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Illusion and Disillusion in a Development Organisation

Dr Lorraine Mancey O'Brien

A thesis submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to the Department of Sociology,

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List of Acronyms

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

APSO: Agency for Personal Service Overseas

ASA: Association of Social Anthropologists

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CHOGM: Commonwealth heads of Government meeting

CSP: Country Strategy Programme

DCD: Development Cooperation Dublin

DCI: Development Co-operation Ireland

DFID: Department for International Development

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HIV/AIDS (Human) Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (Virus)

HQ: Headquarters

IA: Irish Aid

ICT: Information Communications Technology

IRCHSS: Irish research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences

KM: Knowledge Management

KMWG: Knowledge Management Working Group

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

NGO: Non-Government Organisation

ODA: Official Development Assistance

ODI Overseas Development Institute

OLS: Organisational Leaning System

PAEG: Project Appraisal and Evaluation Group

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

SIDA: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

TCD: Trinity College, Dublin

UN: United Nations

USAID: The United States Agency for International Development

Acknowledgments

For Edie,

Who may one day wonder what it was that mum was doing for all those years.

This thesis is dedicated to my family, both in the UK and Ireland, who have encouraged me from the start and to all my wonderful friends for all your kindness and laughter. To my parents, who instilled in me the importance of education and a love of the simple things in life. I also want to thank Hugh Davidse, my sociology teacher when I was sixteen at Harrow Weald VI Form College, who saw potential in my teenage self and inspired me to begin this journey. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my friend and colleague, Barbara Bradby for your continued friendship and supervision. Your voice has helped me to make sense of the chaos and your consistent in-depth, detailed and brilliant critique has been of infinite value in the writing of this thesis. I would not have got there without you!

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Summary

This thesis focuses on a development donor organisation in the Republic of Ireland which embarked upon a project to become a learning organisation with a team from Trinity College Dublin. This thesis explores an area that is under-researched within organisational studies and provides an ethnography of an international aid organisation, which has, to date, been a 'secret world.'

The author commences by describing her journey through this funded project and beyond to writing up her PhD thesis using a retrospective sensemaking epistemology. The research explores how members of the donor development organisation understand the idea of learning, and juxtapose this with how learning is practiced and imagined.

This thesis argues that organisational learning must be understood through the contextual and complex 'messy' nature of development itself. It understands learning to be most productively understood as a form of sensemaking. Capturing stories, including the story of the researcher herself were pivotal in this sensemaking approach, where an autoethnographic analysis illuminated aspects of the research that were previously hidden. Ultimately, it became the 'story of the story' framed by the themes of 'illusion and disillusion' that held the author accountable to the research process. It is through the use of 'two phases' of research that allow the sensemaking approach to retrospectively analyse the emergent data in a cyclical form. Seeing *all* as data then illuminates the emotional engagement between the research and the lived experience as a form of embodiment.

Chapter One: A Tale in Two Halves

Introduction

The Ordinary is Extraordinary

Telling the Story of 'Illusion and Disillusion'

Situating the Study - The Research Context

Turning the mirror on themselves

Irish Aid as a development organisation

Wanting to make a difference

Irish identity and the developing world

The origins and rationale of the LEARN project

A case of mistaken identity

The Two Phases of the Research

Chapter Summary – Foundations

Introduction

> It seemed like a chance to do proper service work…I wanted to be involved with developing countries, that it would be rewarding, I wanted to be a small part of it, to help the specialists do their job but what's so frustrating is that I when I came in I had a conception of what it was and it wasn't that at all (Richard, Civil Servant, Interview, HQ Dublin, 29 June 2006).

At first I thought I could come into this organisation and after a while, when I understood them, I could give them an organisational learning system, and then I ended up trying to reduce all my observations into one page of feedback, cutting out all the emotions and complexities of the experience.

These two statements are from two distinct phases of my research. The first is from 2006 when a civil servant, new to the organisation by only a few months, spoke to me and the following one is from my own retrospection, spoken four years later in 2010 to my supervisor. Each one encapsulates a different phase, and exemplifies the overarching theme of my research: illusion and disillusion.

The Ordinary is Extraordinary

The format of these two phrases above start with the statement 'at first I thought X' (which is almost always followed by 'and then I realised Y'). This was remarked upon by Harvey Sacks (1992) in his 1967 'Lectures in Conversation.' He referred to these as the 'Thought/Realised' alternations that occur in what Gail Jefferson (2004) later termed as 'normalizing devices for extraordinary events.' This idea of the ordinary being extraordinary resonates strongly with this research work.

Richard stated that being in Irish Aid seemed like a 'proper chance' to do development work. This paralleled how I had felt. I had originally thought I was going into a development organisation to 'uncover' how they operated, and then to develop an organisational learning system for them. I thought that I would ultimately, through my work, be of some use within the field of development, both practically - in producing a system for them, and academically - in that my research would feed into enhancing knowledge about development donors. However, for both myself and Richard, our realities differed from our expectations and an interweaving of illusion and disillusion occurred, represented here in this thesis, which tells the story of the research journey in two distinct, but overlapping phases.

Telling the Story of 'Illusion and Disillusion'

The illusions and disillusions in this research are manifold. Organisational members spoke of illusion, of working in an organisation thinking they were making a difference, but finding they were swamped with bureaucracy and emails, and that their jobs were more paperwork than what they had first perceived as development. Linked to this was a sense of disillusionment; as they spoke candidly about impending decentralisation, high staff turnover and what was often perceived of as the futility of new initiatives, and of feeling disillusioned with the organisation itself.

Secondly, I found *myself* experiencing many forms of illusion and disillusion. I had initially adopted an epistemological approach grounded in a positivistic paradigm which had affected how I entered this organisation, the relationships I had formed, the meetings

I had observed, and the questions I asked. My illusion during this phase[1] was fundamentally linked to the positivistic ontology of diagnosing the problem to which I had the solution (an organisational learning system) and seeing a single objective reality to the research question (Carson et al, 2001: 6). I believed I could deliver them what they wanted, and this unquestioned belief became my stumbling block as gradually I became more disillusioned. I realised that there were *no* simple answers. The initial research question I posed: 'How do the members of this organisation see learning?' (Chapter Three) proved problematic, paradoxical and contradictory. So I looked at the emerging theme of organisational culture and belonging (Chapter Four) in order to try and understand the organisational as well as feelings of illusion and disillusion that was emerging from the data. Slowly but surely, the research began drifting away from its earlier incarnations, and its mandated research proposal. With growing unease, during both the period of research in the organisation and throughout the analysis phase and the subsequent periods of reflection,[2] I realised that my original plan was unfolding very differently. The data, 'generated' in interaction was leading me on an unfamiliar and seemingly non-academic path of confusion. It was also one where my identity as researcher morphed into that of confidante and friend and even conspirator, leading me to feeling both conflict and ultimately disillusionment with my role as part of the Learn Project. This was followed by a turning point,[3] which led into a second phase[4] of interpretivism and involved a re-conceptualising of my generated data to include the self. It is also based on Sack'-s theory of 'Thought/Realised' alternations. There are many places within this research where both the organisational members and myself expressed the 'at first I thought X and then I realised Y' type of statements that are encapsulated by the interweaving of illusion and disillusion throughout this thesis.

This study is to some extent a personal act of retrospective sense-making at a time when my individual and academic lives collided as I mourned for the loss of my father and my grandmother. This personal side of my life clashed with analysing my data, negotiating the concepts of belonging and representation, and questioning the boundaries of objective

[1] 2005-2008
[2] July 2006 to September 2012
[3] 2009
[4] 2009-2012

and subjective research. Sense-making became reconceptualised through the adoption of autoethnography as a mechanism by which I would attempt to understand my experiences.

However; it was *more* than just self-inclusion, as these retrospective acts of sense-making extended to a deeper understanding of how the research was conducted. Certain emotions and relationships affected what I saw, experienced and recorded. This research had a profound effect upon me; not least keeping me focused on something whilst my emotions were chaotic and unpredictable, but also in searching for a way of representing my academic data. Retrospective sensemaking and the autoethnographic approach weren't only fundamental in understanding my role within the organisation, but also helped my understanding of how Irish Aid operated as a development organisation. Ultimately this thesis represents the stories we ultimately make ourselves (Linden, 1993) which help us to understand the world which we construct through the self's interactions with it.

Situating the Study - The Research Context

This research takes place in an Irish development donor organisation which, at the time of study, was based in Dublin, Ireland. This study was researched and written between 2005 and 2012. This study is data-driven and is in two distinct phases. The first phase took place between the end of 2005 and the start of 2008. During this period I drew upon the organisational learning literature, much of it based in positivism and results based management. The data was generated both in Irish Aid's headquarters in Dublin, Ireland and in the Irish Embassy, in Kampala, Uganda. 2005-2008 was a period of enormous change for Irish Aid as the majority of the organisation was decentralising to Limerick, a process which began in July 2006, and as a result of this, there was a staff turnover of very high proportions.[5]

[5] This amounted to 85% of the total workforce.
http://historicaldebates.oireachtas.ie/D/0649/D.0649.200803110008.html. . Accessed 11 February 2014.

It was at the end of my first year of research that I attended a three day meeting in the Dublin headquarters, of Field Advisors from many of Irish Aid's programme countries:- Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. I was also heavily pregnant at the time and due to give birth on the second day of the meeting. My supervisor had advised me to both record *and* attend the meeting, as this was the first time these particular Field Advisors had all been together in Ireland. This meeting is explored in detail in Chapter Five. Fourteen months later I attended another Irish Aid meeting, in Kampala, Uganda, which forms the basis for Chapter Six. It was after these meetings were transcribed and attempts were made at analysis that it became clear to me that something was missing from how I was conceptualising, analysing and portraying the data. This culminated in a turning point which led to the second phase of research.

The second phase of research (2009 – 2012) was marked by a turn to the self in order to make sense of the data. It was also marked by a change in supervisor in 2009, and uses a reflexive and in some part, autoethnographic research methodology which centres on the stories and narratives of both myself and the development workers. This second phase of research draws upon many different strands of academic literature, and brings together academic work on development, in particular, post-development' critical theory (particularly addressing the need to study 'donor' organisations), organisational studies, the interactionist tradition of story-telling, and autoethnography.

Turning the mirror on themselves

From the 1970s to the present day, there has been an influx of social scientists, working in development organisations where academic study and political action have converged (Escobar, 1991). Using social scientists (often anthropologists) within development processes was a trend towards a more critical engagement to help expand the scope of development research. This enabled researchers to engage with multiple roles of being both researchers *and* paid workers and also perhaps helped them to challenge their own preconceptions in the field. This idea of a researcher being a trusted insider and permitted to investigate the inner workings of development institutions stems from a perceived need to study the culture of the development institutions themselves (Hoben 1982). Within the chapter on Culture and Development, the Elgar Companion to Development Studies calls

for more research on cultures 'not of the weak, but of the strong' because of the many 'myths that legitimise their style of operation' (Clark, 2006: 100). Lewis states that rarely has anthropological work been undertaken on the inner workings of aid agencies and donors themselves (Lewis, 2005: 477) while Rosalind Eyben writes that:

> So far, no official aid agency has been prepared to undertake a study that aims to learn about their staff's everyday practices – what they are doing, as distinct from what they report they are doing – and their effects (Eyben, 2010: 384).

The implication of these arguments is that there is a fundamental need to explore the everyday practices of development donors, within their Headquarters as well as within Embassies, and including those working within programme countries as an extension of the organisation. As Escobar indicates:

> We hear a lot about 'voices from the field' but as of yet, nothing from the donor development workers at the other end, anthropologists have long concentrated on the field, perhaps now it is time to turn the mirror on development donors and ourselves (Escobar,1991: 671).

Development donors *themselves* need to be reflective and self-critical. This is all the more pertinent due to the publicised issue of €4 million in emergency Irish Aid funding disappearing in Uganda, and the sudden spotlight on Irish Aid themselves as a development donor. This came to the public's attention when it was reported in the Irish news that 'Fraud at 'very high level' in Uganda [was] behind missing €4m aid' (*Irish Examiner*, 14 November 2012). Facing a public relations disaster like this enhances the need for donor organisations to be seen as accountable, transparent and trustworthy, however, despite this, research into donor organisations remains limited. The next two sections explore Irish Aid as a development donor and locate the organisation historically and in its cultural context.

Irish Aid as a development organisation

Irish Aid began as an organisation in 1973 and is the development donor organisation of the Irish state. Its main role is to offer assistance to developing countries. It is a subsection of the Department of Foreign Affairs[6] and Ireland's development cooperation policy is an integral part of its wider foreign policy. Responsibility for Irish foreign policy, including assistance to developing countries lies with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and it also has a coordinating role in relation to Overseas Development Assistance by other Government Departments.[7] On its official Government website it states that's its aims are:

> ...To reduce poverty and hunger, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where the needs are greatest. By supporting long term development and providing humanitarian assistance in over eighty countries, on behalf of the Irish people, we are helping to build better futures for some of the world's poorest communities.[8]

However, despite Overseas Development Aid being €669 million in 2011, of which €534 million was allocated to the Department of Foreign Affairs, the work of Irish Aid is not well known. Ronan Murphy, was Director General of Irish Aid from 1991-1995, reiterates this point by stating 'It is surprising how little is known about Irish Aid outside of the circle of people working or interested in development aid' (Murphy, 2012: 1). One attempt to familiarise the organisation with the Irish people was by changing its name to make its function more explicit in its title because 'If you ask the man or woman in the street who gives what, they are unlikely to know much about Irish Aid' (Murphy, 2012:1). When this research project began in October 2005, the organisation was called Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI) but before 2002 the organisation had previously been known as Ireland Aid. When, in 2003, after the DAC Peer Review revealed that 62% of respondents in a public opinion survey had 'never heard' of DCI, the name was changed to Irish Aid to make its role clearer to the general public and link it purposefully to development and aid. As well as changing its name, other efforts were made to try and convey the work of this little known Government organisation such as publishing its

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[6] Whilst I had access to Irish Aid for this research, I had no contact or interaction with the wide organisation of the Department of Foreign Affairs

7 http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/about.asp Accessed 13 December 2013

8 http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/what-we-do/ Mission Statement. Accessed 13 December 2013

annual report, and opening an Information and Volunteering Office in O'Connell Street, Dublin which hosts information events for both schoolchildren and the general public (Murphy, 2012:1).

