isaacs, 1999).

The willingness to explore own’s assumptions as well as to reflect on them is what distinguishes this conversational mode from field II. Scharmer (2001) suggests that in this mode, rules of language games are being reflected. People might be more open to explore and question the rules that have dominated their acting and thinking. Moreover, they are willing to do so in a public, collective sphere. At this stage, blind spots as well as new meaning can be discovered. Differences are not necessarily considered a difficulty or an obstacle to understanding but have rather an inspirational quality. Agreeing and convincing is not necessary as long as everybody can have a voice of their own. There is no obligation to respond positively or agree with their own perspective. In contrast, field II makes it necessary that the opponent judges and replies on my statement. Looking for coalitions and partners that help you to win the ‘battle of conversation’ requires that you know who’s on your side – and who’s not. Another feature of this mode is that people start to learn a jointly developed language and to speak across certain mental models. It allows them to identify and connect at certain viewpoints and assumptions that might have a very different viewpoint from them. It is through such an experience that the use of your ‘own’ language by another participants indicates that he or she has understood or at least made a credible attempt towards understanding (Isaacs, 1999).
Field IV: Flow – Generative dialogue

Field IV is probably the least likely field and very hard to get a grip on conceptually. It deals with the social whole in a reflective manner in order to create and contribute to a new social reality. In this field, new rules for language and interaction are being generated. Isaacs describes this an experience of a collective flow, which he refers to as synchronicities: “One person will think of something and another will say it.” (Isaacs, 1999: 280). In this field, implicit assumptions and mental models are reflected upon and suspended as to provide space for new possibilities. The atmosphere of such as space does allow for fundamentally and opposing viewpoints whereby new possibilities can emerge and be seen. As Isaacs notes, the discovery of field IV conversations paradoxically lies behind words, i.e. people might lack of an appropriate language to describe what they have experienced in such a conversation. In this field, people tend to become understanding of other people’s inability to express as they experience their own limits in that regard. The degree to which this lead to connection and alignment described as participating in a pool of common meaning that is subject of current development and change.

Field IV seems to be the conceptually least developed. While acknowledging the relevance of this conversational mode, for analytical purposes the descriptability does not seem to be sufficiently developed. The paradox of not having words for what is going on might be limit to academic analysis at this stage. It therefore not a question of whether a center has ‘reached’ Field IV in any session, it is rather the very low level of conceptualization that limits any analytical efforts in that regard. Hence, when clustering the conversational modes the different workshop sessions regarding their conversational modes in Chapter 5, I will employ the fields I – III.

2.3.4. Conclusion

Dialogue as a concept and tool has been employed in organization development as to enable cross-cultural communication (Schein, 1993, 1999), collective thinking (Isaacs, 1993, 1999) and reflective conversation (Scharmer, 1999, 2001). As a conversational mode that allows for and aims at

- acknowledging of differences in mental models and language games;
- developing a common definition of a state of affairs;
- developing shared mental models and cognitive frameworks; critically reviewing own viewpoints and assumptions; and
- reaching understanding within and between different cultural contexts,

dialogue holds promise to provide an adequate communicative strategy for sensemaking in organizations in general, and hence, for conversations with stakeholders in particular
2.4. Conclusion and Research Questions

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine and assess different communicative alternatives regarding their contribution for a concept of responsiveness in general, as well as for conversations with stakeholders in particular. Assuming that the pluralism of stakeholders’ interests, claims and demands emerges from a pluralism of their lifeworlds, I have described that not only access to these lifeworlds, but moreover, understanding of the claims might be limited (Kirsch, 1991; Kirsch et al., 1993).

The concept of communicative action provides a useful meta-framework for reflecting on communication in general. Moreover, communicative action as a concept of social interaction that assumes an orientation to reaching understanding by participants, provides a strong conceptual referent when investigating conversational alternatives for stakeholder communication (Habermas, 1984; 1987). However, despite the explanatory power of this concept, it remains rather abstract.

At the level of organizations, the concept of communicative action can be reflected upon by referring to Weick’s (1995) concept of sensemaking. He holds that ‘conversations make sense’ by allowing for multiple interpretations and viewpoints to be argued in social controversy. Arguing, conceived of as a rather controversial, competitive mode of conversation might not be the adequate mode of sensemaking, if sensemaking is about reaching understanding.

Dialogue is supposed to provide an opportunity to (a) examine the assumptions that underlie thinking and to reflect on the implications of that thinking, (b) to develop a common language among participants, and (c) create a shared context in which people learn how to talk to each other (Schein, 1993). These three aspects of dialogue might proof crucial when engaging in communication with stakeholders.

Based on the above reflections, I suggest to conclude that dialogue as a reflective mode of conversation holds promise to provide an adequate mode for communicating with and among stakeholders as to (1) render visible their interests, demands and claims, and (2) gain understanding of these items.

Research questions

The literature review of Chapter 1 provided the finding that responsiveness is of relevance for strategy, stakeholder management as well as organizational learning literature. Or, in short: responsiveness matters.
The review of the concept of communicative action, sensemaking and dialogue provided the finding that a reflective mode of conversations holds promise for an adequate conversational strategy to understand stakeholder interests, claims and demands. Or, in short: conversations make sense. By tying these two arguments together, I propose the following research questions that will be investigated in this study:

- What is the nature of responsiveness in organizations?
- What is the relation between dialogue and responsiveness in organizations?

In the following chapter, I will develop and define my method as to investigate the above research questions. Based on the characteristics of the questions, as well as my fundamental epistemological beliefs, I will argue for an interpretive case study approach. Moreover, the nature of the research questions requires a high researcher involvement. Therefore, the case study approach will be complemented by a participatory mode of inquiry.
3. Methodology

Introduction

Having developed the research focus, how can I now investigate into these questions?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and define an appropriate research strategy and methodological foundation to operationalize the investigation into the research questions.

As epistemological considerations of the researcher shape the methodological choice as much as the research questions themselves, I will briefly explicate my fundamental beliefs in that regard (3.1.). Secondly, I will examine the characteristics of the research questions and resulting methodological requirements in more detail (3.2.).

Based on the above reflections, I will choose an interpretive case study approach (3.3.) as an outer frame for this study and discuss methodological details and options in that regard. The nature of the research questions reflects a very strong process dimension that can hardly be investigated from a detached observer’s point of view. Due to the characteristics of the research task at hand that require a high involvement of the researcher, I will complement the case study approach by an inner methodological frame, i.e. a participatory mode of inquiry (3.4.).

In section 3.5., I will discuss the details of the research design and outline the steps of data collection, analysis and meaning generation from the case as well as ethical considerations. Interpretive, qualitative research approaches draw from an evaluative frame that corresponds to the overall paradigmatic assumptions in order to assess and ensure rigor and quality of a study. I will discuss the relevance and implications in that regard for this study (3.6.).

Finally, I will provide a conclusion of this chapter in section 3.7. which summarizes the above considerations.

3.1. Epistemological Considerations

“Behind every method lies a belief.” (Zuboff, 1988: 423) – As much as the nature of the research question, it is the researcher’s fundamental assumptions in terms of the nature of reality and knowledge that shapes the methodological choice.

When reflecting on epistemological and ontological aspects of research, paradigms matter. A paradigm can be defined as “a set of basic beliefs ... that deals with ultimate or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world,’ the individuals place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world an its parts.” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 107).
One paradigmatic line is drawn between qualitative and quantitative research. What distinguishes qualitative and quantitative research according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) are not only the methods employed but also the epistemological and ontological positions. In contrast to quantitative research that emphasizes measurement, analysis, confirmation and explanation between variables, qualitative researchers stress reality as socially constructed, a very close relation of research and object of study as well as constraints stemming from the contextual and situative quality of the inquiry. Such research is more exploratory in nature and strives for understanding process of sensemaking and attributing meaning to events and phenomena (Denzin, 1994: 4). In their overview of alternative inquiry programs, Lincoln & Guba (2000) distinguish positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory approaches to inquiry, that differ in paradigmatic characteristics of ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding human action and communication. However, the philosophies of how to address this concern differ significantly. As to understand human action that is inherently meaningful, the researcher has to grasp the meanings that constitute an action. In order to find meaning in a particular action, i.e. claiming an understanding of an action requires a process of interpreting or sensemaking in that regard (Schwandt, 2000: 191). There are different strategies of interpreting or sensemaking in that regard. Phenomenological analysis emphasize the relevance of intersubjective communication based on language games that constitute and reproduces a specific context, i.e. a lifeworld (Schwandt, 2000: 192). Every language game has specific rules that make it meaningful to its ‘players’. Then, human action can be conceived of as “an element in communication governed by rules” and “is meaningful by virtue of the system of meanings” (Schwandt, 2000: 192). To gain an understanding (‘verstehen’) of those systems of meanings, or rules of language games, is the goal of interpretive approaches to social research (Schwandt, 2000: 193). Interpretivists posit the possibility to understand subjective meanings of actions; they aim “to reconstruct the self-understandings of actors engaged in particular actions” (Schwandt, 2000: 193). Hence, in its pure form, interpretivism strives for an understanding of understanding, by objectifying the contextual meaning from a detached observers point of view who remains unaffected by the interpretive process (Schwandt, 2000: 194).

Social constructionism holds a non-representationalist view, as it challenges the possibility of an unmediated direct access to empirical phenomena and knowledge, that is mirrored and represented in an unambiguous structure, i.e. language. Meaning is created through linguistically mediated social interaction: “It is human interchange that gives language its capacity to mean, and it must stand as the critical locus of concern” (Gergen, 1994: 264). While acknowledging the potential of conversation to create meaning, social constructionism does not subscribe to any truth to be discovered by objective interpretation (Gergen, 1994).
Moreover, social constructionism posits the ideological, political and value-laden quality of knowledge in research as well as in practice (Schwandt, 2000: 198).

Social constructionism challenges three major assumptions of modernist research: rational agency, empirical nature of knowledge and language as representation. In contrast, proponents of social constructionism argue for a communal rationality, knowledge as socially constructed and language as action. (See Table 5)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Modernist</th>
<th>Postmodernist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of rationality</td>
<td>Individual rationality</td>
<td>Communal rationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of knowledge</td>
<td>Empirical nature</td>
<td>Social construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language as</td>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Realist vs. social constructionist approaches to social inquiry
(Based on Gergen et al. 1996)

**Communal rationality**

Within social constructionism, rationality is not conceived of as a taken-for granted, superior logic of instrumental rationality, that regardless of the context a priori determines whether means and ends are combined efficiently. Rationality is rather conceived of as a contextual, situative and communicative process in an interaction. It is more about doing rationality than applying it. Rationality then is “to participate in a form of cultural life”. To argue rationally then is to play by the rules of and within a particular cultural context (Gergen et al., 1996: 362). Key features to any context or lifeworld are the rules of language games. If meaning generation in general and being rational is a communal achievement in language, then rationality is an inherent form of participation in a lifeworld: “To speak rationally is to speak according to the conventions of a culture. Rational being is not thus individual being but culturally coordinated action.” (Gergen et al., 1996: 363).

**Knowledge and meaning as social constructs**

“Research technologies may produce data, but both the production and interpretation of the data must inevitably rely on forms of language (metaphysical beliefs, theoretical perspectives, conceptions of methodology) embedded within cultural relationships. “ (Gergen et al., 1996: 366). Hence, understanding a phenomenon is never outside any interpretive framework. However, the selection of a theory, i.e. language game, determines what and how a phenomenon is to be examined and what outcomes can be expected in that regard (Gergen et al., 1996: 364).

From a social constructionist point of view, multiple perspectives and voices are to be taken into account, as there is no absolute truth to be discovered as in nomethetic approaches to
research. Meaning of human action is constituted through social interaction and can therefore only be accessed by social interaction. Researchers then do not only observe the behavior of human beings, but also participate in the meaning creation of certain contexts of study. The researcher then is not only ‘reading’ a certain social phenomenon as text, but ‘writing’ it at the same time. Such alternative perspectives to research, Gergen et al. posit, "sensitize us to our participation in constituting our world, thus emphasizing our potential for communally organized change in understanding – and thus action.” (Gergen et al., 1996: 364).

Language as social action

Drawing from Wittgenstein, Gergen proposes that language creates meaning from its use in action, i.e. when participating in a language game. For social constructionism then language becomes a reflexive phenomenon: It is the object as well as the means of studying social action. In that regard, language is not a simple reflection of mind or outside world, but is constituting social reality: “Language does not describe action but is itself a form of action.” (Gergen et al., 1996: 364).

Based on these considerations, Gergen pleads for multivocality in research. Whereas traditional research approaches attempt to establish univocality, i.e. a single language, that might destroy or at least render inaccessible the research object in question. Multiple interpretations, constructions and perspectives should result in a pluralism of methodologies and languages when engaging in research (Gergen et al., 1996: 365).

3.2. Characteristics of the Research Question

Having outlined my fundamental beliefs in terms of ontological and epistemological considerations, I will now discuss the characteristics of the research question and the resulting methodological implications. Let’s take a closer look at the form and nature of the research questions, (1) What is the nature of responsiveness in organizations? and (2) What is the relation between dialogue and responsiveness in organizations?

Yin (1994) distinguishes three generic research strategies, i.e. experiment, survey and case study. As to identify a research strategy that corresponds to a research question, he suggests the following criteria: (1) Form of research question; (2) control over behavioral events required; and (3) focus on contemporary events (1994: 6).

In terms of the form of the research question, I would suggest that the former question refers to a descriptive aspect of responsiveness as a process, while the latter refers to a relational aspects in the process of responsiveness in relation to dialogue (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 23). A control over behavioral events is not required. However, an inquiry into
responsiveness as quality in the process of a communication clearly requires a focus on contemporary events.

Given that the form of the research questions are descriptive and relational, and that control over behavioral events is not required, the need to investigate responsiveness in the process and flow of communication makes it necessary to study contemporary events. Neither experiment nor survey, according to Yin (1994) is then an appropriate methodological choice to be made. Hence, I will use a case study method as the outer frame of my research.

It will be complemented by an inner frame of methodology that allows to study the phenomenon in question (i.e. responsiveness in process and its relation to dialogue) in a real-life context, to gather rich data, to actively involve participants and researcher, to sense how people place meanings on events and how they connect them to the social world. All of these aspects are supposedly inherent to the research phenomenon of responsiveness and can hardly be investigated from a detached observer’s point of view (Miles et al., 1994: 16). Therefore, the case study approach is not sufficient with regard to researcher involvement. Hence, I will employ a participatory mode of inquiry as the inner frame of this study that complements the case study approach.

3.3. Outer Frame: Case Study Research

Literature holds a variety of definitions of case studies. Yin refers to case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin, 1994: 13). Eisenhardt conceives of case study as “a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534). Miles et al. (1994: 25) refer to the case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" while Stake (2000) holds that case study is “not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case. ... As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used.” (2000: 435).

Regardless of the epistemological orientation, case studies can consist of single or multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534; Yin, 1994: 38). Multiple case designs usually collect and analyze data from several case studies, whereas single case studies may inquire into subunits or subcases within one case. As for this research, I would suggest to conceive of the project in Omega as a single-case study within which subcases, i.e. the process of the project in the different centers is being investigated.
Case study is a distinct method of conducting qualitative research that is flexible and adaptive with regard to research design, data collection techniques and epistemological orientations. As I have discussed, case studies are an appropriate strategy for research questions that do not require control over behavioral events but focus on contemporary events in their natural setting (Yin, 1994: 6). The form of the research question as well as the characteristics of the phenomenon in question reflects a blend of descriptive, explanatory (i.e. discerning patterns in terms of relations), and exploratory elements.

Stake (2000) distinguishes case studies in terms of the researcher's motive. In contrast to an intrinsic case study that is studied mainly for its own sake, an instrumental case study is undertaken if a particular case is examined as to draw generalizable knowledge from the investigation. The depth of analysis does not necessarily differ from an intrinsic case, it is the motive of advancing understanding a generic concept that drives such a case study approach (Stake, 2000: 437). Merriam (1998) points to the heuristic quality of case studies, i.e. the potential of a case study to enhance our understanding of a phenomenon by exploring and exemplifying new or different meaning.

In contrast to a positivist case study (Yin, 1994), an interpretive case study is inductive by nature, but both research question and design are usually informed by some theoretical considerations. Hence, case study research consists of the complex process of oscillating between inductive and deductive phases of research: “Definition of the case is not independent of interpretive paradigm or methods of inquiry. Seen from different worldviews and in different situations, the ‘same’ case is different.” (Stake, 2000: 449). Regarding data collection, case studies can be conducted using various methods, involving observations, participant observation, interviews and document analysis. This due to the necessity to validate and cross-check findings – or in other words – triangulate research findings: “[A]cknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (Stake, 2000: 443).

Data analysis can have an interpretive, structural as well as reflective focus. All three attempt through close examination of case study data as to identify themes and to discern patterns. Reflective analysis refers to data that are based on the researcher's reflection on his or her action. “Perhaps the simplest rule for method in qualitative casework is this: Place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on. ... In being ever reflective, the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating recollections and records – but not necessarily following the conceptualizations of theorists, actors, or audiences. ... Qualitative case study is characterized by researchers spending extended time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on.” (Stake, 2000: 445).
Stake (2000) holds that it is due to the subjective character of case studies that propositional and experiential knowledge can be enhanced. Case material parallel actual experience of readers and feed into processes of creating awareness and understanding. As knowledge is socially constructed, “case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge.” (Stake, 2000: 442).

Having chosen a reflective approach to case study, I will now discuss the implications of this choice for the inner frame of methodology, i.e. the details of a participatory mode of inquiry.

3.4. Inner Frame: Participatory Mode of Inquiry

Gergen et al. (1996), Argyris (1985), Schon (1983), Torbert (1991) and Kappler (1984) argue for the inextricable link between research and social action. In that regard, a participative mode of inquiry as a methodological approach emphasizes the relevance of researcher’s involvement in the context of study, allows for local and situative knowledge as well as multivocality in terms of research and practice. Moreover, it is through participatory, dialogic forms of inquiry that new perspective or practices might be realized (Cooperrider et al., 1987; Schein, 1993).

I would argue that human action is inherently meaningful whereby the meanings are contextual and situative. Language is both object and means of study. Any researcher with the intend to study lifeworld contexts has no other choice than becoming involved, as Habermas (1984) suggests: “In order to describe [the lifeworlds and language games, C.J.], he must understand them; in order to understand them, he must be able in principle to participate in their production; and participation presupposes that one belongs.” (Habermas, 1984: 109). Hence, inquiring into the relation of dialogue and responsiveness requires becoming part of conversations in natural settings in an attempt how meanings and sense are created. If I intend to inquire into the specific lifeworlds and language games with regard to my research question, I need to become part of the lifeworlds.

Understanding a process of sensemaking and meaning creation fundamentally requires participation in the process of reaching understanding: “Meanings – whether embodied in actions, institutions, products of labor, words, networks of cooperation, or documents – can be made accessible only from the inside. ... The lifeworld is open only to subjects who make use of their competence to speak and act. They gain access to it by participating, at least virtually, in the communications of members and thus becoming at least potential members themselves.” (Habermas, 1984: 112, my emphasis). When investigating the nature of responsiveness in process and its relation to dialogue, it is exactly this quality of understanding and sensemaking
that requires my involvement in the context of the conversations that generate meaning and ‘make sense’.

Of the many participatory research strategies that could be used, it is action research as a family of approaches that allows the researcher to work in an organizational context “with members of an organization over a matter which ... of genuine concern to them and ... which ... is an intent by the organization members to take action based on the intervention.” (Eden & Huxham, 1996: 527). Action research is future oriented, is collaborative, implies system development, generates theory grounded in action, is diagnostic and situational (Coghlan, 2001a; Coghlan et al., 2001; Kappler, 1980). The notion of action research refers to a ‘family’ of approaches, most of them sharing the above assumptions, e.g. action science, collaborative inquiry, action learning, clinical inquiry, process (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2002).

Thus, action research by offering different participatory modes of inquiry, involves actual social change, the researcher providing assistance to the client system; iterative cycles of identifying a problem, acting and evaluating; involves changing patterns of thinking; challenging the status quo from a participatory perspective and simultaneously contributes to knowledge in social science as well as to social action in the client system (Coghlan, 2001b; Coghlan et al., 2001). In that regard, the value of action research can be seen in reemphasizing the relevance and impact of practical knowledge by “developing and elaborating theory from practice” (Eden et al., 1996: 533). As outlined in section 1.1., it was due to my practical experiences as a facilitator to the Omega foundation, the research focus of responsiveness emerged – from practice.

What does researcher involvement mean in the context of this study? My role within the OD project changed and evolved throughout the project. With hindsight, I would describe the different roles that I held as follows.

My immediate role was that of a facilitator in the workshop sessions. Participants should become engaged in a reflective conversation and were highly involved in that regard. The more participants took ownership of the workshop session, the lower my involvement. Especially in individual but also group conversations outside the workshop sessions, members from the different stakeholder groups asked me to give some guidance in terms of certain internal, mainly political aspects of their practice. By not answering, but engaging in a joint inquiry, we often ended up in a reflective conversation. Discussions with managers at the local as well as national level resulted in a high involvement from them as well as myself. Members of the Omega foundation and myself were jointly working together as to identify and explore what the emerging issues from the stakeholders might be. This might be close to traditional action research, but the fundamental difference is the fact that this exploration is driven by the client’s not by the researcher’s agenda. My role was to serve the organization as a process consultant that did not hold expertise to fix a problem, but to explore what the problem is and to help
surfacing issues relevant to the centers and their stakeholders as to then address them jointly. Schein (2001) refers to this type of researcher-client setting as process consultation.

When the project was near to completion, the action research approach shifted towards the research end of the term. The interviews that I conducted had a twofold purpose: One, to evaluate the project’s outcome and process after several months and two, to inquire into the notion of responsiveness with the people that had come up with it in the first place—the participants of the projects. In this third step, I would still make a case of high involvement of both parties, however, the agenda for the interviews was mainly driven by my concerns. The purpose of the interviews mainly catered the needs of my research. This is distinct from a pure process consultation. I involved the members of Omega so as to inquire into the nature of responsiveness and its relation to dialogue that attempt to study. Schein (2001) would refer to such a setting as a traditional action research setting (see Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher initiates project</th>
<th>Subject/client initiates project</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher involvement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subject/client involvement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>Demography</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Educational interv.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>Participant observ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnography</td>
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Table 6: Typology of research strategies (Schein, 2001)

The participatory mode of inquiry that I was employing in the process of carrying out the project oscillated between process consultation in the phase of the project where clearly the client had set the agenda, and traditional action research when investigating into the notion of responsiveness by interviewing members of the organization. However, in both cases a high involvement of myself was required that allowed me to engage in and observe people in their sensemaking and meaning creation. It is this aspect of giving practical experiences back its validity in terms of knowledge creation that I consider action research as a family of participatory approaches the best method for the task at hand, i.e. investigating the relation of responsiveness and dialogue.
3.5. Research Design: Steps of Data Collection, Analysis and Meaning Generation

Based on the outer and inner frame of the methodology that I have chosen in this study, I will now outline the steps of data collection, analysis and meaning generation along the criteria adapted from (Stake, 2000: 448):

Selecting research question - Bounding the case - Conceptualizing the object of study

Case selection is a key feature in the research design. Stake (2000) suggests drawing a purposive sample, which allows for a variety and opportunities of intensive study. The main criterion is not that of representativeness, but that of learning opportunity: “The researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn. My choice would be to examine that case from which we feel we can learn the most.” (Stake, 2000: 446). In my case, the project work provided a superb opportunity to investigate the notion of responsiveness as the theme was inherent to the case itself.

Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues – Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation

I have gathered and employed three sources of data in the analysis of the case study: (1) The data to inquire into the research question were my experiences and reflections as a facilitator to the organization that I have captured as field notes in my journal. These stem mainly from participant observations, direct observations and individual reflections. (2) I have clustered and identified themes from these data so as to conduct semi-structured group interviews within participating centers. (3) These interviews have provided me with some confirmatory as well as exploratory material that I have further discussed in semi-structured interviews with key informants from the different stakeholder groups, different centers and different hierarchical functions in the organization.

Generating meaning from the case

In terms of generating meaning from the case, I have employed the iterative cycle of action and reflection (Coghlan et al., 2001). With the senior researcher of the project, i.e. my supervisor, I held several meetings as to reflect on certain incident and dynamics of the project as to decide what the next useful step of action might be. The same format was employed at the level of the analytical investigation. My supervisor and I deliberately held separate meetings, either clearly indicated as an OD-project reflection meeting or a PhD-research meeting. This distinction proved useful throughout this study.
For the process of each center and the research questions in terms of responsiveness, I was able to provide in-depth insight into the particularities of the process in each center. In terms of identifying relevant themes and issues, I have coded and clustered the different workshop session with regard to the conversational mode, thereby drawing from Scharmer's process archetype of conversation that provides properties of conversational modes that I have then attributed to each session. I have captured these analyses and reflections in my journal.

As to analyze the processes in the different center from a comparative point of view with regard to the research questions, I have discerned patterns of conversational and responsive qualities. I have used the codes of the individual center and have identified stakeholder specific issues across the centers. In terms of conversational modes, I have juxtaposed the conversational modes that were predominantly used in the different centers. This provided me with a cluster that showed centers with high, moderate and low levels of reflective mode of conversation. Based on a typology that I have developed in Chapter 5, I have coded the project outcomes for each center and have then compared the outcomes as to discern a pattern between dialogue and responsiveness. This provided me with a cluster that showed center of high, moderate or low level of responsiveness.

As to validate my findings I have been in close contact with key informants of the client organization at each step of the analysis. They have provided me with useful insights and comments throughout the development of the conceptual framework and findings of this study.

Methodological challenges and Reflexivity

"Qualitative data are sexy." (Miles et al., 1994: 1), however, they are somewhat harder to handle in their generation and analysis than figures. Some aspects of this research presented challenges in that regard that I have attempted to cope with.

Employing a method in which meaning generation and context are major aspects, language and culture matter. English not being my mother tongue and the country in which the study was conducted not being my own culture, there were certainly aspects in the conversations that I might have missed out. Participation and belongingness as requirements for an interpretive research approach were limited to a certain extend. I have strived to minimize possible shortcomings in that regard by (1) iteratively double-checking meanings of words and statements within and outside the workshop sessions with participants (“member validation”); (2) iteratively reflecting on actions and statements with my supervisor as part of the action research cycle, and (3) discussing meanings of certain words and idioms with peers from the country in which the study was conducted and whose mother tongue is English. The transcription of the interviews was also subject for such a “quality assurance”.

The people that I have worked with had some severe physical and sensory disabilities, so that the lack of experience for working and communicating with them has also limited some
communicative aspects in the conversations. Some aspects in their body language, facial expressions and sense of humor, such as irony, were certainly somewhat different to my mental models of communication. Moreover, in several cases where participants had severe speech impairments, I had to adapt the workshops process according to their needs. With explicit permission of these people, I asked their personal assistants or volunteer members of staff to help ‘translating’ their statements so that I would understand their viewpoint. It also meant that I had to change the pace of conversations to their needs. In one case, a man with no speech participated and was able to make his voice heard by blinking with his eye, by facial expression and by nodding or shaking the head. To read these signals for me was only possible with the assistance of a member of staff who is close to him and knows how to read his expressions.

By addressing the challenges as outlined above, I have attempted to be attentive to my own limitations in terms of interpretation and construction, referred to by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000) as reflexive mode of inquiry.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are relevant for any research in general, as every action of a process consultant or action researcher is an intervention in the client system and might have intended but also unintended consequences (Schein, 1999). As qualitative researchers, we are “guests in the private spaces of the world. ... Those whose lives and expressions are portrayed risk exposure and embarrassment, as well as loss of standing, employment, and self-esteem” (Stake, 2000: 447).

This is even more relevant in the context of working with an organization in which at least one group of people considers themselves vulnerable subjects. Miles et al. (1994) drawing from Sieber (1992) point to three generic principles to guide ethical choices in research: (1) beneficence, i.e. maximizing beneficial outcomes to science and the context of inquiry while avoiding any harm, risk or wrong; (2) respect, i.e. protecting autonomy and respect of individuals, especially disenfranchised people; and (3) justice, i.e. ensuring carefully considered procedures and fair administration. In terms of this study, I have attempted to ensure these three principles by the following considerations.

At the beginning of the process in any of the centers, I have outlined my dual role as process consultant and researcher. I have explained to the local steering committees as well as in any initial workshop session the purpose of intervention and research as well as the right of individuals and groups to withdraw at any time if they wished to do so. I have agreed with the national steering committee, that any statement made in an individual or group situation remains strictly confidential unless the individual or group decides otherwise. This might have prevented some useful cross-fertilization in communication, but ensured psychological safety for participants. Certain issues would not have emerged in the first place without such
confidentiality agreement. Such confidentiality has prevented me from taping the workshop sessions, as participants were not willing to be taped in the process of the workshops. In terms of data collection, this is certainly regrettable, but the respect of the decisions of participants in terms of their psychological safety weighs higher in that regard. In any workshop I have asked the group to discuss and agree the issue of confidentiality. I have also made clear that participation in the process is voluntary and that any participant can opt out of the process at any stage without giving reasons to do so. I have also been careful when reporting agreed items to another party in the organization by protecting the speaker, i.e. not disguising his or her identity. In an informed consent with the organization, its subunits as well as the individual groups, I was permitted to use the data gathered in the process for my research on the shared understanding that anonymity and confidentiality would be provided. The consequence of this agreement is that I have refrained from including the interview transcripts in an appendix, as the identity of speakers could not be disguised entirely. Access to data was restricted to myself only.

3.6. Quality of Qualitative Research

The fact that I have chosen a qualitative research framework in general, and a case study approach complemented by a participatory mode of inquiry in particular, requires some elaboration on quality and rigor of such a research approach. Usually, validity, reliability and generalizability are areas of concern in that regard. However, the quality of a research cannot be assessed outside the given paradigmatic framework in which it is located and stems from. For example, constructivists tend to question replicability and objectivity while concerning themselves with dependability and confirmability (Guba et al., 1994). Thus, to assess exploratory, qualitative research with quality measures from confirmatory, quantitative research is ‘putting Hindu questions to a Muslim’, i.e. “questions that have no meaning because the frames of reference are those for which they were never intended” (Lincoln et al., 2000: 175).

There is no need to argue about the fact that case studies by their very nature do not allow for statistical generalization. A case study technically can never be a probability ‘sample’, from which one could generalize into a population. However, statistical generalizability is just one way of generalization (Gummesson, 2000: 89). The goal of a case study is not that of enumerating frequencies, but rather to enhance and generalize theories, i.e. analytical generalization. Hence, analytical generalization attempts to generalize from case into theory. Its contribution to scientific generalization then can be conceived of as more concerned with theory development than theory testing (Yin, 1994: 30).

From a social constructionist point of view, there is no such thing as ultimate knowledge or truth: Truth as any agreement on valid knowledge arises from the rules that members of some community share. Such “agreements may eventuate as the result of a dialogue that moves
arguments about truth claims or validity past the warring camps of objectivity and relativity toward ‘a communal test of validity through the argumentation of the participants in a discourse’.” (Lincoln et al., 2000: 177-178).

They suggest thinking about quality of qualitative research beyond rigor as an appropriate application of a method. In contrast, rigor should be established by a “community of consent”, whereby the question is addressed and assessed “Are we interpretively rigorous? Can our cocreated constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?” (Lincoln et al., 2000: 178-179). On the same note, Seale (1999) points out that modernist notions of validity and reliability “are no longer adequate to encapsulate the range of issues that a concern for quality must raise. Instead, we need to accept that ‘quality’ is a somewhat elusive phenomenon that cannot be pre-specified by methodological rules.” (Seale, 1999: 7).

Schwandt (1996) suggests an alternative concept of validity as authenticity, which holds the following authenticity criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness refers to the quality of balancing stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices that should appear in the text. An imbalance in that regard could be conceived of as a form of (deliberate?) bias. Ontological and educative authenticity refer to the degree whether awareness and understanding of individual research participants or those surrounding them has been enhanced in terms of a social or organizational purpose. Catalytic and tactical authenticities describes the impact in terms of action taken by participants as well as some form of training for social and political action that they might have asked the researcher for (Schwandt, 1996: 180-181).

In terms of judging social inquiry, he proposes three alternative criteria: (1) He suggests that a social inquiry should be looked at whether it “generate knowledge that complements or supplements rather than displaces lay probing of social problems”. Such knowledge might allow for an enhanced understanding the necessities and aims of practice from a various perspectives. (2) He proposes to conceive of “social inquiry as practical philosophy” aiming at “enhancing or cultivating critical intelligence in parties to the research encounter”. Critical intelligence thereby refers to “the capacity to engage in moral critique”. (3) Judgments of social inquiry in his view should incorporate an evaluation “on the success to which his or her reports of the inquiry enable the training or calibration of human judgment” or the “capacity for practical wisdom” (Schwandt, 1996: 179).

Finally, Schwandt (1996) outlines the relevance of reflexivity as an inherent quality of research, i.e. the researcher ability to critically reflect on the self as research. Reflexivity as the conscious experience of self-reflection “demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. We must question our selves, too,
regarding, how those binaries and paradoxes shape not only the identities called forth in the field and later in the discovery processes of writing, but also our interactions with respondents, in who we become to them in the process of becoming ourselves.” (Schwandt, 1996: 183-184).

3.7. Conclusion

In order to investigate the nature of responsiveness and its relation to dialogue, are inherently of a process nature that requires studying them in their natural setting. Based on my epistemological and ontological beliefs that are informed by social constructionism, critical theory and phenomenology, I would argue that human action is inherently meaningful, and that the attributed meanings of action can only be understood by participating in the lifeworld and language game out of which such an attribution is made.

Case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 1994: 13) is an outer frame of methodology, flexible and adaptive enough to inquire the phenomenon in question. However, as I have indicated, the research requires a high researcher involvement. By taking this insight into account, I intend to complement the case study approach by an inner frame of participatory mode of inquiry, i.e. action research.

Both research design and analysis of action research cater best the requirements for studying a phenomenon such as responsiveness and its relation to dialogue and comply with quality and rigor considerations of qualitative research methods.

Equipped with this robust methodological foundation, I will now describe the story of the case – as detailed as necessary, and as concise as possible.

Introduction

What was the process, structure and content of the case study and how does it inform the research?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of the project as it evolved in order to provide the basis and context for the next step of the analysis. I have divided this chapter into three parts:

In a first section (4.1.), I will provide a brief profile of the services, structure and mission of the Omega foundation. So as to understand the story of the project, such contextual information seems to be useful for the sensemaking of the reader.

Secondly, in section 4.2. I will describe the rationale, focus, ethos and design of the project. Whereas my initial description in section 1.1. was intended to outline the motivation for this research, this section provides an access to the project in more detail.

Thirdly, I will describe the process of the project in the participating centers (4.3.). I have structured this section by briefly introducing each center, describing procedural details of the project and the dynamics of the workshop sessions within and between the stakeholders of each center. I have complemented these with a brief reflection of the overall process in the center.

Finally, a brief conclusion (4.4.) will complete this chapter.

4.1. Organisation Profile: The Omega foundation

The Omega foundation provides residential care in 14 centers for people with physical and sensory disabilities. It was founded in 1963 as a foundation and has currently about 300 places in its centers with a total number of staff of around 400. Each regional health authority in which a local Omega Center is located funds the service provision. Local managers of the centers report directly to the CEO who is supported by a Head Office team that covers central function such as strategy and organization development, service user development, human resource management and training, financials and administration amongst others. The Board of Trustees in which voluntary members from the wider community as well as service users and staff are represented has the accountability for ensuring a quality service delivery as well as the strategic development of the foundation (Omega Foundation, 1999a).
4.1.1. Services provided by the Omega foundation

At the core of Omega's service provision lies long-term supported accommodation service, which until the 1990's took the form of a traditional residential care model. Over the course of the last decade and in response to requests by service users, Omega's model of service has changed from an implicit benevolent paternalistic care model to an explicit professional service provision. In terms of governmental policies for people with disabilities, this development is in line with the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disability and the Department of Health policy document 'Towards an Independent future' (Department of Health, 1996). The Omega foundation provides three distinct services in its centers: Besides (1) long-term supported accommodation services, recent developments include (2) respite services and (3) outreach services. Respite services are available to people who normally live in the community or with other voluntary agencies, and within Omega as to provide short breaks to service users.

4.1.2. Structure of the Omega foundation

The Omega foundation was established in 1963 as a company limited by guarantee whose charitable status has been recognized by the tax authorities in the same year. According to the constitution of the foundation, the governance structure reads as follows (Omega Foundation, 2000).

The foundation operates under a Board of Trustees who is responsible for the overall direction of the organization. At the national level, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible and accountable to the Board of Trustees for the day-to-day operation and leadership of the organization as a whole. He is assisted by the Head Office management team to whom he delegates responsibilities in respect of various functional areas such as service user development, budgeting and financials, strategy and organizational development as well as human resource management and training.

The Omega foundation service is delivered through 14 centers, 4 in the city and the remainder throughout the country. The nine larger Centers have between 20 to 35 permanent places, whereas the five smaller Centers provide independent housing in a quasi-apartment setting for about 10 tenants each. In total, Omega has 287 permanent place as well as 32 respite places. The service users are assisted by 353 permanent staff as well as 104 community employment scheme workers (Omega Foundation, 1999a).

The local service managers in the centers report directly to the CEO and are responsible and accountable of their operations. They act autonomously within the guidelines given by the CEO with regard to service provision, staffing and budgets at the local center. The group of the
service manager’s meets on a regular basis with the CEO and the Head Office team in order to coordinate issues beyond the local agenda.

Each Omega center is funded through its local health authority together with minor contributions from service users. Agreed service plans are in place for all services. Some voluntary fund raising is still required to meet core service costs, whereby the foundation has been working to replace these amounts with guaranteed revenue funding from statutory sources (Omega Foundation, 1999a).

4.1.3. Mission and Values of the Omega foundation

At the time of the research project, the Omega foundation has been in the process of defining its strategic direction. As part of this process, the foundation intends to define and adopt a mission statement. Though no written mission statement has been issued as yet, the Omega Foundation (1999a) provides the relevant components as well as a draft mission statement.

(1) Primary objective: “The Omega foundation exists to provide residential accommodation be run as far as possible on the lines of a home and not an institution for the care and general well-being of people regardless of creed who are chronically ill or permanently disabled, especially those of limited means.” (Omega Foundation, 1963: 1).

(2) The Omega ethos; “An Omega Home should be a place of shelter physically and of encouragement spiritually; a place in which the residents can acquire a sense of belonging, and of ownership, by contributing in any way within their capabilities to its functioning and development; a place to share with others and from which to help other less fortunate; and a place in which to gain confidence and develop independence and interests; a place of hopeful endeavor not of passive disinterest.” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 9)

(3) Independent Living and Choice: “The philosophy of independent living espouses living like everyone else, i.e., having the right to self determination, to exert control over one’s life, to have opportunities to make decisions, take responsibility and to pursue activities of one’s own choosing regardless of disability.” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 9). With regard to independent living, the notion of choice is considered a prominent, central issue to Omega foundation.

The ‘Omega philosophy’ reflects the organization’s attempts “to create an environment where choice occurs at various levels ... We are also trying that service users can make informed choices – i.e., are aware of alternative courses of action or challenging options which they may want to consider ... whatever the type or scale of choice involved, the practical promotion of individual choice, and the related promotion of individual control, are at the center of what we are trying to do.” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 9).
The Omega foundation aims at “becoming a modern, responsive service-providing organization capable of delivering service which meet the needs of individual service users” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 9). It is in the light of these considerations that a draft mission statement has been proposed: “Our mission is to become a service provider which listens to people with disabilities and responds to their wishes and needs in ways that respect individuality and maximise opportunities for choice.” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 10). Complementing this draft mission statement, the foundation has identified a list of words that are “intended to indicate the types of values which we see as core to the organisation: Listen, Respond, Understand, Respect, Integrity, Choice and Individuality” (Omega Foundation, 1999a: 10 my emphasis).

4.2. The Learning Through Listening Project: Rationale and Design

4.2.1. Rationale and purpose of the project

The Learning Through Listening (LTL) project was a 12-month OD project with the Omega foundation. When initially designing the project in 1998, the CEO and the senior researcher of the project had identified several internal and external forces for change that would affect the organization. As to facilitate the organization to cope with these forces for change, the project’s objective was defined as to build “the capacity for change through creating a shared learning experience for participants which would be grounded in Omega values and mission enabling it to develop capabilities and processes for continued organizational learning and change” (Coghlan, 2000: 5).

External forces for change

In 1996 the Department of Health had issued a report called “Towards an Independent Future - On Health and Personal Social Services for People with Physical and Sensory Disabilities” (Department of Health, 1996). The purpose of the review was “to examine the current provision of health services to people with physical or sensory disabilities and recommend how such services should be developed to meet more effectively their needs and those of their families.” (Department of Health, 1996: 5).

The main recommendation of the report was “the development of service to enable people with a physical or sensory disability to live as independently as possible in the community. We recommend that priority be given to the provision of more day care, respite care, nursing and therapy services, personal assistants and residential accommodation to achieve this goal.” (Department of Health, 1996: 5).
Besides recommendations in terms of increased resources and general policies with regard to community services and personal assistance services, the report focused on respite and residential care services, i.e. the services provided by the Omega foundation (Department of Health, 1996: 6).

In order to comply with and adapt to the main recommendations of the report, the Omega foundation had to review, change and develop its service in terms of funding but also organizational issues related to the quality of the service delivery. The project deliberately did not focus on providing solutions for any specific item on the requirements/recommendations of the report and its implications for Omega, but attempted to familiarize the main stakeholder groups of the organization with the notion and process of change in general.

Internal forces for change

The need for change triggered by the report and its implication for the Omega services, was complemented by internal forces for change which manifested itself in two major directions:

- **Centralization**: From local autonomy of the centers to more central accountability and governance

- **Professionalization**: From a benevolent, paternalistic care model to a modern professional residential care service provider

The traditional, implicit governance structure put emphasis on the local center that acted autonomously and fairly independently of Head Office which did not have more than 2 staff to assist the CEO until 1999. The operations in the local centers were run by a head of home or head of care, whereas staffing and financials were managed by a voluntary management committee. The new constitution of 1999 changed this to an explicit governance structure strengthening the role of the CEO and Head Office as well as the local service manager. The service managers became responsible and accountable for all affairs of their centers, i.e. operations, staffing and financials and were required to report directly to the CEO. The voluntary management committees did not have any role under the new constitution.

Whereas in the past, staff were employed by the voluntary management committee of each local center, the Omega foundation itself became the single employer of all staff working in Omega centers. Issues regarding Health and Safety, property and insurance that had been handled locally were centralized as well.

Funding remained mainly at the local level, as the regional health authorities negotiate with the local Omega centers the details of service delivery in question. However, some of the direct funding by the Department of Health to the Omega foundation had now to be allocated centrally.
Centralization as well as professionalization manifested itself in the numbers and priorities of new staff in Head Office. There had been a Financial and Accounting Manager as well as two secretary staff to assist the CEO until 1999. The need for a Training and Development Manager was recognized so that skills and capabilities of staff delivering the ‘front line service’ could be enhanced. Secondly, a Service User Development Officer who should act as a direct interface and advocate to the service users was hired as to identify service user needs as well as to cope with their complaints and appeals formally and professionally. Thirdly, a Human Resource Manager came on board as to provide advice in terms of recruiting, retaining and other staffing issues.

Finally, a main internal force for change was the service users’ changing needs and expectations with regard to the service provided by Omega. Long-term accommodation as the default model for people with disabilities has been substituted by services that encourage and enable people to choose an independent living arrangement so that Omega services are required for a transition period only.

4.2.2. Focus and ethos of the project

In the light of these forces for change, the OD intervention was labeled with a title that reflects the Omega ethos as well as the goal of the project itself: “Learning through listening”. A special logo designed for communications of the project showed the founder of Omega listening to a young adult in a wheelchair.

In terms of expected outcomes, the CEO had hoped in general that “everything that would bring the organization forward is worthwhile” (personal communication, 17.04.02). More specifically in a communication to the entire organization, he expressed his hope that “through the experience of the LTL project, we will all see that listening is one of the keys to true learning and that this principle should be reflected in how the foundation carries out its work both nationally and in each center.” (Omega Foundation, 1999b: 1). In summary, according to the CEO, the aim of the project was to build and develop the capacity for change through a shared learning experience. Both project rationale as well as design were considered to be firmly rooted in the ‘Omega philosophy’ and values of listening, understanding and responding.

4.2.3. Design of the project

As I have already discussed in section 1.1., among the various and diverse definitions of OD (e.g.Bennis, 1969; Burke, 1994; Cummings et al., 2001; French et al., 1999; Neilsen, 1984), my understanding of OD is informed by and based on Beckhard who conceives of OD as “an effort (1) planned, (2) organization-wide, and (3) managed from the top, to (4) increase organization effectiveness and health through (5) planned interventions in the organization’s processes using behavioral science knowledge” (Beckhard, 1969: 9).
Reflecting on the project, Beckhard’s (1969) characteristics can be discerned as, (1) being planned by the CEO, the senior researcher and myself, as (2) involving the entire organization, (3) being managed from a national steering committee, (4) aiming at building the capacity for change by developing a culture of reflective conversation, and (5) mainly being informed by the concepts of dialogue as discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g. Scharmer, 2001; Schein, 1993) and appreciative inquiry, an approach that I will discuss in more detail below (e.g. Cooperrider et al., 1987).

This section outlines the initial design of the OD project agreed by the senior researcher, the CEO, myself and the national steering group of the project. It outlines the core concepts on which the project was designed (Coghlan, 1998).

**Planned Process of the project**

It was planned, that each of the 14 local centers would engage in three individual days of the OD process. These days would be spread across a ten-month period. On the first day, members of the local center would work together on (i) identifying contextual areas of change, (ii) articulating a desired future for the center, and (iii) agreeing on plans for action. Implementation should then begin. On the second day, some months later, the plans for action would be reviewed and adjustments to the implementation made, where required. It was considered important that each center works independently in the initial stages. This was to build a sense of psychological safety and to maintain confidentiality so each center could work through its own change issues. On the third day, progress would be reviewed and the process evaluated. On this third day, neighboring centers would hold joint review and learning sessions (Coghlan, 1998).

- Due to the specific dynamics in each of the centers and its constituencies, the actual process deviated from the initial plan. For most centers, it was an achievement to reach agreement on certain action steps on the third day. Joint review and learning sessions between centers were not being held due to time and resource restrictions.

It was intended that the project accommodate national, regional and local perspectives for the organization. While the interventions described above were designed to take place at local level, national and regional level issues should also be addressed. A national conference was planned to be held, where representatives from all the centers gathered together for three days to reflect on the learnings and findings of the local workshops as well as to work on the strategic future for the Omega foundation (Coghlan, 1998).

- With hindsight, due to the project dynamics in the different centers and the change in priorities of Head office, neither the regional nor the national perspective was addressed in the project.
**Project management**

In terms of project management, the senior researcher as well as the CEO would be accountable for the overall process. Within the project, my role was that of a facilitator. Additionally, a national steering group comprised of members of the foundation was established to oversee and manage the process. Beside the senior researcher, the OD officer, and myself, trustees, residents, members of management committees as well as staff members were represented in this committee. This steering group should then plan the process and monitor its progress throughout the project. The coordinating group was intended to act as a form of cooperative inquiry research group.

- The national steering group met three times during the project. Twice at the beginning when designing the workshop format and reflecting on early findings, and once when the project was completed as to reflect on learnings, findings and next steps.

**4.2.4. Design of the workshops**

By the time I came onboard, two years had expired between the initial project proposal and the actual start of the project in May 2000. The overall OD framework of the project remained unchanged. In terms of operationalizing the idea and purpose of the project, the senior researcher and myself agreed to base the workshop format on two conceptual cornerstones. On the one hand, the concept of dialogue in organizations (Scharmer, 2001) provided a meta-referent for conversations in the workshop sessions. On the other hand, the dialogue concept was complemented by the concept of appreciative inquiry as developed by (Cooperrider et al., 1987). I would consider the two concepts compatible as they both attempt to facilitate OD processes in terms of mode and orientation of a conversation. Having discussed the dialogue concept in detail in Chapter 2, I will briefly outline the concept of appreciative inquiry.

Appreciative inquiry refers to a recently developed form of OD intervention that aims at providing a theoretical frame and method for organizing and changing social systems (e.g. Bushe, 1991, 1995, 1999; Cooperrider, 1990; Cooperrider et al., 1987; Golembiewski, 1998). Assuming that language as social action matters in processes of social construction (Gergen et al., 1996) as well as acknowledging that sense is made through words (Weick, 1995), proponents of appreciative inquiry argue that the wording of questions and the perspective implied in these words are critical to the success of an OD intervention.

Based on the assumption, that traditional (OD) consultants implicitly employ a problem-oriented view of organizing and inquiry, (Cooperrider et al., 1987) posit that such view reduces the opportunities for creating new images and forms of social reality. Appreciative inquiry refers to “both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization, or society as a whole” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987: 159). Drawing from social constructionism,
Cooperrider (1990) proposes a ‘helioptropic’ metaphor, which assumes that – similar to plants that grow towards the light – social systems tend to evolve towards affirming images and metaphors. In OD processes, groups and organizations need to be affirmed that “every new affirmative projection of the future is a consequence of an appreciative understanding of the past or present.” (Cooperrider, 1990: 120). Hence, the core of appreciative inquiry consists in creating collective, positive prospects by exploring the best of ‘what is’ or ‘what has been’. The ‘unconditional positive question’ is considered key in the beginning of any appreciative process.

Consequently, appreciative inquiry as an OD intervention should begin with a first step by discovering the best of ‘what is’. By searching for recent examples and experiences, an appreciation of the current state of affairs is created that allows identifies the dynamics and mechanisms that underlie these positive experiences. The next step consists in collaboratively developing a vision of ‘what might be’ and ‘what should be’. By exploring future possibilities, opportunities and options that are voiced without immediate cognitive or material restriction can be discovered. And finally, by collectively revisiting the current state of affairs by discussing ‘what can be’: based on the appreciative assessment of what is, the prospected future options can be evaluated as to identify next steps for action and implementation (Cooperrider, 1990; Cooperrider et al., 1987).

Informed by dialogue and appreciative inquiry, the following workshop format, including three generic questions as to structure the conversations, was agreed by the national steering group.

1. *What do you really like about (your life, your work) in this home/home?*
   As most people in the center had not been familiar with any type of group work, it would allow them to participate in a conversation that would start off in a positive, friendly mode.

2. *What could be done even better?*
   Based on the confidence build in the conversation around question 1., it was expected that participants would then speak up more freely with regard to opportunities for change.

3. *How do we get there?*
   Finally, concrete suggestions in terms of goals and action steps to be taken would follow from the discussion of question 3.

Three separate days of group facilitation should be held in each center. The timeframe was to not exceed two hours per group as that was considered sufficient in terms of rostering of staff as well as span of attention by residents. With regard to the *overall project time*, it was agreed that the local centers would choose the pace of the overall process, i.e. spread the three days over several months or to have the three days close enough as to initiate the process with a sufficient momentum. In terms of the *duration of each session*, initially 3 hours per session were
discussed but after a pilot workshop in the Alpha center, 90 minutes proved to be the maximum amount of time of an individual session. Sessions with residents lasted between 60 and 90 minutes depending on the energy level and span of attention.

To meet the goal of learning experience within each center while providing a psychologically safe space for conversation, the two options in terms of participation were discussed. On the one hand, joint sessions from the very beginning would provide an all-inclusive experience while some issues might not be voiced, as people would feel shy/insecure to speak up in such a large group. On the other hand, to have separate sessions with each stakeholder group first and have a joint meeting on day three would provide a safe space to speak up but might lead to difficulties on the final day to include all the issues discussed in the large group.

In order to allow people in the center to familiarize them with the project and to decide on the above questions, it was considered necessary to hold preliminary meetings with local steering committees that comprised the manager, a representative of staff, residents and, where applicable, the management committee.

4.3. The Learning Through Listening Project: The Story unfolds

4.3.1. Participating centers

The Omega foundation provides its services in 13 centers. All centers were invited to participate in the project. However, 5 did not participate for different reasons: one center had been running a total quality management project that should not be confused or jeopardized by a parallel process. Two centers were in the process of changing management at the time of the process so that the national steering group decided not to run the project in these centers. Another two centers chose not to participate having discussed the usefulness in a preliminary meeting with the facilitator. In summary, eight centers participated in the project, whereby one center was not included in the analysis due to its specific service provision to a mainly elderly but not physically disabled population. The seven centers that were included in the case study are large residential care centers with 25+ residents each and are therefore comparable in size and service provision (see Table 7 for a brief profile).

In the following reports of the process in the center, I refer to the workshop sessions held with the two major constituencies of each center, i.e. service users and staff. The managers’ perspectives were captured in individual interviews. Outcomes of each process will be presented in the analysis section of Chapter 5.
At present, 31 permanent residents live in the Alpha center and are assisted by 34 members of staff, a number of international volunteers and 26 community employment scheme workers. Its service includes a respite service with 6 places. Recently, the building has been extended by 10 individual units, which allows residents to live in their own flats that have a bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom. If assistance is required, it is provided by care staff of the main building.

All members of the center got individual written invitations to participate as well as an outline of the workshop format, purpose and questions. Among the members of the local steering group, it was agreed to hold separate meetings on the first two days and then complete the project with a large-group event where all stakeholder groups would meet and share their discussions and learning with the other groups. The manager deliberately opted not to be part of any of the group sessions. The group also agreed to a strong confidentiality, i.e. nothing discussed in the groups would be discussed outside unless the group itself decided to do so. This was as to provide psychological safety for all people involved and to encourage them to speak up as freely as possible.

**Alpha Staff**

According to the 15 members of staff who attended both workshop sessions, they didn’t have any prior experience of formally meeting as a group. Expectations were “to hear other opinions and views” as well as “to learn about the project in order to improve things”.

In terms of what people appreciate about their center and their work, people referred to the friendly atmosphere, opportunities to learn and good teamwork with colleagues. Regarding the relationship with residents, staff experienced a climate of trust and closeness between
residents and staff: “Residents come first. You quickly develop the ability to read the resident’s mind”. The relationship between staff and manager was appreciative with regard to his flexibility in allowing staff to organize their workload and rostering fairly autonomously. However, while acknowledging his enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit, staff questioned his ability to listen: “He talks a lot, but you never know, whether he really listens. You have to make him sit down and he might listen to you”.

Communications among staff, i.e. care workers, nurses, drivers, kitchen workers, as well as between staff and manager was considered a priority in terms of opportunities for improvement. As there had not been a formal meeting culture, regular meetings were suggested. Dissatisfaction was expressed with regard to informal meetings held by the manager, where agreed next steps were rarely followed through. It was agreed to set up a meeting with the manager to discuss these issues.

Workload and quality of service were critically discussed in the light of current staffing levels. Some staff experienced what they called “the guilt trap”, i.e. to go home on time or according to schedule, knowing that there is more work to be done. For example, in the respite service, staffing levels determine the quality of life of respite residents, as it is the rostering that determines when residents have to get up and go to bed at night: “Everybody in respite has to be in bed by 9pm. That’s when the shift ends.” The specific issues of the respite unit should be addressed in the meeting with the manager.

Induction of new staff was considered crucial for the service delivery, but there was no policy or procedure in place apart from an informal ‘training on the job’, i.e. learning by doing or shadowing more experienced members of staff.

Finally, staff expressed a curiosity and urgency to meet the residents in order to listen to their issues and to get feedback on the staff’s issues.
Reflection

At the beginning of the first session, there was a certain feeling of shyness or even intimidation at the beginning as people said they were not familiar with speaking up in large group. However, the appreciative question seemed to have allowed people to become part of the conversation in a non-threatening manner. Issues about the respite service somewhat dominated the session but allowed to switch from talking nice into a talking tough mode. It was then possible to talk more openly about the 'real' issues elsewhere. Both sessions depended very much on my input at the beginning. People had to familiarize themselves with the concept of the workshop as well as the questions. So not surprisingly, the conversation was rather between facilitator and staff member and I got the impression this was to double-check whether a statement was "right" in terms of the question. This took probably 2/3 of the workshop until people started referring to each other and I had less and less airtime. This was not a smooth process but rather a radical shift from "checking with the facilitator" to "talking to each other".

The second meeting was more concise and productive as people now felt safe enough to speak up. In terms of conversational space, safety issues dominated the session. However, the main issue behind that turned out to be a critical view on communication in the center as well as management style issues. In terms of next steps, a staff member volunteered to set up a meeting with the manager to discuss the topics in more detail. Finally, it was agreed to change the format for the third day as to meet with residents as soon as possible, even if that meant for the manager not to participate.

Alpha Residents

Having introduced the workshop format, and myself the question for their expectation was responded to with a long moment of silence. The mood seemed to be apathy and a certain degree of suspicion towards the facilitator and the overall exercise. When I repeated the question, a resident replied, "We don't have expectations that things here will ever change. Because we have seen lots of people like you coming in, and nothing has ever changed". In their view, projects were never followed through to a tangible or visible result to them. My job was (re-)defined by participants as "to convince us why this project is different and worthwhile". People pointed to their individuality ("We are all individuals") and that the common denomination of wheelchair users and Omega residents does not make them group or even necessarily friends. Relations between residents were considered very limited as institutionalization results in a general apathy and disinterest.

In terms of service quality, one resident pointed to the limited choice and possibility for critique: "There are things that you would not accept outside this home, but have to accept because you are in this home." For example, the quality and variety of meals were causing
dissatisfaction. “We know exactly what we get on Thursdays, Fridays and so on.” The role of staff in service provision was critically discussed as residents identified a lack of awareness: “Staff do not have an awareness of the needs of residents. It’s about their schedule, not our needs.” In this context, residents voiced the urgency to meet with staff “in order to see their points and having them listening to ours”.

At the same time, dependency of residents on staff limits the possibility for critical feedback on the service provision: “You lose your confidence in a wheelchair.” Moreover, fear of being sanctioned for critique does not allow people to voice their dissatisfaction and points to a fundamental dilemma: “You don’t rock the boat with the people that you rely on”. Exemplifying the dependency with personal stories, we explored what the dilemma means in practice. To criticize for example a certain way of lifting or washing is translated by staff members as a personal attack and the person who voices these concerns does fear subtle ways of “special attention” that cannot be sanctioned as they are beyond any possibility to criticize or even sanction. This pointed to a second loop of dilemma: Voicing concerns results in fear or dissatisfaction that cannot be discussed with the manager for the very same reason.

Some residents expressed dissatisfaction and lack of attention for long-term residents since the respite service opened. In their view, the respite unit was “the manager’s new toy” that attracted all his attentions and he consequently allocated main resources to start up that service. In general, the ability of the manager to listen was described as unsatisfactory, as “he does not listen to us, he is too busy. He meets you in the corridor, but he doesn’t listen”. A regular meeting with the manager was suggested, as he was considered trustworthy to deal with concerns: “If you could change one thing, a regular meeting with management would be it. Then the project would have been worthwhile for us”.

Reflection

Meeting with residents in Alpha center was my first intense encounter with a group of people with disabilities. The most prominent topic was the awareness and the ability of staff and management to listen to residents and their needs. It turned out that institutionalization results in a fundamental dilemma: Vulnerability, dependency and fear hinder people to give critical feedback on the quality of the service provision. The rather tough start of the conversation made this dilemma very tangible to me. I was very thankful that despite their suspicion residents involved me in their critical reflection of their fundamental dilemma while not pointing to individual cases. But to discuss the dilemma at an abstract level seemed to have been a first step. The fact that residents felt safe enough to share their situation with me could be seen as a ‘proof of concept’ of both, the workshop format as well as certain aspects of responsiveness.
Alpha residents and staff

Both staff and residents had expressed the urgency to meet with the other group as they felt the project was a good opportunity to meet outside the day-to-day business. Independently, I was approached by staff and resident representatives to set up the meeting. The manager did agree to hold such a meeting but opted deliberately not to participate. Residents and staff would set the agenda on the day, as they would bring topics and questions to the meeting. There had not been a meeting in such a format before in the center. On the day, 14 residents and 12 members of staff attended who had participated in the two previous sessions.

A staff member started off with asking whether there was a gender issue in terms of provision of care. In the discussion that followed, both groups realized that female residents have the option of being served by female staff whereas male residents have to accept to be assisted by female staff if not enough male staff is on duty. As there were only four male care workers on the pay role, no immediate action step could be identified. Awareness, however, was increased by the discussion.

Lifting and handling, put on the agenda by residents, were discussed very intensely. Whereas some staff used the hoist according to health and safety requirements, some staff deliberately refused to use it as using it would slow down their work. On the other hand, some residents refused to be lifted using the hoist as it meant total exposure, dependency and insecurity in their view. It was agreed that a general lifting policy should be developed, discussed and implemented.

Some weeks after this meeting, a member of staff approached the Department of Health directly to address the issue without consulting or informing the manager and the foundation. This obviously caused some major dissatisfaction in the center between all people involved. The main critique was that the issue came out in a forum with an orientation to mutual understanding, but it was brought into public in a confrontational manner.

Both groups pointed to the need to improve communication by setting up semi-regular meetings that might have some socializing aspect but should not be limited to that. Especially in terms of relations between the groups, some very important statements were made in this forum: A staff member expressed her commitment for the residents: “You are an extended part of my family.” A resident replied in saying “We really appreciate the work that you do and we know about the challenges that you have”.

The fundamental dilemma discussed in the two previous sessions was brought forward by residents: The fact that residents do not dare to criticize individual members of staff regarding quality of service in general, and quality of care in particular. Moreover, one resident pointed to the lack of awareness by staff: “You can go home after your shift, we live in this place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.” Staff reacted somewhat surprised but also acknowledged that the dilemma might have been a blind spot in their perception. They had always thought that trust
and – in their view – friendship were the basis of their relationship to residents. Or, as one staff member put it: “It was disturbing but very helpful to hear about this issue from residents directly outside daily business.”

Reflection

First of all, ownership of the process and the meeting was with staff and residents. The need to meet for the first time in such a format was reflected in the urgency to set up such a meeting.

Secondly, the mode in which the conversation took place was one of openness and willingness to listen. Even though very controversial issues were discussed, people stayed in a mode of mutual understanding.

Thirdly, the most prominent issue became the usage of the hoist. It was alongside this content issue that the fundamental dilemma could be exemplified and discussed in safe environment without any immediate threat to a particular resident. To voice the fundamental dilemma in terms of not being able to criticize staff for their provision of care due to dependency was crucial as it was the first time that staff had heard about this issue. Their understanding so far had been, that they had developed the ability to “read a residents mind”. It was through this meeting that staff realized some blind spots in their mental model and pointed to the need of still asking questions – even “if you think you know someone”.

Finally, in order to improve communication within and between the different constituencies of the center, the need to have more arenas for conversation was expressed. It was agreed that this meeting should be seen as a starting point to develop a new culture of communication in the center. Staff and residents agreed that the manager should be included in any new forum to be established.

Beta center

At present, 34 residents live in the Beta center and are assisted by about 35 members of staff, including a number of international volunteers. Beta center provides a residential care service with 25 residents and an independent living service with 10 tenants (Gamma center).

In preliminary meetings with a local steering group, it was agreed to have separate meetings with the different constituencies of the center on the first two days and to have a large group event on the third day, which would include the independent living tenants. All members of the centers got written invitations. In all groups, strong confidentiality was agreed. The manager did not participate in any of the session. However, he addressed the questions in a semi-structured interview.
The design of the large group event, which will be outlined below, made it necessary to hold preparational meetings with the different groups. This was agreed as to ensure the large group process to be successful.

**Beta center main house staff**

26 members of staff met three times for LTL sessions. There had not been a formal meeting structure prior to the project other than semi-regular meetings with the service manager in a ‘management by exception’ mode.

In terms of appreciation, staff pointed to the Omega philosophy, a good team spirit among staff as well as good staff-residents relations: “95% of residents and staff are friends. We care about each other”. People show high commitment to their work in saying “This house becomes part of your life. I wouldn’t want to work elsewhere” and by the fact that “people give more time than they are paid for”. The good teamwork was exemplified by “sharing workload across functional roles and between the different departments of the house”.

In terms of opportunities, the staff shortage and the high workload resulted in difficulties to “act as a real team”. Staff questioned the quality and level of care that they could provide given the current staffing level. There was no induction policy or procedure in operation.

Operational issues such as clear roles and responsibilities as well as assignments of tasks were subject to an intense discussion: “We need more transparency and equality of the workload”. A formal hand-over from shift to shift was not in operation at the time, which caused misunderstandings and dissatisfaction within the staff team: “People on the late shift don’t know what’s on with a resident”. This should be provided by a senior member of staff that should coordinate and supervise the hand over process. Furthermore, additional workload due to sick-leaves should be organized better. To provide clarity around these issues was unanimously considered to be the head of care’s job.

Relations to residents were also discussed intensely: The need for care staff to be able to spend more ‘quality time’ with residents was pointed out and some competition for this quality time was expressed when care staff said: “Volunteers and others get the good bits, whereas we do the hard stuff”. On the same note, the difficulty to keep track and pass on status and changes in individual needs of residents was discussed. Staff also defined their role as to enable those who can to care for themselves, which reflects the Omega ideal of independence. However, the Omega philosophy was questioned as staff critically discussed the practicality of the Omega ethos of independence and choice: “We need a workable Omega philosophy.”

Improving facilities and level of service was discussed: quality, variety and flexibility of meals, en-suite accommodation for every resident, fully equipped intensive care unit, occupational and speech therapy, and finally better facilities for the last days of life were suggested. On the last point, staff suggested to have a specific area where residents could live
with their families during their last days of life in a hospice-type of environment which staff thought would provide room for “the dignity that people deserve”.

Overall, the most prominent issue was to provide better opportunities and arenas for discussion within and among staff. Such a forum was urgently needed as “We need a support system to sort things on a regular basis before they grow big.” It was agreed to discuss this with the service manager and to set up a forum for that purpose.

Finally, staff were very interested to have the third day together with the other groups of the house to share perspectives, appreciate differences and learn from each other. Staff was explicitly keen to meet the management committee members, as they perceived them as “being rather foreign and remote to this place”.