Whether or not these initiatives to increase public awareness about Irish Aid have been a success remains to be seen, but even amongst academic circles, little is known about Ireland's aid agency. In addition to this the study of aid history more generally in Ireland has received limited attention (O'Sullivan, 2011: 111). The Trocaire Development Review, as far back as 1985 was reporting on a high level of public ignorance about what development was.[9] Perhaps as Kilcullen (2010) notes, this is due to the quintessentially Irish attitude to aid, where common knowledge began and ended with only a portion of its history, that of missionary involvement in Africa and 'wanting to make a difference' (Kilcullen, 2010: 17).

Wanting to make a difference

Despite the fact that some of the general public may be unaware of Irish Aid and its specific work in the field of development, Murphy states that Irish people *are* aware to some extent of playing a role in the developing world and consequently there is a discourse connecting Ireland and the Irish to development - that goes beyond its development assistance organisation.

> People do know that Ireland has a long engagement with the developing world. Stories have been brought back by missionaries and returned aid workers [and] by young people who spend time in Africa or Asia (Murphy, 2012: 2).

One aspect of Ireland's history that reconfirms the connection between Irish identity, history and development was the historical legacy of the Famine. O'Sullivan states that this can clearly be seen in the name chosen by the Irish government for the semi-state development agency, Gorta ('Famine'), as an obvious reference to past traditions (O'Sullivan, 2013: 481). Murphy also links the public's knowledge of the developing world to the history of the famine in Ireland, stating that the Famine left a 'searing

[9] http://www.trocaire.org/sites/trocaire/files/resources/policy/1985-public-official development-assistance.pdf.pdf . Accessed 13 December 2013

impression' upon the Irish so that when they were faced with other countries enduring famine, they could empathise (Murphy, 2012:8). It was the 'Great Famine' - a period of mass starvation, disease and emigration that occurred between 1845 and 1852 - that taught Ireland a salutary lesson, enabling the Irish to understand poverty in its 'real form' (Murphy, 2012: 9). This discourse can be seen reflected in the words of a former Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern:[10]

> Because of our history, Ireland can rightly claim to empathise with those who are suffering from disease, poverty and hunger every day around the globe (DFA, 2006: 3).

This can also be seen in the words of Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland (1990-1997) who also locates this connection as being rooted in empathy between the Irish and developing nations.

> The Irish can empathise with people living in the developing world …and see things from the point of view of the poor – maybe because we come for the most part from modest backgrounds ourselves and have learned through history what it is to be on the receiving end – made us more suitable partners than donors from rich countries who often talk down to the recipient countries" (Mary Robinson, Foreword, 2012: xi-xii).

This public discourse of 'empathy,' put forward by the country's leaders plays a fundamental role in linking Ireland and the Irish to the developing world in a specific manner. It was a combination of the history of the Famine, and Irish missionary activity that was, according to O'Sullivan 'part of a longer narrative that linked work in the education and health sectors in independent Africa and Asia with Ireland's own experience of state building in the twentieth century'(2013: 481). This combination helped to shape Irish attitudes to aid and the developing world. The emphasis on a shared experience made its way easily into Irish interpretations of the developing world (O'Sullivan, 2013: 481). It is this interpretation that O'Sullivan calls 'the official adaptation of the past to suit present agendas' (O'Sullivan, 2011: 2). This adaptation of the past and its links to the present can be seen in the portrayal of the Irish as selfless, more caring and generous than other nations.

[10] Bertie Ahern served as Taoiseach from 1997–2000.

In a general article about how development personnel are represented, Stirrat (2008) categorises three stereotypes of development worker: mercenary, missionary and misfit. The label missionary in this case is not linked to religion, but linked instead to an ethos of 'helping.' Stirrat's characterisations of personnel within the aid industry seem pertinent here, as his categorisation of the 'missionary' personnel resonates with the empathetic Irish development worker, who can be characterised as committed and enthusiastic, 'people with a sense of mission, people with a vocation driven by a sense of duty' (Stirrat, 2008: 412).

> Not for them the world of executive lounges, expensive hotels and air-conditioned vehicles, but rather of a direct meeting and identification with the 'real people'. In this sector of the development world, people are motivated not by money but by a personal moral commitment (Stirrat, 2008: 412).

As Murphy unequivocally says 'the impulse to help is a phenomenon that recurs so often as to make it a feature of the Irish character' (Murphy, 2012: 7) and it is not just the earmarking of helping, - that is part of the Irish character, but that this is done differently in contrast to other countries, both in the context of having a unique personality within development (explored further in Chapter Six) but also in how generous the Irish are: 'There is hardly a disaster where Irish people have not been to the fore, often giving far more than our richer neighbours' (Murphy, 2012: 7). Similarly, Stirrat (2008) links the adoption of the role of 'missionary,' to:

> a sense of guilt at the poverty of the developing world; it may derive from a particular political agenda or it may be fuelled by some romantic dream (Stirrat, 2008: 412).

It is this idea of questioning the origins of the relationship of Ireland and the Irish to development that is relevant here to my overall argument in this thesis. The stereotype of the genuine person wanting to make a difference resonates with the illusion and disillusion felt by Richard and myself. Our expectations of working in development, especially when contrasted with the unfolding reality, could well be seen as informed by romantic notions, and a sense of guilt about our privileged positions in the world.

Irish identity and the developing world

As Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, stated, the Irish know what it is to be on the receiving end of colonialism, discrimination and famine (Murphy, 2012: 1). Murphy who was Director General of Irish Aid (1991 - 1995, 2004 - 2008) attributes this deeper understanding of poverty by the Irish people to the 'absence of colonial baggage' (Murphy, 2012: 9). If Ireland's relationship to the developing world is in part based upon its history, it is important to explore this idea in relation to a discourse of inclusion and exclusion of how Irish identity is perceived both by the Irish themselves and those that they work with in the developing world. In aligning the Irish to developing nations, Murphy is creating rhetoric of inclusivity with African nations, and a separation from others based on historical experience.

> If we *do* generalise then we might say that there is an overarching concern to be seen *on side* with developing nations, to show that the Irish are not like other people …as Murphy states 'the people of the emerging African nations looked closer to Ireland as a model for themselves.' That Africans saw the Irish as 'closer in terms of development to their own situation than other donors.' (Murphy, 2012: 9).

Certainly within Irish Aid there was a sense of wanting to make a difference, of caring, of getting involved with development, as is explored in Chapter Four of this thesis. Some members wanted to be involved in order to explore what development is. As Richard explained in Chapter Four: 'I had an idea it was going to be a bit more glamorous…It seemed like a chance to do proper service work, (Richard, 30 June 2006, Civil Servant, Interview, HQ Dublin).

O'Sullivan (2013) asks why the missionary past, and individuals like Mary Robinson became such 'visible manifestations of what it mean[s] to be Irish' and whether that empathetic identity emerged from *within* Irish society, or outside of it (O'Sullivan, 2013: 477). It is the preferred discourse, the prevailing choice of association with the developing world that frames Irish identity through the power of 'subjective belief' in Ireland as a 'Third World' country (Howe, 2000: 155). This choice, of choosing one discourse over another can be explored through the topic of Ireland and racism.

It is in the context of debates on racism in contemporary Ireland that these issues of Ireland's relationship to the developing world have been most roundly challenged in recent times. For instance, Garner (2004) links the Irish collective self-image, and attitudes to racialised 'Others' as having its roots in English colonial practice. Far from the experience of colonisation he argues rather that it has caused racism to be appropriated as a post-colonial construct (Garner, 2004: 26). It is therefore not sameness, but difference, that has created a contradiction in the Irish treatment of those *in* the developing world and those *from* the developing world. This contradiction is similar to that which Lentin and McVeigh see in the Irish racial state's commitment to encouraging 'diversity' whilst simultaneously restricting in-migration (Lentin & McVeigh, 2006: 7). For the Irish, part of their development rhetoric is to be seen as noticeably separate from the colonisers, but the argument that '*we are better development workers because we can empathise with beneficiaries of development*' creates a contradiction when 'issues within the developing world are highlighted without any reference to racism or colonialism or imperialism or slavery.' Poverty was condemned without any context or explanation' (Lentin & McVeigh, 2006: 182).

It is also important to consider the historical role of the Irish *themselves* in colonisation. There was a significant Irish contribution to the day to day management of the 'Empire' and of coercive enforcement of its control that saw the Irish carrying out the functions, and appropriating patterns of exclusion and oppression (Garner, 2004: 129). Garner states that this has been hidden. It may be that the Irish often frame themselves as victims of colonial exploitation whilst also creating distance between themselves and certain other racialised populations. For example, the Irish had to emphasise their whiteness as a section of the American working classes and distance themselves from non-white others in the New World (Ignatiev, 1995) to differentiate themselves and thus creating an outcome of unequal power relations with 'black and other Third World people' (Garner, 2004: 138).

In the economic sphere a similar contradiction can be seen in how the developing world is portrayed – primarily as producers whose goods are restricted access to European markets; as the grateful beneficiaries of appeals; as oppressed, and as victims (Advisory

Council on Development Co-operation, 1985: 8). Thus a contradiction occurs, 'preaching common experience while simultaneously denying the developing world access to the same markets relied on by Irish producers' (O'Sullivan, 2013: 484). This contradiction seems on the whole unchallenged, and as the world of the development donor organisation is relatively unknown, questions as to the role, the success and the daily interactions of Irish Aid need to be explored. As O'Sullivan asks are 'Irish intentions really so different from its counterparts elsewhere in the West?' (O'Sullivan,

2013: 490). If the prevailing discourse is that Ireland is a post-colonial, empathetic donor, closer to developing nations than other donors, perhaps even, a third world state itself (Howe, 2000: 155) - how does this resonate with the experience of Irish Aid's staff in the reality of being Irish in the developing world? This thesis seeks to explore these questions.

Despite the rhetoric of being able to identify itself with developing nations, my argument will be that Irish Aid seems to operate like any other Northern development institution. It is described by its staff as an 'old boys club' (Chapter Six) as well as being 'entrenched in bureaucracy' (Chapter Four), both of which are criticisms that have been levelled at development organisations in other countries. It is also preoccupied with keeping abreast of what other development agencies are doing. However, as an outsider myself I was stuck by some aspects of the organisational culture within Irish Aid, which did diverge from my expectations of an official development organisation; for instance, that those I encountered were on first name terms with each other. This was the case both at headquarters in Dublin and in the field work I was privy to in Uganda, and was explained to me as part of their relaxed attitude and casual nature that came naturally to the Irish (Chapter Six). This attitude was picked up by Ugandans I encountered as earmarking the Irish as different to engage with than other donors. I shall argue, however, that behind this relaxed front there lay further contradictions. On the one hand, Irish development workers saw themselves as coming from a romanticised past of empathy and as victims themselves of colonialism, yet on the other hand, aspects of their engagement in the field countries seemed distinctly colonial, - such as bringing in smoked salmon in the diplomatic bag to the seemingly colonial attitudes of Irish advisors

towards people they were delivering training sessions to in Uganda, discussed further in (Chapter Six).

The origins and rationale of the LEARN project

The research for this project was funded for the first three years from October 2005 - October 2008 by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and was part of broader funding aiming to research infrastructures in the humanities and social sciences. The LEARN Project was specifically focused on addressing the challenges of organisational learning in an international aid organisation. The research project description states that:

> Despite a significant and internationally recognised history of Irish Government, missionary and NGO activity in developing countries over many decades, there have been few attempts to place this activity on a firm research basis and initiate new projects on organisational learning or evidence based outcomes...the creation of a system to collect information on such activity is crucial (Research project description, document to IRCHSS, April 2005: 1)

This 'system' was hoped to be a computerised archive ranging from qualitative accounts of individuals' work to project reviews and longer term outcomes. At a theoretical level it was hoped that this project could explore factors influencing organisational learning. At a practical level it was hoped that the project would 'encourage learning across and within organisations by the sharing of programme experience and in doing so contribute to capacity development in the effective delivery of international aid' (Research project description, document to IRCHSS, April 2005: 2).

A case of mistaken identity

When I was initially recruited for this research position, it was in September 2005. The project had already been in operation since April 2005 with four researchers and four supervisors making up the LEARN project team. The position was advertised as funded PhD research in an Irish development organisation, looking at organisational learning. For the interview I had produced a power point presentation on organisational learning which was, prior to this, a subject that was unknown to me. However, I did a great job in

convincing them that I would be good in this position and was accepted onto the project team, with only a few months before we were to enter the organisations (two researchers at Concern, and two at Irish Aid). It was hoped at some stage that we would publish our work, both independently and as a group in collaboration. The reason I had been drafted in at a later stage was because the previous student, whose specialism was information technology and computing (ICT) systems had left after six months, and thus I inherited his supervisor who was an academic based in ICT. My secondary supervisor was from psychology and with psychology closer to my background of sociology and anthropology, my secondary supervisor took the leading role. However, as this project's backbone was to be ICT based, the organisation was expecting an ICT specialist. It was not until my first day in the organisation that I realised there was a case of mistaken identity, when I was asked: 'So, what's your background in ICT?' I'm an anthropologist, I stammered nervously'. This beginning was to be more pertinent than I ever could have imagined.