In preparation of the large group event, a short and concise session was held to discuss and agree on the items that staff would like to discuss with the other group on the day of the large group event: (a) set up an all-inclusive forum/procedure to solve re-occurring in-house issues; (b) define a practical, working philosophy of Beta center; (c) facilitate activities outside the house; (d) design an information system/procedure to keep everybody “in the information loop”; (e) provide a formal induction in terms of disability awareness and medication involving residents; (f) involve families and relatives of residents more; (g) provide better facilities for last days of life; and (h) have a chill-out/respite house by the sea or a lake.
Reflection

The first session was dominated by a very intense discussion about frustrations and exhaustion within the staff team which resulted in an inability or unwillingness to be open to the questions asked by the facilitator: “We are overworked, everybody is exhausted. There is little to appreciate at the moment”. A highly emotional debate started off regarding unequal workloads between different departments and team members. Moreover, the workload was discussed with its implication on the quality of service: “We would like to have more quality time with residents”. The high turnout combined with high emotions showed that there was a lot of anger and dissatisfaction that people had “to get off their chest” before entering the LTL process. The fact that the head of care walked out was not commented by any of the other participants. The discussion continued as if nothing had happened. When asked why she walked out in a conversation later that day, she said, “I am not prepared to serve as the scapegoat of this place!” She had even considered resigning after the session as she felt being treated unfairly by her staff.

It was only on the second day that the initial workshop format could be addressed. The general mode and atmosphere was very positive and constructive; the head of care did attend the meeting after a short discussion with the facilitator in which she pointed to the responsibility of the facilitator not to allow staff to use her as a scapegoat. People realized the usefulness of this type of meetings and that the project itself cannot solve the detailed problems but provides a forum to identify and discuss issues of relevance. The project itself could not be more than “a starting point in that regard”. Key to the quality of the conversation of this session was the mutual appreciation that was expressed by the head of care for her staff, which was reciprocated by individual members of staff. This necessary hygiene factor was crucial for the process on that day to move forward.

The additional session was conducted in a very structured, outcome oriented and, hence, directive mode so that the conversational mode was rather a friendly debate mode.

Beta center main house residents

15 residents attended the workshops. The discussion of the appropriate mode of confidentiality was already subject to a lively debate: “Confidentiality in this house is impossible! Why should we trust you?” Pursuing the issue of confidentiality in more detail, it turned out that residents didn’t trust staff, were concerned about their privacy in the center and were suspicious with regard to the project and its ‘hidden agenda’. The most prominent issue was trust: “Can we trust the staff?” Apart from recent insecurity due to some thefts in the home, people did not feel safe enough to discuss this with staff themselves. It was then no surprise that the only appreciative statement that was voiced was “Staff works hard.” Encouraging residents to point to some other appreciative aspects of their home did not succeed.
In terms of opportunities, residents pointed to the lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities: “There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians. Passing the book is an everyday occurrence”. Moreover, residents were dissatisfied with the quality of service reflected by staff priorities: “Staff duties go before residents’ needs”. “The roster determines when you have to get up and when you have to go to bed at night. That cannot be right, if this is really our home!”

While residents acknowledged the workload and staff shortage, they didn’t accept this an “always being used as an excuse”. Even worse, “residents even get blamed for the staff shortage”. The consequence of staff shortage is a decreasing quality of service and quality of life for residents. There doesn’t seem to be the time and/or the willingness for social or individual outings: “There was a time when we went to the pub, the park to the city, but why has this changed?”

Quality of meal was a major issue in terms of quality of service. Residents asked for a higher variety, flexibility and creativity in terms of food: “There should be more alternative dishes and you should know beforehand so that you can choose what you like”. Overall, the quality of the food as well as the working routines around meals were criticized as not being “responsive to the needs of residents”. Staff was considered to very dogmatic about this issue. “They won’t listen, even if you give feedback. There is patronizing, demeaning attitude – in fairness, on both sides.” Fear of sanctions was considered key to the lack of understanding and feedback on the meal quality: “You don’t speak up, as you get put down if you do so.”

It was agreed that the food issue should be dealt with outside the Learning through listening process. During the meeting even, a volunteer checked with the manager who immediately agreed to call a meeting with kitchen staff and residents to look into the issue. – The outcome of that meeting was an agreed procedure a) to have increased meal variety, b) a menu that people can choose from and c) a procedure to check whether everyone had lunch implemented. It seemed to have been a satisfactory response to residents as well as staff.

In an additional session to prepare for the group event, residents discussed in a very relaxed atmosphere the items they would like to share and discuss with the other groups on the joint day III. The items that were agreed to put forward were: (a) improve communication with staff; (b) facilitate more individual and group outings; (c) increase flexibility in terms of getting up and going to bed; (d) giving your opinion without being considered being offensive; (e) giving feedback or making suggestions; (f) knowing a resident’s preferences; (g) inducting new staff (incl. volunteers) appropriately; (h) pass on the knowledge about individual preferences; and (i) Have more residents/staff-meetings to raise and address issues.
Reflection

The general mood was mistrust and dissatisfaction of the quality of service. But there was also suspicion with regard to the 'hidden agenda' of the project. "How can we know that you do not pass on information to the foundation?" As we could not agree on any mode of confidentiality, some people did not feel safe enough to speak up as they told me afterwards. However, even though the workshop format had to be changed, the conversational setting itself seemed to have provided residents with a space where they could voice at least their concerns around the issues of trust, privacy and confidentiality. When asked why they could not discuss the service quality with staff, residents replied that "if you cannot trust, and everything is a big deal, how can you then seriously discuss these things with people that don't have enough time and the right attitude to talk to you anyway?" In terms of conversational mode, the sessions were in an adverse, confrontational debate mode whereby my role was mainly to listen and to understand their concerns in the larger context of the project and the center.

The fundamental dilemma occurred again. This time it manifested itself on issue around food. In broader terms, the food issue can be considered an example for the structural dilemma that residents face in the house. To give feedback is considered as "rocking the boat by eccentrics" and a non-conform behavior, because "you ask for more that you already get". The manager provided an immediate response in setting up a group that would look into the issue and thereby limited the immediate pressure. However, the underlying dilemma has not been addressed as yet.

Beta center Management Committee

With the 8 members of the local management committee, two sessions were held. In terms of appreciation, the MC mentioned the "good partnership between all groups in the house" and "the good balance of independence and responsibility".

In terms of opportunities, a review of the Omega philosophy, a procedure to regularly review the service within the house was suggested. In terms of service quality, new technologies with regard to speech facilitation, development of the facilities (en-suite accommodation), staffing situation (especially staffing level, recruiting, retention and wages) were discussed. At the time of the project, a high staff turn-over and a very slow recruiting process due to the overall labor-market situation was a key concern for the MC. Team building efforts as well as promoting social events within and across the groups in the house needed to be developed. Better communication, interface and relation with the foundation were required as well as improved PR by the foundation. Finally, MC members reflected on their role within the center: "What can we do as the MC? What do the other groups expect us to do?"

When discussing opportunities in terms of strategic development of the service, MC members pointed to the overall goal of residents to be encouraged and facilitated to live and
work more independently. With regard to the independence of Beta center, the MC members were very clear that in their view, main building would remain the parent building of Beta center. Individuality and privacy should be improved by providing an individual room for each resident as well as the facilities that go with that (e.g. phone). Management committee agreed to make the meeting minutes of their meetings public so that everyone in the house can see what is/was on the agenda. In addition, a leaflet should introduce the function as well as the members of the MC to new residents. Their future role was suggested as “being close enough to care and detached enough to provide objectivity”. Moreover, the offered to act as independent advocates for “issues that cannot be resolved within the normal problem solving routines”.

Reflection

There was a very business like meeting mode as most members of the MC had a business background. They were obviously familiar with different meeting techniques. The overall mode was a friendly brainstorming session for which in their own view the regular sessions do not provide the space for – a fact that was acknowledged by all members. However, the residents’ representatives remained silent throughout the entire session and were never asked to comment on any of the topics. Moreover, the meeting included discussions about residents while some of them were present in the room.

Beta center large group event

In a preliminary meeting of the local steering group, the goal of the joint session on day three was defined as to complete the Learning through listening project as well as to start off a follow on process by inviting all members of the Beta and Gamma centers. Each stakeholder group would identify common items and next steps. The emphasis would be on listening and sharing rather than decision. The items brought to the meeting by the different groups would set the agenda. In order to prioritize them, the following voting process was agreed. When entering the room, participants would be given time to explore the different items presented to them on flipcharts and a representative of each group would be available to explain each item if questions were asked. Then as each person would have five votes (represented by colored stickers) he or she would then be given the opportunity to express his or her preference and priority on what should be addressed in the plenary session by voting for one item. Votes for your own group were limited to one vote respectively. A group comprised of representatives of each group as well as the facilitator clustered the results and so the final agenda for the plenary session was set.

Communication

The staff report book which staff used to write down relevant information for other staff members in different shifts was agreed to be open to each resident to see what was written about
him or her. Questioning the procedure of having a staff report book reflected the degree of mistrust from residents toward staff.

The lack of information flow within and across the constituencies of the house was criticized. Decisions and discussion results, even those of informal staff meetings should be made available to residents. In terms of social outings and activities, was suggested to have a Beta message book in the entrance hall.

Giving everybody a voice and making sure that information is passed on was of major concern to all stakeholder groups. Regular house meetings were suggested. But staff would have separate meetings first in order to develop the necessary skills to participate in such meetings.

*Training and induction*

Because of the very personal and intimate nature of care service provided by staff, induction was considered key to the onboarding of any new member of staff. However, driven by insecurity some residents refused “to play guinea pig” for new staff members. Others used the opportunity to deliberately “train new staff to have it done their specific way”. In order to have enough figures to run a general induction course on lifting and handling it should be organized either in cooperation with other Omega houses or organized by the foundation. In the meantime, in order to allow for shadowing as well as to provide continual service for residents, a “balance of experience” should be reflected when staffing each shift. It was thought that the health and safety initiative of the foundation might be useful in terms of discussing and identifying new opportunities to induct new staff. A blind spot in this discussion was pointed out by the manager: He emphasized that induction can only be the first step in a larger learning and training program as well as career development policy of the center.

*Individual housing*

The goal of independent housing as suggested by Gamma tenants was “to be completely integrated in a ‘normal’ community” because disability should not be the common denomination regarding the choice of where to live. An increased freedom of choice was considered a mid-term goal for the Beta center in each of its services. The management committee promised to cooperate with the foundation on this item and to promote this idea in the next meeting.

*Individual needs and preferences; Outings and activities*

In general, residents pointed to the lack of sufficient outing and activities. They also wanted a balance between individual and group outings. In terms of becoming integrated in the local community, “you cannot go to the pub with an entire bunch of wheelchair users”. Residents acknowledged, “Staff have a right of their private life”. The idea of a ‘good-buddy club’ was suggested, i.e. to attract people from the local community who are interested and willing to go to outings with residents. The MC agreed to take both suggestions on the agenda of their next meeting.
Reflection

As the previous section shows, the focus was on highly specific issues. Individual concerns that were voiced in a confrontational manner led to a defensive reaction by most participants. When staff replied very emotionally to the concerns voiced by one of the residents, residents no longer took part in the discussion. It was mainly amongst staff that the issues were discussed. It was very unfortunate that rather than talking to each other, staff talked about residents.

For such a large center with such diversity, it was an achievement to have for the first time everyone from the Beta center in one room. The group building effect was overshadowed by the controversy on individual issues. Interestingly, the conversation was started and maintained by residents who felt safe enough to speak up. But when they felt that staff put one of them down, they no longer participated in the conversation.

In a debrief meeting with the local steering group, the benefits and concerns of this session were discussed. The good turnout, good set up of the room, clarity of flipcharts on the walls, informal atmosphere, availability of all sheets on A4 format were welcomed. The explicit confidentiality agreement allowed people to speak up and people were prepared to listen. It was difficult for most staff and the manager to remain silent or to listen. People might not have said what they really thought. The manager considered the exercise a missed opportunity to voice concerns in public as people were on the defensive and there was active participation only by people with good verbal abilities. Rather than visioning the future, the discussion got stuck in present operational issues. Many of the items and good suggestions of the previous sessions were not all followed up. And finally, the participation of residents changed significantly, they backed out when a member of staff put one of them down.

Delta center

At present, 32 residents live in the Delta center and are assisted by 33 members of staff. The new manager of the center had just started two months before the first workshop took place. She welcomed the exercise and considered the project an excellent opportunity to get to know the house and also to set the tone for her work. In a preliminary meeting with herself and the head of care, it was decided to hold joint sessions from the very beginning. Everyone in the house was invited by several public announcements to attend, and throughout the project the turnout was very high as the manager organized relief workers to cover the floor for staff attending the meetings. The manager herself took part in all sessions that were held. In this all-inclusive approach weak confidentiality was agreed. We spread the three questions over the three joint sessions. After the project, the manager asked me to provide a synopsis of the items discussed. The previous manager had been in the house for over 25 years and had run the house
as an institution. Artifacts of that are the uniforms that had to be worn by nurses, but not by care workers. There had not been any structure or culture of meetings within and between the different departments of the house.

Joint session on question I

In general, both staff and residents appreciate the mood of the house and the fact that there are good opportunities to communicate and have a chat. Especially residents pointed to the relevance of the occasional chat: "There are always people to talk to." In terms of quality of care, residents appreciate the specialized care provided by staff that could not be provided elsewhere. Residents consider safety and security as the key features of the Omega home that should not be jeopardized by any changes. In terms of solving conflicts, residents and staff mentioned that now "there is the possibility to clear the air if necessary. And that in itself shows you mutual respect."

The refurbishment and development of the new activities room with bright colors and lights everywhere was considered a reflection of the changes that took place after the change of management. Residents mentioned the increased opportunities for self-development due to the activities room and the occupational therapist. As one resident put it: "You have now the freedom to develop your own talents. I have started painting and discovered my love for art. "Mutual trust has been developing according to participants. Residents as well as staff feel included in the activities and changes in the house.

With regard to staff-manager-relations, the new manager is considered very cooperative and open: "You can always go to her and ask for advice or help, that was not possible under the old regime. There is no harm in feeling stupid anymore". The manager explicitly appreciated explicitly the "fantastic work" of her staff team. Staff were more relaxed rather than being on the run and being observed as under the old regime. This was a quality of relations that can be passed on to residents. The new manager took different views into account so that staff realized that their opinions and suggestions were considered, and staff therefore felt they were listened to. The change in management style was reflected in a significant decrease of staff turnover.

The changes that have been taking place under the new manager are considered necessary by both staff and residents alike. One resident put it: "We have to move in order not to be left behind. We were standing still for so long." "Changes give us additional freedom, we have more choice and control of our life, for example the evening classes."

However, the downside of changes in terms of threatening routines and feelings of safety were discussed: "On the one hand, changes mean fear, and risk, and cause resentment. So change can make you feel insecure, especially when you feel vulnerable as most of us do." As one resident put it "the best way of dealing with this fear of change is communication and involvement. Show us the consequences of changing and those of not changing. Then people
get a good feeling of the pace of change, and that they are part of.” Residents as well as staff should be “involved in the decision making processes of the house”. Therefore, it was agreed that the management meeting minutes would be made public.

**Reflection**

As one would expect from an all-inclusive meeting, people were rather cautious about their statements. The appreciative character of the question allowed people to take part in the conversation in a non-threatening mode. It was also an important political meeting for the manager as she got the opportunity to set the tone for her work in public.

However, the comparison between the old and new management style was openly discussed while people tried to do justice to the old manager as well as the new one. However, there was a clear preference for the new management style. At the beginning, I had to work hard to make people talk. Interestingly the residents were much more relaxed in talking openly in front of staff and manager.

As there had never been a meeting structure or culture outside the formal governance structure, neither residents nor staff were familiar with this format of conversational setting. Therefore, most people were more curious than suspicious. The format seemed to work well for them. It was a very interesting and inspiring session as people were very aware of the impact of changes that might happen. It was a very good discussion with several pockets of dialogue.

**Joint sessions on questions II and III**

With regard to improvements, transport facilities were discussed as they allow residents to make contacts outside the center. Not the number of vehicles, but the shortage of drivers was identified as the bottleneck in that regard. Especially at weekends, it seemed to be difficult to find qualified drivers. On the same note, late outings were restricted due to the rostering, as assistance to be brought to bed was not available for late returns from outings. Residents expressed the need for more social activities at weekends, both within and outside the center. Given the restrictions above, staff saw their role as to encourage people to go out and take responsibility. One resident pointed to the disadvantage of a naïve independence approach: “If you take the independence approach wrong, and people are not up to it, that leads to aggression and frustration that then has to be dealt with.”

Residents felt that relations amongst residents should be improved in general, but especially with regard to respite guests. They should be actively introduced and included in the social routines of the center.
In terms of staff-residents relations, it was pointed out that patience and time to listen was key for residents. Especially the interaction with people with speech impairments might take more time, but for them the few conversations that they might have during a day are key to their social well-being: “People with speech impairments like myself, get frustrated when people aren’t patient, don’t have the time to listen.” It is not so much technical devices that would make a difference than the attitude with which staff approaches residents. Patience was also considered crucial in terms of knowing residents needs and tracking changes in that regard: “How do you know who wants what? You have to keep asking, even if you think you know someone really well.”

Staff pointed to the relation of workload and staffing level. Given that no more funding for additional staff is available, effectiveness especially for care staff was considered key to cope with the overall workload. That is, especially in the mornings the focus has to be on the physical side of care. Unfortunately, there is no time for any decent social interaction, i.e. to spend quality time with residents in the mornings.

In terms of residents-staff relations, residents expressed the fear to speak up and to give honest, i.e. critical feedback on different aspects of care and service provision. “I am afraid of asking for something, because staff turn you down. So you don’t ask.” Residents explained that they had an unwritten code amongst themselves: “Don’t ask, you will be turned down.” and “You know exactly whom you can trust in staff if you are asking for something.” Staff was surprised to hear this but also pointed to the difficulty to know about this: “If residents don’t speak up, is it shyness or fear?” The manager made a strong statement that she would like to address the issue of fear in a separate process were residents and staff could discuss this issue in more detail and ways to work around it.

It was in the light of the issue of fear, that the lack of appropriate arenas for discussion were identified. There aren’t any arenas were fear or frustration of residents as well as staff could be addressed. But not all issues might be suitable for a public arena: “Do we have any arenas where issues can be threshed out before they grow big? Which issues are for the public sphere and which should be dealt with in private?” Residents suggested setting up semi-regular residents meetings.

On the same note, the issue of dealing with change was discussed. To make people aware of the risks and opportunities for change, involvement and transparent communication was suggested: “Talk to us about changes, let us know what’s going on and then you will see that insecurity and fear will be less frequent” said one resident. In that regard, a regular staff-residents meeting was suggested as to keep everyone informed.
Reflection

This part of the process was dominated by staff at the beginning. Residents joined in later with very valid contributions. People referred to this session as “heavy”, but very insightful. Staff in a very reflective and comprehensive mode dealt with the issue of fear. This set the tone for the rest of the conversation.

In my view it was the more outspoken residents that dominated at first sight, but staff were very considerate to involve the less outspoken people as well. When residents presented their feeling of fear, the conversation turned into a reflective mode again. Staff and manager didn’t react in a defensive but a comprehensive and reflective mode.

Epsilon center

At present, 30 residents live in the Epsilon center and are assisted by about 32 members of staff. Epsilon center is located in a rural area, four miles from the nearest town. It was run by a very strict regime, both at the managerial as well as the care level. The benevolent, paternalistic care model was justified by the high degree of dependency of most residents in the center.

The new manager who has a management background, had to face major resentments with staff and the management committee. Both the head of the management committee as well as the head of care resigned due to complaints by residents only made public when the new manager came in. For the new manager, the project was a good opportunity to re-establish a working relationship with staff. In a preliminary meeting, the manager and the head of care agreed to hold separate meetings and to opt for a ‘weak confidentiality’ mode to share views already in the separate sessions. The management committee was invited to take part in the process but was excluded as no timely response by any members was given. The third day would be held as an all-inclusive session with all participants of the project.

Epsilon Staff

Staff appreciated the very friendly and co-operative atmosphere within the staff team. Work with residents was described as enjoyable, “at least with 90% of them”. Staff acknowledged the high bond with residents, as residents care about staff and their families. The refurbished center is considered a convenient and pleasant workplace. The private life of staff is recognized in the rostering processes. The new manager is appreciated for dealing with the unfair level of wages in the center.

The relationship between the foundation and the local centers was subject to a lively debate in terms of philosophy, standards and reputation. According to staff, the foundation
considers the performance and quality of service in the rural areas as being inferior to the urban centers: “The Urban houses are the flagships, and we are just the old ships.”

Staff also questioned the implementation of general rules and standards of care without taking into account the local needs, skills and expertise. Differences of resident population as well as staff qualification should be acknowledged before setting general standards. Staff pointed to the different service provision of the center on a scale from independent living to high care needs. Moreover, progressive illnesses add to the complexity of service and care provision. The role of Head Office was considered ambiguously: “When does the foundation provide helpful advice and when is it just bullying?” Within the center, rules and standards set by the foundation and operational procedures defined by the manager have to be enforced and implemented by staff on the floor that feel left alone with that task.

The Omega philosophy in general and the notion of independence was critically discussed as staff considered the philosophy somewhat biased towards residents: “You cannot encourage people to take independence, but leave out the responsibility that goes with that.” Clarity of the nature of the service provided was required: The overall purpose according to staff is that “This is not a hostel. Omega homes are houses of care.” Moreover, the ideal of independence conflicts with staff responsibility in general and a certain professional ethos of nurses and care workers in particular: “Look at our population. They are highly dependent. This is a mini-hospital. Then it should be run that way.” Health care professionals, not former administrators should then also run it. For most participants, especially those with a nursing training “the philosophy of Omega is clearly conflicting with the philosophy and ethos of nursing”. For example, a resident with a progressive illness that is told that he or she is still independent does not understand that her conditions mean a reduction of that independence and an increased dependence and responsibility from staff. “When food is prepared according to swallowing conditions and it is refused, feeding is necessary – even if the resident might not like that.” The complaints that might result from such an incident are perceived by staff as being treated unfairly: “We have responsibility without being able to make decisions”. The role of the foundation was of particular interest as one member of staff said: “Why are you here and not the CEO? If he is not listening to us, this is a total waste of time!”

A “clash of cultures of care” is perceived when residents from another Omega home with a different approach are transferred to Epsilon: “They have to learn how care is done here.” In terms of keeping track with changing conditions of a resident, especially those with progressive illnesses a regular case conference was suggested. Staff training with regard to care and nursing skills as well as a better induction to new staff should be provided. During the recent refurbishment, staff felt left out without having the opportunity to contribute and to make suggestions. This reflected in their view a general attitude not to take staff’s view on board when making decisions.
Two issues reflected a general mood of mistrust between staff and manager. Firstly, the new lifting and handling instructor was considered an agent of the foundation in order to conduct a time and motion study. The fact that staff were not informed and that the training went far beyond lifting: “This is about implementing a holistic care plan. That’s fine, but why did nobody tell us?” Secondly, a new CCTV had been installed throughout the center for security reasons. However, the positions of the video cameras caused suspicion amongst staff to be controlled and monitored, especially at night. “You just feel uncomfortable being monitored by these cameras, especially during night shift. We don’t know what happens to these tapes?” When discussing both issues, staff concluded that the manager does not trust his staff and that he wants to control everyone. Staff assumed a coalition between the manager and the residents against staff. The manager is considered of treating staff unfairly, “he even called us anarchists one day.”

With regard to plausibility, we discussed the video issue twice: Once under the assumption that it serves a controlling purpose, and a second time under the assumption that it was installed for security reasons. Staff concluded, that despite the fact that it could be used for monitoring purposes, security seems to be more plausible. At the end of that discussion the designated head of care said: “Well, maybe I am totally paranoid.” – After the session, she went to see the manager and asked him whether they could not start all over again.

Reflection

The discussion was dominated by the difficulty to combine the Omega philosophy with the ethos of nursing as well as the mistrust between staff and management. In terms of conversational mode, due to the frustration and anger, talking tough was the most preferred mode. A reflective episode occurred when critically discussing the CCTV under two hypotheses. Despite the rather negative mode of the sessions, people were keen on having a joint session sooner rather than later to reestablish a decent way of communicating with each other.

Epsilon Residents

Residents appreciate the house in general, the food and the “good staff who are very kind and thoughtful”. “This is my home,” said one resident. Some residents see it also as a stepping-stone: “It’s the safety of this place, but also the possibility to move on from here.” Staff and management attempt to provide “freedom of choice, but in the end, it requires a lot of self-organization and a lot of your own will to decide”.

In terms of opportunities, transport facilities should be improved, as it would allow more spontaneous social and individual outings. The rare social outings limit the freedom of choice significantly. Transport facilities are not the goal but the means for increasing freedom of choice. Moreover, in terms of personal development, staff should “raise the awareness of the
potential for independence of an individual. You should be more encouraged to get out rather than saying ‘stay at home’.” This also reflects the difficulties to overcome the routines and attitudes from the patronizing old regime. It is not only the workload that creates stress, which should not be passed on to residents. Moreover, they see an urgent need for a change in attitudes of staff in that regard: “They shouldn’t make a big deal about small things.” Residents also criticize the fact that during staff dinner the corridors are not covered.

The possibility for critical feedback is limited by the structural power that staff might exert: “You can’t complain without people getting back at you in more or less subtle ways”. In that regard, a transparent and fair complaint procedure for both sides should be established. Prior to such a formal procedure, residents would welcome a regular staff-residents meeting so that issues could be sorted “before they get nasty”. Residents would like to see a higher involvement in decision-making. A very telling example was the management committee’s decisions that residents should wear name badges. As one resident put it: ”Would you wear name badges in your own house?” Reflecting on all the items discussed, the usefulness of an open discussion was acknowledged so that residents suggested having a regular meeting with staff, residents and manager.

**Reflection**

*The major point in the conversation was the question of independence: Do staff realize their responsibility in encouraging and supporting people? There was no talking nice other than what one could expect regarding the appreciative mode. People were immediately willing to outline issues important to them and discuss them. A few very outspoken people dominated the conversation without referring to each other. People were mainly talking to me than talking to each other. When it came to describing the dilemma, a very controversial but reflective conversation took place. People started referring to each other and building on each other’s arguments.*

**Epsilon Joint session**

The room was set up with flipchart that summarized the results of the discussions in the different groups. People were given time to study these, and the facilitator talked people through these charts at the beginning of the session.

When revisiting the results of the discussion in the different groups, some common ground was found in several areas: “How can we deal with things constructively, as fighting is not the right option as we all know?” and “How can we deal with issues inside the house rather than asking others to solve our problems?” Both staff and residents pointed to an improved involvement of their views and voices when it comes to decision-making. Transport facilities were agreed to be an issue, but staff pointed to the implications for not only getting cars and
drivers but also look at the implications for staff that are required to assist residents. The tension between staff responsibility and residents’ freedom of choice was discussed. The induction program should be finalized and then implemented. Staff and residents questioned the purpose of so-called care plans. In terms of staffing levels, the manager pointed to the difficulty to define the ‘right’ staffing level, as needs and requirements change with residents conditions as well as the population in the house. All these items were agreed with more or less consensus.

The most interesting discussion took place when one resident claimed to have an increased flexibility of meal times. Whereas the immediate reaction by kitchen staff and the manager was defensive, it was the designated head of care who made a suggestion that found the approval of all participants “Why don’t we set up an all inclusive committee that can look into the issue?” Moreover, she suggested and it was agreed that this format might be the appropriate way of dealing with future problems as well.

Feedback on the project was provided as well. “It’s good being listened to.” Said one resident. “The project was too short, it needs more time and continuity. It will be forgotten soon.” “We should have this more often, for example once a year.” “The project was a catalyst, a point to start from.”

Reflection

The session was dominated by one very courageous and outspoken resident who did not hesitate to talk tough. Other than that most staff and residents remained in talking nice mode. The manager attempted to balance the controversies. The most interesting point was the suggestion to test an all-inclusive mode of problem solving with flexibility of meal times as a template for future problems.

Zeta center

At present, 28 residents live in the Zeta center and are assisted by about 57 members of staff. The manager who had started his job 18 months prior to the beginning of the project had started several initiatives and changes in the center with regard to service and care provision, staff training and service user development. As there had not been a meeting structure or culture, he saw the project as a welcomed exercise that would complement her change efforts. In a preliminary meeting, the manager suggested to hold two separate sessions with residents and staff, one session with herself and the management committee and a final joint session with all groups. We agreed strong confidentiality as to provide the psychological safety in all sessions.
Zeta Staff

Staff appreciate the very informal, non-institutional atmosphere of the center. In terms of problem solving, there seems to be the possibility to clarify things, "things don't roll over". Staff support each other in an informal way as people see when help is needed beyond the boundaries of departments. The aspiration of staff was captured by one staff member as "be aware to be available". Staff claim a high awareness for residents needs, as "Listening is crucial to our work."

There had not been training and staff development before the new manager took over. People were very satisfied with these exercises as "they open your mind regarding needs and also the entitlements of residents. It makes you see your daily work and routines in a different light". The lack of a formal induction and meeting structure is challenging for new staff members, as they have to find out themselves what is needed.

In terms of opportunities, the lack of an appropriate forum to discuss issues as well as the non-controversial culture in the center was identified: "People don't confront each other to keep a homely atmosphere". Moreover, there had neither been an atmosphere nor a culture of giving and receiving feedback. The staff meetings are mainly for operational issues only and have a more formal structure.

Departmental boundaries are still an issue. This is mainly due to the size of the center but also a lack of interest and appreciation of different roles and responsibilities in the centers. For example, the increasing social activities of residents with the requirements of care staff are lacking certain coordination. Understanding for the different perspectives might be increased by spending some time in a different department, especially during the time of induction.

The ability to identify and track the change in residents' needs is a huge challenge: "How can we be responsive to residents' needs without being patronizing?" Best intentions can lead to unintended outcomes, or as one staff member put it: "It's a thin line between taking care and taking over?" In terms of resident needs, "how can we pass on the basic background information of preferences to the different members of staff? You don't want to reinvent the wheel all the time on the one hand, but we don't want to become an institution either." For example, there is one resident who can communicate through winks only. "It takes a lot of time to find out about his preferences, his likes and dislikes. You have to ask the right questions. For example, we found out that he really likes raspberry yogurt for desert. But should we write this down, he will get raspberry yogurt for months then."

Staff responsibilities as well as residents safety on the one hand has to be balanced with encouraging residents to independence and make use of their freedom of choice on the other: "How do we know an individual's potential? You have to give him or her the freedom to make own mistakes". To track individual needs is probably best done in a 1:1 interaction, whereby
common issues and needs might best be done in a semi-regular staff-residents meeting that should be chaired by an independent person.

Staff acknowledged the necessity of changes but pointed also to the very challenging character of these interventions: “How can we learn and support each other in coping with the change that is necessary?” Moreover, involvement and transparency were considered key to keep everyone on board with regard to increasing number and areas that will change under the new manager: “Being informed reduces confusion and insecurity.”

The workload for care staff especially in the morning limits the time for a quality interaction with residents: “In the morning especially, the only thing that counts is to get everyone up. The focus is on the physical care only.” By discussing and developing the different needs of the different departments, people suggested to have a monthly staff meeting in order to discuss and coordinate items between the departments as well as to discuss general issues. From a broader perspective, it was acknowledged that communication in general could be improved: “We have to become better in terms of our communication skills but also in terms of using the right means such as notice boards and care diary.”

**Reflection**

People weren’t afraid at all to speak up. The discussion started easily as people referred immediately to each other’s points, so I had little airtime. At first the more senior members of staff spoke up and gave their view, which was then challenged by younger members of staff in a clear but polite way. People used “we” very often, e.g. we should think about. Very discursive, my role was limited to provide the questions. Politeness at the beginning, discussion from the younger members of staff and some reflective bits when identifying surprises within daily business.

Communication and coordination as well as involvement regarding changes dominated the conversation. People started checking-in with daily business and stories and then while revisiting last session’s summary identified patterns. It was easy enough for them to agree on and prioritize items they would like to share with the other groups. From the very beginning everybody in the room joined in. People also heard other’s difficulties and were surprised about many details they hadn’t heard of before.

**Zeta Residents**

Appreciating the informal, non-institutional mood of the center, residents pointed to the very balanced care and service approach of the new manager “People here are different and equal.” Independence is encouraged and reflected by statements such as “I can live my own life”. Many individual and social outings, the possibility for shopping or even to go on holidays
once a year are very much appreciated: “There is very good social life in this place”. The residents feel having a good link with the local community. Residents perceive the relations to staff as very good. The quality of care and service is highly appreciated. The new manager and the changes initiated by him have made a difference for many residents’ lives.

In terms of opportunities, the admission policy has been subject of concern. “There are certain reservations from permanent residents regarding quality of respite residents. Some people feel not safe.” “How is admission of respite guests decided upon? Why are we not involved in that decision?” It was agreed to find out admission policies of other Omega centers.

Residents also pointed to the necessity to improve relations among each other. A certain selfishness or egocentrism seems to develop in such an environment which has to be addressed in a non-threatening way. In terms of service quality, a higher variety and quality of meals would increase the residents’ quality of life.

Activities outside the house and during the week seem to be sufficient. At weekends, the activities room is not staffed, and it is also difficult to get drivers for weekends. Therefore, activities in- and outside the center at weekends should be improved.

**Reflection**

*People didn’t feel afraid to speak up. Most people who are able to speak spoke up and challenged each other’s points. At first the two residents’ representatives in the management committee dominated the conversation. But after a while people felt safe enough to speak up for themselves. I tried to ask people for their views on things.*

*Admission policy was the dominant point as people felt threatened at the time by one particular respite resident. But that allowed us to enter in a broader discussion around resident’s involvement in decision-making processes of the house.*

*Very high turnout didn’t allow sitting in a circle. People felt even happier to speak up than last time. Very hard to get started as people didn’t feel the need or didn’t want to express concerns or problems other than admission policy. A couple of questions were needed to make people think and talk. The two representatives were very dominant again, but nobody felt restricted by that. In the end a lot of people participated in the discussion.*

**Management committee**

The management committee wanted to participate in the process, but asked to limit their involvement to one preparational session and the final session.

A certain lack of understanding of disability within the management committee was identified that should be addressed through a disability awareness training for all MC members.
This would allow the MC members to better fulfill their role as educators and ambassadors outside the center, i.e. in the local community and beyond.

The management committee considers its role of providing advocacy for both residents and staff when issues cannot be resolved within the operational routines of the center. The MC would consider their role as advocates for the different constituencies of the center as their contribution to building a community in the center.

In terms of effective and efficient service provision and development of the service, the MC considers its role as monitoring and advising and providing expertise where it might be required (such as legal, financial etc.). The MC should also consult with other centers and other service providers to provide ideas for a future strategic development of the center.

In order to enhancing the role of ambassadors of the center, the local and wider community should get more involved. Fundraising and active networking should be complemented by social events in the center, such as an Art exhibition in the garden of the center over the summer.

The MC strives to enhance its understanding of its role within the Omega movement and ethos. However, the opportunities to learn from other centers and the Head Office are very limited to date. It was suggested to hold annual meeting between the Trustees of the foundation and the local management committees to exchange ideas and experiences. The managers’ meetings minutes should also be made available to the MC members. Finally, a meeting between the MC’s of the southern region with Head Office and Trustees was suggested in that regard.

**Reflection**

_This was the first facilitated session for the MC outside the monthly routine meetings. Expectations weren’t high at all. But people were very pleased how much depth of strategic thought MC members produced. They even decided to take the minutes of this session as an ongoing agenda for their work. The manager and the chairman started to speak up and set the tone. But after a while more members joined the discussion, which became a very inspired and reflective conversation in the end._

**Zeta Joint session**

The manager and myself clustered the items of the separate sessions in order to set the agenda for the joint session (agenda headings are set in italic below).

In terms of enhancing mutual understanding and advocacy, the need for an informal get together of all groups of the center was agreed. Moreover, a semi-regular meeting of residents, staff and management should be established. With regard to the admission of permanent and
respite residents, the manager offered to involve permanent residents in the admission process. The management committee offered to act as conduit and fair referee if questions cannot be resolved in the regular operational procedures of problem solving.

As to improve the effectiveness of the service, a formal hand-over meeting between the different shifts, especially from night to day staff and vice versa was agreed. On a similar note, as the increasing level of activities affect care duties, a better coordination process in terms of communicating planned activities of a resident to the care staff was agreed. In order to address the tension between the independent living model and the medical care model, a forum to discuss this in more detail should be set up.

As to support residents and staff with regard to changes, updates on planned changes in operations and service provision should be discussed and reflected in the suggested staff-residents meetings. This is to increase the awareness and involvement of all constituencies of the center. It should also provide a space to contribute relevant perspectives to the decision making process.

In order to discuss specific operational issues with regard to menu, transport facilities and weekend activities, all-inclusive sub-committees should be set up and people who would like to volunteer should be identified shortly.

The local and wider community should be brought into the center with different events such as an Art exhibition, the charity walk, founder’s day amongst others.

Reflection

With permission of the different groups, I gave a brief summary of the discussion processes in each group. The pre-clustering proved to be very helpful, as people immediately bought into the agenda structure. A very inspired but also controversial discussion took place. Unfortunately, the residents didn’t have as much airtime as they would like to have had. However, other participants were very considerate to residents needs and double-checked their statements with residents. Overall, the different perspectives were shared, but with a clear outcome-orientation and next steps so that accountability could be identified for each item.

Lambda center

At present, 20 residents live in the Lambda center and are assisted by about 37 members of staff. Lambda center is located in a small village with good integration in the local community. In a preliminary meeting with the line managers of the departments (care workers, nurses, house-keeping), manager, secretary and representatives of residents the purpose and format of the project was discussed. In terms format, we built on a review process that was held
two years ago: All members of the house would meet and then split into groups in order to discuss items important to them. These findings would then be reported in a plenary session. The findings were written up in a report that was requested from the manager and then used as a “To-do-list”. There was suspicion whether such a project was needed, as people said, “that we already have a very integrative approach. Each decision is made within meetings and committee where every group has its voice.” It took several months after the first meeting to set up a follow up, as people were dissatisfied with the first meeting across the different constituencies of the house. It was agreed that the project would be completed with the review of the progress of the items on the to-do-list in a second session.

Joint session I

In a conference room of a hotel more than 60 members of the Lambda including residents, staff and management committee as well as the manager attended the meeting. The room was set up as to have the group seated in a circle. First of all, we collected individual expectations of this exercise. The group formation was designed prior to the workshop as to ensure that each group would be balanced in terms of representing the different constituencies of the center.

In terms of expectations, people were mainly interested in the different views of others and the possibility to express their own views. Moreover, one resident wished to better communicate with others “in a more civilized way” and “how to be a house and not to be an institution”.

The agenda for the five groups was the generic three questions that should be discussed and recorded in the small group processes. The groups themselves were not facilitated however, they were asked to nominate a note taker who would present the results to the large group later on. The results were presented to the other group in the plenary sessions, which were then clustered and summarized under the following headings. In terms of appreciation, people appreciated the good level of care and service, the lack of a directive regime, a sense of freedom and good relations between all groups of the center. In terms of opportunities, the group was very keen on identifying and defining a clear operational list of items in the form of a to-do-list. This was due to their prior experience of the review process they had conducted 2 years earlier.

With regard to the quality of service and care, a formal induction program as well as continuous training should be provided for current and new staff. Showers, outdoor seating and hoists should be provided for each corridor. The choice of menu and the meal times as well as the smoking policy should be reviewed. Security issues such as private lockers, ID cards for emergencies, CCTV, security staff at night and restricted access for visitors was unanimously considered of being a priority. Staffing levels were considered a major issue. It was discussed how more staff could be attracted and more importantly retained, with a special focus of attracting male staff. Extra drivers should be hired for social and individual outings, as it was
agreed that transport facilities are a key aspect to put freedom of choice into practice. Physio- and occupational therapy facilities should be enhanced by hiring a full time staff member. Prior to career development considerations, the pay scheme should be reviewed. The number of international volunteers from the European Volunteer Scheme should be increased.

In terms of relations between people in the center, it was considered crucial to hold monthly residents-staff meetings to provide a space to discuss ongoing issues outside the day-to-day routines. Integration of new staff, residents and respite guests should also be addressed through such a meeting. Social activities especially between residents and staff should be enhanced and included while planning the roster. Despite the fact that compared to other centers, Lambda center has a very advanced culture of integrating and involving the different groups in the decision making process, the appropriateness of certain committees and meetings should be reviewed.

Six months after this initial meeting, a review meeting was held as to evaluate the progress on the different items of the 'to-do-list'. A very pragmatic mood characterized a preliminary meeting with the manager and representatives of all groups. People felt there was "unfinished business in terms of the project" and they didn’t want to be considered by the foundation as not complying with the expectations. The motivation to hold a follow-up meeting was driven by these considerations rather than appreciation of the LTL approach. So we met with people in the Lambda center to follow up a ‘process’ that had ‘started’ 6 months earlier. It turned out to be a very technical meeting as we revisited the ‘to-do-list’ that resulted from the joint session in a business like announcement mode. For each of the points on that list a status update was given, and most items on the list had been addressed one way or the other.

The meeting changed into a conversation when the manager asked the residents with whom they would like to spend their time with? The unanimous answer of residents present at the meeting was that they would like to socialize with able-bodied people outside the center: “This creates a sense of normality and being part of the community”. Residents also emphasized that they “would like to get out of the house. I would like to have a life outside this place.” “The house should also facilitate long-term friendships and relationships outside the center.” For most staff, this turned out to be the most important finding of this session.
Reflection

The process in Lambda was dominated by suspicion, as members of the local steering group weren't sure about the hidden agenda of the project. Moreover, they felt not involved in the decision making process whether to participate in the project at all. This unresolved issue could not be resolved throughout the process.

The large group event was difficult to manage not only because of group size, workshop format, lack of facilitation skills and resources but also by a rather adversial attitude of participants. Moreover, the different groups of the center were very outcome-oriented in their discussions. Neither was a critical review of the past nor a creative vision of the future established. This might have been the format of the review process they had experienced two years earlier. I was not in the position to develop a sense of the different approach I would like to take. People seemed to be satisfied with the outcomes, that they now have "tangible items they can work on". As the turnout in the following sessions shows, we lost many members of the house during that process.

The most interesting discussion in my view took place in the last 30 minutes of the workshop when people questioned the purpose of the entire exercise. It was only then we got "to the real stuff". The project was considered "a waste of time and money" and "does not help us to cope with change". Unfortunately, time constraints did not allow exploring these statements further.

The follow up of this initial session was not considered a priority as the difficulties to find a date and time as well as enough people willing to attend. The meeting was held as a requirement to finish the LTL process for external observers, i.e. the foundation. The meeting therefore was very business like. The secretary provided a detailed progress report on the different items of the to-do-list. It was rather a monologue than any type of conversation between individuals.

It was only in side-conversation and discussions outside the meetings that the 'real issues' were addressed: Relationships, closeness, sexuality are the needs that people have, but public meetings are certainly not the appropriate formats to discuss these in detail.

Kappa center

At present, 20 residents live in the Kappa center and are assisted by about 50 members of staff. At first, the manager was suspicious and somewhat reluctant to participate in the project. "Do we have to participate? Will you report to the foundation if we choose not to?" The difficulties that she saw were mainly a collision of two projects, in her view, especially as staff were "a little bit fed up with project work". We agreed to shape the project according to his needs. The design was customized in the following way: The project should enable the
leadership team comprised of the line managers and the service manager to learn issues that they weren’t aware of through the go-between of the facilitator. The items emerging in the session would be reported to them, but confidentiality of the speaker was agreed. This procedure was communicated to participants beforehand. The participants got a transcript of the flipcharts in preparation of the second session.

**Kappa Staff**

Staff appreciate the easygoing atmosphere', the good relations amongst and between staff and residents as well as the dedication and pride of staff. The changes implemented by the manager were acknowledged as they have improved the quality of life for residents. The openness of the manager is appreciated and reflected by her open door policy, which is considered not only lip service. His ability to listen allows staff to speak up without fear, and resulted for example in an improved pay scheme.

In terms of opportunities, induction was considered a major issue. A formal induction course should include disability awareness, general lifting and handling training. On the first day on the floor, new staff should be introduced to the home by shadowing an experienced member of staff. It was suggested that the general modules of such an induction should be organized and provided centrally by the foundation.

General information about new residents and respite guests should be provided to all departments as it speeds up the process of care and service provision. The time spent to find out preferences could be used in a more efficient way. A one-page summary should provide basic information and should at the same time comply with confidentiality considerations of the resident.

Coping with the fast changes implemented by the manager is a concern put forward by long-term members of staff. Despite the benefits for residents, staff questions the pace of change and how they could they be assisted in adapting to these changes.

Staff acknowledges the importance of residents being involved in the decision-making processes. Information and involvement in meetings was considered a prerequisite for that. With regard to daily operations, a better planning and coordination system and procedure between the different departments should be established. Regular staff meetings as well as semi-regular staff residents meetings were suggested in that regard.


Reflection

Very open, everybody participated. People from different departments (care, kitchen, etc.) were all involved in the discussion. No artificial politeness, straight to business. Very clear statement both positive and negative. Very reflective in terms of opportunities for improvements.

Challenging the process and the facilitator provided the opportunity to discuss the benefits of meetings and what makes good meetings. It was the group themselves that "disciplined" the critical members and convinced them of the benefit of the session.

Kappa Residents

Residents appreciate the good relations between staff and residents, "We don’t have this us and them going on here, it’s rather like a family", as well as the very approachable manager "who always listens to you". Both staff and manager appreciate critical feedback. Transport facilities, food quality as well as the overall service provision are highly appreciated.

In terms of opportunities, residents would like to be more involved in the running of the home as well as the decision making process. In terms of improved communication, "couldn’t residents meetings be linked with other bodies of the house such as the advisory board. We would then get more information and could give feedback on issue important to us". Communication and involvement in that regard should be improved.

Residents also offered their skills and expertise to help and support staff and management in the running of the center on a voluntary basis. This would allow them to provide more input in the running of the center. Residents’ meetings are held on a semi-regular basis, but turnout and participation has been low, as some residents don’t feel safe enough to speak up, as there is neither facilitation nor prior experience of working as a group. A problem related to that is resident involvement "how can we encourage and invite more residents to meetings, which will strengthen our interests and everyone will benefit from that."

Activities at the weekends are considered a major shortcoming, as neither social outings are organized nor are there enough drivers for individual outings. On a similar note, self-development courses were suggested for residents to explore and identify possible areas of interest.

Reflection

Rather slow start mainly due to the fact that people attended because they were asked to. But then people got involved. It was mainly the two representatives of the residents who apparently had their own agenda in terms of criticism. As people knew that the results of the meeting would be reported to the leadership team, residents were hesitant and anxious to speak up freely. The meetings remained clearly in a talking-nice mode of conversation.
Kappa Leadership team

The leadership team got the results of the sessions prior to the meeting which would help the team to identify and address blind spots of their efforts to improve quality of service and care.

Reflection

Residents' issues were a considered being of main concern. The leadership team discussed each of the items that were brought forward by staff and residents and promised to feed progress on each of them back into the appropriate meetings already in place. Everybody participated equally even though the manager dominated the session.

People were surprised to hear about the perceived lack of involvement by both residents and staff. It was agreed that the departmental team meetings would be the appropriate format to address this, whereas residents' meeting with the manager would allow to hear more about the participation issues that residents might have.

4.3.3. Managers, Trustees and Head Office

At the national level, the Head Office team, the Trustees of the foundation as well as the group of service managers held one Learning through listening session each.

Head Office Team

In this session, the members of the Head Office team discussed the three questions. The CEO, OD manager, service user development manager, HR manager, financial manager, personal assistant to the CEO and the Head office secretary attended the session. Head Office staff appreciate the intimate and very close team situation. The ideals and the service provision of Omega provide high motivation and job satisfaction. An open atmosphere and a culture of mutual trust in the team allows for a pragmatic approach that leads to pride in achievements. The CEO appreciates the pioneering spirit in the team after some very difficult years in terms of funding and service provision. According to the team, tensions between local centers and Head Office are negligible, for example the standardization of pay schemes went smoothly. The variety of personalities, expertise, skills and background is acknowledged and appreciated. In terms of opportunities, the lack of a clear policy in terms of working hours was discussed. Another issue was how to assess the workload in terms of tasks and the resources required to deal with these tasks. The travel times to the local centers and the costs involved were discussed. In terms of office duties, an overall compliance with a standardized filing system and data protection should be implemented as to reduce search and coordination times. On the same
note, a ‘database of issues’ that should feed into the agenda of the regular Monday meeting should be established. This would allow a transparency for all team members to identify and flag issues important in their area that might affect others. In terms of productivity, the team acknowledged that there was room for improvement, but the emphasis should be on quality as the issues are very important for other people’s lives. The dissatisfaction with the team productivity was seen as an indicator for the need for new resources. There are certain functional areas not covered by any member of the team so that certain aspects and issues remain without an assigned responsibility “We need to clarify roles and responsibilities within Head Office as not to have these gray areas. And that should reduce coordination efforts and time”. On the same note, areas where responsibilities overlap should be identified in that regard. The lack of space and time for reflection outside daily business issues, such as organization and strategy development was identified. So called ‘do-not-disturb-slots every week should provide time for reflection and planning in order “to get out of the fire fighters mode.”

The balance between central and local competences to make decisions should be carefully discussed with local management, because there is a “continuous tension between Head Office and local centers regarding responsibility and accountability”. Therefore “we need to develop a partnership approach between Head Office and the local centers. We can’t work in the us and them mode effectively.” The Managers’ meetings do not seem to provide such a team- and confidence-building space. Communication was considered key: “We need an agreed style of communication, i.e. memos or emails that should be considered binding for all people involved. Sometimes, centers simply don’t respond to any of our attempts to contact them.” On the same note, Head Office considers itself as being a role model or best practice example in terms of organizational culture, “for example no phone calls to and from center after 5.30pm”.

Reflection

At the beginning very much Q&A driven by the curiosity of the team members. I felt a little bit under observation but clarified that this was not a report session. However, process wise it was necessary to satisfy the information needs of the group. Otherwise the process would have been affected by the lack of that. Very curious attitude, but also very political as the micropolitics between centers and Head Office were present through my reports and thoughts.

We started off in a schoolish Q&A mode, had a very polite discussion before lunch which was then continued for another 2,5 hours. It then turned into a very open discussion with reflective moments when it came to questioning your own role and the Head Office’s role within the organization. Interestingly enough, the meeting evolved around topics within the Head Office team. One could have expected a more organization-wide or even strategic discussion taking place. More informative than this meeting was the group interview with Head Office team, which had a clear organization and strategy development focus.
Managers’ meeting

The managers appreciate the high degree of autonomy, flexibility as well as the freedom for making decisions in their jobs. The very people oriented business provides the opportunity to make a difference in people’s life. The Head Office team is considered listening to feedback provided by grassroots. The variety and breadth of the tasks in the managers’ job is appreciated as well as the mutual support: “Fellow managers are very supportive and approachable.” The political impact of the job is very challenging and if successful very satisfying. Integrity and openness are considered key to deliver a self-critical job: “As an organization, we have the guts to face up to things that are not ok and could be improved. We are pretty honest about flaws here in Omega.”

In terms of opportunities, the topics discussed were clustered in the large group under the following headings

Cooperation within the managers’ group

Resources of the different centers of a region could be utilized more efficiently. This requires a transparency of the resources available to the different centers, e.g. transport facilities, occupational and physiotherapists.

The service managers have very different backgrounds, some have a nursing others a business background. Cross-fertilization and mutual support in terms of skills and expertise should be improved beyond the informal channels of communication.

While appreciating autonomy, local service manager feel isolated in their centers, as the peers with which they could reflect on certain operational and strategic issues are not nearby. The need for a group forum of managers to provide a sounding board was expressed. This forum would also be helpful to develop reflective practices for managers. Reciprocal audits could be a possibility to access certain blind spots of service provisioning in a cooperative manner.

The current format of managers’ meeting does not meet these requirements. It was suggested to allow time for operational items that managers could discuss amongst themselves without attendance of Head Office staff. Moreover, this process should be recorded and provided through a database of issues, which would allow people to draw form prior experiences of other managers. Finally, the managers should take ownership for their forum rather than letting it de facto being run by Head Office.

Quality of service – quality of work

Managers discussed the complexity to balance the running of a center in a family-like mode of a home on the one hand and the requirements of a professional service provision.
Staff and residents should become more involved in terms of developing the organization as well as building a team or home spirit, and for career development for staff as well as service user development in particular. On a similar note, staff recruitment and staff retention should be improved by regular training and induction programs that might be designed cooperatively between centers. Managers also pointed to the difficulty of identifying appropriate staffing levels that are inextricably linked with the service and care needs of a center's population.

*Communication and advocacy*

Communication within and between centers should be improved by making use of information technology. Each center should have the facilities and skills to use email as the standard form of communication. At the same time, misunderstandings in the communication between local centers and Head Office should be avoided. Several requests from different Head Office managers on a similar topic should be clarified beforehand, as to allow for a timely response. The quality of face to face communication should not be underestimated as it was considered key to the service provision, it should not be lost within the group of people who manage such a service.

A fruitful relationship between local centers and Head Office should be developed, as at the moment managers perceive a certain disadvantage of centralization which is reflected by a tendency towards a ‘us-them’-mode of attitude.

At the national level an advocacy system for staff and residents should be provided or included in the existing governance or committee structure. It was considered of major relevance to provide people with the opportunity to escalate complaints in a formalized way while being supported in a fair manner.

Managers acknowledged the ability to listen, understand and respond to the needs of service users as a core value of the service. In that regard, they would like to discuss ways and techniques with other managers and to share their experiences in that regard.

With regard to residents needs, the opportunities for residents to develop and maintain friendships and relationships outside the center were discussed. It was even suggested to consider this a weak indicator of a good service quality. The responsibility of the center then would not only be to provide transport services but also to enable residents in their development of social skills.

*Planning and Development*

The lack of a clear strategic as well as mission statement leads to a critical discussion what actually Omega's core business was. The lack of a formal, planned strategic and organization development was criticized by the managers. Moreover, their involvement in the incremental, de-facto strategic development was not considered sufficient. Managers would expect that Head Office draws on their expertise in terms of certain functional areas as well as the service provision.
The lack of an agreed definition of disability should be addressed by developing an agreed catalogue of dependency criteria. This should be complemented by cooperation with state of the art research. This would allow managers to identify and judge on individual needs and potentials. These tools should then be reviewed on a regular basis. Service audits, identification of needs and other forms of assessment should also provide Omega with a competitive advantage in terms of health authority funding.

Reflection

The overall mode was talking nice at the beginning, but turned into an open discussion in the second half of the session. Some managers were concerned that the presence of Head Office staff would not allow fellow managers to speak openly.

However, critical topics were not avoided even though the urgency to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Head Office managers on the one hand and service managers on the other was not made public. A reflective mode of conversation did not occur as the meeting culture itself had evolved around a disinterested mode of talking nice.

Board of Trustees

The board of Trustees is comprised of voluntary members of the community with business or legal background as well as researchers. Residents from the local center are also full members of the board. The meeting was held within one of the monthly board meetings, whereby the vice-chairman allowed a time slot of 90min. for the exercise.

In terms of what members of the board of trustees appreciate about their work and role, a resident point to her role as “better facilitate service user’s development and developing an ethos of listening through participation by providing openness and transparency to the residents”. Their role was defined as to ensure value for money “as we are dealing with state money”. With regard to staff, it is to ensure staff development and training. At the strategic level, the board should identify opportunities for improvement of the current service and of developing new services.

The board acknowledges the challenge of very complex service provision such as residential care for people with disabilities. Unanimously, people appreciate Omega’s philosophy of independence and freedom. Board members a proud of the achievements and progress made by the local centers, but mainly for residents.

In terms of opportunities, a better balance of skills in the board should be achieved: More people with disabilities outside the Omega service should be on the board. A review of the work and membership structure should be conducted. The board should increase its efforts in
increasing awareness and attention to specific needs and particular situation of individuals in the local center. A service audit that is en route should allow identifying and then addressing these issues. The board sees the threat of a “two-tier” system, i.e. two different services in Omega: On the one hand, the traditional high care centers and the independent housing projects on the other. To avoid a widening of this gap should be the task of the board. The board should contribute to a better communication within Omega and also with other key stakeholder such as families, management committee.

There seems to be dissatisfaction with too much detail and operational focus on the board’s agenda rather than discussing more strategic developments. The agenda itself proved to be allowing too little time to discuss specific items, especially when they are considered sensitive or difficult. The agenda should be limited to a few items. From the non-permanent members of the board, i.e. resident representatives, it was argued that new member should be better prepared and inducted to the work and group dynamics of the board. In that regard, a mentor system by which future candidates will be supported by current members was suggested. The quality of the service should be continuously assessed. However, the interests of residents as well as the requirements of the health authority have to be taken into account and be balanced.

Reflection

As most members of the Board are voluntary members with a strong business background, the overall mood was a typical board meeting conversation. The chairperson challenged myself and the CEO in an debate mode of conversation.

Suspicion, reluctance and disinterest were the impression that I got from the board. It was only when a residents’ representative constructively answered the questions that I had put to the board, the other board members joined in.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter aimed at providing a concise report on the process of the Learning through Listening project in the Omega organization. Having presented the foundation’s aspiration to become a modern, responsive care provider facing external and internal forces for change, I have discussed the rationale, focus and design of the project as it was planned, and then described in detail the process as it was conducted in practice.

Introduction

What sense can be made from the case in terms of responsiveness and its relation to dialogue?

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the relation between conversations and responsiveness by tracing differences in and discerning patterns of conversational and responsive qualities from the case. A critical reflection on these differences should provide a more enhanced understanding of the relation between responsiveness and conversations. The argument of this chapter is organized as follows.

Firstly, by applying Scharmer's typology of conversational modes to the workshop sessions in the centers (Scharmer, 2001), I will identify differences in conversational qualities (5.1.).

Secondly, I need to explore differences in responsive qualities. As I have indicated, the literature neither provides a definition of responsiveness beyond a behaviorist approach, nor with a typology of responsiveness in that regard. Therefore, I will have to develop such a typology, based on characteristics, properties and procedural aspects of responsiveness. Perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity are identified as key dimensions of responsiveness from the case analysis. Conceiving of responsiveness as process quality, I propose responsiveness as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive organizational capacity, that is relevant for any organizational action. The three key aspects are the foundation for the typology of responsiveness, ranging from a low degree of responsiveness ("autistic reflex") to a very high degree of responsiveness ("vigilant answer"). The typology allows us to assess and identify differences in responsive qualities of process and outcome of the case.

Thirdly, by juxtaposing differences in conversational modes with differences in responsive qualities, I can now investigate the relation between dialogue and responsiveness. The case data suggest a correlation of a high degree of reflective conversations with a high level of responsiveness. However, rather than suggesting a direct, linear link between the two key dimensions – à la "dialogue enhances responsiveness" – I would suggest to conceive of responsiveness as being enhanced by creating discursive arenas that provide the space for dialogical, reflective conversations.

Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a section of propositions (1) on the nature of responsiveness and (2) on the relation between responsiveness and conversations.
Focus of analysis

Before turning to the core of the analysis, I would like to emphasize and argue the focus of this analysis. The process of Learning through Listening – as outlined in the Case report in Chapter 4 – included workshops with the Board of Trustees, Head office and Managers’ meeting. All workshops with these stakeholders were held at a time when the processes in all the local centers had been completed. Each of these bodies opted for a single workshop session only, so that no iterative, evolving process within these bodies could be traced. Moreover, the cancellation of the initially planned national conference for developing a shared vision for the organization made no joint reflection and exploration of the project’s findings and implications between the different levels possible.

However, as it turned out, the common theme of the workshops with the ‘governing bodies’ was a validation or ‘reality check’ whether the findings of the project were complying with individual and collective mental models, cognitive frames or prejudices.

In each of the sessions, members aimed at receiving a report and asked for findings because they were not only curious but also really interested in learning what is going on in ‘their’ organization – and whether it confirms or challenges their cognitive reality of the organization. While complying with the confidentiality agreements that I am committed to, I outlined some key findings for the different stakeholder groups. Regarding residents, I reported the fundamental dilemma of not being able to give feedback on the quality of service due to fear of repercussion. As for staff, I reported their dissatisfaction of being ‘squeezed’ between an empowered service user population on the one hand and the functional role of the local manager. Regarding local managers, I pointed to their concerns of not being involved in the overall strategy development and their entrepreneurial efforts being reduced to a local service delivery only. Especially for Head office as well as the Board of Trustees, these core findings were surprising or at least reconfirming of a ‘fuzzy feeling’ about some of these aspects. The Board of Trustees took a very business-like approach to these reports by delegating the solving of the problems to Head office, without having explored the implications of the findings.

Head office, being much closer to the local service, were very committed to understand and discuss the details of these aspects in order to address them. The project findings were extensively discussed in a 3-hour meeting at Head office. After the session, the CEO said: “You have a perspective that I have been missing or that other guys here wouldn’t know about. I just found this morning so refreshing ... It put me back thinking about what is important which I have been trying to do for the last while for the strategy stuff. ... You taught us again and reminded us of what is important.”

As I have already discussed in section 1.1., the linking pin seemed to be missing. For the time of the project, I acted as substitute for that missing linking pin that I would refer to as responsiveness now. In terms of analysis, the processes and dynamics in each local center were
already sufficiently complex so that we agreed to focus this investigation to the processes in the local centers. However, a more detailed analysis of the interlevel dynamics as suggested by Rashford & Coghlan (1994) and their relation to responsiveness is certainly an important next step in the development of a theory of responsiveness in organizations. By conducting the following analysis based on the processes in the centers, I will be in the position to develop a concept of responsiveness by focusing on the local level.

**5.1. Characteristics of Conversational Modes**

As to distinguish the quality of conversations in the different workshop settings, I will employ Scharmer's process archetype of conversation for the case analysis. Throughout the project and based on the properties of the different conversational modes as outlined in Table 8, I have identified the dominant conversational mode for each session.

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, Scharmer (2001) suggests to distinguish speech acts along two dimensions: (1) degree of reflection of speech act (reflective/non-reflective) and (2) orientation of speech act (primacy of social whole or parts). The 2x2 matrix that can be generated from these fundamental distinction of speech acts provides four generic stages and field-logics of languaging that points to the different levels of conversational complexity that people use referring and relating to each other in conversations.

**Field I** (‘talking nice’) refers to a conversational field in which polite interaction prevails. People tend not to say what they think and feel as mutual face-saving prevents addressing ‘hot issues’. Referring to the wholeness of the shared context can be considered a confidence building measure in that regard. Moreover, this field is dominated by governing rules that remain unexamined at this stage due to lack of reflection. Scharmer refers to this mode as following and reproducing the rules of existing language game.

**Field II** (‘talking tough’) refers to a more competitive conversational field in which debate and discussion prevail. People start to say what they think as they feel safe enough to speak up. The social whole, however, is no longer predominant. Individual viewpoints, i.e. the parts, become primary. The competitive mode of this conversational type results in a battle of meanings. The competitive nature of the conversation does not allow for a critical review of underlying assumptions. In terms of language game, the underlying rules are applied, but even more importantly, they are explicitly addressed and revealed.

**Field III** (‘reflective dialogue’) refers to a recognizably different mode of conversation. The attention of participants is redirected to the assumptions that underlie their points of view. People start to speak of themselves rather than about others. Inquiring into the underlying assumptions of participants’ points to a reflective mode of conversation. As the focus remains
with the individual assumptions, the primacy of parts remains – in a reflective mode though. The rules of the language game are not only revealed but also critically reflected in the group.

Field IV ('generative dialogue) refers to a rare conversational mode in which participants experience a collective flow. The whole becomes dominant again but in a space of collective reflection. It is under these circumstances that not only new meaning but also new possibilities are generated. This includes the creation of new rules of the language game.

These fields are spaces in which there is a particular conversational quality of energy and exchange. Isaacs (1999) refers to these fields as containers that are “the relatively observable features of fields” (Isaacs, 1999: 257). Each of these fields hold distinct characteristics and patterns that I have discussed in Chapter 2. These characteristics and patterns have provided me with a referent to cluster the conversational mode of the workshop sessions throughout the empirical work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Conversational mode</th>
<th>Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>“Talking nice”</td>
<td>Primacy of social whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of reflection and openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Shared monologues)</td>
<td>Face saving,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Politeness, Conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rule reproducing</td>
<td>Neglecting differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No/little reference to other participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shared monologues of harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>“Talking tough”</td>
<td>Primacy of parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Debate/Discussion)</td>
<td>Lack of reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rule revealing</td>
<td>Emphasis on third person data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Openness for confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasizing differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocating viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reference to other viewpoints in a competitive or blaming mode of conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Inquiry</td>
<td>Primacy of parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Reflective dialogue)</td>
<td>Reflecting on individual assumptions, Emphasis on first person data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rule-intuiting</td>
<td>Openness for understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledging differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attentive listening to other viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inquiring in own and others' assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curiosity (open questions), surprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening without the need to reply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suspension of own viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>Primacy of whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Generative dialogue)</td>
<td>Reflective mode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rule-generating</td>
<td>Collective flow of thinking, Synchronicities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inability to articulate shared experiences as they emerge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of a pool of common meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Characteristics of conversational modes (based on Scharmer 2001 and Isaacs 1999)
Based on the Scharmer's and Isaac's considerations, I have attributed the dominant conversational mode along the properties as shown in Table 8. Clustering and attributing conversational qualities reduces the complexity of the conversations, but provides useful and necessary points of reference in order to analyze the role of conversational modes in general and reflective dialogue in particular with regard to organizational sensemaking and responsiveness. The conversational mode that is attributed is based on my observations and reflections that I have discussed and shared with participants after each session in informal conversations. The attributes are therefore not absolute but relative to the participant’s perspective. As to exemplify how I attributed and assessed each session according to the criteria for conversational modes, I will briefly outline and describe some ‘prototypical’ sessions in the centers.

5.1.1. Field I: Shared monologue of politeness

For example, the first meeting with Zeta residents can be considered a prime example of shared monologues of politeness. Residents emphasized the “great atmosphere between residents and staff”, “very very helpful staff” and appreciated the “lack of formality”. Ultimately, the metaphor of the family was extensively used in this session: “We are like a big family here!” The primacy of the social whole was at the core of the statements as to create an image of the center as a warm, welcoming family-type of setting. It is a certain lack of reflection in that regard that can be observed. Assuming that “everybody has a voice” and that “everybody is being listened to” neglects obvious difficulties that residents would have mentioned in off-the-record conversations before and after the meeting. Any critique at an individual or organizational level was neglected and polite appreciation of every group in the center was expressed: “Staff does a great job.”, “We have a fantastic manager.” and “Management committee are very good.”. Relations between residents were described as “equal and different”. All these statements within the flow of the conversation indicated a strong interest in conformity and face-saving attitude. Despite the fact that residents would acknowledge differences, in this session equality in terms of service and care was emphasized several times: “We get assistance here that you wouldn’t get elsewhere.” and “Everybody is treated according to their needs.” Participants made very little reference to viewpoints of other participants. It turned into a one-way communication with the facilitator. Interventions by the facilitator attempting to inquire into certain statements and their rationales by asking open questions were replied with long moments of silence until another resident provided an additional statement without referring neither to the previous statement of a resident nor the question of the facilitator.