The Two Phases of the Research

The discussion of first phase of the research in this thesis locates the context of the LEARN project and explains how the commissioned research was undertaken. It firstly explores organisational learning, the premise for which the project was conceived, and discusses how the research evolved. In this phase of the research I was very keen to supply the organisation and the project with what it needed - an organisational learning system. The story of this early evolution can be seen in Chapters Three and Four, where I struggle to fit the generated data into a 'results based' mechanism. I tried to focus on the original project of providing them with a system that would 'fix them' and solve their learning problems, but the growing unease during data generation and the subsequent periods of analytical reflection would not abate. What then ensued was a long period of reflection where I looked to intersecting and sometimes diverse disciplines within academic thought to try and make sense of both the data and my changing experiences. Intellectually and personally I had doubts, the data seemed contradictory, and the themes arising of learning, belonging and the organisational culture, explored in Chapters Three and Four seemed to lack a deeper context.

In 2009 I went to my supervisor to discuss what I had called my 'analytical paralysis.' He was very keen on me to 'just write up' my results, to be quick with the analysis and to publish. When the project had initially started there were four students and four supervisors, all looking at organisational learning - in different ways at different organisations. The four project supervisors put pressure on the four students to produce as part of a team, and by 2009 there was no discernible output, neither in journal articles nor as completed theses. Two students had left the project completely and one other was taking some time off from the project. This left just me. The three year funding had ceased for the project (2005-2008) and there had been no visible output from it.[11] I had sought extra help from the Department of Sociology and had decided that I needed to change supervisors so that I could receive the guidance I needed in making sense of my data. Although not unusual this did cause considerable conflict and took some time, and intervention, until it was resolved. There was an overlap of personal and intellectual difficulties at this time; I was mourning the loss of close family members – conjoined with what I perceived as my failure to create output from the research project.

This change in 2009 heralded a different approach to the research. There was initially a disjuncture between what I wrote and what I said, and my academic work was dry - filled with other author's works and ideas to validate what it was that I was trying to say. This transition is represented in Chapter Seven where I describe how experiencing a shift, both personally and academically, in which I was moving from a positivistic approach of 'fixing them' (and not being able to) to a very different approach whereby I undertook to make sense of the data retrospectively, in a more interpretivist manner. This involved using autoethnographic method as a reflexive tool, attempting to understand myself in terms of my interaction with organisational members in generating the data and subsequently analysing how this helped me understand the organisation further.

I never expected to write the story of my research journey, yet I have done just that, retrospectively working back from the end, then jumping and skipping to fragments, moments, recalled thoughts, layers of memory triggered by random sentences in books, epiphanies and academic articles. There were many times that I felt entirely

[11] One student submitted her thesis in March 2010, there were no other submissions.

overwhelmed, but little by little the thesis became woven together through retrospective sense-making. As well as providing insight into debates on development and how learning and knowledge are organised in development, this thesis also explores the way that my own learning was, and is, conceptualised. The autoethnographic elements connect the personal to the cultural, the micro to the macro, and also add to the debates concerning the connection of the everyday mundane aspects of organisational life to broader political and strategic organisational agendas and processes.

My work is in the vein of David Mosse (2005), Dorothea Hilhorst (2003) and Rosalind Eyben (2009), who are all critically engaged with development donors and processes. Taking from the work of Mosse (2005) I empathise with his idea of the development donor organisation having blurred organisational boundaries and where the very question of what a donor does or represents can be problematic. Mosse states that one of the challenges within anthropology is to break free from one's own preconceptions, and this work attempts to do this, however, where it differs from Mosse is that I did not set out to challenge my assumptions, but that in order to make sense of the organisation from the generated data, these assumptions became vital to analysing and understanding the organisation, and my interaction with it. Hilhorst's (2003) work resonates with that of Mosse, in that she notes how researchers often have little room for exploring avenues outside of the formal and expected, but I feel my own work rises to this challenge in the way I explored myself reflexively and my own interactions as an entry point for the emergent nature of the research. Although my research began in a positivist way, it veered away from the expected - so much so, that a change of supervisor and re-conceptualisation of the data were needed before the thesis could be completed. I found myself inhabiting between insider and outsider, which, following Eyben, I see as a place of liminality, between insider and outsider that moreover can offer both surprises and intellectual excitement (Eyben 2009: 72). I found, like Eyben, that an awareness of my own position led to an unmasking of the secret world of the development donor.

Chapter Summary – Foundations

Chapter One (this one) is an introduction and background chapter situating the study and identifying areas of thesis contribution. It begins with identifying the 'Thought/Realised' alternations of Harvey Sacks (1992) as 'normalizing devices for extraordinary events' as the idea of the ordinary being extraordinary resonates strongly with this research work. It then continues with the introduction of the themes of illusion and disillusion that run throughout this thesis. It then explores the research context, and introduces the two phases of research within a wider context of researching the development donor organisation itself. The chapter then locates Irish Aid both culturally and historically as Ireland's Government donor organisation with some discussion over its lack of visibility amongst both the Irish public sphere and within academic knowledge.

The chapter then examines the idea of 'wanting to make a difference' that emerged both from the data and from locating the origins of aid in Ireland as being linked to a chosen assumption of empathy and caring due to certain historical events like the Great Famine. This is then explored as to connections between Irish identity, history and development.

Ireland's relationship to the developing world is further explored in relation to Stirrat's typology of development personnel. Comparisons are drawn between Ireland's attitude to racism and the rhetoric of inclusivity with African nations, in the field of development. The origins and rationale for the LEARN Project are then discussed followed by a preliminary look at the two phases of research and their significance.

Chapter Two: Methodology is a discussion of the epistemological and methodological approach taken at the start of the research, the different methods used and their limitations. This chapter documents the journey from positivism (in phase one) to a turning point, where I use the work of Fernanda Duarte and Bob Hodge (2007) as inspiration for what I perceived as being caught between two frameworks. I then explore how the second phase helped me make sense of the earlier epistemological struggles and the use of storytelling, memory and epiphany as retrospective sensemaking tools. It includes reflections on the specific problems, and ethical constraints this particular research encountered, and is explicit about the fact that there are some difficult issues the

reader will not be told about and the devices deployed in this research to protect the subject's identity. It also includes reflections on the generic problems of access and publication in organisational research.

Chapter Three: Organisational Learning: A Magical Transformation. This chapter delves into different discourses around the idea of organisation learning and knowledge and explores how the members of this particular development organisation understand learning. It also documents my involvement with the LEARN project and gives an account of the first LEARN project meeting. From this point on, we enter the organisation through my eyes and feelings. By telling the story of this research I am tracking my thought and research processes in trying to 'see the invisible' and exploring the idea that organisational learning might be 'a magical transformation' that I, as conjurer / researcher attempted to make happen. This period of research described (conducted in 2005) was exploratory, where I tied to question some of the things that are usually taken for granted and explores the concept of learning. I set about trying to understand how organisational members understood learning, and how it was manifesting itself as a technical solution. This section also explores an emergent idea that the system *itself* was preventing learning. Some of the challenges that emerged during this phase of research were about working within a segmented system with a myopic view of what was going on and very little understanding of what was occurring on a macro scale and how the organisation was managing as a whole. I also consider the relevance of its institutional positionality with respect to how and whether it learns. I then critically analyse the relevance of Irish Aid as a *development* organisation to explain how power/ knowledge relations shape individual and organisational learning trajectories. This idea of a sense of ownership of learning links into the idea of belonging which is then further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Four – Exploring Culture builds upon Chapter Three and explores the culture of Irish Aid to navigate issues around cohesion, identity and belonging. I begin with many questions, such as where does culture reside, and whether a unified organisational culture existed, or a multitude of fragmented ones. This chapter explores how the induction process as an entry point to looking at belonging and organisational identity. It

also signifies the beginning of questions around whether the Irish do development differently and whether there is a unique sense of Irish identity within development. This examination continues in Chapter Five and Six. It also signifies a disjuncture, between perceived reality (what working in development was expected to be like) and its actual lived reality. Through this exploration my own role is examined, as simple tasks such as connecting two people within the organisation seemed outside of my jurisdiction, signifying further issues emerging through dual role and a growing sense of liminality.

Chapter Five - Negotiating Development is about making the invisible world of the development donor more visible. I use ethnographic methods to explore how development policy is framed by people, with human passions, relationships and emotions as well as by bureaucratic strategies. This chapter also examines how the development process is negotiated within a learning context. Through exploring a learning event between field officers and staff at Headquarters it shows how one discourse becomes powerful in a situation of multiple realities. This chapter also makes the point that in this context, organisational learning is about power. In feedback from the meeting, the experiences of those involved are largely about the disillusionment that they feel at not being able to have time for discussion, reflection or learning. This was brought to light in the transcriptions of the meeting yet was not represented in the organisational report of the event. I also explore the emerging idea of *disjuncture,* since the actual lived experience of the meeting seemed to work in contrast to the aims of the conference as expressed in intended learning outcomes and notions of dissent and consent are explored in relation to the idea of disjuncture.

Chapter Six - Room for Manoeuvre: Telling Stories tells the story of an organisational learning experience in the form of a gender-mainstreaming training seminar in Kampala, Uganda that took place in November 2007. It examines the role of stories, both in a macro-perspective, in the official development discourse and a micro approach, examining the stories generated within the data that help to make sense of *how* the Irish do development. It also considers how organisational members use storytelling to make sense of change which gives important insights into what they understand by a learning process. The continued thread of illusion and disillusion is explored through

retrospection. At first glance I was in the company of Irish experts working within a field position, however, I soon became aware of a shadow side of the development discourse, whereby power, colonialist attitudes and diplomatic privileges created a paradox within the story of the Irish's engagement in Uganda. This links to the rhetoric of inclusivity and the notion of supporting one type of Irishness over another. This chapter marks a change in perspective as I began to see that the originality of my work lay not in representing their learning experiences, but in the relationship between my own learning and reflections.

Chapter Seven - Success, Multiple Realities and the Aesthetic Experience examines the organisational response to feedback from my early research findings and draws out the wider implications of this dialogue for the evaluation process within development. I argue in this chapter that it was the idea of *sharing and representing the self* that was fundamental to understanding the organisation itself. Within this framework, the use of autoethnography rebukes the idea of the researcher and the researched being separate.

This chapter argues that notions of the 'aesthetic self' and of emotional engagement within research are inevitable and unavoidable part of the research process. This chapter then takes a deeper look at the two phases of research and their significance, building upon previous chapters.

Chapter Eight - Conclusion: Illusion and Disillusion Revisited summarises the learning journey, and themes that arose. It also revisits representations and roles. It considers the contributions of the thesis, as well as concluding how less constraining circumstances could avail of different methodological approaches, such as facilitating research subjects as co-learners. It finally revisits the themes of Illusion and Disillusion.

Chapter Two: Methodology: From Ethnography to Autoethnography

Introduction
A discussion of the Empirical Material Collected
The Chronology of the Research Process
Phase One of the Research: The Organisation as Machine
Between the Two Phases - Identity Matters
Phase Two of the Research: The Reflexive Self
    Exploring an autoethnographic approach
    Differentiating between autoethnographic approaches
        The present tense
        Disclosure of personal experiences (evocative)
        Retrospective sensemaking (analytic)
    Epiphanic moments in research
Ethics and Risks
Protecting the Research Subjects' Identity
Evaluative Criteria
Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

> The actual experience [of fieldwork] hedged around with contingencies, rarely lives up to the ideal (James Clifford, 1988: 24).

Organisational research uses a variety of methods, ranging from quantitative to qualitative approaches or sometimes using a combination of the two in the mixed methods approach. The presentation of all these approaches could lead one to believe it is a war between two sides and it is merely a question of picking the 'right' method. However, my experience is that the choice of a method itself is an emergent question, drawn out of the experience of the researcher grappling with her subject. The method laid out below is both an expression of the rigors and appropriateness of those available

approaches and the story of an individual researcher's experience of discovering their applicability.

The research is divided into two phases that are discussed within the Chapter as Phase One and Phase Two. The methodology chosen was not fixed during the research journey, but transformed due to the emergent and changing nature of the research from a basic ethnographic approach to an autoethnographic one – which made use of retrospective reflexive sensemaking to help analyse the data.

Choosing which methodological approach will best suit the research context is a choice often shaped by the project's aims, epistemological concerns and the organisational context itself as well as the consideration of ethical issues. 'Choice of research method tends to be presented as a step in the research process between setting objectives' (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009: 5) so most often a methodological approach will be pre-determined at the research planning stage, and a blueprint for how that research will be carried out will be drawn up and put into practice *before* commencing fieldwork. Even with the mixed methods approach, the combination of methods from the positivist and the interpretivist paradigm are most often pre-decided. In this research project there was a certain amount of fixed agreements about the shape of the research by the pre-approval of the project outline, the signed memorandum of understanding (MOU) and the goals set by research mandate (in this case, a funded project) to produce an organisational learning system. Within these parameters I had a quasi-consultant role to fulfil. I also had the added task of generating data for my PhD thesis. My research was originally conceptualised in the positivistic tradition. The aims of the funded project were clear with a methodology combining semi-structured interviews and participant observation, with some discussion of focus groups to be agreed at a later stage.