In summary, the strong emphasis of the family metaphor, the non-threatening, face-saving attitude, little reference to other participants and the lack of reflection and inquiry made this session a prime example for shared monologues of politeness. However, the usefulness to start a process in such a mode should not be underestimated: It provide people who usually do not
have a voice, let alone in large-group settings with the opportunity to enter a conversation in a psychologically safe way.

5.1.2. Field II: Talking tough – Debate and Discussion

The first staff meeting at Beta center turned out to be a prototypical “talking tough”-session. The invitation to discuss items from an appreciative point of view was wiped away with the comment “There is little to appreciate here at the moment.” People then jumped right into debate mode. By criticizing the low level of care and the bad working conditions for staff, members of the different departments emphasized their relevance and contribution to the overall service delivery. However, all their efforts were considered meaningless and were destroyed by the lack of professionalism and willingness to cooperate by other departments: “The floors look awful. But that’s not our job.” “Yes, the mood of the house has changed. But we don’t have the time to spend with residents. You guys can sit and talk, but we can’t.” Thereby, emphasis was made on third person data that is reflected by a distinction between ‘us and them’. People were open enough to confront each other with critique “Now, this is your job!” Lack of clarity in roles, responsibilities and assignment of tasks was discussed extensively so that the head of care felt being scapegoated and left the room without any further comment. She even offered to resign the same day to the manager.

The different viewpoints were advocated in a non-reflective manner. Acknowledging the poor quality of the service did not result in a critical inquiry of the own role but resulted in blaming everybody else for it. Again, this conversational mode has a specific role in the development of conversations. Without giving the opportunity for people to thresh out their anger and concerns, any following session would have been jeopardized by the undiscussed frustrations.

5.1.3. Field III: Reflective Dialogue

It would be very naïve to claim that any of the archetypes of conversations would have happened in its pure form. There are aspects and sequences within every conversation that could be identified as talking nice or talking tough. Reflective dialogue sequences were part in some of the conversations but the Alpha joint session is prototypical in that regard. Even though the meeting was part of the project, it was both residents and staff alike that called for this meeting. Curiosity to hear and listen to other people’s views was voiced several times prior to the session. Residents and staff emphasized their different roles in the center and thereby hold particularistic viewpoints: “You can go home after your shift, we have to live in this house 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.” Such statements weren’t used to justify one’s role in the center and to advocate your own position but were used to enhance an understanding of the other’s experiences: “How can we then make your life easier?” Asking open and honest questions that
are not intended to confirm privately held assumptions but to understand residents were very prominent features of this session. For example, staff asked, “Is there a gender issue in terms of care? Do the male residents feel uncomfortable being assisted by female staff?” Residents were surprised and impressed that staff had spotted an important issue that residents wouldn’t have come up with themselves.

Justifications and explanations make a debate usually a very messy conversation. This session however was characterized by a very strong emphasis on listening. People seemed to suspend their immediate reply to a statement in order to listen carefully until the person had finished his or her statement. Differences in needs were acknowledged and discussed by means of usage of the hoist. Some residents would feel safe others anxious to use the hoist. Staff on the other hand pointed to efficiency and safety issue against or for the usage of the hoist. It was not until the issue was sufficiently discussed that people started to judge on the issue by pointing to the necessity of clarification in that regard. Another very prominent item in that session was discussed: The fundamental dilemma of residents not being willing to give honest and open feedback because they fear repercussions if they do so. Staff was very surprised to learn about this dilemma. Their default assumption had been “that we are friends and you can tell us everything”. Staff did not react defensively but remained silent for a long moment when a resident put the dilemma to the group. They then started to ask question “Why is that so? How can we help to make you feel safe enough to give us feedback?” Surprises, curiosity and a strong emphasis on listening and understanding is what characterized this particular session as a reflective conversation.
5.1.4. Synopsis of conversational modes in the centers

Each of the workshop session was coded and clustered according to the properties as shown in Table 8 and as outlined above. Hence, I suggest to conclude the following Table 9, which shows the conversational mode for each workshop session in the different centers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II/III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambda</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Cluster of conversational modes of workshop sessions in participating centers

Based on the above cluster, I can identify three distinct groups of centers that differ in the degree to which reflective conversation occurred. Within that, a further distinction was made whether reflective conversation occurred in the separate sessions only or in the joint group sessions as well.
- **High degree of reflective conversation**
  Centers in which reflective conversation occurred in separate as well as group sessions:
  - Alpha
  - Zeta
  - Delta

- **Moderate degree of reflective conversation**
  Centers in which reflective conversation occurred in separate sessions only:
  - Epsilon
  - Kappa

- **Low degree of reflective conversation**
  Centers in which reflective conversation could not be identified being the dominant conversational mode in any of the sessions:
  - Beta, Gamma
  - Lambda

This clustering does by no means neglect the individual and collective ability of members in each center to use reflective conversation in their interactions. Talking nice and talking tough are equally important conversational modes for exploring and voicing issues that are best discussed in such a mode. Within the project setting, some groups preferred these conversational modes for their conversations rather than reflective dialogue.

In terms of this investigation, I have now identified differences in conversational modes in the process of the project. In the following section, I will identify differences in responsive qualities for the discussion on the relation between conversations and responsiveness. Prior to that, I will develop an analytical frame – that comprises key aspects and a typology of responsiveness – for assessing responsiveness in the different centers.
5.2. Characteristics of Responsiveness

Having accomplished the first analytical step, i.e. identification of differences in conversational modes, I will now turn to differences in responsive qualities of the case. While I was able to draw from an established framework of conversational modes, in terms of responsiveness the conceptual situation is different: The properties of responsiveness and its key aspects will be developed inductively from the case data, i.e. the process of the project as well as the narratives provided by participants in interviews:

Firstly, I propose to distinguish 

**responsiveness at the individual level of the care interaction** (responsiveness I) from 

**responsiveness at the institutional or organizational level** (responsiveness II) (5.2.1.). In terms of the former, I draw from Küpers' (1998) notion of service interaction as a responsive, embodied encounter.

This distinction is necessary to clarify the focus of the following analysis. When using the term responsiveness, I refer to responsiveness at organizational level only, unless indicated otherwise.

Secondly, by examining prototypical narratives of the case, I have identified perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity as key aspects of responsiveness. Distinctive properties of these dimensions in general, as well as inductively derived from the case in terms of gestures of speech acts will be provided (5.2.2.).

Thirdly, by relating these three key aspects of responsiveness to one another I will propose a typology of responsiveness, followed by a definition of responsiveness as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization (5.2.3.).
Finally, I will use this typology of responsiveness so as to assess the responsive qualities of process and outcomes of the project in the centers. This will result in a cluster of different levels of responsiveness for participating centers (5.2.4).

5.2.1. Responsiveness I: Embodied encounter in the individual care interaction

In terms of role of responsiveness in the care interaction, two aspects can be clearly distinguished. Biophysical aspects of care would address immediate needs with regard to food, personal hygiene, transport facilities etc. The psychosocial dimension of care addresses aspects such as relations within and between individuals and groups of a center, socializing outside the center etc. With regard to both dimensions of care, responsiveness as the ability to ask questions, listen, understand and respond to residents’ needs is at the heart of the care and service delivery of every Omega center.

At the individual level, responsiveness within the care interaction addresses needs of both residents and staff. The care interaction is a very intimate, individual and personal service that requires a trustful relationship between staff member and resident. The quality of asking questions to identify needs and preferences as well as tracking changes in needs and preferences is key in that regard. At the same time, listening carefully is another important feature of responsiveness at the individual level. A third dimension results from a trustful relationship and communication between resident and staff whereby both sides strive to understand the lifeworld and language game of each other. This process would then result as a jointly developed, common language that allows for easier understanding of statements and requests in the light of the different rationalities. Finally, providing a response that caters for the needs of both resident and staff can be considered the tangible and visible result of a successful and responsive care interaction. In summary, the process of responsiveness at the individual level of care interaction can be summarized along these four steps: Asking – Listening – Understanding – Responding.

This inductively derived concept can be reflected upon by an approach that conceives of service as an embodied, responsive encounter: Küppers (1998) conceptualizes services as referring to embodied and emotional situations. Embodiment in his view plays a prominent role in any service interaction. From a phenomenological point of view, people participating in a service process are considered “first and foremost embodied beings who are embedded in a specific ‘life-world’. ” (Küppers, 1998: 338). It is through their corporeal perceptual interaction that service staff and clients are involved in these ‘life-worlds’: “It is through their physical selves that the subjects of the service process are situated in their environment in a tactile, visual, olfactory and auditory way.” These sense-related aspects of the service encounter are taken into account by a phenomenological viewpoint. Approaching these interrelated processes requires considering them “embodied intention”. By using their body, the participants of the service encounter reach and perceive the objects of their work or consumption: “All those
involved in the service process encounter perceived realities through their bodily organs from an intentional point of seeing, hearing or touching. The body responds to meaningful questions posed to it through a situational context in which the body itself takes part. These bodily and intersubjective relations are of particular relevance to personal and productive encounter situations within services.” (Küpers, 1998: 338).

Hence, Küpers (1998) takes an interactionist approach on service interactions. He holds that service quality results and emerges at a point where “embodied production and consumption interpenetrate” (Küpers, 1998: 338). The inextricable link of the service encounter is conceptualized as prosumption, i.e. the way the “embodied subjectivities of producer and consumer” interrelate. In the moment of the service encounter, both become producer and consumer at the same time: they both become what Küpers calls ‘prosumers’. By using the neologism ‘prosumer’ and ‘prosumption’, Küpers (1998) argues from a post-dualistic perspective that questions the taken-for-granted distinction between the entities of producer and consumer and conceptualizes the interaction as a phenomenon in which the service encounter becomes an embodied encounter of two participants.

Symbolic convergence theory suggests that meanings, values and motives converge through narratives that integrate the customer: “As the symbolic convergence theory ... has shown, it is through storytelling that meanings, values, and motives converge through forming group narratives integrating with the customer. A typical pattern of a service story includes “customers” and “servers” as protagonists, a quest and/or predicament, attempts to fulfill the quest or to resolve the predicament. Service stories resonate with these symbolic expressions. Stories are the key as to how “prosumers” think about service experiences and the way they evaluate the quality of services. Narrated plots provide “prosumers” a medium to create and experience vicariously the events of their “prosumption”. The service-provider and the customer voluntarily become “caught up” in a co-created story. They participate in a drama and feel psychologically involved in its story line, atmospheric scenarios, unfolding motives, and characters. Through an emotional climate and identification with the enacted story, both are standing on and continuously rebuilding the common ground of the embodied, symbolic “prosumption”. “(Küpers, 1998: 351).

Based on Küpers’ notion of service provision as an embodied, responsive encounter of prosumers, I will investigate this quality of responsiveness by drawing from narratives from the case:

**Asking – Identifying needs**

Staff member: “Billy knows what you are saying to him but he cannot respond, he cannot talk, he was hit at the side of the head by a baseball bat. His communication by hand ... can be often very very poor. ... So I remember one day, he was pointing out at his chair, he was
pointing at the sink and the locker and I didn’t know if he wanted a drink from it, whether he wanted a spray for his arms. You go through every single thing. And everytime you would say do you want this or that he would go no. … You begin to get frustrated yourself because you are just not able to meet his needs, and next thing I pointed at his chair. … Then I knew I had the chair but what was the problem? … I said ‘Is it your head that is uncomfortable?’ and he shook his head. ‘Is it your feel?’ and he shook his head. … So I said jokingly to him so as not to frustrate him more, because you can actually feel you are frustrating them and it is very irritating when you are going through this and this can happen everyday wondering what they need. … I said to him ‘Billy, I know what is wrong with this chair. You are getting too fat for it because of all you are eating’ Next thing he started laughing as contentedly as anything and he shook his head as if to say the chair was too tight. And that was it.”

Staff member: “I suppose we have a blind, deaf and dumb chap here and it is very hard to know what he wants. … I write on the person’s hands to find out what they need but there is another way he talks back with different signals, which I am only half way through learning. I did have a conversation with him the other day but you find yourself going to that person not as much, because it is that much more difficult and I would safely say here that most of the care staff would not respond to any of those needs and I would only try because I was interested in sign language, I did the sign language course and I was interested to see if I could communicate with the boys … But it is difficult to try and respond to those needs because it is difficult to know what they need.”

These two reports by a staff members outline the process of developing ways to ask questions in order to identify the needs of a resident who does not have speech. The quality of asking is for both examples driven by an interest in getting access to the lifeworld of the other. One of the fundamental assumptions of any communication theory, i.e. the ability to communicate, has to be reconsidered when examining this example. The very limited ‘vocabulary’ of the residents requires from the staff member a very skillful way of asking as to balance the questions with the risk to frustrate the resident by not asking the ‘right’ question. Asking provides the resident with little speech and vocabulary with additional expressive means. The staff member becomes the ‘voice’ of the resident. The questions are ultimately open questions, as the staff member does not know what to expect. This exploratory character of questions is key to such a fundamental process of asking.

Listening – Being attentive to needs

Staff member: “Yes I think that the feeling is here that sometimes people are afraid to say what they want or need and one of the ladies was in distress over a certain condition but she was afraid to call on certain staff members because she felt they would react, that shouldn’t be
happening, you know we shouldn’t have to do this three or four times of once a day, but her needs were... that she wasn’t able to say it to this person, why she needs it yet she felt she could say it to me. I am not just saying just to me, but just say she could, she was very distressed and her needs weren’t being looked after. I don’t know why she couldn’t say it or why she was afraid, I asked her why and I said can you not say it to everybody they will understand I said, you don’t know she said you haven’t been here 35 years you don’t know this place.”

Despite the interest of the staff member to learn about the specific problem of the resident by asking her about it, the resident would not provide an answer. Listening then is not a trivial endeavor as to fulfill the intention of a question but requires the ability to read between the lines, i.e. to identify the underlying issue of fear. The fundamental dilemma of residents not willing and able to give honest feedback on the service and care result from the feeling of vulnerability and dependency that cannot be neglected. Listening and acknowledging this undiscussability of fear is the first step as to uncover the rationale behind the fear and to identify the ‘real’ issue. Attentive listening would be noticing the concern of the speaker not being listened to.

Manager: “I think what happens in places like this is that people are here for so long most of their lives maybe... and there is a human element that gets lost. People stop responding to almost any signal they send out that doesn’t get picked up on and care staff that have been working here for a long time and they become masters of the art of not looking for signals. They just want to go in and do the task and the problem is that they are not responding to signals and they are not looking for signals which either makes the client or with a resident they have got to be very overt and determined to get the message out they have to be extremely vocal in getting it out, or violent or aggressive or abusive in a desperate attempt to get the message out and I think the lack of responsiveness is causing issues that we would have in a place like this that is thirty odd years going with a lot of people being here most of the time. ... Maybe they think it makes their jobs easier to have tame residents. ... I think it is because they think it makes there job is easier. Somebody asks or sends out a message, something you don’t respond to. It is easy, you respond to it, you are suddenly caught up in it, suddenly what is a very cold clinical relationship might even get closer emotionally, you know that would be something they would shy away from. It is very easy to keep your distance. ... Anything extra it means an input at another level. And I think that care workers are almost afraid. I spoke to them once about their lack of emotional involvement and there are two things that I am quite sure about, if you have to give to help to someone physically you don’t want to be close to them emotionally. And I mean as basic as if you have to wash somebody and you have to do very intimate and sometimes unpleasant physical care on them. You almost need that distance to give you the dignity to even give your resident a bit of space to feel that there is this emotional distance and it makes them feel almost protected or private ... they want distance.”
The manager reports on the lack of interest and willingness to identify signals of residents. This can be considered an unwillingness to listen to their requests. Listening becomes a threat to the daily routines of staff as it either disturbs the efficiently organized care plan or the signals are interpreted as crossing the boundary between a professional care worker and the request of residents to reduce the psychological and emotional distance between them. The deliberate neglect to listen seems to create major disturbance and frustration among residents. While acknowledging the superb quality of biophysical aspects of care, they would feel neglected at the psychosocial dimension of care. Listening means attention and taking one's statement or comment seriously. It means to treat the resident as an equal adult by accepting him or her being a fully developed human being that cannot be reduced to a 'care recipient' with biophysical needs only.

Manager: “When I talk to J. about transport, I know that he is not just sitting at the back watching, he is watching the driver for any bump in the road because he has to readjust his position in his wheelchair ... because if he doesn’t, if he goes forward like that he can’t get back. When we talk about transport in the Head Office, ... they have no knowledge of what it is really like for somebody in such a vehicle and all our vehicles we use are commercial vehicles that are adapted for wheelchair use, they have very hard springs, they are not comfortable vehicles they are like ... I would be saying, we shouldn’t be using any of the vehicles we currently use because they are designed for commercial use for carrying big loads but not for people. There is very hard Pirelli tires, there is not soft tires, they have very hard suspension and for people like Delta or for thinking of being client focused they are not the business but when we discuss transport centrally it is about vehicles complying with the legislation that they have to have. ... The learning is to listen and it doesn’t happen.”

This manager reports about the expertise and responsibility that residents are able to take for their lives within the service. The particular example of transport points to the gap between adequate transport facilities and the legal requirements for such vehicles. While the resident voices and explains his experiences and difficulties with the vehicles in detail, the manager can then better understand what adequate transport might mean. When attempting to transfer this knowledge to the managerial layer above, the authenticity and immediacy of the report is lost. The quality of listening therefore requires an immediate interaction between resident and manager as it is through the listening of the detailed analysis that the rationales and language of residents can be learned and – understood.

Understanding – Acknowledging needs

Resident: “I made the point that it irritated me slightly when someone is shouting in the middle of the day ‘Who is feeding James?’ It is not a zoo! ‘Who is feeding James?’ ‘Who is
giving James his lunch!’ and that should be put up on a notice board. With the new staff it is the same after a few weeks, you know who is feeding who … I looked across at Margaret and maybe she had never thought about it that way before. … I mean there is a word that is used here a lot, people like the residents and you and myself have a certain amount of your dignity taken away from you. And if someone comes in and says ‘Do you want your tea?’ or ‘Do you want fed now?’ you know they take my dignity away by saying that but they don’t see it that way.”

Staff: “I had heard things from Delta there that I wouldn’t have been aware of, by saying ‘Who is going to feed somebody?’ That would not have registered with me as being a problem, because maybe I didn’t look at it from their point of view.”

Resident and staff member had attended the same group interview that day where the resident had reported this incident. For the resident, it is crucial to point to the moral impact of statements that threaten the dignity of residents even though non-intentionally. It is through the careful explanation of the incident but more importantly of the rationale behind and the assumptions from which the resident was speaking from that allowed for an enhanced understanding of the staff member. The degree of authenticity of her understanding cannot be underestimated as she reported her learning from that episode voluntarily and independently in an individual interview. This overall episode shows how a reflective conversation enhances the mutual understanding of stakeholder group in a center.

Responding – Adhering to needs

Resident: “Every wheelchair … has footplates, it is where you rest your feet. People have them at different levels, some people have them sticking up. … E. was upset for weeks and that was a real major issue for her because she didn’t feel comfortable in her chair. … It was the most serious matter that she had and constantly for weeks I had to listen to her morning, noon and night and I was even getting a little tired of it too. But at the same time I could associate with what she was saying, I am a service user as well. Because if the situation happened to me, especially our power chairs, … they are our life pod. And if something happens to that, … it is not as easy as saying there is something wrong with my car, because you can walk away from that. We need our power chairs and for someone to go into a manual chair it means that she has lost every bit of independence she has. She needs staff to come down to take her to dining room. She has lost her mobility.”

This episode points to the relevance and urgency of needs for residents not only in terms of biophysical but also psychosocial dimensions. Whereas the immediate issue of the footplates requires an immediate response at an operational level, the need for a response at the psychosocial level is also required. This resident feel frustrated due to the lack of an immediate response with regard to a request that is at the core of her life: mobility. The inability to provide
a response at both levels in this example points to the relevance of the four steps of responsiveness: Listening to her needs carefully would have provided staff or management with an understanding about the urgency of a response that then could have been provided more timely.

Resident: “There are some residents and they need to go out at night. It means having assistance to get ready, they need washed or changed of clothes. Maybe and unfortunately the staff are quite acceptable and think that it is good to have this thing but here is where a certain amount of hypocrisy comes in, because it interrupts their tea time and they have to give up their tea time to assist this person to get ready so that means that an a lot of occasions, not just one occasion the word comes down that this person changes their mind they are not going out but the resident hasn’t changed their mind it is the staff that has changed their mind for them. … So if you are going along the independence route you have to tow along that line and their attitude is that is fine to go out but you can go out on our terms.”

This episode shows how requests can be formally be responded to but staff would take advantage of their relative power over residents. The dependency issue that shines through in this example points to the ambiguity of the quality of responses. What can be considered an adequate, honest response to any request is ultimately in the eye of the beholder, or in this case, in the eye of the resident.

Conclusion

On the one hand, responsiveness at the individual level is translated as responding to the needs of residents, which implies reading their signals correctly. On the other hand, daily routines, ignorance and disinterest from both sides are barriers to a more responsive interaction in the delivery of care: “Well, care is more the lack of response. I think the care people are in the front line and they should be the ones to pick up all the signals and they should be the ones feeding to the rest of us, you know this person has particular needs and responding to it. But they are not, and the messages are all getting blocked.”

In a one-line quote, responsiveness was defined by a staff members as follows: “How do we know who wants what? And how do we act on that?” The notion of responsiveness has been discussed throughout the project with the different stakeholder groups and my understanding of responsiveness is derived from and mainly informed by their theories-in-use of responsiveness. Hence, Responsiveness at the individual level of care interaction can be conceptualized in four generic steps: asking – listening – understanding – responding, as exemplified above. At this level, any communication problem appears to be between two subjects of a communication and their ability or inability to come to terms with regard to a certain state of affairs.
However, the episodes above point to certain barriers to a responsive interaction: The inability or unwillingness by not asking questions, or not the ‘right’ questions; the inability or unwillingness to read signals; not being willing to voice needs out of fear of repercussion; inability or unwillingness to understand certain needs; response quality and response time not being authentic, adequate and/or timely.

At first sight, explanation for such barriers might be found in individual intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and attitudes. However, despite the relevance of individual communication skills, the service interaction is provided in an organizational setting that co-determines the quality and extent of the interaction itself. Responsiveness in the context of service provision points to the organizational frame for any embodied service interaction: “Successfully expressive service work requires a productive service culture.” (Küppers, 1998: 337). Hence, I suggest distinguishing the individual dimension of responsiveness from the organizational dimension in which the service encounter takes places. The latter is at the core of the following sections of this investigation.

5.2.2. Properties of perceptive, reflective and adaptive aspects as key attributes of responsiveness in organizations (Responsiveness II)

For responsiveness at the organizational level, the case analysis suggests that perceptive, reflective and adaptive aspects are key attributes in that regard. Based on the case, I will propose distinctive properties of these dimensions, then juxtapose them with three key capabilities of any organization (ability to perceive, to learn and to take action), and finally propose a typology of responsiveness in organizations.

The following narratives from the field will provide me with the theories-in-use that actors have in terms of the above aspects of responsiveness. Actors thereby attribute these different aspects to the organization or its subunits. Contrasting episodes complement the narratives to indicate the lack of a specific capacity.

Dimension 1: Perceptivity

At the organizational level, perceptivity refers to the ability of an organization to identify signals or stimuli of relevance. The development of perceptivity at the institutional level can be observed as perceptive practices described by the different stakeholders’ perspectives in that regard.

Manager: “I think the communication groups have improved the situation, have given us space and have reduced the amount of complex issues that have come up, there are some areas where they are working badly and that would be if you have got a person needing a group who is not skilled in working with groups and they come across as very dismissive and very
autocratic, very unapproachable and there a couple of spots that I am conscious of and what I try to do from time to time is to sit in and to avoid those people being completely stuck within a bigger format where anybody can come into, if there are issues not addressed in their little circles, so I am trying to get the spaces where people can talk and I think it is definitely better than before those spaces but it does depend a lot on the facilitator that is there at the time, you can kill a meeting very quickly."

The manager reflecting on the usefulness of communication groups that were set up as a consequence of the LTL project show the opportunities and limits of such discursive arenas. While a space has been created to address complex issues, the skills of participants for reflective conversation limits the sustained quality of such a process. Responsiveness as reflective practice, however, provides the opportunity to develop on content issues as well as on the process and skills necessary for learning in a social setting.

Resident: “When you set up a scheme like the advocacy group, you have to give them 100%. There is no point in saying they are fantastic meetings but at the same time you don’t kind of 100%, for want of a better phrase, the care doesn’t go the full way to a certain degree and that is not a criticism of any one individual but from the point of view of... I think open dialogue would be a very good thing, I think it would take away a certain amount of power that some individuals have as against other people airing their voice, it is the same with residents, there are some residents who wouldn’t have thought speaking out here in a matter that would be of concern to them. Now... The attitude hasn’t completely reversed around but they understand now that if any issue does come up about something that there are not out on a limb, they do have other residents here that would say hold on this is how we go about things and that they have friends... they try to impress on the residents who do not come into the advocacy, you cant twist peoples arms unfortunately if they don’t come in they don’t come in and they are residents here. And what is said is that the residents who don’t come in, they have fears and they have concerns but how can we help them if they are not prepared to come in and deal with it... I don’t have residents who come into me, but various little problems I cant fight their case, if they would come in for this dialogue but they don’t say anything to the staff because are afraid.”

The advocacy group of this center has been set up some weeks after the project had been conducted and has been successfully established since. Residents discuss items among themselves and invite staff and/or management when they find it appropriate. As the reflection of the residents above shows, it is the opportunity to voice issues, concerns and claims in a psychologically safe environment, which can be considered the first step when perception is at stake. Some residents however, are still facing the fundamental dilemma, that even though the forum is a residents’-only setting, they fear the power of the grapevine and thereby repercussion
by staff or management. This dilemma is certainly a structural barrier to responsiveness but at least for residents willing to discuss their items, the advocacy proves beneficial.

Resident: “Being more responsive is to see more what Head Offices does. Because there is lot of projects that need to be supported. For example, when the service user development manager was going around the centers and trying to set up some projects to get some constructive training ... I would welcome if Omega was more responsive.”

This resident is interested in learning and understanding what the head office thinks and does. Even though he criticizes the lack of transparency to a certain extent, it is the general interest in knowing what is going on that he emphasizes. Responsiveness as enhancing understanding would require at least providing stakeholders with reasons why a certain action did not happen as planned. Accountability in terms of communication then becomes key to a responsive cooperation.

Contrasting episode: What perceptivity is not

Resident: “The way I would responsiveness for me is that the center was set up without the input of people with disabilities. It was set up because a group of people without disabilities said: ‘There is cripples out there, there are disabled, handicapped. They are unfortunate, they need somewhere to live. Families cannot look after them. Let’s build a place that will accommodate 30 people.’ That’s what happened 30 years ago. That’s lack of responsiveness for me.”

Best intentions are not sufficient if understanding is lacking. The above example shows how a benevolent founder did not include the views of future clients and therefore failed in developing purpose-built facilities to cater the needs of residents best. Both process and result are artifacts of a lack of responsiveness as the ability to include viewpoints foreign to your own.

Conclusion

The will to learn about and curiosity for other life-worlds and rationales seems to be a fundamental prerequisite for reflection and understanding. The lack of such a will does not only lead to personal dissatisfaction of relational quality but to organizational inefficiencies such as defensive routines, misallocation of resources etc. Perception and interest does not seem to be a passive, one-way communication in that regard. Active information gathering, involvement and participation provide the different stakeholder groups with additional views that can then be incorporate in the sensemaking processes of a particular constituencies. At the sender’s end of the communication, the willingness to provide any information seems to depend on the degree of attention that is attributed to the information in question. At the receiver’s end, the recipiency for signals as weak as they might be proofs crucial in an organizational setting. Not actively
searching for signals might be poor listening practice, ignoring existing, knowable signals indicates the lack of or a low level of responsiveness at the institutional level. Well-established, sustainable conversational arenas at least provide the different constituencies with a space whereby signals are made explicit and known and induce accountability for claims made in the public sphere of the conversational arena. These arenas seem to be an indication that the ‘perceptual surface’ at an institutional level has been enhanced.

**Dimension 2: Reflectivity**

Reflectivity refers to the ability to make sense of these signals or stimuli in the light of the theories-in-use of the organizational actors. Reflection means to reconsider taken-for-granted pre-understandings about the world and other people. Reflection as a social process requires space for such interaction.

Staff: “Whereas here you do get the message, it is the message as is sent in the literal translation of wondering why is this person cross well they are just cross you don’t look any further ... and suddenly I am left with a group that just don’t know anything what they should know or the levels that they know are just so different. So it makes it very difficult. I think in the perfect world we would have group meetings once a week exploring these kind of issues, finding out about ourselves, where are we, why are we there, how do we feel about it, how do we feel about one another, but there is just nothing there is no space for that.”

*The need to develop the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to reflect on your actions as well as the need of a conversational space that allows for that are described in this episode. The lack of such a space might lead to organizational routines that are established and persist for no other reason that tradition.*

Resident: “Whenever an issue crops up, the staff member in question can say ‘Right, an issue has arisen here’. We have got people’s houses, we have an activity room, we have a conservatory, and we have lots of places where meetings can take place between X amount of people. ... And even for the manager to participate and bring it in and say ‘Right, let’s have a chat about this’ and it is like everybody being open about this, there is no closed doors situation. ... That is what some of the residents might have a chat about it. And then a day or a week later, the residents would be informed by the manager. Now, this is what is going to happen from now on. So how can that harbor any lasting attitudes between staff and residents, if the person who had the problems says fine and would say ‘I would like one or two people with me as well’, and there is only 7 or 8 people get together and say ‘Let’s have a chat about this’ because at the end of the day, in any conflict situation it is dialogue that leads to a certain amount of understanding in any situation.”
This episode shows how formal and informal boundaries are of high relevance in terms of participation. Who is in and who is out is usually not a question that is addressed within the conversation, but is regulated by extra-conversational means such as relative power. However, if different constituencies acknowledge the usefulness of multiple perspectives on a particular issue as to find a mode of coping with it, the likelihood to stabilize such conversational settings is increased.

Manager: “I think that we need to be resurrecting something like the residents committee, we do have residents on our management support committee and that works very well, we do have residents who are trustees, we do have residents who are involved in the consumers group. But those residents, who are involved in those committees, don’t feed back to the residents what is going on in those committees; I mean that is a big issue. Up until three months ago, I would have met with a wide cross section of staff every two weeks on a Wednesday, what I did then was I put in the new management structure and I spoke to my managers, the team leaders, you have got your care team, your activities, and they would meet with their teams. And I have minuted the meetings and I have asked them and continually pushing to meet them on a more regular basis. I mean this morning, was a classic. Fiona was bringing up issues there, those are the kind of issues they should be bringing up at a team meeting, so I think we need to be pushing for more regular team meetings, certainly from a care point of view. As managers and line managers, we meet about every two weeks.”

Each conversational arena address a specific purposes but can be considered themselves as contributing to responsiveness as they provide the space to understand differences and other people’s viewpoint in the light of their grammar and vocabulary.

Contrasting episode: What reflectivity is not

Resident: “That with people with the managers and that the people who have power, both the staff and the residents, including myself, know that if an issue comes up now the staff could call a meeting at any time and they would call a meeting now it doesn’t happen all the time, but it has happened more than once on maybe some issue about a resident, and they go to the staff room and have a meeting about something that has taken place between a resident and a staff member and they have a meeting about it but the resident never hears about what happens in the meeting, the resident should actually be involved in that meeting and maybe one or two other along with him and then the manager would be approached during this case and he says right.. and it is the attitude...that the staff know that the manager, the manager will speak to the residents and that is the way the problem is solved and sometimes it is not solved it just lies underneath the surface.”
Meeting for the meeting’s sake and lack of involvement and transparency are key to this episode. What the resident reporting this session points to in terms of responsiveness is the lack of inclusiveness of the resident’s viewpoint with regard to that particular issue. Responsiveness as the opportunity to voice and share your viewpoint with others is key to any sustainable problem solving.

Conclusion

Reflection can be seen as an intrapersonal act. However, in an organization and its conversational settings, reflection becomes a discursive act. Reflection as sensemaking is an attempt to rationalize certain viewpoints in the light of own and other viewpoints. Two aspects seem to be crucial in that regard: Again, the willingness and ability by stakeholder to engage in reflection as a basic condition that is complemented by the establishing of discursive arenas in which the reflection a social, discursive act can take place. Inclusiveness obviously is required, as viewpoints not voiced or authentically represented in a conversation cannot be reflected upon adequately. The discursive arena in terms of reflection is somewhat paradox: Conversation makes uncertainty and ambiguity, that tend to be neglected in organizational settings, discussable and provide a mode to cope with them that is different from neglection. However, opening the conversation to plural life-worlds and language games increases uncertainty and ambiguity, as different actors will provide fuzzy statements and ambiguous claims to the conversation.

Dimension 3: Adaptivity

Adaptivity refers to the ability of an organization to respond to these enacted signals appropriately. The first of the following examples exemplifies a mode of coping with uncertainty, whereas the other examples show different formats for dealing with ambiguity.

Staff: “Well every morning and every evening, I suppose that this has happened really since you were here in fairness, we have a nurses report. There was always a nurses' report but now the carers join in on the nurses' report, which is very good. It is only half an hour in the morning and the same every night. So that actually is very, very good. Because it is happening every day so therefore, we all know, Mr. X rang the bell 20 times last night and we have follow up and we ask why.”

Routine meetings that deal with operational issues to coordinate tasks can be valuable spaces not only for a mechanistic information exchange but a starting point for asking questions, which is one of the key features of responsiveness at the individual level of care. This example also shows how the adaptive quality of the social context was enhanced, as staff...
members considered it useful to include another staff group into their coordination efforts, and thereby changing organizational practice.

Residents: “It was out of the advocacy meetings, we decided that we only ever had two drivers and basically they drove during the day and went up to the city and that was fine, at nighttime you had to make special arrangements and in the summertime, especially two summers ago here, why cant I get out tonight, well because I have no driver and over a short period of time I spoke to the manager and I said we need someone to take us out at nights and it is another step towards independent living and do normal things and it happened and we got a driver and it was worked fantastically well and we actually have two guys that rotate on nights and ok it is only from Tuesday to Saturday and we make arrangements through the advocacy group!”

Self-organization of conversational arenas, giving a voice for people that didn’t have one before, impacting on organizational practices. This episode shows how perception and reflection in a conversational arena has provided the residents with well-thought arguments to convince the management to change certain aspects of the transport policy, i.e. organizational practices.

Manager: “There is talk of us managers meeting informally, in terms of setting up a little forum for ourselves where we can talk, I don’t know if the foundation will go for that. We are talking no Head Office personnel, just managers only. It is like there are issues and it is not about the Head Office, but there are issues on the ground, I am dealing with issues as we speak, bits and pieces, we need to talk, to share expertise, to support each other and we don’t get any other support”

This manager reflects on the lack of reflective practice that should be embedded in a discursive arena that caters the needs of this particular constituency, i.e. the managers of the centers. The need for such a meeting was voiced by different managers throughout the project which is a strong indication that to enable managers to manage change in their centers requires a setting in which they can reflect on their role as change agents as well as on operational issues.

Resident: “Then in terms of to move things on, like in terms of responsiveness, I suppose I kept making a case that things have to change. And in the last 4 years that has really happened. The manager, head of care, she moved on following some reports, and an official complaint made by a few of us as well to head office. A new manager came along, a new secretary came along. And the whole thing changed. ... For me it was so significant, that it was the very first time that somebody said: ‘I want you to be involved. Really involved. And I value what you are
saying. Not lip service. You know more about it than me in many ways, with your projects. You get on with it. I am here to help you with that if you want.’ … Definitely involvement does increase responsiveness. … A lot of work needs to be done in terms of making more opportunities available to people in terms getting involved. Everybody, residents, tenants, staff and so on so that they see a reason to be involved, see a reason that is really their home, their place of accommodation until they choose to move on.”

This resident expresses the effect that the appreciation of his viewpoint had on his willingness to contribute to the development of the service and the center. Moreover, it shows that involvement and participation can and have to be learned, and that a lacking ability to participate can be remedied by – participation. Participation and involvement provide multiple interpretations on issues that recur in ever changing forms.

Contrasting episode: What adaptivity is not

“When I joined the Management Committee after a few year battle, nearly legal actions, eventually, the residents said we want someone on the MC. I arrived to my first meeting, had my report and everything. The chairperson said: “Pat, do you want to give a residents’ report?” I did that. Then there was silence for about five minutes. The secretary then said: “Sure Pat, you are busy now, you wouldn’t want to be waiting or hanging around. I will open the door for you if you want to get out.” “Oh, I said. I am not in a hurry at all.” In other words, I was kicked out of the meeting after five minutes. I insisted. A very big debate took place, arguments took place. I insisted that I would not go anywhere. If you don’t hold the meeting, don’t hold the meeting. I said, I am elected by the residents to be here, I am here as an equal. The main people have said they want me here, I am here. If you don’t hold the meeting, I will sit here all night. They just did have no choice, but with to get on with the meeting.”

This episode is somewhat disturbing as it shows how responsiveness can be claimed at a formal, institutional level. A stakeholder group representative was allowed to participate in a decision-making body of a center. However, involvement and authentic participation was not expected and asked for. It was through the resident’s insisting that a long-term involvement and participation in that committee could be established and developed. Responsiveness as formal representation only falls short of the intention to develop a common grammar and vocabulary as to understand other life-worlds.

Conclusion

Adaptivity refers to the ability of an organization to respond to these enacted signals appropriately. This ability depends on whether a challenge to the organization is referred to as a problem or an issue. The notion of ‘problem’ refers to resolvable interruptions of a flow of action. As a problem of confusion, ambiguity can be reduced by allowing for multiple
interpretations on an issue. The notion of 'issue' indicates that it recurs as a motive in different form. Reducing ambiguity means to establish formats that allow for multiple interpretations to be voiced and issues to recur in different forms. Changes in operational practices tend to address problems of uncertainty whereas changes in the organization's ability to change tend to address recurring issues and confusion, i.e. ambiguity. The former refers to operational items such as daily hand-over meetings, transport policy etc. The latter exemplifies changes in the meeting structure of the center. Lack of discursive arenas for perception and reflection results in a low response if any, as the contrasting episodes shows. Taking ownership in existing or establishing new conversational arenas are attempts to bridge the perceived gap between reflection and action.

5.2.3. Responsiveness in organizations: Definition and Typology

In order to discern patterns of responsive aspects from the case, we can identify properties of the three key aspects of responsiveness by examining and clustering the narratives above. An analysis of participants' narratives on responsiveness indicates differences in focus, orientation, complexity handling, dominant speech acts (Ford, 1995), relevance of statements, as well as variety and equality of voices (Table 10):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptivity</th>
<th>Reflectivity</th>
<th>Adaptivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Identifying, reading signals</td>
<td>Acknowledging, understanding differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Orientation to understanding: Attentive listening</td>
<td>Orientation to understanding: Interested investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity handling</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant speech acts</td>
<td>(Suspension), assertives, requests, expressives, declarations</td>
<td>Mutual questions, expressives, mutual confirmations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of statements</td>
<td>Voicing various interpretations</td>
<td>Equal relevance of statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of vocality</td>
<td>Multivocality</td>
<td>Equivocality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Properties of perceptivity, reflectivity and reflectivity
Defining responsiveness

Based on the case analysis, I would suggest to conceive of

- Responsiveness as a process quality experienced by stakeholders in encounters ‘with the organization’
- Responsiveness as a socially constructed attribute of an organization – enacted and reproduced by the stakeholders of an organization
- Responsiveness as consisting of
  i. perceptivity as the ability to identify issues raised by stakeholders;
  ii. reflectivity as the ability to understand and make sense of these issues;
  iii. adaptivity as the ability to respond to the issues accordingly.

The three dimensions link up to responsiveness as perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. The following Figure 4 shows, how the three key capabilities interrelate and represent different degrees of responsiveness. Seven fields or types of responsiveness can be identified in that regard.

Figure 4: Properties of responsiveness - interrelated
The fields differ in the level of each of the three dimensions. This provides a typology of responsiveness, reaching from a low level of responsiveness ("autistic reflex") to a high level of responsiveness ("vigilant answer").

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Perceptivity</th>
<th>Reflectivity</th>
<th>Adaptivity</th>
<th>Type of responsiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Autistic reflex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Myopic inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Myopic response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>&quot;Phlegmatic&quot; observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Conditioned response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Attentive inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Vigilant answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Typology of responsiveness

The seven generic types of responsiveness that I would suggest to discern from this analysis are described in more detail below.

Field 1: "Autistic reflex"

As both the level of perceptivity as well as reflectivity are low, stimuli or changes in stimuli cannot be identified. Action taken in such a situation is based on outdated data and received wisdom of the past.

Field 2: "Myopic inquiry"

When reflecting on outdated data without adding new information or signals from the past, combined with the lack of taking action, both the goal and the quality of such an inquiry is to be questioned.

Field 3: "Myopic response"

Without identifying stimuli or changes in stimuli, any reflection has to be based on perceptual assumptions that might be refined but will only result in a response that is based on known insights.

Field 4: "Phlegmatic observation"

To identify and perceive stimuli without any reflective or adaptive consequences can only be referred to as a passive, disinterested observation.
Field 5: “Conditioned response”

This field describes best the behaviorist view on responsiveness. Changes in stimuli might be identified, but as they are not reflected upon the response is very likely to come be derived from a given response repertoire.

Field 6: “Attentive inquiry”

While changes in stimuli are being identified, and reflection occurs, it does not result in any form of action.

Field 7: “Vigilant answer”

This field describes an active view on responsiveness best. Not only are changes in stimuli identified, and made sense of. Action is based on a high degree of perception and reflection and hence, a response will result in an appropriate answer that is based on a sufficient understanding of the state of affairs.

Conclusion: Responsiveness in organizations as a perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity

When asked to reflect on responsiveness in their context, participants of the project from the different stakeholder groups mainly refer to three dimensions of responsiveness: perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity. Furthermore, as I have suggested, responsiveness is not an inherent characteristic of an organization but an attribute, i.e. a social construction. Based on the project data, I have explored the three key dimensions in more detail:

Perceptivity refers to the ability of an organization to identify signals or stimuli of relevance. In the case, it was experienced in organizational practices by stakeholders as opportunities to voice issues, interests and claims as well as to listen to others issues, interests and claims is based on the curiosity, willingness and necessity to take others’ views into account.

Reflectivity refers to the ability to make sense of these signals or stimuli in the light of the theories-in-use of the organizational actors. In the case, it was experienced in organizational practices by stakeholders as opportunities to render own and other views, assumptions and mental models visible and thereby accessible for discursive scrutiny allows for surprises, critique and review of taken-for-granted positions. At its best, it might enhance understanding for others’ viewpoints.

Adaptivity refers to the ability of an organization to respond to these enacted signals appropriately. In the case, it was experienced in organizational practices by stakeholders as opportunities to take action based on reflection and understanding refers to the perceived ability of an organization to respond to needs, interests and claims made by its stakeholders. However, it seems plausible to assume that involvement and participation enhances the likelihood for a vigilant answer in that regard.
Even though I would assume that the final assessment of the quality of a response is in the eye of the beholder, it is plausible to distinguish responses with regard to their relative innovativeness – responses drawn from a given response repertoire will be referred to as *reproductive responses*, whereas responses that allow for inventing responses in the process of answering will be referred to as *productive responses* (Waldenfels, 1994). This distinction echoes the notion of single-loop and double-loop learning of Argyris et al. (1978).

All three link up to responsiveness, defined as an attributed, perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. Having developed a typology of responsiveness – based on the three key dimensions, and ranging from “autistic reflex” to “vigilant answer” – I will now revisit the process and outcomes in the different centers in order to identify differences in responsive qualities and cluster them according to the above typology.

### 5.2.4. Synopsis of responsiveness in the centers

Having defined responsiveness as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity, as well as having developed the typology of responsiveness mainly on the basis of individual narratives, I will now employ this typology as to assess the degree of responsiveness in the different centers. To apply a framework, developed on the basis of narratives of individuals, in order to discern patterns at the institutional level complies with the nature of an interpretive, inductive approach, as well as with the nature of the phenomenon as a socially constructed attribute.

For this purpose, I will refer to the outcomes of the project in each centre and employ these as indicators of responsiveness. Some of the outcomes related to the project might not include responsive aspects in centers that already practice a high involvement and participation of stakeholders in existing conversational arenas. However, this does not jeopardize the overall value of this analysis.

In terms of perceptivity, outcomes differ in the degree to which the response is a contribution to the organization’s perceptual capacity. In terms of reflectivity, outcomes differ in the degree to which the response contributes to the opportunities for reflections in the organization. In terms of adaptivity, responses differ in the degree to which they contribute to an adaptation within a given response repertoire (reproductive response), or to an adaptation that allows for participative invented responses beyond current response repertoire (productive response).

**Alpha**

In Alpha, lifting and handling practices were assessed by an expert and resulted in a new policy that was welcomed by staff, most residents and the local manager. What resulted from the review was not so much the lifting practices, but the fact there are options for people in...
terms of lifting and ways in which people can help themselves. This change in organizational practice qualifies for an act of adaptive capacity.

The residents' advocacy group that was established by residents provides a psychologically safe space for residents to voice and discuss issues important to them first among themselves and invite other stakeholder groups such as staff and management when they find it appropriate to do so. Giving voice is certainly a fundamental feature and prerequisite for perception as well as reflection.

Regular staff meetings once a week in which operational aspects of the service are being discussed. This does also provide people with the opportunity to share views among different departments of the center and the relations between the different functions and roles in terms of the overall service delivery. The staff-management meeting would be more focused on perception and exchange of viewpoints as well as their reflection and therefore is mainly an outcome in that regard.

Finally, a group of staff members have established a semi-regular meeting among themselves to follow on the LTL process. This self-organized group attempts to discuss and reflect on issues that go beyond daily business. As the focus of this meeting is to reflect on different views within staff, it would address the perceptive, reflective as well as an adaptive dimension of responsiveness.

*Beta/Gamma*

A formal hand-over meeting had been established since the project made the low level of communication between the different stakeholder groups and departments visible and intelligible. Once a day, the very business-like meeting is held to keep everyone informed on daily problems.

In order to address the issue of intransparent activities and information policy an activities book has been established that is accessible for everyone anytime at a specific point in the hall of the reception area. Residents can then make an informed choice whether they would like to be part of an activity or a social outing.

A formal complaints procedure has been established which allows residents to voice their concerns and can expect to receive a response. The formal and explicit complaints procedure creates a visibility and accountability within the center both for staff and residents.

*Epsilon*

As to address the issue of flexibility of mealtimes it was agreed to set up an all-inclusive committee to look into the issue. Participants valued the inclusivity of such a committee that should serve as a prototype for problem-solving in the future.
Residents' meet once a month to discuss issues important to them and report them to the head of care and the manager of the center. Turnout and participation vary according to the chairperson. However, as the manager explicitly encourages residents to express their views and to become involved in the development and improvement of the service, the cooperation is considered useful.

There had not been a meeting culture in that regard between the different departments and professional groups of the center. As participants from all departments valued and welcomed the exercise, the daily nurses' meeting has since been open to all professional groups of the center, i.e. care workers respectively. The inclusion of the care workers in the nurses' meeting shows an enhanced necessity and willingness to include different viewpoints as to coordinate specific operational items.

Zeta

The manager has established programs to develop self-esteem and capabilities among other training and induction initiatives. The training and induction initiative tailored for both staff and residents enhances the ability to cope with change in the long-term for both constituencies and contributes to an adaptive capacity at that level.

Developing space for reflective practice was considered a useful exercise that should remain part of the meeting structure. It is therefore that this center has been continuing the LTL process in a self-organized way. The generic format of appreciation and inclusiveness were considered key in that regard. The LTL initiative in this center aims at capitalizing on the quality of inclusive perception and reflection opportunities as a means to enhance the long-term ability to change, i.e. adaptive capacity at a strategic level.

Lambda

The meeting cultures and structure is very well developed and established. In every committee, be it formal or ad-hoc, all the different groups of the center are represented. It is probably for that reason, that this member of this center did not see and appreciate the immediate value of LTL for them.

However, they customized the forum in a way that they considered useful to them. Conducting a review of the service at a very operational level resulted in a ‘to-do-list’ with operational items such as facilities, transport, social outings, security, gardening and smoking policy etc. All these items were addressed and in the final session, progress on each item was reported.
**Delta**

Stakeholders in this center opted to hold joint meetings throughout the entire process of LTL. Participants were surprised and satisfied with the quality of conversations that they experienced. Hence, the manager encouraged his line managers to establish a meeting structure in the different departments so that local issues can be dealt with immediately at a local level.

Residents’ meetings had not been held but were re-established after the LTL process. Especially residents from the independent housing project hold regular meetings as to reflect on current practice and future developments. Providing space for perception and reflection are the two key features of these meetings.

It was agreed to establish LTL on a regular basis as a core feature of the communication processes in the center. Every three months the generic format of LTL should be conducted as to provide all groups of the center to voice and discuss their views in a reflective manner, helped by an outside facilitator.

**Kappa**

As the format of the LTL process in this center was customized to the needs of the leadership team, the outcomes were mainly driven by operational concerns. The two separate sessions with residents and staff were designed as to collect current issues that then should be reported and dealt with in the leadership team. Adaptiveness would address the operational level only in that regard.

Communication groups should enable staff to develop their communication skills towards a more reflective mode of conversation and reflection. And might thereby enhance the long-term adaptivity of the center.

**Identifying the centers relative degrees of responsiveness**

Based on the definition and typology of responsiveness, I can now distinguish the outcomes of the project by assessing the potential of the outcome with regard to the three key dimensions of responsiveness. Here are two examples, how I have clustered the project outcomes using the typology of responsiveness:

For example, the residents’ advocacy group established by residents in Alpha center can be conceived of as creating a self-organized space for perception and reflection that does not aim at an immediate problem to be resolved, but to address recurring issues from the residents’ point of view. This project outcome, or response, would qualify as a “vigilant answer”, as all three aspects of responsiveness score high in this example.

In contrast, the process in Lambda center resulted in a straight forward, operational to do list, e.g. facilities, transport, social outings, security, gardening and smoking policy etc. The
items on the list were conceived of as problems to be fixed. The project outcome would rather qualify as a "conditioned response", identified needs were responded to by mainly drawing from a given response repertoire without reflecting on overall changes of the service provision.

Based on the three properties of responsiveness, the outcomes in terms of their responsive quality and potential can be summarized as follows (Table 12):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Responsive attributes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New health and safety policy regarding lifting</td>
<td>P=Perceptivity; R=Reflectivity; A=Adaptivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-organized Residents' advocacy group</td>
<td>High; High; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Staff meetings</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-regular Staff/management meetings</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-organized semi-regular LTL-staff group</td>
<td>High; High; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal daily hand-over meeting</td>
<td>Low; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and communication book</td>
<td>Low; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints procedure</td>
<td>High; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal staff/meeting</td>
<td>High; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All inclusive committees</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily coordination meeting (nurses' meeting)</td>
<td>High; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Residents' meeting</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced training and induction</td>
<td>High; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-organized LTL on a regular basis</td>
<td>High; High; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adressing several operational items</td>
<td>Low; Low; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-organized LTL on a 3-monthly basis</td>
<td>High; High; High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Residents' meeting</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Line managers' meeting</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication groups</td>
<td>High; High; Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adressing several operational items</td>
<td>Low; Low; High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Cluster of responsiveness in participating centers

* P=perceptivity; R=reflectivity; A=adaptivity
Conclusion

From the analysis of responsive qualities with regard to the outcomes of the project, I would suggest to distinguish three distinct groups of centers. While a high level of responsiveness is related to vigilant answers, a medium level of responsiveness to attentive inquiry, a low level of responsiveness was attributed to centers that mainly responded with autistic reflexes and conditioned responses to the item emerging from the project.

- **High level of responsiveness**
  These 3 centers are distinct as they were able to establish sustainable conversational arenas within and across the different stakeholder groups. Moreover, Most of their outcomes were responses that enhanced not only perceptive and reflective but also the adaptive capacity in terms of the ability for organizational change.
  - Alpha
  - Zeta
  - Delta

- **Moderate level of responsiveness**
  These two centers have established mainly conversational arena that aim at enhancing perception and reflection within the daily delivery of the service. Responsiveness as an adaptive capacity therefore remains at an operational level. However, the perceptual capacity of the center as a whole has been certainly enhanced at the level of organizational practices.
  - Epsilon
  - Kappa

- **Low level of responsiveness**
  These centers have responded to the request and claims that emerged through the LTL process mainly by addressing operational issues in a single-loop manner, i.e. immediate problem detection and error correction without reflecting on the learning mode itself. This does not imply that the service delivery in these center is by any means inferior than in others, it is the outcomes that can be attributed to the LTL-intervention that are mainly driven by operational considerations at a non-reflective level.
  - Beta, Gamma
  - Lambda
5.3. Making Sense of Differences – The Relation between Conversational Modes and Responsiveness

Having accomplished the two major analytical steps in this investigation, i.e. identified differences in conversational modes and differences in responsive qualities, I will now reflect on the relation between conversational modes and responsiveness.

Based on this analysis, I have clustered the process and outcomes of the project in the different centers with regard to two dimensions. On the one hand, the degree of reflective conversation within the workshop sessions that ranged from a high degree i.e. dialogue occurred between stakeholder groups, to a low degree, i.e. talking nice or tough remained the preferred conversational modes within and between stakeholder groups. On the other hand, the level of responsiveness, indicated by the project outcomes, ranging from a high level, i.e. vigilant, productive answer, to a low level, i.e. conditioned, reproductive response. For each center, I have attributed the relative degree of conversation and level of responsiveness accordingly. This provides Figure 5 that visualizes the results of this investigation in that regard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of reflective conversation</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Zeta</th>
<th>Delta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Epsilon</td>
<td>Kappa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betal</td>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of responsiveness</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 5: Relating responsiveness and dialogue
Intuitively, the figure suggests a linear relation between degree of reflective conversation and level of responsiveness. One might think now, that this conclusion might be too simple. That is correct. I would suggest being cautious and skeptical to draw such a conclusion at this stage. There are contextual factors that influenced both the degree of reflective conversation as well as the level of responsiveness that are not represented in this figure. On the one hand, the ability and willingness to engage in reflective conversations is very much influenced by organizational culture and individual communication skills. On the other hand, the quality of response resulting from the project is very much influenced by the internal and external forces of change that put pressure on the organization’s subunits to adapt. Before concluding on the relation between conversational modes and responsiveness, let’s therefore take a closer look at some important contextual factors, influencing both dimensions.

**Legislation**

Changes in legislation both in terms of funding as well as in terms of health policy in general and disability in particular will affect the foundation directly and most center indirectly (See for a detailed description Chapter 4). The challenge with regard to legislation consists in adjusting the strategy as well as operational practices to the standards and requirements of the new legislation. In terms of Head Office, this results in establishing organization-wide policies as frame of references for the different centers. In terms of the local level, adaptation of and compliance with these policies in the light of the local situation represent a challenge for management and staff at this level. These changes require an enhanced challenge to the center’s ability to perceive, reflect, i.e. make sense of and adapt to these changes. Hence, changes in legislation induce a higher degree of responsiveness.

**Competition**

Omega’s database of the population and needs of the future customer base has not been developed as yet. Head Office managers as well as local service managers describe the current situation as a quasi-monopoly. They would admit that service quality in a monopoly situation is not a critical success factor: “As a monopoly we could still be in there providing services like any monopoly” and “We are in a monopoly situation at the moment, so our quality doesn’t really get questioned. In a real market situation, quality is everything!” However, both levels of management acknowledge significant changes in terms of competition. Competitors from other European countries have been entering the residential care market with a clear business focus. The health authorities as the ‘purchaser’ could then choose between different offers. In a most recent pitch for state funding on a particular service provision, the commercial service provider achieved 60% of the overall money allocated by the health authority whereas Omega got 7% of the total amount. As one manager concludes: “So, someone somewhere is playing the proper business model game. They are talking to the politicians … to the department of health and they are getting the money. Because there is no quality to measure against. Because what is out there
is Mickey Mouse service provision." Overall, Head Office as well as service managers agree that the current changes in competition produce a threat to the Omega service provision. Changes in the competitive environment therefore can be better understood and responded through a higher organizational responsiveness.

**Governance structure**

Under the former constitution and governance structure, the local service managers reported directly to the CEO of the foundation. Head Office staff had not been recognized in that structure. Since the new constitution was agreed by the Board of Trustees, Head Office staff shows as support managers to the CEO. The next hierarchical layer consists of four regional managers that report directly reporting to the CEO. Finally, the local service managers of the center report directly to their regional manager. These changes are assumed to improve communication, control and efficiency by reducing the span of control of the CEO. While acknowledging the rationale from a Head Office point, local service managers feel demoted to local service managers mainly concerned with the operations of the center. Changes in the governance structure can be considered significant changes in the organizational practices that have to be communicated, accepted and adapted whereby a higher degree of responsiveness would make acceptance and compliance more likely.

**Historical aspects: Dealing with persistent aspects of the old regime**

Most of the Omega centers had changes in management prior to the project start. The paternalistic, benevolent but very strict regimes that had been created in most centers did not allow for individual choices to be made. They created the very dilemma of fearing to give honest feedback on the service. In very unpleasant cases, long-term issues of poor service quality or even abuse had not been disclosed until recently. The acquired behavioral routines and habits by both staff and residents in these centers have been very persistent and are changing very slowly. However, most staff and residents welcome a more open and inclusive approach to the service provision and transparency in terms of decision making. The behavioral patterns from the old regime that have been reproduced over the years mainly by staff and residents can better be overcome in making these implicit practices visible and hence intelligible. Voicing and reflection on these issues in adequate settings are both aspects of a responsive approach in that regard.

**Managerial aspects: Management style, Managers as change agents**

The managers of Alpha, Zeta and Delta perceive themselves as change agents. They describe their roles as facilitating and guiding people through the necessary changes in structures, processes and attitudes. Some of these managers had already training and development schemes in place, when the project started. Others saw the usefulness of the project in that regard and used LTL as a template for facilitating changes in their centers. Staff as well as residents were included in these considerations. The role of a change agent is not to
tell other people what should be done but to facilitate participative processes in which the different stakeholders can form a common will within and across different constituencies. Managers that describe their roles as change agents in that regard have a high impact on organizational culture regarding responsiveness as an attributed institutional capability. To involve residents and staff as 'experts' is one key indicator of such an approach.

**Issues and problems: Uncertainty and ambiguity handling**

Another distinction that makes a difference in terms of responsiveness is the overall approach how stakeholders conceptualize interruptions or challenges to the daily routines and experiences. On the one hand, people referring to these challenges as 'problems' are implicitly assuming that the underlying uncertainty can be remedied by additional information. Additional information could be gathered by asking the different constituencies about their needs, interests and preferences and could thereby still lead to a participatory mode. However, this approach tends to lead towards a 'market research by participation' mode. On the other hand, people acknowledging that challenges are rather 'issues' that recur and that cannot be resolved but addressed, would opt to ask for multiple interpretations on the issue in adequate settings whereby a shared grammar and vocabularies could jointly be developed. This approach can be conceived of a more authentic mode of participation and involvement.

**Conclusion**

The contextual factors provide a much more detailed picture of the situation of the organization and its subunits. There are other factors not covered by this investigation influencing both conversational mode as well as responsiveness. Hence, I would suggest not concluding a direct and linear correlation between conversational modes and responsiveness. But there are the following conclusions to be drawn regarding my initial research question:

1. **Degree of reflective conversation**

   The degree of reflective conversation depends on (1) the conversational spaces in which different modes of conversations can take place. It is up (2) to the communicative abilities of participants in terms of openness and willingness to engage in such a conversation.

2. **Level of responsiveness**

   The level of responsiveness depends on the perceptive, reflective and adaptive qualities of the responses to the items raised in the project. The productive responses are more likely to sustainably address issues by creating conversational arenas for addressing them. Reproductive responses are of equal importance as they fix immediate problems, but are less likely to contribute to double loop learning.
3. Relation of responsiveness and conversational modes

The case analysis suggests that creating the spaces for conversation was a necessary condition to enhance the perceptive, reflective and adaptive abilities. Participants in some centers were willing and able to use these conversational spaces to engage in reflective conversation. Those reflective conversations resulted in productive responses to sustainably address recurring issues of the different stakeholder groups, either within or across stakeholder groups. It is the necessary condition of responsiveness that an organization is able to influence and manage directly: creating conversational arenas. The sufficient condition of responsiveness, i.e. openness, willingness and ability of participants to engage in reflective conversation can hardly directly be managed. Hence, I would suggest concluding from this analysis that the relation between reflective modes of conversation and responsiveness can be conceptualized as follows:

**Responsiveness** as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization can be enhanced by creating contexts in the form of conversational arenas, that allow for — but do not guarantee — reflective conversations. If reflective conversations take place in these arenas, it is likely that productive answers to demands of stakeholders can be found.
5.4. Conclusion: Ten Propositions

In this section, I will briefly summarize the key proposition that I have identified throughout my investigation and that correspond to my initial research questions.

5.4.1. On the nature of responsiveness

Proposition 1: Three dimensions of responsiveness

Responsiveness has three key dimensions: (1) Perceptivity as the ability to identify issues raised by stakeholders; (2) Reflectivity as the ability to understand and make sense of these issues, and (3) Adaptivity as the ability to respond to the issues accordingly. These three dimensions differ in their distinct properties regarding focus, orientation, degree of complexity, speech gesture, relevance of statements, as well as variety and equality of voices.

Proposition 2: Responsiveness as an attribute

Ontologically, responsiveness is not an inherent characteristic of an organization, it can rather be conceived of as an attribute. Organizational actors or stakeholder enact and reproduce responsiveness in discursive acts. Hence, responsiveness is a socially constructed attribute to the organization.

Proposition 3: Defining responsiveness

Responsiveness should be conceived of as a process quality that is inherent and integral part of the experience of unique communicative episodes and encounters. The attribute of a 'responsive capacity of an organization', I would suggest, results from encounters 'with the organization' that different stakeholders experience and that inform their evaluative sensemaking. Then, responsiveness as a socially constructed attribute of an organization refers to the perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization.

Proposition 4: Typology of responsiveness

Degrees of responsiveness can be distinguished depending on the degree to which each of the three key dimensions has been developed. The typology of responsiveness ranges from "autistic reflex" to "vigilant answer".
Proposition 5: Qualities of responses

Responses differ in their degree of relative innovativeness. Whereas as reproductive responses draws from given response repertoire, productive answers are invented in the process of answering.

Proposition 6: Two types of responsiveness

I would suggest distinguishing responsiveness at the level of the individual care interaction as an embodied encounter, from responsiveness as an organizational attribute. The latter can be conceived of as an enabler for the former. This research focuses on responsiveness at the organizational level.

5.4.2. On the relation between conversational modes and responsiveness

Proposition 7: Broadening the focus

Our initial research question assumed a 1:1 relation between dialogue and responsiveness, i.e. one conversational mode relating to a single type of responsiveness. However, I have indicated that different conversational mode relate to different types of responsiveness. Hence, I would suggest that it is rather an n:n relation that is to be investigated.

Proposition 8: Context matters

Responsiveness and conversational modes do not relate in linear, direct manner. It is rather the conversational arena as the context for any conversational mode that is of interest for responsiveness.

Proposition 9: Relating conversational modes and responsiveness

Responsiveness as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization can be enhanced by creating contexts in the form of conversational arenas, that allow for – but do not guarantee – reflective conversations. If reflective conversations take place in these arenas, it is likely that productive answers to demands of stakeholders can be found.

Proposition 10: Managing responsiveness

The possibility to manage responsiveness directly is limited. Organizations can definitely influence the necessary condition for responsive, i.e. creating and providing conversational arenas in which (reflective) conversation can take place. The sufficient condition, however, can hardly be managed directly. Whether a reflective conversation takes place is depending on the
individual communication skills in terms of ability, willingness and openness to engage in reflective conversations.

**Conclusion**

Having accomplished the case analysis, I would now suggest addressing the two initial research questions:

**What is the nature of responsiveness in organizations?**

_Responsiveness is proposed as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. Degrees of responsiveness can be distinguished regarding the three key dimensions of perpectivity, reflectivity and adaptivity. Thereby, responses in their degree of relative innovativeness. (Propositions 1 - 6)._

**What is the relation between dialogue and responsiveness in organizations?**

_Responsiveness and dialogue are not related in a direct, linear manner. The contextual settings for conversations matter. Creating contexts in the form of conversational arenas that allow for – but do not guarantee – reflective conversations, can enhance responsiveness. If reflective conversations take place, it is more likely that productive answers to stakeholder demands can be found. (Propositions 7 - 10)._

In the following chapters, I will discuss implications of my propositions for theory, practice and research.

In Chapter 6, I will reflect on my propositions by referring to the communication theories of dialogue, communicative action and sensemaking. In Chapter 7 I will draw conclusions regarding the contribution this research can make regarding strategy, stakeholder and organizational learning theories. I will also provide implications for practice as well as for further research in that chapter.
6. Discussion and Implications: Responsiveness and Communication – Revisited

Introduction

What implications can be drawn for the communication theories discussed in Chapter 2?

In the previous chapter, I have suggested to conclude the following propositions in terms of responsiveness and its relations to conversational modes in general, and dialogue as reflective conversation in particular:

(1) Responsiveness is proposed as an attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. Degrees of responsiveness can be distinguished regarding the three key dimensions of perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity. Thereby, responses differ in their degree of relative innovativeness. (Propositions 1 - 6).

(2) Responsiveness and dialogue are not related in a direct, linear manner. The contextual settings for conversations matter. Creating contexts in the form of conversational arenas that allow for – but do not guarantee – reflective conversations, can enhance responsiveness. If reflective conversations take place, it is more likely that productive answers to stakeholder demands can be found. (Propositions 7 - 10).

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the above propositions in the light of the three communication theories employed in Chapter 2 and to assess the relevance of my argument in that regard. Acknowledging the exploratory nature of the propositions inductively derived from the case, I would expect not only confirming but also some disconfirming arguments that will help me to access some blind spots and to sharpen the argument. The argument of this Chapter has been organized as outlined below. Thereby, each section is introduced by a brief description of a case episode to illustrate the argument.