However, early on in the research it became clear to me that my neat research framework did not align to what I was experiencing, observing, and hearing. As the research progressed, it became clear that a shift was occurring in how I was making sense of the organisation. It was a year into the research that I began to struggle to honour the pre-determined role of 'expert' or quasi-consultant and began feeling that I had lost control of

what it was that I was there to do. I was *not* producing an organisational leaning system but instead was mirroring the organisation, documenting their daily realities, akin to what Pettigrew, a Professor of Strategy and Organisation at the Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford states that research is catching 'reality in flight' (1985: 37). This came to a head in 2009, a year after my work in the organisation had finished I was 'lost in translation' and experiencing severe analytical paralysis, fearful that this generated data would never be analysed in a way that it represented what had actually occurred. In a renewed effort to produce a PhD from the data - I changed supervisors and began to reconceptualise my experiences. The research then transitioned from a positivist and results based ontology (signified as Phase One) to a more interpretivist and emergent paradigm using the inclusion of the reflexive self and autoethnography as sensemaking tools within the methodological arena (signified as Phase Two).

I moved within the research journey to a more open perspective based on recognising that organisational research *can* be intuitive and emergent, and where the subjective experience is often of fundamental importance in making sense of the organisation. In documenting the research journey in this way I was able to connect the subjective experiences of the self to understanding the organisational members experience of working within the field of development. It is important to draw attention to the irony of the hermeneutic emergent nature of research which is often shown in an ordered and structured presentation to be rhetorically persuasive.

A Discussion of the Empirical Material Collected

The fieldwork involved a prolonged period of participant observation at the headquarters of Irish Aid in Dublin. This period spanned eighteen months in total:

December 2005	Irish Aid Headquarters, Dublin (Exploratory phase)
March - September 2006	Irish Aid Headquarters, Dublin (Participant Observation)
Sept 4 - 6 2006	Attendance at Country Heads of Mission for Health and HIV/AIDS meeting in Irish Aid Headquarters, Dublin
March – December 2007	Irish Aid Headquarters, Dublin (Participant Observation)
November 27 2007	Field visit to Kampala Embassy and gender-mainstreaming training, Kampala, Uganda (Field trip)

The participants in this study were staff from the Dublin Headquarters, field advisors from a selection of programme countries and Irish embassy staff from Uganda. Some volunteered to be interviewed after an original email was sent out in December 2005; some were people randomly selected throughout the Irish Aid offices and also people who attended meetings and training seminars. Although the Irish Aid staff are a mixture of civil servants, technical specialists and diplomats, none of the diplomatic staff wanted to be interviewed, or appeared at the meetings I attended. The key to speakers below represents the fifty-two respondents that I interacted with, although there were some that could not be represented in the body of this research for reasons of confidentiality. All are represented by pseudonyms, and in some cases the gender, age and job title have been changed to protect their anonymity. This is further discussed in the 'Ethics and Risks' section of this chapter. Where some were facilitators or consultants, it has not been made apparent so as to protect their identities, and none of the specific identifying features, such as whether they are a health, HIV or education field advisor are made clear.

Michael, 33, Civil Servant, Ireland	Irene, Technical Specialist, 51, Ireland
Daniel, 57, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Thandi, 38, Field Advisor, Zambia
Brendan, 54, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Ruth, 53, Field Advisor, South Africa
Dervla, 52, Civil Servant, Ireland	Irene, 32, Field Advisor, South Africa
Eimear, 58, Civil Servant, Ireland	Lisa, 35, Technical Specialist, Ireland
Cathal, 54, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Edith, 37, Technical Specialist, Ireland
Niamh, 46, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Joan, 56, Technical Specialist, Ireland
Breda, 62, Civil Servant, Ireland	Grace, 51, Technical Specialist, Ireland
Gavin, 43, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Helen, 33, Civil Servant, Ireland
James, 51, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Esther, 36, Field Advisor, Uganda
Kieron, 52, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Sharon, 32, Field Advisor, Uganda
Liam, 67, Civil Servant, Retired, Ireland	Joseph, 37, Field Advisor, Uganda
Sorcha, 42, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Isaac, 39, Field Advisor, Uganda
Richard, 36, Civil Servant, Ireland	Faith, 44, Field Advisor, Uganda
Siobh, 36, Civil Servant, Ireland	Martha, 57, Field Advisor, Uganda
Deirdre, 34, Technical Specialist, Ireland	Mary, 38, Field Advisor, Uganda
Laura, 33, Civil Servant, Ireland	Juliet, 48, Field Advisor, Uganda
Bekele, 34, Field Advisor, Ethiopia	Sarah, 31, Field Advisor, Uganda
Lerato, 44, Field Advisor, South Africa	Sen, 29, Field Advisor, Uganda
Mosa, 39, Field Advisor, South African	Ivan, 51, Field Advisor, Uganda
Adila, 39, Field Advisor, Tanzania	Moses, 40, Field Advisor, Uganda
Gabrielle, 53, Field Advisor, Mozambique	Jen, 37, Field Advisor, Uganda
Kaleb, 42, Field Advisor, Ethiopia	Joy, 39, Field Advisor, Tanzania
Peter, 37, Field Advisor, Mozambique	Chris, 50, Technical Specialist, Ireland
Bali, 40, Field Advisor,Tanzania	Eileen, 49, Technical Specialist, Ireland
Busu, 34, Field Advisor, Tanzania	Mercy, 47, Field Advisor, Uganda

Figure 1: Key to Research participants

In total there were 52 organisational members interviewed. The gender breakdown was 37 female and 15 male ranging in age from 20 to 65. Of this number 25 were of Irish nationality, but not all worked in the headquarters in Dublin. Due to the rotational nature of development work the Technical Specialists also worked overseas in the programme countries. However, this was not reciprocal as at the time of my research there were no African nationals working in the Dublin headquarters. Those interviewed that were not Irish were either in programme countries themselves, or visiting for meetings. They were from Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

In the exploratory phase interviews I started by asking the questions 'what does learning mean to you / what does learning conjure up for you?' Other questions covered the

themes of decentralisation, barriers to learning, communication, and talking about their lives; how they began in development (or the civil service) and what they wanted from their roles within Irish Aid. In the second set of interviews we talked about how the organisation functioned, where it could improve and how organisational members felt

supported or restricted in their work. This second set of questions built upon themes arising from the first set, and I was struck how critical staff were from the beginning. The word 'disillusion' grew out of disenfranchisement – feelings of restriction, futility and disappointment which struck me in the first set of interviews. This sense of futility had continued on in Irish Aid where there were many references to disillusion. I semi - coded topics that interested me: themes of family, struggle, conflict, disillusion and belonging, and followed them up in a second set of interviews. I interviewed 52 people in total over the course of eighteen months. Data Set 1 was the 'Exploratory Phase' and consisted of:

- 11 days exploratory phase at DCI (5 – 21 Dec)
- 21 interviews (internal staff)
- 3 informal interviews (external staff – consultants)
- 1 meeting with Technical section
- 1 meeting (HIV/AIDS; cross cutting issue)
- 1 meeting with DCI and all partners re; MAPS
- 1 review meeting of HAPS scheme
- 1 lunchtime seminar – Sectoral Cluster

Each file pertains to a particular date span, written on A4 pages, and dates from December 2005 to November 2007. The period covered by each file varies according to the time spent and the intensity of data collected during that period.

13 May 2006: 9.30am Gender-Mainstreaming discussion meeting

17 people present, (in house meeting)

Thoughts: Organisational emphasis in certain issues given prominence over others
Q: When they make a decision, how do they implement it?

9.47am Talk of being sent to Limerick 'Are we being demoted?'
'No, that's the reward!' (Much laughter)

9.51am Organisational objective: 'to make mainstreaming go right across the organisation'; Q: where does this stem from?

- key point!

File 2; March - September 2006; Second Data Collection Phase

Figure 2: Sample of field jottings from a meeting.

In total there are five files, of approximately 100 pages in each. The September meeting (Chapter Five) and the Kampala meeting (Chapter Six) are transcribed in totality, totalling 46 hours of transcribed work, which is 230 pages. Field notes and formal organisational documents with notations make up the other files, and all five files were coded. I coded for family / belonging, conflict, organisation as anathema, illusion and disillusion. My analysis was reflexive coding where all is data. After I had analysed the data, I re-analysed it including myself and my own interactions. It was after this point that I began to retrospectively use autoethnography as a critical self-analysis tool, to shed further light on both the organisation and my interactions with it.

The chronology of the Research Process

Phase One:

October 2005 – October 2006 First year of contract research with LEARN project

December 2005;	Exploratory Phase at Irish Aid; data collected
December - June 2006;	Literature Review of Emergent Themes;
March 2006;	Access Negotiation was agreed and MOU Signed
May 2006;	Ethical Approval Received from the Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee;
March - September 2006;	Second Data Collection Phase of emergent themes at IA
September 2006;	Transfer Paper; First Draft Completed;
Sept 4 - 6 2006;	Attendance of Country Heads of Mission (Irish Aid) meeting

October 2006 – October 2007 Second year of contract research with LEARN project

October 2006- March 2007	Maternity Leave
March – December 2007	Participant Observation began at Irish Aid and in depth semi structured Interviews

October 2007 – October 2008 Third year of contract research with LEARN project

November 2007	Field trip to Kampala, Uganda
March 2008	Transfer paper and presentation to Psychology Department

Phase Two:

October 2008 – April 2012

May 2009	Transfer to sociology Dept, TCD
May – September 2009	Off Books due to ill health
October 2009 – April 2012	Study and supervision with the Department of Sociology, Writing and revision of successive drafts of thesis chapters with supervision from Barbara Bradby
May 18 2013	Submission of thesis
September 18 2013	Viva Voce

Phase One of the Research: The Organisation as Machine

The theoretical foundations behind this research originated in the early 1800's when the scientific management model was developed by the economist Adam Smith. Smith applied a division of labour to factory work by breaking down complex tasks into numerous simpler tasks to increase productivity. A century later, Frederick Winslow Taylor published his work, The Principles of Scientific Management (1911). In this work, Taylor describes how worker productivity could be improved upon, and output made greater, through the use of scientific methods of management. Taylor built upon

Smith's earlier work by advocating taking the autonomy and control *from* workers – essentially deskilling workers to make them specialists in one segment of production. Taylor believed that work was more efficient when broken down into its constituent parts, which meant that the management and decision-making functions were also developed outside of each person's specialised tasks. In doing so, Taylor viewed the majority of workers unfit to make important decisions – in Taylor's own words:

> One of the very first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron as a regular occupation is that he shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles the ox... Therefore the workman...is unable to understand the real science of doing this class of work (Taylor, 1911: 28).

At the beginning of the research I was pre-occupied by the output. I thought that the way to research this organisation lay through adopting a positivistic approach; after all, the research ethos was to observe the organisation, then to identify entry points for applying an organisational learning system (OLS), then to implement a learning system. I was to provide Irish Aid with an organisational learning system, based on ICT, and an MOU was signed in May 2006 stating that this organisational learning system must be 'a cornerstone of Irish Aid's growth strategy.' It's time scale was in three distinct stages stated as:

> Stage One: December 2005: Exploratory phase
> Stage Two: Jan – Dec 2006: Data Collection: mapping/interviewing/observation
> Stage Three: Jan – Dec 2007: Presentation of Findings Analysis and development of Organisational learning System

It all seemed straightforward – go in – collect data - analyse it – and subsequently produce a system based on the knowledge from Stage Two. Scientific management emphasised the predictability of tasks and this idea of predictability also ran through my early research, where I felt sure, that I could provide Irish Aid with an OLS – *and* that I could write a PhD from the research generated. A framework based on cause and effect seemed to fit well with Irish Aid, as a reflection of the organisation itself. 'Management thought' is often grounded in this approach where organisations are said to run 'like machines,' efficiently and with mechanical precision. These phrases were repeated continually throughout the generated data. Organisational life begins from the time staff clock-in, to meetings that run as planned, and doing predetermined tasks that are performed at routine times, efficiently, predictably and reliably.

This mechanised way of conceptualising work is also grounded through Max Weber's work on rationalisation. For Weber, rationality had different strands to it. Practical rationality can be found in people's mundane day-to-day work, where people seek the 'methodological attainment of a definitely given and practical end of means' (1958: 293). In this way people seek to choose the best alternative that will get them their end result and to solve the problems facing them. An example of this is that when I was faced with a task – researching, designing and implementing an organisational learning system - I believed that following this cause and effect model would give me the end result that I needed. A second type of rationality discussed by Weber is theoretical rationality. This involves 'an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts' (1958: 293). This translates within a bureaucracy to a form of causality where people ascribe meaning to certain events to make sense of them. A third type, substantive rationality, is about the values that guide people in their 'means to an end' choices, whilst the fourth type, formal rationality, describes the calculations organisational members make, based on rules and laws.

Weber regarded bureaucracy as the epitome of formal rationalisation. Weber's theoretical perspective was that it was the unique development of formal rationality that accounted for the way that bureaucracies developed (Ritzer, 1993: 44). Bureaucracies were like 'iron cages' - inescapable, and he feared that society would come to be

dominated by a seemingly endless web of rationalised structures (Weber, 1922: 1401). However, as I was going to find out in due course within Irish Aid, mechanistically structured organisations have difficulty in adapting to changes, partly due to their being designed to fulfil predetermined tasks and goals, and as change requires the ability and space for free thinking, innovation and reflexivity are often the stumbling blocks for the bureaucratic organisation. When a new idea is proposed, such as 'let's become a learning organisation,' there are no sure-fire ways in which to deal with the proposed changes. Often the response to organisational change will result in fragmentation (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008) so that the existing organisational policies and procedures will try to incorporate a new idea through standardised procedures, and if all else fails, tag it onto something else as an add-on.