Firstly, as I have employed Scharmer’s (2001) process archetype of conversations as to discern differences and patterns in conversational modes of the workshop sessions, I will revisit the dialogue strand of organization and management literature (6.1.1.). Then, I will revisit the theory of communicative action (6.1.2.), and finally I will discuss implications of this argument in the light of the sensemaking perspective (6.1.3.). The conclusion section will provide an overview and a conceptual synopsis that result from the discussion (6.1.4.).
6.1. The Dialogue perspective

Dialogue strives to enable mutual understanding. In the case episode in which a resident considered the inappropriate use of language in the dining room a threat to his dignity ("Who is feeding James?"), the staff member attending the group conversation was not aware at all of the impact the use of language might have on residents. It was within the dialogical interaction of the conversation that she suspended her immediate reaction to justify her practice and that of her colleagues and opted to listen. In the following individual interview with her, when reflecting on the group conversation, she acknowledged her surprise and lack of awareness. Surprises, or moreover reflection on surprises, create awareness. The mental model that she had worked from did not incorporate the residents' point of view in that regard. The careful and authentic report by the resident had enhanced her understanding of the unintended outcomes of her practice.

The dialogue strand of organization and management literature (Isaacs, 1993, 1999; Scharmer, 1999, 2001; Schein, 1993, 1999; Senge, 1990, 1994) diagnoses an increasing differentiation in organizations and pluralism of subcultures. These developments and trends increase the need of perceptive, reflective mechanisms that make it possible for people “to discover that they use language differently, that they operate from different mental models, and that the categories we employ are ultimately learned social constructions of reality and thus arbitrary.” (Schein, 1993: 43). This problem definition suggests that differences in lifeworlds and language games call for an enhanced capacity of the organization to perceive, understand respond to issues voiced from members of the different contexts. Based on this investigation, I would refer to such a capacity as responsiveness.

Most forms of organizational group talk take place in a confronting mode such as discussion or debate, usually resulting in a strategy of participants to maintain their certainties and suppress deeper inquiry into the root causes of problems. In contrast, dialogue, conceptualized by proponents of this literature, is considered “a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it.” (Isaacs, 1993: 24-25). In the light of these considerations, the acknowledgment of pluralism in language and social construction of reality results in the suggestion to consider responsiveness as a means for enhancing and encouraging collective thinking, i.e. perception and reflection.

Dialogue is conceived of as “a form of conversation that makes it possible, even likely, for participants to become aware of some of the hidden and tacit assumptions that derive from our cultural learning, our language, and our psychological makeup” (Schein, 1999: 200). From this point of view, knowledge is not a commodity that can be discovered but is enacted in the
process of discursive interaction. Gadamer’s notion of ‘fusion of horizon’ refers to the attempt to understand a horizon that is foreign to ours in relation to our own. In doing so, other speakers ideas and viewpoints become intelligible, without necessarily having to agree with them (Gadamer, 1979). This reflective quality allows people to acknowledge how their perception can be colored by expectations based on our culturally determined mental models: “We have to learn to listen to ourselves before we can really understand others” (Schein, 1999: 209). Rather than focusing on producing results, the key aspect of dialogue consists in its potential to allow people to participate in the creation of shared meaning.

In his initial dialogue concept, Bohm (1996) sets out two important prerequisites for dialogue: (1) Suspending assumptions as distinct from ignoring it allows the speaker to have it ready for exploration and allow other views to emerge; and (2) Equality of speakers, i.e. that fact that any person has an equal chance to participate in the conversation is based on an appreciation and respect for other participants an their viewpoint. A more detailed and procedural concept of conversational setting is provided by the notion of container, that can be understood as the “sum of the collective assumptions, shared intentions, and beliefs of a group” (Senge, 1994: 360) and “a field of genuine meeting and inquiry” (Isaacs, 1993: 25). The container represents the mental environment for a joint perceptive and reflective process that is supposed to move through four stages. In a first phase, called ‘instability of the container’, participants are faced with the requirement to express their privately held differences in perspectives and assumptions. A second phase, ‘instability in the container’, is described as a phase in which members suspend their views on the one hand while engaging in discussion on the other in which extreme views are voiced and defended. The third phase, ‘inquiry in the container’, is described as a major shift as the group develops space for exchanging views and thoughts in a collective inquiry process. Senge suggests that this phase holds the potential for innovative ideas as a result of joint inquiries. ‘Creativity in the container’, i.e. collective intelligence, occurs when in phase four “[t]he group no longer has meaning in its conversation, but ... the group [rather] is its meaning.” (Senge, 1994: 364).

The dialogue literature conceives of dialogue as conversational mode that does not only lead to understanding, but to agreement or consensus. Reaching understanding and reaching consensus or agreement should not be equated. Habermas proposes a ‘weaker’ form of agreement, i.e. “To understand a symbolic expression means to know under what conditions its validity claim would have to be accepted; but it does not mean assenting to its validity claim without regard to context.” (Habermas, 1984: 135-136). Regarding responsiveness, the dialogue literature addresses the sufficient condition of responsiveness only while neglecting its necessary condition, i.e. the non-discursively defined context of any conversation.
Conclusion

Reflecting on the propositions, I would suggest concluding that

- The dialogue strand of organization and management literature proposes a nominalistic, prescriptive concept of dialogue. Moreover, dialogue is supposed to not only lead to understanding, but even to agreement or consensus.

- Acknowledging the relevance of responsive capabilities of organizations, proponents of dialogue put the emphasis on perceptivity and reflectivity. The type of responsiveness implied in such an approach is that of “attentive inquiry”.

- Regarding the necessary condition for dialogue, i.e. creating conversational arenas in organizations, it seems that proponents of dialogue underestimate this dimension. When talking about the context of conversations, the notion of container refers to the mental, but not structural or institutional, environment of a conversation. The propositions could inform this body of literature in that regard.

- Regarding the sufficient condition for dialogue that I have identified, i.e. openness, willingness and ability of an individual to participate in reflective conversation, while acknowledging that these aspects can be learned, dialogue literature assumes the individual to possess these abilities already when participating in conversations. This study would suggest that such abilities can and should be developed through participating in conversations.

- Overall, this body of literature acknowledges the relevance of responsiveness in organizations. The prerequisites and conditions for reflective conversations that this study suggests could contribute to conceptual considerations of the dialogue literature in organization and management studies.

6.2. The Communicative Action perspective

The case episode in which a resident reports his battle of becoming a fully accepted, equal member of the local management committee points to the tension between communicative action and strategic action in organizations. Communicative action and strategic action are two efficient modes for coordinating different social actions. Whereas the former coordinates social action in lifeworld, the latter is conceptualized as to coordinate systems, i.e. organizations. As the resident was an elected representative of his constituencies, the management committee granted him access to give a residents report only, then excluding him from the rest of the meeting. This exertion of administrative power represents an act of strategic action, that allows only for pseudo-participation, assuming that the needs, interests and claims of service users are known by management anyway. Communicative action, however, is not only more efficient but
crucial when these needs and interests are not known. Communicative action as authentic participation would give a voice to the different lifeworlds and consequently value different viewpoints as contributions to a more informed managerial decision.

Referring to the concept of communicative action, two major distinctions are relevant when reflecting on responsiveness in organizations.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Habermas distinguishes two areas of social interaction, i.e. systems and lifeworlds. Whereas systems – as organizational and institutional structures oriented towards attainment of certain goals – operate through rational-purposive, functional rationality, lifeworlds – as social, cultural and personal contexts – operate through a communicative rationality. Communicative action, as the mode where actors are oriented at reaching understanding, “refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations ... The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of interpretation refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus.” (Habermas, 1984: 86).

The two areas differ also in the mode by which social action is coordinated. While systems are mainly coordinated by non-linguistic media such as money and/or administrative power, in lifeworlds social action is coordinated through communicative action, i.e. intersubjective testing and agreeing on validity claims made in speech acts. Habermas (1984, 1987) proposes the concept of the lifeworld as the context for any process of reaching understanding or definition of a situation (Habermas, 1987: 119-52). This context consists of implicit knowledge, which cannot be explicated and fully represented through propositions, but is still drawn from in any situation definition: “Situations do not get ‘defined’ in the sense of being sharply delimited. They always have a horizon that shifts with the theme. A situation is a segment of lifeworld contexts of relevance ... that is thrown into relief by themes and articulated through goals and plans of action” (Habermas, 1987: 122). Intersubjective understanding is made possible through argumentation, i.e. “the type of speech in which participants thematize contested validity of a statement and attempts to vindicate or criticize them through argument” (Habermas, 1984: 18).

With regard to the context of communicative action, Habermas proposes the concept of an ‘ideal speech situation’ which should provide general symmetrical conditions that involve the following dimensions:

“1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.

2a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.

2b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
2c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.

3. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (1) and (2)” (Habermas, 1987: 26).

Finally, Habermas provides the concept of ‘autonomous public spheres’. Such conversational arenas that arise “spontaneously out of micro domains of everyday practice” can develop into “autonomous public spheres and consolidate as self-supporting higher-level intersubjectivities only to the degree that the lifeworld potential for self-organization and for the self-organized means of communication are utilized” (Habermas, 1987: 364). Such forms of self-organization “strengthen the collective capacity for action” (Habermas, 1987: 365) – and thereby perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity of an organization. From this point of view, the self-organized discursive arenas in the different centers can be conceived of as such ‘autonomous public spheres’ that have strengthened the collective capacity in terms of perception, reflection, and adaptivity, hence, have enhanced responsiveness in the organization.

Conclusion

The reason why organizations as systems tend to be coordinated by strategic action lies in the reduction of the necessity for intersubjectively negotiating and agreeing on a certain state of affairs. Or, as I could say: in a limitation of responsiveness. Money or power provide a single, univocal interpretation, or communicative ‘shortcut’ in that regard. In contrast, communicative action is open to multiple interpretations and their explicit or implicit validity claims that have to be negotiated if agreement is to be reached.

These two modes differ in their responsive qualities. Whereas strategic action is supposedly an efficient vehicle for coordination of systems, the very reason for being efficient is that an a priori, univocal view of a certain state of affairs is sufficient. Hence, perceptivity is limited to a predetermined interpretation repertoire, reflectivity rarely required as functional rationality determines the validity of a statement based on a priori rules, and adaptivity is limited to a given response repertoire. This makes strategic action a less responsive form of coordination: ‘same’ stimuli are identified from a predetermined set of interpretations, that are responded to by ‘same’ responses drawn from a given response repertoire. In contrast, communicative action can be conceived of as a responsive mode of coordination. In order to understand stimuli in the form of validity claims, an orientation to reaching understanding requires an openness to encounter viewpoints, rationalities and perspectives beyond our own. Perceptivity, reflectivity in the form of communicative rationality and adaptivity in the form of productive responses is key to reaching understanding. Hence, through communicative action productive answers are more likely to occur if understanding – not necessarily consensus – can be reached.
Table 13: Responsiveness in relation to strategic and communicative action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Coordination medium</th>
<th>Response quality</th>
<th>Type of responsiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic action</td>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>Reproductive</td>
<td>Conditioned response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative action</td>
<td>Lifeworld</td>
<td>Productive</td>
<td>Vigilant answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responsiveness in organizations as the proposition suggests, makes a claim to shift from a supposedly efficient medium for coordinating systems, i.e. administrative power, to a supposedly less efficient medium, i.e. communicative action. Why would an organization or its managers make this shift? Because it is efficient to do so. When reflecting on the case study, I would suggest to conclude that the task of rendering visible and making intelligible the needs, interests and claims by primary stakeholders, can hardly be accomplished by a simplistic, monological market research effort. The embeddedness of stakeholder needs in the lifeworlds requires engaging in a conversation that aims at reaching understanding. Otherwise, key features and aspects of stakeholder needs cannot be voiced, reflected and eventually taken into account of the organization’s action plans.

Regarding the contextual conditions of communicative action, the counterfactual idea of an ideal speech situation serves as a frame of reference: An equal, symmetric conversational setting should ensure that any participant can make any statement or expression at any time. This represents that a high degree of perceptivity and reflectivity is expected from participants. However, in practice the intention is not to meet these requirements as to achieve an ‘ideal speech situation’. Moreover, the model sensitizes for the non-discursive aspects of conversation that are crucial for content, mode and outcomes of any conversation. It also implies that issues such as asymmetric communication due to power of any kind need to be taken into account when referring to conversational contexts. In that regard, it provides a useful, but still rather abstract referent for conversational settings.

Regarding the propositions, I would suggest to conclude that

- Strategic action and communicative action differ in their degree of responsiveness. The level of responsiveness of the former is limited for efficiency considerations. The latter requires responsiveness as a prerequisite in a conversation that aims at reaching understanding. The level of responsiveness implied in strategic action is that of a conditioned response, as strategic action’s claim of efficiency is based on a reduction of responsiveness. In contrast, communicative action does not necessarily lead to, but
holds promise to the level of a vigilant answer. Perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity will be high, if understanding is to be reached.

- Organizations as systems tend to be coordinated by strategic action. The propositions however, make a claim to shift the coordination mode towards communicative action. In order to identify stakeholder needs, understand them and respond to them in a productive way, a conversation with an orientation to reaching understanding is required. Hence, this shift does not necessarily result in a loss of efficiency. On the contrary, much is to be gained from such a shift.

- Regarding the necessary condition of responsiveness in organizations, i.e. creating conversational arenas, I can reflect on the design features of these settings in the light of the ideal speech situation. This is not as to emulate an ideal speech situation but exert an awareness of the non-discursive limitations of a conversation.

- Regarding the sufficient condition of responsiveness, i.e. the individual ability, openness and willingness to engage in reflective conversations, the concept of communicative action seems to assume the individual’s ability to participate.

- In summary, the notion of responsiveness provides a solid argument that communicative action should be used to coordinate social action in organizations if the needs, interests, claims and demands of stakeholders are of vital interest to the organization and, hence, need to be understood and addressed.

6.3. The Sensemaking perspective

According to Weick (1995), sense is in the eye of the beholder: Believing is seeing. Disconfirming perspectives to our own are threats to our interpretation of a specific state of affairs, which might encourage or force us to reconsider our perspective. The case episode in which staff members discussed their anger and anxiety of being monitored by recently installed CCTV cameras exemplifies this aspect. The theory-in-use or the univocal interpretation among staff members was a conspiracy theory that the manager would use the tapes of the CCTV as to conduct a time and motion study and to assess their work. When the staff group discussed the implications of the conspiracy theory, some limitations occurred: Who has the time to watch these tapes? What can actually be seen? etc. Consequently exploring this line of thought as well as that of the official version, i.e. the use of CCTV as to increase security in the house, led the designated head of care to conclude “Maybe, I am paranoid”. Providing multiple perspectives on a similar issue allowed for a different, more plausible sensemaking of the situation.
Weick (1995, 1979) conceives of organizations as systems of interpretation and construction of reality. Sensemaking in organizations is induced by a change in the environment that creates distortion in the routines or flow of experience engaging the people of an organization. Hence, sensemaking means to interpret the environment in a sequential process of enactment (from raw data to equivocal data), selection (from equivocal data to meaning) and retention (learning from past sensemaking).

Ambiguity and uncertainty are two fundamental occasions for sensemaking. Uncertainty as a problem of ignorance can be remedied by additional information. In contrast, ambiguity as a problem of confusion refers to a situation in which several different interpretations at the same time emerge and persist so that additional information cannot resolve the confusion, i.e. our imperfect understanding of the world. Multiple interpretations and meanings that create confusion “call for social construction and invention” (Weick, 1995: 94).

For sense is created by words, words do matter. The inventive character of sensemaking is about finding words for aspects, state of affairs and reasons that are not fully clear or certain. Therefore the choice of words matters most: “Rich vocabularies give options for construing the meaning of action and are more likely to reveal latent opportunities in what might otherwise seem like blatant threats.” (Weick, 1995: 183). In that regard, shared experience provides a common referent for equivalent rather than similar meanings of words. In order to share meaning, people need to talk about their shared experience and thereby developing and find a common grammar and vocabulary.

As the key challenges for organizations in turbulent environments tend to be problems of ambiguity and equivocality rather than problems of uncertainty, Weick concludes that people need to meet and talk more often. What will help them is a setting where they can argue, using rich data pulled from a variety of media, to construct fresh frameworks of action-outcome linkages that include their multiple interpretations.” Meetings suited to address ambiguity might be very challenging but provide the adequate format to address issues and hence, confusion about what questions to ask and answers to give (Weick, 1995: 191-195).

The key process of sensemaking is arguing – according to the recipe ‘how can I know what I think until I see what I say?’ Rather than providing appreciations, descriptions or classifications, explanations are more helpful in terms of sensemaking: “Explanations create sense by connecting concrete experience and more general concepts. These connections tend to be inductive operations. ... In the process of developing and criticizing explanation, people often discover new explanations, which is why argument can produce adaptive sensemaking.” (Weick, 1995: 139).
Conclusion

Overall, the implied notion of responsiveness in this concept is that of a vigilant answer. Weick (1995) conceptualizes his approach of sensemaking in a way that perceptive, reflective and adaptive qualities correspond to a higher level of sensemaking. Conversational settings and mode that allow for the development of a common vocabulary and grammar are crucial in that regard.

Regarding conversational arenas, Weick (1995) acknowledges that the most likely context for social argument to take place in organizations is meetings. Meetings are characterized as conversational episodes with multiple participants that regulate the conversation by establishing specific conventions (Weick, 1995: 143). “Meetings are sense makers”, i.e. they generate and maintain an organization’s entity and identity (Weick, 1995: 143). However, not every meeting structure meets the minimal requirements of a reflective conversation that would enhance the quality of sensemaking. Meetings make sense – But do certain meeting settings and structures make more sense than others?

Regarding the conversational mode, which reflects the individual ability, openness and willingness to participate in a reflective conversation, Weick (1995) suggests that arguing is the preferred mode for sensemaking. He challenges the ideal of consensus that, in his view, by no means serves as a plausible default assumption: the ideal of searching for common ground in conversations is complemented by an equally strong motive for participants to contradict. Contradiction is an important, but often slightly neglected part of sensemaking, by which differences, attitudes, minorities, majorities, problems and issues are rendered visible in meetings which allows people to “argue their way into a new sense” (Weick, 1995: 144). While on the one hand acknowledging that consensus is certain bodies of literature has been overestimated, one can critical reflect on Weick’s (1995) suggestion that it is mainly through argument, i.e. talking tough, that sense is made. The likely misunderstanding might be that an orientation to reaching understanding and/or a reflective conversation does not necessarily result in consensus or agreement. These conversational modes, however, are more suitable for the task of sensemaking.

Turbulent, uncertain and ambiguous environments call for adequate practices to meet these challenges: “If the sensible in times of uncertainty, ambiguity, and surprise is seldom sensible, then practices and maxims that begin to correct this imbalance should be welcome and have an impact.” (Weick, 1995: 182). Weick’s (1995) approach can be read as a manifesto for responsiveness in that regard: “In a changing world, it is not just the old answers that are suspect. It is also the old questions.” (Weick, 1995: 192).

Regarding the propositions, I would suggest to conclude that
• Ambiguity and uncertainty as key properties of an organization’s enacted environment call for adequate strategies, which not only the response repertoire has
to be, questioned (old answers) but also the perceptive and reflective devices (old questions).

- For sensemaking requires an adequate conversational setting, Weick (1995) proposes meetings as ‘sense makers’. However, the details of such a conversational setting are to be examined in more detail, as not every meeting per se is suitable for the task of sensemaking.

- For sensemaking requires a conversational mode, he proposes arguing, or in Schamier’s terms, talking tough, as the adequate mode. A reflective conversation, aiming at reaching understanding, might be more likely to contribute to sensemaking than discussion or debate, that remain in known sets of rules and mental models.

- While the implied aspiration of sensemaking in terms of responsiveness seems to be “vigilant answer”, this research could contribute to this goal by providing a more detailed discussion regarding to the suitability of conversational setting and mode.

6.4. Conclusion

All three approaches explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the relevance of a responsive capacity in organizations with regard to perceptivity, reflectivity and adaptivity.

Regarding the type of responsiveness, the dialogue literature makes a claim of a high level of perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity, while emphasizing the former two dimensions. In the typology, such an approach would qualify as attentive inquiry. Communicative action and strategic action differ in their degree of responsiveness. The latter would at best qualify as a conditioned response, whereas the former holds promise for a vigilant answer. Similar to the dialogue literature, sensemaking makes an implicitly high claim on responsiveness. However, neither the chosen conversational setting nor the conversational mode allow for a vigilant answer.

Regarding the necessary condition for responsiveness, i.e. the creation of adequate conversational arenas, dialogue literature seems to underestimate the impact the structural context of a conversation. The sensemaking approach suggests that meetings in general ‘make sense’. It is likely that certain structural features of meetings enable or hinder processes of sensemaking more than others. The ideal speech situation as suggested in the theory of communicative action does not provide advice for designing such a conversational setting, however, it provides a referent for reflecting on certain features of such a conversational arena.

Regarding the sufficient condition for responsiveness, i.e. the individual communicative skills in terms of openness and willingness to engage in a reflective conversation, dialogue literature assumes theses skills for participants. The theory of communicative action does not
address this dimension either. The sensemaking perspective claims that the ‘natural’ mode of conversation is arguing, and hence, should considered the default assumption when reflecting on conversations and sensemaking.

Each of these perspective makes a valuable contribution to the subject, however, all three approaches could also benefit from taking an active view on responsiveness into consideration. Dialogue literature could consider the relevance of conversational settings for the conversational mode. Communicative action could consider the assumption in terms of communicative abilities of participants. The sensemaking approach could consider whether both conversational setting and mode chosen in the current approach comply with the aspiration of sensemaking as a vigilant answer.

![Table 14: Synopsis: Responsiveness in relation to communication theories](image.png)
7. Conclusion: Responsiveness and Strategy, Stakeholder Management and Organizational Learning – Revisited

Introduction: Implications for Theory, Practice and Research

What is the relevance of the propositions of this investigation for theory, practice and research in management and organization studies?

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on and discuss the implications for these three areas in the light of this study as well as providing a philosophically informed outlook.

As I have suggested concluding in Chapter 1, the three reviewed literatures acknowledge and emphasize the relevance of responsiveness. None of the approaches provided suggestions for communicative strategies and formats. My intention is to contribute to the three bodies of literature by shedding light on the above shortcomings regarding the nature of responsiveness and its relation to conversational settings and mode.

Firstly, I will revisit the schools of strategy and discuss theoretical implications for processes of strategy formation in their attempt to provide adequate responses to strategic challenges (7.1.). Secondly, by revisiting stakeholder management literature, I will suggest conceptual implications for responsiveness in the processes of including and responding to stakeholder demands (7.2.). Thirdly, theoretical implications for organizational learning will be discussed in section 7.3.

Fourthly, I will propose practical implications regarding the necessary and sufficient condition of responsiveness for the following aspects: management, organization, stakeholder group, individual and OD consultants’ practice (7.4.). In section 7.5. implications for further research on responsiveness are discussed.

The chapter concludes with a section on the limitations of this research (7.6.) and a brief exploration of responsiveness as ‘encounter with the foreign’ as a philosophical frame of reference for further research (7.7.).

7.1. Implications for Strategy

As discussed in Chapter 1, responsive aspects in current strategy concepts consist of providing adequate responses to strategic challenges. While acknowledging the relevance of responsiveness, strategy literature implicitly relies on a behaviorist, reactive concept of responsiveness whereas the assumed environmental properties such as turbulence, change would suggest an active concept of responsiveness. The communicative formats and strategies
necessary to understand demands made by stakeholder are not discussed in these approaches. Hence, I will revisit the schools of strategy formation and discuss the implications with regard to the above shortcomings in the light of the propositions.

**Strategy as a process of conception**

As discussed in Chapter 1, strategy as a process of conception as proposed by the ‘Design school’ of strategy, consists in achieving a ‘match’ (or fit) between internal strengths and weaknesses, and external threats and opportunities. The strategy creation itself is assumed to be a creative act in the light of these appraisals by the CEO (Andrews, 1987; Chandler, 1962). In terms of responsiveness, I would suggest that this concept of strategy could be informed by the propositions of this investigation as follows:

In this approach, the nature of the strategic challenge consists in uncertainty. The future is uncertain simply because the organization does not have enough information as to anticipate the key aspects of future developments. However, this information deficit can be reduced, as the future is intelligible in principle. Hence, strategy provides a means as to reduce such uncertainty. The CEO, conceived of as the organizations perceptual and intellectual device, consciously identifies, prioritizes and analyzes relevant information and decides on strategic options. As the CEO is conceived of as the architect of the strategy process, one single interpretation, i.e. univocality prevails. Thinking is detached from action: Diagnosis and prescription by the CEO is followed by implementation of the suggested strategy by lower levels of hierarchy. In this process, communication serves as a tool for implementing the strategic change process. Language in this context is the means by which unambiguous information that reflect reality is transferred. Reading, interpreting and assessing the relevance of environmental signals is limited to the CEO’s perceptive, reflective and adaptive capabilities. Equivocality as a means to challenge and complement a single perspective in participatory modes of strategy formation are likely to lead to ‘reproductive responses’, i.e. same answers to supposedly same problems – which at best refers to a conditioned response.

**Strategy as formal process**

While drawing from most assumptions of the design school, the planning school suggests strategy formation as a formal planning process. Planning as a strategic process can be decomposed in distinct analytical and hierarchical steps, would then be delineated by checklists and finally broken down into objectives, budgets, programs and so on. This task is to be done by strategic planner rather than senior management (Ansoff, 1984, 1987; Ansoff et al., 1976). In the light of the propositions, I would suggest to discuss the following aspects of responsiveness:

Again, the strategic challenge consists in an uncertain future. The deficit of information and the resulting instability is to be remedied by a formalized planning process that produces
additional information for anticipating the future. Accessibility to the environment and the different intra-organizational subsystems is assumed to be a technical, not a cognitive or interpretive issue. Externally, scanning techniques allow recognizing weak signals of the environment as to enable top management to identify strategic issues and allow for scenario planning. The organization's environment, i.e. economy, market and society in general, are to be observed and assessed using checklists attempting to cover any conceivable factor that might affect the firm. The properties of it are assumed to be predictable, controllable or in short: stable. Internally, strengths and weaknesses should formally be assessed as to identify distinctive competencies. Ontologically, organization and environment are conceived of as two real, distinct units that are knowable, controllable and stable in principle. Communication serves a tool in the implementation process, whereby issues of incommensurability or translation is neglected. The decomposed strategies or objectives are operationalized in several hierarchies of objectives, budgets and programs for business units and other subsystems of the firm. Strategy formulation and implementation remain two distinct steps. Responsiveness is limited to a technical capability of the strategic planning department. Checklists substitute real-life experiences and hence, reduce experiential knowledge of senior management and planners that results in univocality. Formalization does not allow for unpredictable factors and weak signals that can better be recognized if the strategy formation process allows for plural rationalities. The planning school reduces the cognitive and judgmental challenges to tools of scanning and issue management that do not ignore issues of perception, reflection and interpretation but limit them to a single-loop learning effort.

**Strategy as an analytical process**

The positioning school holds that strategy formation can be operationalized through an analytical process. Based on an analysis of its competitive environment, i.e. the five forces, a firm can determine its current and its preferred position in this industry. The leap from the current market position to a planned position can be made by choosing one of three generic strategic options. The key player in this strategy formation school is the analyst who holds the key to match industry analysis with the appropriate generic strategy (Porter, 1980, 1985). In the light of an active notion of responsiveness, I would suggest that the following aspects are of relevance:

Turbulent environments result in strategic uncertainty. Based on quantified data with regard to new entrants, suppliers, substitutes, buyers and competitors strategic options can then be chosen. Within this approach, the environmental situation overall is considered to be stable, mature, well structured and quantifiable in terms of the five forces that drive competition. Communication and language are non-issues in this school of thought: Accessibility and recognizability of the predetermined properties of the five-forces model are taken for granted. Based on the 'hard facts' that result from the industry and competition analysis, three generic
strategic options are proposed: overall cost leadership, differentiation and focus. The positioning school renders the underlying stimulus-response model of strategy literature visible: Using a predetermined framework of environmental descriptor, i.e. the five forces, as then to choose one of three generic strategic options. The responsive aspects of strategy formation are reduced to a tool within a guided analysis of an industry. Pluralism of contexts or rationalities is highly unlikely as it would not comply with the overall logic of the model: Positioning school holds that the one best strategy can be calculated, an approach that I would refer to as a conditioned response that does hardly allow for innovative responses.

**Strategy as Process of Transformation**

Mintzberg (1988, 1987a, b) conceives of strategy as a process of transformation as continuous change from one configuration to another. Any configuration, however, is a social construct. Transformation means the shift from one organizational configuration that was determined by and adapted to the historic conditions towards a new organizational configuration adaptable to the current environmental conditions. In the light of the propositions of this investigation, I would suggest on responsiveness in the context of transformation as follows:

The strategic challenge in this approach consists in shifting from organizational phases of relative stability that are occasionally interrupted by periods of radical, quantum leap changes to new configurations. Transformation, i.e. strategic change, occurs when an organization due to internal and external forces of change is required to shift from one state to another. The strategic issue in terms of direction of strategic change therefore is not one of uncertainty, but of ambiguity. Conceiving of strategy as a perspective points to the social construct that is created by the members of the organization. Strategy in this respect points to a shared perspective, i.e. something expressed by the words, ideology, culture, Weltanschauung or paradigm. Both organization and environment are considered social constructs. When conceiving of strategy as social construct, language matters. Communication then is not the means to implement change, but change is the outcome of communication. Access to the different internal and external context is no longer trivial or simply a matter of information technology. The acknowledgment of plural contexts that contribute different viewpoints require an orientation to reaching understanding, not necessarily consensus between different lifeworlds and language games. Rather than programming and planning, strategy is made through an organization-wide strategic thinking (Mintzberg, 1994: 218). Involvement and detailed knowledge are required, as not to rearrange established, but inventing new categories of perception. Actors in terms of responsive aspects are considered to be all members of the organization, as they are decentral experts of specific issues. Given that strategic change is about a radical shift from one configuration to another, the question how this new configuration is to be achieved, which of the new configurations should be chosen or which factors force an organization into transformation is up to the change agents in the organizations. Hence, equivocality is crucial in terms of strategy.
formation. If strategy is conceived of as ambiguity handling, it is key to provide contexts for multiple perspectives to be voiced and perceived as arenas for strategic thinking. Obviously, the results of such processes cannot be predetermined neglecting contextual features; therefore, the resulting strategic responses tend to be productive answers to strategic challenges.

7.1.1. Conclusion

I would suggest that this investigation contributes to a more enhanced understanding of responsiveness in strategy beyond a reactive, behaviorist notion of responsiveness.

It can inform strategy literature at the conceptual level by having reconstructed the underlying notion of responsiveness, discussed the relevance of responsiveness for strategy, and suggested an enhanced notion of responsiveness that contributes to a more fine-grained discussion of strategic thinking:

In the light of the propositions, conceiving of strategy as a process of programming (conception, planning, positioning) corresponds to a level of responsiveness that I would refer to as conditioned response. The reason being that all three approaches represent an approach to strategy formation as single-loop learning, i.e. within the given rules and models, so that neither the perceptive, reflective aspects nor the response repertoire is likely to be shifted in a quantum leap manner.

Conceiving of strategy as strategic thinking (configuration), the purpose of such an endeavor holds promise of producing a vigilant strategic answer. This is because the purpose of strategic thinking is “to discover novel, imaginative strategies which can re-write the rules of the competitive game; and to envision potential futures significantly different from the present” (Heracleous, 1998: 485). Such an approach to strategy I would suggest represents an attempt to double-loop learning.

Given that strategy as strategic thinking aims at incorporating and developing new ‘rules of the game’, an active notion of responsiveness can inform strategy literature. The claim of strategic thinking to provide novel, imaginative strategies – in my terms: productive, vigilant responses – requires conversational arenas that allow for multiple perspectives to be voiced, differences to be acknowledged and mutual understanding to be reached on a certain state of affairs.
As discussed in Chapter 1, there is consensus among the different schools of stakeholder management, about the fact that stakeholder interests should be incorporated. Both approaches suggest that stakeholder management contributes to enhancing organizational performance. From an instrumental point of view, Dill (1976) has pointed out that stakeholders and their demands represent one of the key challenges to strategic management. As the review of the literature in Chapter 1, has shown, this strategic challenge requires the development of a better understanding and openness to their needs as well as participation and involvement. In a normative approach to stakeholder management, Deetz (1995) proposed not to conceive of stakeholder interests as limitations to organizational goal accomplishment, but as the organization’s goals. While providing a typology of stakeholder salience in order to identify and prioritize stakeholder claims (Mitchell et al., 1997), the adequate communicative format for such an endeavor has not been discussed.

As stakeholder literature has neither provided a comprehensive approach to responsiveness, nor concluded consequences in terms of communicative strategies and formats as to engage in conversations with stakeholders, I would suggest that the propositions of this investigation could inform this body of literature as follows.

The case study has shown that a reflective conversation with primary stakeholders of the organization, i.e. service users, staff members, managers etc., has rendered visible issues, themes and problems that had never been communicated before within the organization. Hence, the workshop sessions themselves but moreover the self-organized conversational arenas show
how responsiveness impacts on people, when they felt and experienced seriously being listened to.

In terms of the sufficient condition of responsiveness, Deetz (1995) argues for a dialogic communication that might be incomplete and partial, but "the reason I talk with others is to better understand what I and they mean, hoping to find new and more satisfying ways of being together" (Deetz, 1995: 97). While acknowledging the difficulty of putting dialogic communication in practice, he concludes that involvement leads to participation. Involvement refers to the search for the better argument based on expert's knowledge, whereas participation is based "on giving voice to difference, negotiation of values and decisional premises, and the production of new integrative positions. ... New positions are generated out of the 'subject matter' or 'otherness'" (Deetz, 1995: 100).