The 'contemporary mechanised system' can be found in the work of George Ritzer, who took Weber's theory of rationalisation and 'amplified it into the realm of consumption'(Ritzer, 1993: 25). It echoes Taylor's assembly line (1911) where segregated specialised tasks create a model of efficiency, which has a dual-fold effect - maximising the output, whilst also providing maximum control over workers. Ritzer calls this the 'McDonaldization of Society.' This 'iron cage' of production, where people are 'less than human' (Ritzer, 1993: 33), is based upon calculability as every aspect of the business/organisation is calculated and quantified. This quantitative approach poses a problem according to Ritzer, as there is 'little or no concern for the actual quality of work' (Ritzer, 1993: 25) and this can lead to large amounts of poor quality work.

Another feature, labelled by Ritzer as the 'irrationality of rationality' is that employees can grow unclear about what they are supposed to do, and communication breaks down. This was clearly evidenced later in Chapter Five, as organisational members continuously questioned what their role was, what the organisation did, and what they were supposed to do with it.

The need for predictability, of cause and effect, was evidenced in both the research outline of the project and subsequent emails where an action plan for implementation was discussed. An example of this can be found in the 'output orientation' of responses to a document I had formulated explaining that my research proposal (after the initial exploratory phase) was: 'To look at the culture of Irish Aid and its impact on

organisational learning' (Internal document, 12 February, 2006). This was met with comments such as:

> This research proposal is strong on research but limited in application.It is difficult to see from her outline how she will develop and implement an organisational learning system that can be rolled out across the organisation (Email, January 16 2006).

Scared of not being able to deliver the desired output, I talked about implementing a positivistic model but I had in fact defaulted, almost immediately (a month after entering the organisation) to an ethnographic approach based on my background in anthropology. Ethnography was the methodology I was most comfortable with, having conducted ethnographic research in both my undergraduate and master's degrees. I wrote in my field notes (11 January 2006) about 'exploring shared systems of meaning,' using the organisational culture to illuminate the highly routinised daily lives of Irish Aid members.' I began to immerse myself in the work of Mosse (2005), Hilhorst (2003) and Eyben (2009) who had published on the multi-layered nature and blurred boundaries of organisations within the donor world, the lack of room for the unexpected in development research and the conflict of fitting the complexity into rational formalised systems.

I desperately wanted to succeed and to make fast headway, not competitively with the others per se, but I needed to prove it to myself. I'd been out of the educational setting for five years after my Masters was finished in social anthropology. I had felt that life was passing me by whilst I was to all intents and purposes one of the 'armchair anthropologists' I had been so critical of at university. I was 25 and had been in the institutional education setting for most of my life. I'd worked in a very dull office doing alphabetical filing and data entry for nearly a year and my mother had persuaded me to 'use it wisely' and get further education. I'd eventually agreed and had enrolled at SOAS. When I had got out of there I'd gone straight to Australia to 'start living.' Five years later and after many incidental jobs I was feeling the need to stretch my brain again. So when I'd been granted a funded place on a PhD project (despite knowing little about the subject of organisational learning), I was determined to do well, and to do it fast, to impress and succeed.

In hindsight I had probably tried to 'shoehorn' this ethnographic methodology into a positivistic framework. I was continually searching for meaning within this organisation, trying to discover what this organisation, its culture and learning meant for each of them.

In studying the literature around development organisations I could see that since the 1980s there was a prioritisation of management driven techniques in developing goals and targets, which allowed policy to be measurable, accountable and filled with promises of learning and thus greater efficiency (Van Den Berg and Quarles van Ufford 2005: 203). However, Mosse (2005), Hilhorst (2003) and Eyben (2009) proposed drawing upon insights from a subjective, relational, participant-insider method of research in order to really understand the organisation in question. I was torn between the two, and I was overlaying positivism with interpretivism, and ricocheting between the two. This is evidenced by the emails and supervisory notes between me and my first supervisor (21 March 2006). I proposed that the culture was the key to understanding the barriers to learning within the organisation, he replied 'what will the analysis look like?' and 'what practical output will there be for the organisation' – these questions threw me into a tailspin as I didn't know the answers, so I would revert back from my interpretive emergent type of questioning and tell him that I would be using grounded theory to look at the data which was clutching for straws in many respects.

Organisation members often expressed that *'it's not my job to do that'* or *'I do my work and that's all'* or *'it's not my responsibility.'* Functional specialisation within an organisation can add to the problem stemming from a fragmented complex system. A system of subcultures can emerge based on job specifications, with a language specific to each subculture based upon terminology and jargon, aspirations and experiences that can detract from an organisation's comparative advantage rather than add to it. This occurs by creating a system of competition, rather than cooperation, and this can affect the organisation as a whole. A mechanistic approach, therefore, can limit rather than mobilise the development of human capacities (Morgan, 2006: 30) as people try to fit *into* the organisation rather than the organisation being built around the strengths of its people. Opportunities to shine according to one's experience or achievements are often lost as the organisation remains unaware of how creative and intelligent its staff may be and this can result in a de-motivated and disillusioned workforce. This was my growing feeling as I spent more time in the organisation, and struggled to understand the system I was to produce, worrying why the data was full of contradictions and how to 'rein in' the messiness into a neat package.

Between the Two Phases - Identity Matters

Many projects lacking in practical implications have been attributed to the epistemological leanings of researchers (Prange, 1999), and I was experiencing concern about how I was managing the research with a pre-agreed paradigm, that I was interpreting as results based positivism. A study I have read that resonates with my own dilemma is that of Duarte and Hodge (2007) highlight this problem, Duarte started a project in 2002 in Brazil, a project conceived in a positivistic tradition where she was to produce a model for participatory urban sustainability programmes to deal with problems resulting from high demographic growth. Duarte notes that her first challenge was coming to terms with her complex identity position. She had taken on the identity position of 'the researcher' and this was the role she believed she had to honour in her research proposal, and conceived in these terms, this role had also helped to get her study funded (Duarte and Hodge, 2007: 195). Duarte notes that:

> Within the discursive frame of positivism, findings must be 'objective', not influenced by the researcher's subjectivity and yet in practice, nevertheless, I discovered that this was difficult to sustain, and indeed not useful. In the chaotic situation I encountered in the field, I found that a 'reflexive awareness of the self' (O'Leary, 2004: 43–4) was inevitable, and indeed desirable (Duarte and Hodge, 2007: 195).

This was very similar to my research experience. Throughout the research journey, I was both quasi-consultant and academic researcher. At any one time I inhabited both roles, as the 'composition of self' was disputed as I moved from one social situation to another (Young, 2005: 154). Yet it was only with the clarity of hindsight, and upon analytic reflection on my work that I realised that what I had set out to do was actually changing due to the nature of the research, relationships and the emergent chaotic experience (Clifford, 1988). At the same time as feeling caught between what I was meant to do, and what was emerging, I knew that a certain element of creativity, aligned with the increasing subjectivity I was using to make sense of my experience, was helping me respond effectively to the organisational members. Like Duarte 'I had to allow issues of identity to surface, to be present in my consciousness, to affect every aspect of my research, because identity matters' (Duarte and Hodge, 2007: 195). I hadn't realised back

then, but it was not just the identity of the organisational members that had to surface, but *my own* authentic voice had to emerge within my research.

When I had first entered the organisation, an email had been sent out asking for people who wanted to be part of this research to get in touch for a semi-formal interview about organisational learning. These were recorded by Dictaphone and then transcribed into A4 sheets, which were filed according to name, job description and date. I then built upon this body of interviews by using a more emergent type of selection: some people were recommended to me by others; the snowball approach to generating data, often people who were leaving the organisation due to decentralisation (which was ongoing from July 2006). Other people wanted to change something about the organisation and saw me, in a consultant role, as perhaps having the power to do this. These first transcriptions of phase one, had an emphasis on *their* responses, and often in place of what I had said, I had just typed, 'interviewer - thus negating my own role in generating the data. I also kept notes to self, mainly handwritten as well as more ethnographic notes in the form of journal entries. These formed the body of data that my supervisor wanted me to analyse, and in our sessions I continually expressed worry about this process. Borrowing from grounded theory I used thematic coding which gave me headings such as 'organisational culture; conflict; barriers to learning; disillusion; belonging; mechanistic/clockwork; workload and time.' Within this initial coding I found many contradictions for example, that the organisation was 'cast in stone' yet the same person would then tell me it was 'fluid' and 'ever changing.' These contradictions formed the basis of my unease with the edict to 'simply analyse your work and publish.'

I then began exploring 'complexity theory' – which is a way of describing and understanding the dynamics and processes of change found in a range of physical and biological phenomena - as a possible method for addressing what I had later named my 'analytic paralysis stage,' I had been at a conference with Ben Ramalingam from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and had talked extensively about the possible uses of the application of complexity theory to development organisations.[12] Ramalingam et

[12] Based upon his publication http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/833.pdf

al., understand development itself to be a non-linear complex system, with a distinct lack of proportionality between input and output (Ramalingam et al, 2008 : 26) and thus challenges the predictability of the Taylorist output model (1911) due to the highly context specific nature of development work and engagement. One of the most well-known development evaluation tools is the logical framework (or log frame) which was assessed by SIDA (Bakewell and Garbutt, 2005). They stated that variables and interactions affect the predictability of the log frame as an effective output oriented evaluation tool. In this sense, the 'logic' behind the log frame can be questioned, i.e.; that 'if activity A is done, Output B will result, leading to Outcome C and Impact D' (Ramalingam et al, 2008 : 26)

Not only was I calling into question the way that organisational learning itself was seen as predictable, as a 'plug in black box,' I understood that learning itself was conceptualised as an add-on, as an extension of Taylorist time and motion efficiency (1911) running like clockwork. I was also beginning to question the predictability of how development was evaluated in a more macro way. It occurred to me in the later analysis of Phase Two that Ritzer's idea of the commodification of modern society also applied to the development sphere, where learning itself was a product: 'When alienated relations of production are disseminated through capitalist society, culture, knowledge, and leisure are produced as commodities' (Ritzer; 2001: 182).

My (first) supervisor was getting more exasperated with me as to why my analysis wasn't done and why I had no journal articles written. As is often common with the supervisor / student relationship, we had drifted apart somewhat, both theoretically and physically. A heated exchange followed and I felt that concentrating solely on the academic 'output' was negating the difficulty I was having with the data, through a project conceived in positivism, but one that had become so highly subjective in my interactions. I felt that I had not conducted 'good research' and had contaminated it by deviating from a consultant-type objective position. I also felt that my thesis research was a commodity, one that was only useful as output, that the entire learning experience and journey was only valued by the University when published. My supervisor, with his *continued* emphasis on 'publishing' did nothing to persuade me otherwise. Eventually, exasperated

with me, my supervisor suggested that I go and see someone in the Sociology Department who might be able to help me make sense of the 'mess' that I was in and speed me on my way towards generating an output from the data. This heralded a change in events that led me to change supervisors not long after, and I began to talk about my experiences within the organisation to her.

Phase Two of the Research: The Reflexive Self

My new supervisor helped me see that the ethical issues and personal factors involved should not necessarily be distractions form the research process, but could instead be 'core components of the data stream' reflecting the uniqueness of the particular organisational setting and [be] central to the analysis phases and the interpretation of results (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009: 6). She began to draw my attention to the research journey itself, and the emergent nature of the research which had perhaps deemed the initial frameworks inappropriate. Like Duarte, my 'crossing into a new paradigm was not a single, unifying flash of illumination, but a pattern of oscillations' (Duarte and Hodge, 2007: 200) evidenced by the way in which I was still trying to represent myself through the voice of others. At one point my supervisor said to me:

'Stop describing your research through other people's work and put yourself right back in there at the core of it.' I could tell she was getting exasperated by my continual adoption of yet another article or book into my writing.

I kept giving her work that was a like a patchwork of quotes, using a multitude of authors to make my point, a combination perhaps of a lack of confidence in myself, of having not yet found an authentic voice, and the negotiation between different methods of enquiry. I was caught in between learning systems and outcomes and finding a different path.

Reading David Boje's (1991, 2001) work on narrative and storytelling resonated with me at this time. The 'messiness' I had encountered in Irish Aid was conceptualised by people telling different 'stories.' Boje states that stories as organisational currency and often encapsulates a 'moment' within an organisation, existing temporarily since it is embedded in changing meaning contexts of multiple stories (Boje, 2001: 18). This resonated with me, as I examined changing metaphors within the data, of both fluidity 42

and stability. I began to analyse the stories people told me to make sense of the organisation – to find that *I* was often part of these stories, and that *my* story was starting to become pivotal.

Exploring an autoethnographic approach

I began to read about authorial voice and polyphonic representation within organisations, and came across work by Carolyn Ellis (2004) on autoethnography. This heralded a methodological shift away from traditional ethnography (that I had defaulted to in 2006 even though I was also trying to produce an 'output based model') and towards a retrospective sensemaking approach. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that transitions beyond storytelling to become a form of critical enquiry embedded in theory and practice (McIlveen 2008). It is a reflexive writing genre that can provide an additional learning experience and enhance research through exposure and vulnerability, allowing the reader to identify with the researcher, in this research it is used in 'present moment narrative' and in 'retrospective sensemaking analysis.' Jackson states that our 'understanding of others can only proceed from within our own experiences, and this experience involves our personalities and histories as much as our field of research' (1989: 17).