However, the necessary condition of responsiveness, i.e. creating conversational arenas in which these conversations can take place needs elaboration. An active mode of responsiveness would provide opportunities and arenas for stakeholders to articulate their problem definitions, concerns and claims and would feed directly into the decision-making processes and systems of the organization. Authentic participation is considered the guiding principle of active responsiveness (Kirsch, 1991).

Such a discursive arena consists of all stakeholders that are involved in the process of problem definition and handling. Thereby the design and shape of the arena itself is subject to discussion and decision. The complexity of the problem and the complexity of the complexity-handling arena are interrelated. Attempting to neglect the complexity of a problem results in a decision making arena that might be 'too small', i.e. not allowing for enough voices and perspectives necessary to address the problem in question.

Acknowledging the complexity of the problem increases the likelihood of an arena that is adequately sized to the problem. This acknowledgment then would result in inviting all actors that are (potentially) affected by the decision and to allow for a self-organizing process for participation in that arena. Hence, a self-organized advocacy group by residents in one of the centers shows how an acknowledgment of complexity from the stakeholders resulted in a forum adequately reflecting their own conversational needs.

The creation and provision of conversational arenas does not necessarily lead to an ad-hoc participation of stakeholders. But involvement, as the project has shown, and as Deetz (1995) would agree on, is likely to lead to authentic participation by stakeholders.
7.3. Implications for Organizational Learning

As discussed in Chapter 1, most theories of organizational learning are based on cognitive psychology and built upon individual learning theories, the models of organizational learning mainly refer on a reactive notion of responsiveness. Organizations in interaction with their environment are assumed to discriminate within stimuli repertoires and to connect an identified stimulus to a response from a given response repertoire. Implications of an active responsiveness for learning modes, learning levels, learning types and learning processes will be discussed below.

Responsiveness and learning modes

Using individual learning theory as an analogy or metaphor allows identifying commonalities as well as differences of the levels of learning. Learning as behavioral adaptation to environmental conditions can emerge either by evolutionary adaptation, i.e. inheriting behavioral features that are crucial for a species' survival, or by adaptation through learning, i.e. learning and adopting of new, optimal behavior for survival. Socio-cognitive learning holds that groups as key elements of organizations serve as entities of knowledge acquisition, evaluation and interpretation. Group culture contains and consists in a set of cognitive maps and interpretation rules shared and established by group members. The awareness and recognition of expertise of each group members facilitates a semantic or item-specific storage and, hence, increases the ability to make decisions and take action. The retrieval process of stored information is another source for plausibility and accuracy check (Maier et al., 2001: 27-28).

In terms of responsiveness, a more practice-based theory for organizational learning might be appropriate. A practice-based theory for organizational learning would emphasize the acquisition of knowledge process of learning taking place in communities of practice. These communities of practice enact and reproduce their knowledge and learning in conversational arenas. The concept of practice shifts the focus from idealist traditions and cognitive concepts of learning to the aspects of ‘doing’ and materiality of social relations (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2001). Thereby, practice is seen as the process of production of the world as well as the outcome of this process. Responsiveness becomes a specific quality in these learning processes that could constitute the link between knowing in practice and knowing a practice. Such a quality shows that meaning is not only contextual, but creates that very context in a reflexive manner. In summary, responsiveness could serve as a methodological guide for examining how practical knowledge is communicated and institutionalized.
Responsiveness and learning levels

Individual and organizational learning are considered two distinct levels of learning. However, it has become subject to a persistent debate (e.g. Simon, 1991; Weick, 1991). Kim (1993) proposes mental models, i.e. frameworks holding images of cause-effect-assumptions affecting what we see, as the missing link between the two learning levels. Shared norms and values are key to developing devices such as standard operating procedures or routines.

In terms of responsive aspects, learning levels outline the potential myopia and maladaptive learning through persistent routines and mental models. Responsiveness refers to sensitivity and acknowledgment of the existence and potential relevance of data that are in conflict with our current mental models, that might be outdated cognitive interpretation frameworks. Responsiveness in terms of learning level would contribute to the development of shared understanding through a participative culture. Conversational arenas in which different privately held cause-effect- assumptions are made explicit and visible, become intelligible. The conversational mode for such an assessment of mental models should not be competitive in nature. A reflective, dialogical interaction holds promise to render the differences visible and to agree on a shared view on a certain state of affairs, which in turn serves as an interpretation and relevance filter at a collective or even organizational level. Given that mental models, shared cognitive maps and interpretation or sensemaking frameworks are the link between the individual and the organizational level of learning, the prerequisites or discursive conditions are of interest. It is with adequate conversational settings or discursive arenas that shared experience can be reflected upon, equivocality can be rendered visible and shared understanding might occur. An active responsiveness could enable the process of linking individual with collective learning.

Responsiveness and learning types

Argyris et al. (1978) concept of learning types distinguishes single loop learning, detection and correction of organizational errors takes place within the context of its current policies and objectives. Through double loop learning an organization is enabled to detect and correct errors by reflection and modification of its norms, policies and objectives.

In terms of responsiveness, single-loop learning might provide an adaptive response to a perceived problem. Reflection, however, is missed out. Double-loop learning inherently draws from responsiveness, as it is the reflection on the variables that govern individual and collective behavior. The prerequisites for double-loop learning are inherent to an active responsiveness, i.e. conversational arenas that allow for a reflection on the governing variables and rules as well as the development of changes in that regard.
Responsiveness and learning process

An active responsiveness could contribute to a more fine-grained understanding of the four sequences of organizational learning processes as developed by Huber (1991).

All five knowledge acquisition strategies imply the question of perceptual, evaluative and reflective capacity of an organization. How current and new organizational members make sense of their experiences as well as deliberate search- and scan-strategies rely on cognitive frameworks and mental models through which relevance and quality of knowledge are constructed. Such evaluation processes are more likely to provide useful insights if they are based on a shared experience or even a shared understanding of the state of affairs. Hence, responsiveness as a perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity enables and facilitates such processes of knowledge acquisition. Acknowledging blind spots by allowing for equivocality is an inherent quality of responsiveness.

Information distribution as the process providing and sharing information from the above mentioned sources is considered an important procedural step to new information and understanding. The underlying container view of the metaphor of ‘distribution’, i.e. an unambiguous information can easily decoded by the recipient using an identical code as the sender used to encode the information, does not reflect the complexity of such processes: One, what’s relevant is in the eye of the beholder, and, two, knowledge transfer that takes into account the different qualities of the knowledge is a more appropriate metaphor. An active responsiveness points to the contextual properties for any process of knowledge transfer, which would lead to an embodiment of such knowledge. A reflective mode of conversation in an adequate format is likely to foster such a process.

Sharing information parallels the process of collectively interpreting information that might result in shared interpretations and meanings. Interpretation of information is affected by five variables: uniformity of prior cognitive maps used by organizational units, uniformity of the framing of information, richness of the media employed, information overload relative to interpretation capacities, and the degree to which unlearning is required prior to new interpretations. Multiple perspectives on a specific state of affairs increases both the complexity as well as the likelihood to come to a shared conclusion for action. Interpretation as sensemaking, both individually, but even more importantly in a social context relies on plausibility and validity checks between members. Again, the setting in which this interpretation takes places can be considered an important contextual factor in the sensemaking process. Responsiveness in that regard, as I have shown, can serve as an enabler to sensemaking processes.

Organizational memory as a means for the collective capacity for storing knowledge as to apply it in the future. Storing and retrieving of information influences the effectiveness of organizational memory, which contains the basis for decision-making processes, which usually
are memorized in organizational routines. Routines contain organizational memories and operationalize an organization’s knowledge base. Within the process of learning the ability to communicate, the validity of knowledge and the ability to integrate knowledge into action outcome-relationships is crucial. In terms of responsiveness, the notion of ‘storage’ might not reflect the dynamics of such processes. In conversational settings that aim at reaching understanding, i.e. communicative action, equivocality is allowed for in order to discriminate between and to develop different stimuli and response repertoires.

7.3.1. Conclusion

March (1991) distinguishes two generic motives for organizational learning: (1) exploring new possibilities on the one hand, as opposed to (2) exploiting old certainties on the other. Exploration of new possibilities refers to experimentation, which includes risk, ambiguity, innovation and discovery. Exploitation refers to the refinement, incremental improvement and extension of current capabilities and knowledge such as technology, efficiency and procedures. Exploitation’s outcomes are certain, predictable, positive and proximate. Because the distance in time and space between the locus of learning and the locus of realization of benefits is generally greater in exploration, adaptive processes tend to favor and focus on exploitation rather than exploration. This might lead to a myopic optimization, which might jeopardize an organization’s overall survival: Short-term effectiveness could lead to self-destruction in the long run. Especially with regard to learning as exploration, active responsiveness can contribute to avoid perceptive, reflective and adaptive myopia.
7.4. Implications for Practice

What are the practical implications of this research? One main implication for practice results from the procedural dimension of active responsiveness:

Responsiveness conceived of as a process quality that is inherent and integral part of the experience of unique communicative processes. Hence, while such an experiential process quality cannot be stored or archived, it is still useful to reflect in retrospective on why a communicational setting and mode was experienced as being responsive. The attribute of a ‘responsive capacity of an organization’, I would suggest, results from the quality, and to a lesser extent the frequency, of responsive processes that different stakeholders experience and that inform and develop their evaluative sensemaking in that regard.

Hence, I would suggest that only the necessary condition for active responsiveness, i.e. creating conversational arenas for reflective conversation, could be directly managed. The sufficient condition is subject to the participants’ communicative skills, abilities and orientation at reaching understanding in a reflective conversation. These skills can be developed and explored by training or other educational interventions, but even more so by involvement that might lead to participation. It is more likely, that a – subjectively experienced and collectively enacted – responsive organizational culture will influence the orientation and willingness for a reflective conversation. In summary, I would suggest to conclude that the development of an active responsiveness means to create the conditions for the opportunity of dialogue.

As responsiveness emerged as an issue from practice, I would like to specify the practical implications for the following aspects: management and organization, stakeholder group and OD consultants.

**Management and Organization**

The guiding question at this level is: how can management contribute to an active responsiveness?

As for the necessary condition, managers are in a very prominent and powerful position to influence the ‘order of discourse’ (Foucault, 1991), i.e. the contextual features of conversational arenas that usually are non-discursively determined. The first of these features consists in the ability for managers to call or cancel meetings, i.e. to allow for conversations in a specific setting. Another key dimension is the question of participants. Who is invited, i.e. whose viewpoints will at least have a chance to be voiced and heard in a conversation? The agenda setting and the definition of the purpose of meetings are more likely to be defined by managers than other stakeholder groups. The physical setting, ground rules and record of meeting minutes...
are other relevant contextual features to be taken into account in that regard. In summary, managers have the power to define who talks about what and when.

The ‘how’ of the conversation, however, is not directly manageable, given that reflective conversations rely on the participants’ willingness and ability to engage in such conversations. By reflecting on the above conversational features as well as my experience of the project, I would suggest the following aspects as relevant contextual features for a reflective conversation: Participation should be made on the basis of affectedness, competence and responsibility for a subject matter. Ownership and agenda setting should be with participants rather than with management only. The physical setting should allow that every participant could see and hear the other. Usually, a circle provides for this. Ground rules should be simple and allow for any voice to be heard. All these aspects are no guarantee but proved useful in the context of the project.

These above considerations might also guide managers in developing the responsiveness of existing conversational arenas and meetings. A participatory evaluation of existing meetings can shed light on the above aspects of the order of discourse and how they hinder responsive interactions. Active participation, turnout, interest in meeting minutes are some areas to detect early signals of dissatisfaction with such meetings.

As for the sufficient condition, i.e. individual skills and capabilities, brief considerations of the barriers for managers to engage in responsive interactions might be useful. The function of management implies the application of general rules that are non-responsive per se, as they draw from a decontextualized response repertoire. Moreover, their attribute role as well as their own understanding of their role seems to imply that the myth of an omni-potent manager still persists in most organizations. As the dominant mode for coordination in organizations consists in strategic action and therefore implies an orientation to success, communicative action as orientation to understanding is likely to be neglected. Applying and role-modelling responsiveness at an individual but mainly in the public spheres of an organization proved crucial in the project as discussed in Chapter 5. The managers that conceived of themselves as change agent serving and mediating the organizational stakeholder groups were attributed by these groups as being open, accessible and – ‘responsive’. In that regard, responsiveness could become one of the key capabilities of a ‘post-heroic’ manager (Baecker, 1993). Managers can train and sensitise these qualities by developing an ‘aesthetic’, perceptual expertise by exposing themselves to experiences outside the daily-business context.

**Stakeholder group**

The guiding question at the level of a stakeholder group is: how can a stakeholder group or individuals in such a group contribute to an active responsiveness?
As for the necessary condition, i.e. the creation of conversational arenas, self-organized, autonomous public spheres might be an appropriate way in that regard. As the example of the Alpha center showed, two stakeholder groups were willing and able to organize conversational arenas for themselves. On the one hand, the residents' advocacy group in which themes and issues of relevance and importance to them can be voiced in a psychologically safe setting. And, the staff's Learning through listening group that aimed at reflecting on operational issues outside the context of formal staff meetings. Both arenas obviously could have been prevented by management, but only for the sake of losing the perception of these stakeholder groups that management was non-responsive per se. Insofar, both groups had more relative power in this particular case. Exploring the boundaries for self-organized conversational arenas can be a challenging but very fruitful endeavour on the way to active responsiveness.

The project showed that talking and listening to stakeholders in a specific way allowed rendering visible issues and themes that had never been explored in public in this organization. Hence, while acknowledging the limits of generalizing from this single case, the project experience and reflection suggests that such specific conversational arrangements in terms of setting and mode are useful for exploring and understanding stakeholder needs.

As for the sufficient condition, how can stakeholders themselves learn the skills of reflective conversation. As Deetz (1995) has suggested, involvement leads to participation. Insofar, learning participation is a reflexive process. Participation and reflective conversation can be learned by participating in conversational arenas. Tracing surprises and paradoxes, discussing them in a curious rather than restricting manner allows for exploring own privately held assumptions about one self and others.

**OD consultants**

The guiding question for OD consultants is: what implications does the concept of active responsiveness have for OD consultants?

As for the necessary condition, OD concepts address contextual aspects of conversations such as structure and directiveness (e.g. Coghlan & Mcllduff, 1990) but very few address the broader contextual features for OD interventions. For OD consultants usually gain a certain relative power to define the 'order of discourse', the reflections and suggestions on responsiveness for managers apply accordingly.

As for the sufficient condition, despite the broad knowledge that OD consultants seem to hold regarding exercises and trainings for groups and individuals within a certain conversational setting (e.g. Senge, 1994). The key implication seems to be that in contrast to most OD concepts, which assume sensitivity, openness, willingness and ability of participants as an existing prerequisite for participants to engage in reflective conversations, I would suggest that active responsiveness in such processes is concurrently developed as the process evolves.
Hence, OD consultants should be attentive to responsive qualities in their interventions and their processes rather than assuming that responsiveness already exists prior to any intervention. A helpful device of this was suggested by my supervisor, who encouraged me to keep tracing surprises in that regard. The simple question ‘What surprised you?’ proved very useful in the context of the project – and beyond as to explore privately held assumptions as an OD consultant.

7.5. Implications for Research

What implications can be discerned for future research? I will briefly outline the different areas that would contribute to a more elaborated model of responsiveness on the one hand, and how such a model informs existing bodies of literature on the other. Responsiveness I would suggest adds an important analytical dimension to these literatures by providing a procedural, qualitative perspective of relevance in terms of communication and conversation.

Strategy

Strategy formation as suggested by Mintzberg (1998) occurs within a socially constructed context of conversations. Complementing Mintzberg’s (1998) approach, this research suggests, strategy formation is not an autistic, conditioned reflex, but results from the process of developing a vigilant answer. The dynamics of such a responsive process of strategy formation that is attentive to the diversity and variety of viewpoints that is necessary for strategic thinking needs to be understood more profoundly. Hence, researchers should investigate the relevance of an active responsiveness and its conditions in theory and practice in more detail. Different contextual features as well as conversational modes and their impact on strategic thinking should be investigated in that regard as well. This will provide researchers as well as practitioners with a more enhanced understanding of responsive strategy formation.

Stakeholder Management

Despite the dichotomy in stakeholder research into a normative and instrumental strand, both would benefit from a more detailed understanding of responsive stakeholder management. Such an approach should not only address the structural design of conversations but also explore in more depth the issue of incommensurability between different lifeworlds and language games of stakeholders. Of additional relevance is the impact of relative stakeholder power on the ‘order of discourse’, i.e. the ability of a particular stakeholder group to determine conversational setting and mode, and hence, influence the degree of responsive interaction significantly. Additional research on identifying these dynamics would give a better
understanding of responsiveness in the context of the political struggles between stakeholder groups.

Organizational learning

The propositions presented here imply that if reflective conversations occur in certain conversational settings, productive responses resulting from such processes are more likely. In terms of organizational learning, research is needed to understand better the impact of responsiveness in the learning process and how the different conversational modes impact in that regard. The relevance of responsiveness as an attributed organizational capacity makes it also necessary to investigate the discourses on learning and change with regard to responsive aspects. A crucial dimension in that regard are the interlevel-dynamics of active responsiveness in organizational change (e.g. Rashford et al., 1994). Additional research in this area will help researchers to better understand the dynamics of how responsiveness as an attribute to the organization evolves from stakeholders’ experiences. Giving attention to the impact of responsiveness on organizational performance is another crucial route for research on responsiveness in organizations.

Responsiveness

Due to the complexity of responsiveness as an organizational, processual phenomenon, further research should investigate how responsiveness can be conceptualized beyond the traditional, reactive model. I will exemplify some these aspects in a philosophically informed outlook in the final section of this investigation.

7.6. Limitations

The concept of responsiveness developed in this investigation is subject to – at least – the following limitations:

Generalizability from a case study is limited in general, as a case study statistically never represents a probability sample that allows generalizing from sample into population. However, in line with Yin (1994), I would suggest that an analytical generalization is the intended contribution of this study, i.e. generalizing from the case into theory.

The specific character of this organization, i.e. a voluntary organization providing residential care for people with physical and sensory disabilities, adds two more aspects on which this research deliberately did not focus on. In terms of the specific service provided by the organization, responsiveness seems to become a critical success factor for the quality of its service provision. This might not necessarily apply in other (service) organizations. In terms of
its voluntary, non-profit character, the relation between responsiveness and the goal-set has not been addressed in this investigation. However, exploring the relevance of the propositions of this study for the management of voluntary organizations and for the quality of service provision will be an important perspective for researching responsiveness in the future.

By limiting the focus of the analysis to the processes and dynamics in the local centers, a more focused analysis for the development of a concept of responsiveness was possible. Interlevel dynamics and their relation to responsiveness were deliberately not at the core of this research. Hence, the dynamics between organizational levels and their relation to responsiveness remains to be explored and investigated in more detail. Additional research in that regard will be an important next step in further developing the idea of responsiveness in organizations.

Conceiving of responsiveness as a capacity attributed to the organization by its stakeholders, a more detailed analysis of the dynamics and processes of how the individual experiences link up to a social construct of ‘responsiveness’ holds promise to provide further insights in that regard. Due to ethical considerations, I have refrained from taping the workshops sessions. Capturing such sensemaking processes would allow for a more detailed discourse analysis of meaning generation in terms of responsiveness.

As outlined in Chapter 5, the development of the typology of responsiveness was limited to the outcomes of the project as indicators for responsiveness. This might have resulted in a certain misrepresentation of those few centers that already involve and welcome stakeholder participation in existing conversational arenas.

Regarding the process quality of responsiveness, this investigation did not include a longitudinal dimension. The episodes of conversations over 12 months provided ‘snapshots’ of sensemaking but did not allow for capturing changes in responsiveness as an attribute. A longitudinal investigation would shed light on the factors influencing stakeholder experiences and narratives in terms of changes in responsiveness.

In terms of understanding some of the participant with severe speech impairments, the use of a ‘translator’ has certainly influenced the statements of the person being assisted by a translator. Certain aspects will have remained undiscussed due to the need for such assistance in communicating. This reflects the fundamental dilemma of dependency in the context of this study. Moreover, non-verbal aspects have not consciously and explicitly been included in the analysis.

Regarding the choice of primary stakeholder in the project, it is certainly a shortcoming not to have included the families of service user or residents. In the process of the project, residents, staff and management pointed to the relevance of family relations – or the lack of these – for the well being of the service users.
Having identified and discussed responsiveness at the level of the care interaction (responsiveness 1) as distinct from responsiveness at the organizational level, the interrelation between the two dimensions of responsiveness remains to be explored in more detail.

7.7. Outlook: Responsiveness and ‘Answerability’

Addressing these questions puts responsiveness into a much wider framework: The aesthetics of organizations. Bateson (1972) defines aesthetics as “being responsive to the pattern that connects” (Bateson, 1972: 17). Such a ‘pattern that connects’ might be what I have discussed as discursive arenas that allow for reflective conversations and thereby enable responsiveness at the organizational level.

Within this research, I have suggested to enhance the notion of responsiveness from a behaviorist, reactive stimulus-response concept to an emergent, active concept of perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity. This shift is by no means obvious or trivial. It leads the way to future research on responsiveness. One of the more responsive routes can be drafted along themes identified by the German philosopher and phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (1994): differences and distances of lifeworlds as encounters with the foreign; differences between responses and answers; relation of question and answer; differences in hearing and listening; differences in qualities of responses.

The own, the other and the foreign

Understanding of reality is always mediated by culturally and contextually situated interaction (Gergen, 1994: 49). Social construction does not only take place in cognitive, verbal interactions of sensemaking but as embodied practices in acts of mutual responding (Küpers, 2002). Sensemaking or social construction involves relations and relating with actors in ongoing conversations taking place in specific conversational settings and contexts. Sensemaking however does not mean to strive for consensus but to acknowledge differences and a systematic asymmetry between participants.

These differences stem from fundamental otherness or even foreignness of lifeworlds and language games. Their incommensurability and irreducibility is experienced by the agony of translation. But even translation does not remedy the systematic foreignness in communicative encounters. But, we cannot help responding (Watzlawick et al., 1969). Thus, as human beings we spontaneously respond to encounters with otherness or even foreignness in any social interaction. Encountering the foreign with openness gives way and requires a non-hierarchical way of conversations and relations. Multiple perspectives and voices can be heard, or being
listened to, and be reflected upon without necessarily come to a consensus. Consensus as a rule means to include other positions into univocality and thereby destroys what makes the foreign.

In that regard, Waldenfels (1991) distinguishes the other, the unknown and the foreign. The other is constituted by difference to an external referent. It is not in opposition to the same, but to the self, that can be compared to the self and hence shows some commonalities (e.g. the other person). The unknown consists of blanks in our knowledge structures (e.g. the unknown bird). The foreign, is in contrast to the own and is inaccessible and excluded from the realm of the own (Waldenfels, 1991: 136). Foreignness, hence, refers to the systematic separation between ownness and the foreign that is not simply contemporary. Foreignness can take different forms. Being foreign as being outside an order (e.g. foreign languages that do not comply with vocabulary, grammar and logic of our mother tongue), or being absolutely foreign (e.g. foreign languages that we do not recognize as languages) (Waldenfels, 1991). Foreignness represents is a very prominent feature in the light of organizational culture, lifeworld and language games. The systematic asymmetry that cannot simplistically be overcome points to the relevance of foreignness to any conversational interactions and puts a limit to an exaggerated optimism to reach understanding or even understand a lifeworld foreign to ours.

Being foreign by definition refers to a status of not belonging to the realm of the own, which results in extreme difficulties to describe the foreign (Waldenfels, 1998: 24). The foreign then can only be described in our terms but not in its own terms (Waldenfels, 1991: 166). There is no immediate remedy for this aspect but it is crucial when reflecting on the possibility and likelihood to come to a shared understanding of a state of affairs. Given this structural aspect of foreignness, inclusion does not seem to be a useful strategy to overcome foreignness. Any attempt to include the foreign, would lead to an immediate loss of the characteristics that make foreignness. This systematic, inextricable asymmetry, results in an unreflected preference for the own rather than the foreign point of view (Waldenfels, 1998: 74). As the encounter with the foreign can only be described in our terms, we refer to it by drawing from experiences regarding questions or claims of the past. Encountering the foreign is not a deliberate, conscious act that could be chosen or neglected at will. However, it represents a challenge or provocation to us that has to be responded to.

Response and Answer

Waldenfels (1991) assumes that the original meaning of ‘response’ has become outdated. At a time, response being the identical twin or logical complement of ‘stimulus’, it has become a basic term to the vocabulary of behaviorism, an approach that aims at explaining behavior as triggered, controlled and conditioned by external influences only (Waldenfels, 1991: 99): “The external agent came to be called a stimulus. The behavior controlled by it came to be called a response” (Skinner in Waldenfels, 1991: 99). In cognitivism, the relation between stimulus and response is considered being mediated by a certain rule or pattern of information processing that
can be observed and recorded by an external observer. Either way, response conceptualized as a reaction, triggered by condition or pattern of information processing neglects any dialogical connotation that the word might have had. Therefore, Waldenfels (1991) prefers to use the term ‘answer’ not only synonymously to the term ‘response’ but as the more precise term that still holds a dialogical connotation (Waldenfels, 1991: 107).

**Question and Answer**

Traditionally, we assume that questions are speech-acts that are somewhat superior as they guide a conversation and precede an answer. In contrast, Waldenfels (1994) drafts an approach that puts the response or answer at the core of philosophical thinking. By deconstructing the different philosophies and communication theories (e.g. Husserl, Habermas, Gadamer, Foucault, Lyotard among others) with their various attempts to conceptualize question and answers, he concludes that these approaches give priority to the act of asking which then has to fulfilled by giving an answer.

A responsive rationality that starts off from the answer would obtain its creative impulses not from the intentions of a question but from the act of answering. In his view, answering is more than just the fulfillment of the intentions implied in a question. Moreover, he posits that any word or speech and – any action even – has the characteristics of an answer (Waldenfels, 1994: 269). Answering then would not be limited to the fulfillment of intentions inherent to the question, but would mean to creatively adhering to foreign claims and demands. The variety of foreign demands cannot be anticipated in the question. Put differently: A question cannot express all implicit claims and demands of a speaker. Moreover, an answer can never fully comply with these implicit claims. Waldenfels refers to this phenomenon as a ‘responsive difference’ between the claims and demands implicit to questions. An answer always refers to both the explicit content as well as the implicit claims and demands of questions to which we respond.

Responsively refers to the aspect that makes an answer or answering possible. This could even be called an ‘answerability’, i.e. the ability to give an answer. Such responsivity would go beyond intentional acts or communicative actions as it puts the answer and thereby answerability first (Waldenfels, 1994: 320).

In our terms, responsiveness then would translate to an organizational ‘answerability’, i.e. the ability to attentively listening to claims and demands, and not simply responding but answering them that will trigger new answer from the stakeholders.

**The process of attentive listening**

Answering requires listening. Listening can be conceived of as a kind of verbal perception. Waldenfels emphasizes the prominent quality of listening, as he considers listening
as the impulse and thereby starting point of giving an answer (Waldenfels, 1994: 244).

Assuming that a question does not only transfer its content aspects but also makes an offer as well as a demand, we do not only listen to the verbal speech act but also to the claim and demand inherent to the questions. Waldenfels refers to this phenomenon as ‘attentive listening’: “We do not answer to what we have listened to, but we answer by listening to something.” (Waldenfels, 1994: 250). Or, in short: listening itself is an act of answering.

Attentive listening differs from the act of hearing in the degree of attention given to the participant in the conversation. Linguistic nuances would confirm such an assumption: in English, to listen and to hear differ as much as to look and to see in that regard (Or in French, écouter and entendre as well as regarder and voir). By listening attentively, we express a receptive attention that in itself represents a first step towards answering (Waldenfels, 1994: 250).

Qualities of answers

Answers can have different qualities. A reproductive answer draws from an existing register of answer or response repertoire by responding to standard situations or recurring claims by repetitive or stereotypical answers. Similar questions are responded with similar answers. Such an answer does not require considering the other person as a subject in a communication. A standardized response can be given to any ‘standardized’ participant in a communication.

A productive answer can be conceived of as the attempt to creatively cope with a situation that is ambiguous and not similar to previous situations. Moreover, the relation between speaker and listener is crucial when inventing such an answer. In this situation, “one gives something, the he does not have yet, but that he invents in giving the answer” (Waldenfels, 1991: 109; my translation).

The notion of a productive answer should not be mistaken for the degree of fulfillment of intentions. Rather, it acknowledges the systematic asymmetry between speaker and listener as well as question and answer that requires openness when encountering the foreign. I would even suggest putting it this way: The asymmetry is the stimulus – to be responsive.

In contrast, the established communication models suggest that any communication strive for equilibrium. The asymmetry in knowledge between speaker and listener is remedied by transferring information, encoded by the speaker and decoded by the listener. One party gives, another receives – These are temporary differences as speaker and listener can switch their roles at any time in principle. Reciprocity of perspectives and reversibility of participants’ roles make possible an unlimited communicative exchange.

Waldenfels (1991) identifies an important blind spot of these communication models: The responsive difference produces an asymmetry which consists in listening to the foreign claim on
the one hand, but by responding never being able to converge with it: "Entering the dialogue is not identical with the result of the dialogue" (Waldenfels, 1991: 114).

This certainly complies with and confirms our finding, that dialogue as a reflective conversation requires (a) the openness of participants to enter the dialogue, and (b) the appropriate conversational setting. Both (a) and (b) however do not guarantee for a dialogue to take place.

7.7.1. **Conclusion: Responsiveness and 'Answerability' in organizations**

Most lifeworlds and languages are different, distant and foreign to our own. The inaccessibility and exclusion of the foreign from the realm of the own results in a systematic asymmetry. For organizations, this is of high relevance as organizational cultures and subcultures develop their specific lifeworlds and language games. If neglection of foreignness is not an option, encountering the foreign is an inevitable occurrence in organizations. These encounters however can be facilitated in a twofold way: (1) by creating an open, non-hierarchical mode of conversation that allows for multiple voices to be heard; and (2) by providing conversational settings in the form of discursive arenas in which these encounters can take place. Understanding then is not about converging to one perspective, but to acknowledge differences and distances by reflecting on each other’s position. Responsiveness in that regard is a prerequisite of such encounters with the foreign within organizations.

Response conceived of as a reaction to an external stimulus does not reflect what responding is about. The process of answering does not simply address the content of a question. Moreover, an answer is an attempt to respond to implicit claims and demands inherent to a question. As these claims and demands can never be responded to exhaustively, it is through dialogic interaction that these demands are rendered more visible and thereby intelligible.

In that sense, organizational products, performances and outcomes can be conceived of as responses. If organizational members were able to not only 'read' the explicit content of a question but to understand and adhere to the implicit claims and demands, then I would suggest conceiving of these outcomes as an – always somewhat insufficient – answer that will trigger new questions in dialogical interaction.

Acknowledging Waldenfels' (1994) approach to conceive of conversation as starting from the answer rather than the question, a responsive rationality would suggest reflecting on the ability of organizations to provide answer. Or, in short: How can organizations be conceived of as 'answerable'? As such an 'answerability' goes beyond intentional or communicative action, relational qualities will become more prominent, not only in service encounters.

An answer makes only sense as a response to a question that we understand. Being open to the other is a prerequisite in that regard. Acknowledging the foreignness and attentively
listening to it allows for an in-between of own and foreign. Understanding is not about bridging the gap between inclusion and exclusion, it is about answering from the in-between (Waldenfels, 1998: 53). Entering the area between own and foreign is what dialogue might be all about: We can give something, that we do not have yet, but the process of answering provided a common response between participants (Waldenfels, 1998: 53).

In organizations, encountering the foreign by its very nature cannot be responded to using a standardized, reproductive answer. Such answers are made for the own, the known and the ordinary. Foreign clients, foreign products, foreign markets, foreign cultures, foreign departments, foreign languages and lifeworlds within and outside organizations put questions to us that we have to respond to by a productive answer. Answers from these encounters have to be invented in the process and act of giving the answer (Waldenfels, 1991: 96).

Encountering the foreign, entering the in-between of own and foreign as to jointly develop productive answers are challenges to individuals as well as organizations. Responsiveness as attributed perceptive, reflective and adaptive capacity would then translate into an enabler for ‘organizational answerability’, i.e. to not only provides same answers for same questions but to invent productive answers to new questions.

At a metalevel, my research questions have been such new questions, for which I had to invent a productive answer in the process of answering; this thesis itself.
Epilogue: Learning through listening in a family

Reading, writing and reflecting on abstract concepts such as ‘responsiveness’ for three years or longer puts a challenge to any researcher: How does all this make sense? What for? In my case, it was in a very difficult family situation where I opted to apply some of my knowledge that I had gained throughout the experience of the project and the research.

For years, I had been the go-between and diplomatic device between two parts of my family that couldn’t or didn’t want to communicate with each other. When a very significant crisis occurred for one member of my family and everybody wanted to switch into traditional modes of problem solving, I “resigned” from my job as diplomat and claimed the role of a “moderator”.

In the conversation that everyone was somewhat afraid of, and in which we had to address a rather difficult issue, I asked everyone to briefly put his or her view on the issue to the family. Everybody else was asked not to comment or discuss, but only to listen attentively. Then, I suggested, we would see where people are coming from and what their ideas are. We had set a time of one hour for this conversation.

To the surprise of us all, it was possible to overcome the traditional pattern of conversation, as everybody listened to the views of the other. After 45 minutes, we had explored the issue to everybody’s satisfaction.

Beyond all academic considerations, the experience of this single episode with my family has made this research worthwhile.
References


*Organizational Dynamics*, 22(2): 24-40.