Whilst autoethnography is a fairly new methodological approach, there has traditionally been an element of biographical work within qualitative research. This can be traced back to Nels Anderson's work, The Hobo, (1923), where he drew substantially on his experiences with homeless men. An interest in biographical work within sociological ethnography continued however, this tended to downplay or obscure the role of the researcher, except for occasionally using self- narrative in fieldwork experiences. Reflexivity within research was usually in the form of small inserts, adjacent to other types of analysis, and marginalised. Anthropologists and Sociologists have tended to insert 'I' into their work in order to give authority to their texts it has been argued (Rosaldo 1986, Pratt 1986) but otherwise the self is sanitised from their research accounts. It was not until 1979, that a clear case was made for the inclusion of 'the observed self' within ethnographic research. This came from the anthropologist David

Hayano, who argued that as anthropologists move out of colonialism where they studied the 'exotic other,' they needed to study the social worlds of which they were a part? Using the 'observed self,' Hayano went on to ground his research work in his personal experiences as a poker player in California (1982), and autoethnography emerged as a distinct methodology drawing upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding' (Sparkes, 2000: 21).

Ellis states that 'the autoethnographic approach features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection' (Ellis 2004, xix) [which] enables researchers to explore the relationship between their personal, lived experiences and therefore actively develops their sociological imagination. It was strange to think that as the researcher I might be the key to unlocking meaning making within the organisation, as prior to think I had looked *outside* of myself for the answers. Yet in analysing myself in context to the generation of data, and looking at my 'notes to self' as data, I could see how this positioning and reflection on the self was illuminating the organisation. By embracing rather than suppressing personal feelings and stories that interconnect the lived experience outside of the research context, I was shedding new light upon the relationships *within* the research context and I was able to represent them in a more authentic way *because* of my subjectivity, not despite it. This exactly matched with the re-transciption I was doing, at the suggestion of my supervisor, putting myself back into the data, to see what *I* had said, seeing that I was as much of a key informant as the people I was interviewing.

Within this genre are seemingly limitless topics of autoethnographic research that cover a myriad of themes and criteria for what an autoethnography is. These include personal narratives, lived experiences, critical autoethnography, reflexive ethnography, personal sociology and auto anthropology (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739-740). The type championed by Ellis (1997, 2004) has come to be known as the 'evocative school' and this has eclipsed other forms of autoethnography (Anderson, 2006: 374). This type of 'emotional autoethnography' has been said to be indulgent (Sparkes, 2000) however Ellis (1997) claims that it can break through academic discourse which traditionally masks and hides the researcher, adding gravitas and additional understanding to the research itself.

I have in part, used this evocative type, which involves 'compelling description of subjective emotional experiences' that create an emotional resonance with the reader (Anderson, 2006: 377). However, I have also attempted to use an analytic form of autoethnography involving analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher's self, dialogue with informants beyond the self and commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006: 378). Like a more traditional ethnographer, who records conversations and takes notes (as a participant observer), the analytic autoethnographer must also record her own feelings and experiences within the embodied context, making the research almost schizophrenic. Within my own research this was done retrospectively, through memory, jottings and notes to self, balancing between the various selves, the embodied experience and the varying interactions with the research participants.

In order to re-conceptualise my data in this way many months and years were spent scrutinising the questions of 'what I know' and 'how I know it' during this research. This 'navel gazing' (Sparkes, 2000) moved to a form of reflexivity that was about having 'an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment' (Hertz, 1997: viii). However whether research includes an 'I' or not, each piece of research contains the researcher's experiences, moods, moments of rapport, so much so that Humphries et al. state that a researcher's personality is stamped upon their work and that it is a 'fantasy that authors are able to write themselves out of the texts they produce' (Humphries et al., 2003: 11).

Applied to an organisational setting like Irish Aid, an autoethnographic methodology, in the form of retrospective sensemaking, allows the researcher to connect the cultural and the personal but *also* to expose the multiple layers of consciousness, thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Boyle and Parry, who work primarily with methodologies in organisational research (2007) state that this offers the possibility of providing the *most* original data available to organisational researchers as it illuminates the relationship between the individual and the organisation, especially in understanding 'culture as it is practiced and understood within institutional and organizational settings' (Boyle and Parry 2007:185). However, it is important that the researcher's own position and stance are not left as

unproblematic within their own research. On this topic Gannon (2006), stemming from a background in educational research and methodology, writes that autoethnographic writing needs to 'destabilise the authority of the self who writes and knows himself or herself as a discrete and autonomous subject' by 'continually theorising the 'self' within the auto/ethnographic relationship' (Gannon 2006: 477). In this way she says, auto/ethnography can both write and destabilise the self at the same time in 'con(texts) [which] foreground the limits and fragilities of self-knowledge' (Gannon 2006: 492). Consequently, an element of caution is advised towards any tendency to privilege one's own perceived truths in the form of personal stories or disclosure purely because one can. As Gannon (2006) proposes, we must critically reflect on our own changing subjectivity if this methodology is to be taken seriously within an academic framework.

There were certainly moments when I, and others, questioned my use of this methodology. For example, when discussing the autoethnographic elements I was writing about, like the birth of my daughter, or the death of my father, my partner remarked to me 'So after all these years of being in that organisation, what you're writing is about you?' Perhaps he was implying that it can be too easy to suddenly turn the gaze inwards, and write emotionally. This is in line with Coffey's argument that autoethnographies are often self-indulgent (Coffey, 1999). Doloriert and Sambrook claim that 'there is evidence that autoethnography is loathed by some' (2012:85) and use Delamont's scathing words[13] to explain that autoethnography is essentially lazy, cannot be published ethically and is often non-analytical. Roth (2005) contends that the use of autoethnography could easily lead to 'will-of-the-wisp inspiration and self-congratulatory, feel-good accounts of world events' (2005: 10) and has perhaps happily edged its way into what my supervisor has termed 'its own cosy corner.'

But using an autoethnographic or reflexive methodology is not necessarily a 'soft' option. The exposure of the self is not a 'decorative flourish' (Anderson, 2006: 385) but seeks to

13 'This 'hatred' is exemplified by Delamont (2007) who describes it as 'essentially lazy – literally lazy and also intellectually lazy' (p. 2). Delamont, S. (2007), "Arguments against autoethnography", Qualitative Researcher, Vol. 4,pp. 2-4. Her objections to autoethnography are on the grounds it cannot fight familiarity, it cannot be published ethically, it is experiential and not analytic, amongst others (Doloriert and Sambrook 2011:85).

move beyond providing both an insider's perspective and the documentation of the self in the research context. There is a fine line between attempts to go beyond mere emotional resonance and self- indulgence. The participating self in this thesis is not an afterthought or an add-on, but an attempt to make the self and the field symbiotic, as interconnected. By employing an autoethnographic approach, albeit retrospectively, I have rejected the idea of social research as being grounded in neutral knowledge and have refuted the idea of the researcher and the researched being separate. It can be somewhat of a relief after grappling with academic theory to adopt a 'literary turn' and there are dangers in seeing this as a way out. This can also be a problematic and extremely complex approach, where the self-unravels as you probe deeper into levels of reflection, memory and self-analysis.

> I fondly remembered the literary work of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. Using 'Down the rabbit hole' metaphorically enabled me to probe the deeper meaning in Alice's exploration of life's ultimate questions through the eyes of what I believe to be one of the most endearing heroines in all literature. I liken the experience of choosing autoethnography for opening this unpredictable process of enquiry into self to falling down a rabbit hole (Allbon, 2012: 64).

I can strongly identify with Allbon (2012) who writes of using an autoethnographic methodology as being akin to falling down a rabbit hole, a method of enquiry with no visible end in sight, a method whereby complexity and confusion growing deeper as easily as they are solved. The next section explores the different autoethnographic approaches used within this research.

Differentiating between autoethnographic approaches

The autoethnographic excerpts within this thesis have different elements, uses and intentions. This section will give examples of the different types of autoethnography and retrospective sensemaking that are used. Some of the autoethnographic excerpts are described in the present tense to portray the immediacy of my experience of being in the organisation. With these parts I aim to give the reader a sense of what I was experiencing in each present moment, so that perhaps the reader can emote with my interactions. They are divided into the following sections:

1) present tense
2) disclosure of personal experiences (evocative)
3) retrospective sensemaking (analytic): analytic reflexivity, dialogue with informants beyond the self

The present tense

One example of using the present tense is where I wrote in the present moment and documented my sense of unease which illustrated my own growing sense of disillusionment during the September meeting described in Chapter Five:

> *Closing them down- shutting down communication – frustration – agenda too packed – too many presentations – not enough talking (Field notes, 5 September 2006)*

This example of the present tense was written at the time that my thoughts occurred, and are recorded by either hand written notes, or from transcribed notes, as I spoke into the Dictaphone to record my thoughts at that time. These were all within Phase One.

However, a second form of 'present tense' exists within this work and was written retrospectively using memory. Clifford Geertz (1988) has argued that anthropologists have been concerned with how to give the reader the authentic sense of 'being there,' and in order to do so, there are a growing number of social scientists formally acknowledging memory as a valid methodological tool for both data gathering and analysis (Coffey, 1999; Wall, 2008). Using memory in this way, and the possible unreliability of such a tool poses questions around the control of the author over the work as well as the validity and reliability of such a deeply subjective and possibly flawed methodology. On this point, Okely states that:

> Field notes may be no more than a trigger for bodily and hitherto subconscious memories. We cannot write down the knowledge at the time of experiencing it…the specific way in which we learned awaits the recounting (Okely, 1978: 16).

Making sense of such events and experiences happens retrospectively and in my own research uses the notes and interviews as a trigger for memory, recollection, sense-making and reflection as data itself. The anthropologist will always draw upon own life

experiences in making sense of the world, and in that memories and its associations are part of 'doing' ethnography. Thus memory and reflection play a part in each of these sub-headings, field jottings and notes, recorded interviews and observations, in dossiers of organisational memos, minutes from meetings and academic correspondences and reports. Memory not only informs the behaviour of the interviewer but also that of the interviewee. Autobiographical memory can be in single episodes or repisodic, where memory is not of a single event but of extended situations (Kotre, 1995). It may consist of verbal narratives or more visual imagery; it may be linked to emotion or sense-making. Judith Okely[14] (2004: 24) has argued that the most fruitful approaches to fieldwork are those that let the researcher follow his/her instincts. An example of this can be found in Chapter Six where I write in the present tense retrospectively to give the reader a sense of what I experienced at the time.

As I sat on the connecting flight from Nairobi I stared out of the window into the black night sky, the red wine sedating my nerves and my mind swinging wildly from elation to the emotional pull of leaving my baby for the first time.

This second form of 'present tense' was written in Phase Two, after I had explored how the use of autoethnography might help to bring the work (Ellis 2004, xix) using an emotional connection. In this way, the present tense becomes part of the evocative school that is discussed in the next section.

Disclosure of personal experiences (evocative)

This second type of autoethnography can be found where I disclose my own personal experiences. These were written retrospectively, in Phase Two, during the last stages of analysis. These emotional moments connect a personal transformation to the reflection process in a highly subjective way. As mentioned above, an example of this can be found in the three sections of Chapter Six: 'Flying, Landing and Floating.' I used these titles at first to communicate to the reader how I was feeling, and give them a sense of the

[14] Remarks made to 2004 European Association of Social Anthropologists meeting in Vienna: 'Fieldwork as Free Association and Free Passage.'

research 'present' however, upon later introspection during the final editing process, it occurred to me that these seemed symbolic as being about the research process as a whole.

It is important to state that the meanings of these autoethnographic extracts are fluid and contextual. In other words, the meanings of these personal and often emotive pieces seemed symbolically different to me at different times. The 'Flying, Landing, Floating' parts were metaphorical, yet at the time of first writing them they were not consciously so. Wikan (1993: 206): in his article about the limitations of anthropological discourse, expresses scepticism about anthropology's romance with words, and states that inter-subjective communication of meanings exists within ethnographic work and that words can mask power relations, thus meanings are often fluid.

This fluidity can be seen in the grandiose themes of birth and death that I included in my work. Metaphorically perhaps it could be said that the beginning of the research process and entry to the field is a type of birth itself, one where the researcher within *that* context is born, and that persona dies upon exit. I also mentioned the birth of my daughter within my work since it changed the way that I was perceived in Kampala and gave me an added element of inclusion that I hadn't experienced before with some of the organisational staff. I would not have heard the story of Irish Aid being 'like an old boys club' otherwise.

Retrospective sensemaking (analytic):

The following excerpt was written in Phase Two but put into the present tense, as I used the data, recorded and transcribed in Phase One, subsequently analysing it in Phase two, to make sense of what had occurred. I used Mosa's dialogue with myself to help make sense of how I struggled with changing identities. In the following section I realise that I was bestowed with a position of power, that of being representative of a university and seen as therefore able to help them in their professional roles:

I was trying to make myself unobtrusive. Mosa turned to me and said 'Can an institution such as Trinity take the generic induction on board to link it to the Masters in Global Health...to give you credits?' All eyes looked to me for a response when it was suggested, and I realised I was straddling roles, indeed I was a representative of Trinity.

This can also be seen where I am trying to gain insight into the social phenomena within the data itself, by analysing how the autoethnographic excerpts helped my understanding of the organisation through phrases used in my field notes such as 'confused, consolidatory, like a therapist, insider/outsider.' The next section explores the use of epiphanic moments within this research process, which often prompted my retrospective use of autoethnography.

Epiphanic moments in research[15]

Denzin (1989) first used the term 'epiphanies' within research processes referring to the moment where a societal phenomenon is recognised and highlights a subjective feeling and connection creating insight. In my research I am using the term epiphany to refer to moments where a certain sense of 'gut feeling was intertwined with emotion. Olesen states that 'epiphany is distinguishable from other forms of transformational insight production, such as 'reflexivity' whereas reflexivity involves a 'self-conscious examination' of the biases and standpoints that implicitly frame knowledge and understanding' (Olesen, 1994: 165). The use of epiphany as breakthrough moments into a deeper insight has validation to restructuring understanding. It is precisely this process that enabled me to make sense of the phenomena, by transporting myself into a knowledge framework whereby the experience began to unfold rather than unravel. Denzin (1989) tells us that the process of autoethnographic storytelling can help us make sense of epiphanies during the research process and this can only be achieved by the blending of both art and science, where identity development and sense making are illuminated.

[15] I borrowed this subsection title from Rance, S (2003) *Changing Voices: Abortion talk in Bolivian medical settings,* Ph.D. thesis, TCD

I have used autoethnography where there are crucial moments in the fieldwork experience. These personal transformations represent a change from one social state or status to another, for example, from child to adult, or woman to mother, or student to graduate, and have a dual fold purpose of transforming both societies' definition of that person and also the individual's self-perception. Some autoethnographies are about the experience of the personal from the outset, which was not initially my intention, articles such as the one written by Stacy Holman Jones '(M)othering loss: Telling adoption stories, telling performativity' (2005) discuss her own experiences with infertility and adoption as linked to cultural attitudes. She demonstrates the changing way in which we talk about these issues at different moments in time. She does this in order to understand her own story but also to change some of the perceptions held around fertility, infertility and adoption. Having completed my research journey for this thesis I realise I aim to change some of the perceptions around autoethnography so that it can contribute to, and be integrated with, differing forms of research. Autoethnographic research should not be limited to emotional exploration of the self, but the self in context to interaction of all types. Rosalind Eyben (2009), in her article 'Hovering on the threshold,' relates being reflexive in relation to different ways of knowing or representing that:

> ...helps us become alert to the possibly different epistemologies of those we are studying or working with. It helps to engage with them in a dialogic construction of a shared understanding of truth. From this perspective, reflexivity is not just how the researcher goes about and represents her work (Eyben, 2009: 81).

Ultimately in research there is a unique relationship between researcher and participant. To omit my voice and experiences reduces this research to a mere summary and an interpretation of the works of others. Many times people divulged very personal details about their working lives to me and those voices, that if portrayed 'floating between quotation marks' with no exploration of the relationship that produced their disclosure, would only tell one side of the story.

Ethics and Risks

Researchers cannot exist in 'splendid isolation' (Clark, 1993) during the research process but are constantly interacting with social networks, friends, family, organisations, colleagues, supervisors, department, funding bodies and research participants:

> Research, teaching and study can exist in not so splendid isolation, with full time research staff in one corner, some teaching staff off in one corner and only slightly guided, if at all, by the results of recent research, and students studying in another corner, with codified text in hand but out of the sight of research activities and peering at distant teachers as if through the wrong end of a telescope (Clark, 1993: 301).

In using an autoethnographic method, the above mentioned relationships and interactions can be implicated. However, this raises ethical issues. To counteract this Ellis (2000) lists certain factors that must be taken into consideration when considering relational concerns and implications of using autoethnographic research as be seen below:

> Did the author get permission to portray others?
> Give them a chance to contribute their perspectives to the story?
> If not, are there sufficient and justifiable reasons why not?
> Are other characters sufficiently complex? Is the author?
> Is this exclusively the author's interpretation of what is going on?
> Does the contribution of the story outweigh conceivable ethical dilemmas and pain for characters and readers? (Ellis, 2000: 5)

Autoethnography, like any social science research method, has situated ethics, determined by its position within risk adverse institutions prescribing its members to use informed consent (Tolich, 2010: 1606). This research was conducted with full ethical approval from the Trinity Board of Ethics. An information leaflet (Appendix Two) was created and distributed to all interviewed and observed/spoken to and a consent form was then signed by all those whose voices appear in this thesis. I had their permission, through signed consent forms, to portray them within the research - and where possible (due to relocation and decentralisation) I sent them transcripts of what I had recorded asking them if they had any objections. Where objections were raised I deleted some parts and change identities to render them as anonymous as possible. I feel that by representing the characters in their own voices I have made them as complex as possible, and by inclusion of myself, I have also tried to make myself less one dimensional. The

elicitation from the respondents was part of an interaction, one which only makes sense where the reader can see both *my* question, which help the reader to navigate through the data and understand *their* answer.

Protecting the Research Subjects' Identity

Within research there is often 'a perennial tension between individual disclosure and organizational protection' (Boyle and Parry, 2009: 699) as the confidentiality of what is said by organisational members needs to be protected. Also the intentions of the funded project need to be upheld and, as I was allowed access to the organisation without conditions, there are vulnerability issues that need to be addressed. Often access can be difficult to negotiate; this was not the scenario in this research, as access had already been granted prior to me starting the research. Once in, it can be hard to get findings out. This is partly due to the effect that disclosure may have upon respondents who spoke freely within the various research relationships, which may make them vulnerable through identifiable features.

Organisational researchers also face difficult decisions about the potential disclosure of narratives of an emotional and intimate nature that may affect the professional status of the interviewees. Perhaps this is why there is so little ethnographic research of Government based organisations or development donors. Both more generally and within my research, participants may face problems over personal disclosures about other colleagues or the organisation itself that may breach professional ethics or affect job status. Merely changing names and places (Fine, 1993) may not suffice especially within the unique setting of an organisation like Irish Aid where identification may be possible due to a number of factors. It has been important to protect the privacy of respondents by altering identifiable characteristics like circumstances, times, job, topics discussed and personal characteristics; in some instances the gender of the respondent has been changed to protect them.

I had some concerns about representing members of this organisation who had been particularly open with me, and where possible I sent them their transcripts before

submission of this thesis to ask if they had any objections about what I had written or included from their accounts. I have also taken various measures to conceal their identities where possible by changing names, roles, genders or other identifying features. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the overall impact that multiple disclosures of this kind may evoke. As Tolich succinctly explains: 'The word *auto* is a misnomer; the self might be the focus of research, but the self is porous, leaking to the other without due ethical consideration' (2010: 1608) so as Ellis (1995) advises, we should assume all people mentioned in the text will read it one day. This of course may have implications for future work with development donors, and the participant-insider role can be quite tenuous when trying to publish, as David Mosse noted in 2005:

> Objections were made by my co-workers [and] my Department convenors ...on the grounds that my book was unfair, biased ... defamatory and would seriously damage the professional reputation of individuals and institutions' (Mosse, 2005: 935).

It is always possible that publication will be problematic, as Mosse found out 'the move to publication had strained and broken valued relationships of fieldwork' but I believe I have produced an honest and subjective account of Irish Aid, a snapshot of particular moments in time and context and my primary obligation is to have represented the people of that organisation. As Denzin states:

> [W]e must remember that our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise . . . that we protect those who have shared with us (1989: 83).

This research is not only about the organisational participants, but a wider engagement with my supervisor, colleagues, partner, and friends and family. I was pregnant with my daughter during my research, my partner features in elements of my retrospection, as does my father in his last year of life. Tolich reminds us that 'persons featured in autoethnographies are typically friends and family members, not public figures' (2010: 1606) which raises questions around the issue of ownership. Do I, as the author, own their stories because I write them? Where possible I have obtained consent from friends, family or colleagues featured or referenced, but ultimately the power rests in my interpretation of their words. Autoethnography is not biography or journalism and

therefore ethical guidelines must be observed for this approach to be given appropriate place within the social sciences (Tolich 2010).

Evaluative Criteria

> The emergence of autoethnography and narratives of self ... has not been trouble-free, and their status as proper research remains problematic (Sparkes, 2000: 22).

There is no perfect methodology and the autoethnographic method, like all others, has its critics and its problems (Morse, 2000). The epistemological tenets of reliability, validity and generalisation are treated very differently within autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). It has also been documented how difficult it is to get autoethnographic research through the PhD examination process.[16] Atkinson has been particularly vocal in his criticism stating that:

> The narratives seem to float in a social vacuum. The voices echo in an otherwise empty world. There is an extraordinary absence of social context, social action and social interaction (Atkinson 1997: 339).

Where possible I have attempted to provide context and details of interaction to offset some of these criticisms, as the using of an autoethnographic approach does not negate the necessity for critical engagement. In fact, non-adherence to this will invalidate its potential as a methodology and give fuel to its detractors. Against the potential charge of narcissism (Coffey, 1999), I incorporated strategies suggested within the literature for achieving credibility (Sparkes, 2002) and authenticity (Ellis, 1999) such as the continual interrogation of meanings and questioning the representation of both the respondents and the self. Sparkes states that autoethnographic research methods extend beyond the self to contribute academically in ways that are informed by self-knowing (Sparkes, 2002).

The goal of the autoethnographic method is not to eliminate the traditional scientific method of objectivity and understanding of replicability and validity but perhaps to

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16 For more on this see Doloriert, C, and Sambrook, S. (2011), 'Accommodating an autoethnographic PhD: The tale of the thesis, the viva voce and the traditional Business School', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 40* (5), 582-615.

redefine it. Ellis tells us that she looks at both what happens to the reader, the researchers and the participants and asks if it evokes connections, emotions, feelings and empathy. She defines good autoethnographic work as truthful, vulnerable, evocative and therapeutic (Ellis, 2004: 183). Despite this not being an autoethnography in the pure sense that Ellis uses it, where one sets out to study oneself, I believe that by doing a traditional ethnography that became illuminated through retrospective autoethnography and sensemaking, many of Ellis' points for evaluation are valid for *this* research. Ellis (2000: 5) asks 'So how do we evaluate this type of work?'

> What is the author trying to achieve? Has she achieved those goals? Are these worthwhile goals? Are they goals that can be met by this writing form? Can the author make legitimate claims for this story? Did the author learn anything new about themselves? What might readers take from this story? Will this story help others to better understand this world? Does it encourage compassion for the characters? Does it promote dialogue? Does it have potential to stimulate social action? (Ellis 2000: 5).

All these points are addressed during the course of this research and were retrospectively used to assess the goals, claims and achievements of this thesis research. The next chapter examines the context of the research, exploring how the space for research was created, the LEARN Project and how I began in the organisation. It considers the learning aspect of the research, and how I attempted to 'conjure' up the problems to which I held the solution to, in the guise of the mandated organisational learning system.

Summary and Conclusions

This Chapter has discussed the epistemological and methodological approach taken at the start of the research, the different methods used and their limitations. It has documented the journey from starting with positivism (in Phase One), but in actuality defaulting to ethnography fairly early on – whilst paying attempting to pay homage to an output based model with the organisation and my supervisor. It illustrates how this was based in the Scientific Management model, with theoretical underpinnings stemming from Adam Smith built upon by Frederick Taylor in specialisation of tasks to increase productivity believing that work was more efficient when broken down into its constituent parts. Weber's work on rationalisation was also foundational to the output based model, which was later applied to more contemporary systems by George Ritzer (1993).

This chapter also documented how I reached a turning point in 2009 where I use the work of Fernanda Duarte and Bob Hodge (2007) as inspiration for what I perceived as being caught between two frameworks. This led to Phase Two, where I then explore autoethnography, using both the evocative and the analytical school for retrospective sensemaking. In the context of *this* research I see the applicability of autoethnography as being at the boundary of academic enquiry due to its untraditional and somewhat unorthodox approach (Sparkes 2000), and that its major contribution may be in the combination of elements from the 'evocative school' (Anderson, 2006: 420) of emotional connection with the reader and together with elements from the 'analytical school', where it sheds light on the socio cultural context of the research where 'every insight is both a doorway and a mirror – a way to see into their experience and a way to look back at mine' (Schwalbe, 1996: 58).

This chapter also included reflections on the specific problems, and ethical constraints this particular research encountered, and is explicit about the fact that there are some difficult issues the reader will not be told about and the devices deployed in this research to protect the subject's identity. It discussed some problems of publication in organisational research, as well as addressing questions of ownership and power as a researcher. Through exploring the two phases, I came to accept the 'messy' (Rossman and Rallis, 1998: 10) nature of development research and became increasingly concerned at the way in which this complex reality is often interpreted into neat parcels of deliverable outputs. 'At first I thought' I was there to deliver an output based system of learning, a measurable and somewhat commodified tool to enhance their capacity as an organisation. However, 'and then I realised' that what I saw was the 'McDonaldization' of knowledge activity, where knowledge and learning are centralised, standardised, logically compiled and applied by trained staff – and this didn't fit the 'messy' reality of what I observed at Irish Aid. The next Chapter explores how the first phase explored organisational learning within Irish Aid, and enters the organisation through my eyes and feelings, as I try to make sense of how I was meant to perform a 'magical transformation.'

Chapter Three: Organisational Learning: A Magical Transformation

Introduction

The Growth of Organisational Learning

Organisational learning as problem solving

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Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

> The actual experience [of fieldwork] hedged around with contingencies, rarely lives up to the ideal (James Clifford, 1988: 24).

This chapter explores the notions of rationality as an approach to 'fixing the organisation' which informed my research in Phase One of the project. It also delves into different discourses around the idea of organisation learning and knowledge and locates organisational learning as a key management concept, from which the LEARN project stemmed, and which involves applying corporate management concepts to a development organisation. It also charts the researcher's engagement through this project and begins to explore learning through the positivistic approach that framed the early stages of my research and documents the researcher's growing concern over contradictions and complexities within the data.

The organisation was divided into subsections according to working area, knowledge and background. Senior management presided over eleven areas that were as follows: Programme countries I, Programme countries II, Emergency and Recovery, Technical Section, Corporate Development and Decentralisation, Multilateral UN, Multilateral EU, Civil Society, Public information and Development Education , Evaluation and Audit and the Advisory Board. Often functional specialisation like this affects learning systems as people tend to create barriers between an 'us' and 'them' which often leads an organisation to fall foul of segmentalism as divisions cause social rifts between hierarchical levels, roles, and functions (Morgan, 2006: 29). Similarly, a system of subcultures can emerge based on job specifications with its own language, terminology and jargon, aspirations and experiences that can detract from an organisation's comparative advantage rather than add to it. This was found to be the case in Irish Aid where a system of competition was created, rather than cooperation which affected how any learning system could be implanted.

As Weber stated, bureaucracies are characterised by rules and routines which govern behaviour, and manifest themselves in hierarchies, specialisations and the vast documentation of decisions (Weber, 1922: 956-958). Nowadays, bureaucratic organisations are busy with answering emails, reading policy documents, constant meetings and updates, as well as dealing with backlogs of work. Added to this, they may also have to deal with the add-on of organisational learning strategies and procedures. This was the case in Irish Aid, where constant interdepartmental communication, electronic communication from the field offices, and communication with the Department of Foreign Affairs (as well as preparing 'questions-and-answer' briefings for parliamentary members) were added to a work - heavy day. A mechanistic approach to the division of labour can limit rather than mobilise the development of human capacities as people try to fit *into* the organisation rather than the organisation being built around the strengths of its people. Opportunities to shine according to one's experience or achievements are often lost as the organisation remains unaware of how creative and intelligent its staff may be and this can result in a de-motivated and disillusioned workforce.

The Growth of Organisational Learning

The notion of organisational learning (OL) had originally emerged in the 1960s and during this time there was a growing emphasis on an outside-in view of behavioural science which saw organisations as machine-like where they could be upgraded and repaired (Cummings and Huse, 1996). It was during the 1970s that the link between organisational learning and business was made, mainly through the work of the business theorist, Chris Argyris (1978), who favoured a cognitive-behavioural approach to learning. Through this lens, learning was said to occur when new insights and assumptions lead to new behaviours. However, it was not until the 1980s that organisational learning and management became intertwined with the idea of competitive advantage. This idea that companies could gain an advantage over each other to maximise profits and capital through learning or knowledge became the backbone of work by authors such as Peter Senge (1990). Senge championed organisational management studies through his seminal work *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), where he developed the idea of the learning organisation as a dynamic system in a state of continuous adaptation. Senge (1990) and Argyris (1978) are programmatic in their approach by suggesting practical tools that intertwine both pedagogy and production. I was influenced by Senge's approach to see the organisation as a place for continuous learning and growth (Kofman and Senge, 1995). This notion of continuous learning was embedded within the regulatory mechanism of the organisation and closely linked to management studies where learning was less about critical reflection and more about *sharing* information that could provide useful to the organisation's purpose. In essence, learning becomes centred on problem solving, recording past experiences, and transferring knowledge around the organisation.

Organisational learning as problem solving

Organisational learning became *the* key management concept in the 1990s (Collins, 2000) based upon a 'problem solving approach,' which implied that through the correct processes organisational learning (and consequently beneficial change) will occur. To verify this idea of organisational learning being a key fashionable concept Easterby-

Smith (1997) states that as many academic papers on organisational learning were published in 1993 as in the whole decade of the 1980s. The literature on organisational learning may be incredibly diverse yet its known champions, such as Argyris and Schön (1978), Senge (1990), and Morgan (1997), all based their work on the aforementioned framework of problem solving. Garratt states that central to this approach of problem solving is the need to achieve a 'balancing inside-out focus of development and transformation of what is already there' (Garratt, 1995: xi). Agryris and Schön's work (1978) is premised upon the idea that organisations need to 'learn to learn,' a form of meta-learning. According to Agryris and Schön, organisational learning is a cognitive phenomenon where learning operates through mechanisms, and where, if harnessed correctly, and if one knows enough about those mechanisms, learning can be instilled.

> Organisational learning occurs when individuals within an organisation experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organisation's behalf (Argyris & Schön, 1996: 16).

The organisational learning literature (Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000; Fiol & Lyles, 1985) seems to revolve around two primary questions 'what is learning? And 'can organizations learn or is learning in organisations a function of what individuals learn?' (Barker-Scott, 2011: 2). Fundamental to this debate about what constitutes learning is how and whether learning occurs under different circumstances. This research will address these issues, and the journey undertaken to discover where and when learning did occur in Irish Aid through the framework of problem solving.

From Literature to Research - The First LEARN Meeting

My own journey in learning began with a review of the organisational learning literature. I had been asked to come up with some research proposal keywords that appeared particularly interesting to me arising from what I had read. The ones I came up with were organisational culture, tacit knowledge, identity construction, stories, narrative and metaphor.

I went the extra mile in that first Learn meeting, I had pages of abstracts from different authors who seemed to be talking a language I could understand, I felt that the more references I could use the better prepared I was. I had Polanyi's work (1958) on how human knowledge is essentially metaphoric in character and all knowledge being in the tacit dimension. I had done some research on what the Department for International Development (DFID) were doing in organisational learning from their paper 'Doing the Knowledge', things like intranets and yellow pages, learning events and mentoring systems as practical advice; some work by Mary Boyce on organisation storytelling (1996) and Barbara Czarniawska (2001) on anthropology and organisational learning looking at narrative learning. I was trying to cover all bases and at the end of this first meeting I had written:

> *'Exploratory phase starts 5 December; I need to find my methodology and see how my reading/ideas so far relate to their needs and where this research pattern lies between what they require (an OLS) and my PhD topic...' (Field notes, 1 December 2005).*

I was like a horse at the starting gate. The other students had been acquainted with this subject since April 2005, and had met every four weeks for the last nine months, so I was playing catch up. Not only that but the exploratory phase of data collection was beginning in four days' time and this was my very first meeting, so I was to hit the ground running so to speak, and felt that at least I had a few things to bring to the table.

The first LEARN meeting (1 December 2005) was four days before the pre-arranged period of fieldwork was scheduled to start. This was my first meeting with the other students on the project (researching two aid organisations) and their supervisors. In total we were a team of four students and four supervisors, each with a primary and a secondary supervisor in line with the inter-disciplinary nature of the project. At this meeting we were given a copy of Bruce Britton's work, which looked at organisational learning in NGOs and had been published six months earlier. According to Britton, learning was defined as:

> ...a developmental process that integrates thinking and doing. It provides a link between the past and the future, requiring us to look for meaning in our actions and giving purpose to our thoughts. Learning enriches what we do as individuals and collectively, and is central to organisational effectiveness, to developing the quality of our work and to organisational adaptability, innovation and sustainability (Britton, 2005: 5).

Britton discusses how towards the end of the 1990s, NGOs turned to an idea from the corporate business world, that of knowledge management (KM) for 'ideas about how best to organise and manage their information and recover their collective memory' (Britton, 2005: 7). This knowledge management 'would unleash the power and promise of ICT to achieve the 'magic' of turning raw information into the knowledge that would deliver solutions to the new problems and the challenges they faced' (Britton, 2005: 7). Britton claims that the increased take-up of organisational learning within the development sector runs parallel with the increasing need for organisations to try and manage the complexity of the new aid architecture. This was due to both a vast increase in budget[17] over the past ten years which was alongside a drive for improved organisational effectiveness - the promise was that organisational learning that could deliver this. The remit of 'turning raw information into knowledge' through a computer based solution was discussed widely at this meeting, and I felt that *all* I had to do, was commit to this process, then write it up for my PhD thesis. At this meeting we had all heard that since the project's first conception in April 2005, Irish Aid had continually asked the team 'What will it look like?' and 'How will it work?

Retrospectively, I realised I had been critical from the very first Learn meeting. I had written in my field notes that 'it was as if I had a plug in box which would solve all their problems.' This is pertinent due to this being the earliest disjuncture, one where outwardly I was just 'getting on with the job,' but inwardly I was already having doubts over the project's intended outcomes. This early statement marks the disconnectedness that would eventually lead to a change in direction and methodological approach to make sense of the data. I decided I would hold interviews with the organisational members who had responded to an email in the hope that I would gain insight into their learning, that I would be able to state certain facts about when and where it occurred, or where there were opportunities for learning *to* occur, and how this could be built into a replicable model.

[17] Irish Aid Press Release (7 April 2007) Irish Aid's ODA increased from €319.9 million in 2001 to €869 million in 2007.

Starting in the Eye of the Storm - The First Day

It was the 5th of December 2005. I got there early, as I had a fear of being late and hence unprofessional on my first day, I had arranged to meet Sarah there at nine, but it was 8.40am so I sat in a small Italian café directly over the road and ordered a black strong coffee. 'Toast?' the small Mediterranean man asked, 'No thanks, just coffee.' I was a bundle of nerves; I didn't like large institutions and previously had few dealings with bureaucracies except through letters and phone calls in everyday life. I sipped the scalding coffee too fast and burnt my throat. My cup clattered on its saucer as I hurriedly put it down and I took a deep breath. My face was in my hands when I heard Sarah say hello, she laughed as she positioned the Irish Independent down in front of me.



Big move is a flop as civil service stays put

Two years on: Government's €3bn decentralisation is going nowhere

Tom Felle

SOME state agencies and government departments could grind to a halt under plans for decentralisation, confidential documents reveal.

Exactly two years after the Government announced its plan to move 10,000 civil servants out of Dublin, further proof has emerged that the €3bn programme is in trouble.

The mounting problems with the plan are shown in the official documents, seen by the *Irish Independent*.

They show that fewer than one in nine civil servants wants to move with their present job under the programme.

Internal Fas memos show the agency is seriously concerned about losing its top staff if it moves to Birr, Co Offaly.

In the Department of Foreign Affairs, where senior diplomats with Development Co-operation Ireland (DCI) have refused to move to Limerick, documents show grave concern about its ability to operate if it loses experienced development aid specialists.

The problems facing the two bodies are mirrored in almost all other specialist units.

Labour's finance spokesperson Joan Burton, who obtained the documents under the Freedom of Information Act, last night called on the Government to scrap its entire decentralisation plans and go back to the drawing board.

"Decentralisation can work and it does work, but this was a political stroke and it was never costed or thought out," she said.

"The eventual cost to the taxpayer will be €2bn to €3bn, money that could be better spent on health, education and front line services that people desperately need," she said.

Ms Burton warned that the loss of senior diplomats from the development aid section due to move to Limerick would have "catastrophic affects" for the development aid programme."

The senior staff refusing to go there represent years of specialist knowledge, she said.

Former Finance Minister Charlie McCreevy promised to have 10,000 civil and public servants decentralised by this time next year when he launched the Government's plans on Budget Day in 2003.

However the Government rowed back on these plans, and now says it will have 1,000 civil servants in place by December next year, with the rest by 2010.

ON THE ROAD TO NOWHERE, PAGE 10
COMMENT, PAGE 12

Figure 3: Irish Independent Newspaper, 5 December 2005, 'Big move is a flop as civil service stays put'

'Have you seen this? What a day to be starting in here!'

I scanned the typed words and read 'Big Move is a flop as civil service stays put' It was about the civil service decentralising and its 100,000 staff being moved around the country.

'Look here.... 'Senior diplomats in the department of foreign affairs with DCI have refused to move to Limerick, showing grave concern about its ability to operate if it loses experienced development aid specialists.'

The article was very critical of the impending decentralisation move, where organisational members of Irish Aid were told they were moving out of Dublin to Limerick. Nine out of ten didn't want to move and many staff was contemplating leaving their jobs if forced to go.

Irish Aid, part of the Department of Foreign Affairs was particularly hit by this impending change due to conducting much of its work with other development agencies based in Dublin and consequently senior diplomats had refused to move. The article predicted that decentralisation would have catastrophic effects for development aid.

What a day to be starting, walking right into the eye of the storm.

<u>Mapping out the office spaces</u>

The offices of Irish Aid were fragmented, to be found through security doors to be swiped and pushed, with no discernible markings or flow to them. It was quite hard to know where Irish Aid began and ended, as there were other parts of the Department of Foreign Affairs in the building and I would only know where they began and Irish Aid ended if my security swipe pass did not let me in. The offices were situated around a large internal atrium that was the height of the entire four floors. In the middle of this were palms and greenery, and a space for sitting. Entry to the specific offices that Irish Aid occupied was through this central green space, entering on the ground floor and going up one flight of stairs. Due to this central space being an atrium, you might have to walk around the entire floor to get to an office, as is shown in shaded part below:

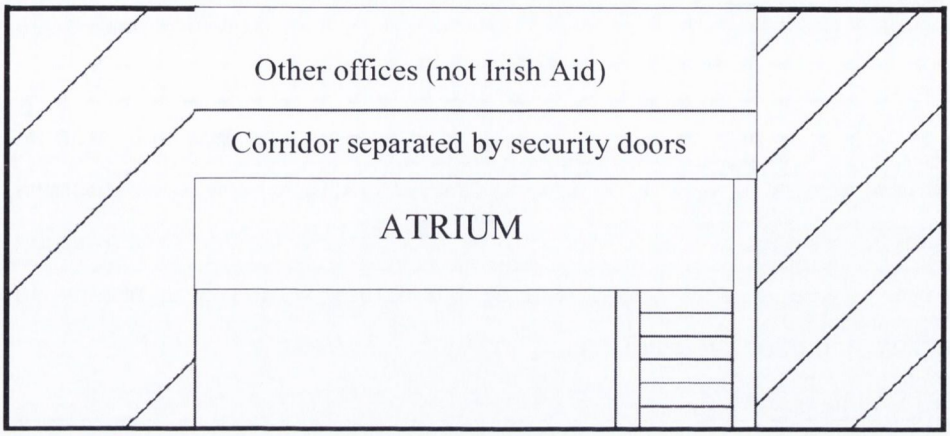


Figure 4: Hand drawn picture of the office layouts of Irish Aid

In the first few days spent in the organisation I had asked for a map, to help me navigate my way around. There was some head-scratching around this request and some days later I was given an architectural ground plan of the building where Irish Aid was marked in bold blue marker (as is shown in the diagram and numbered two and five).

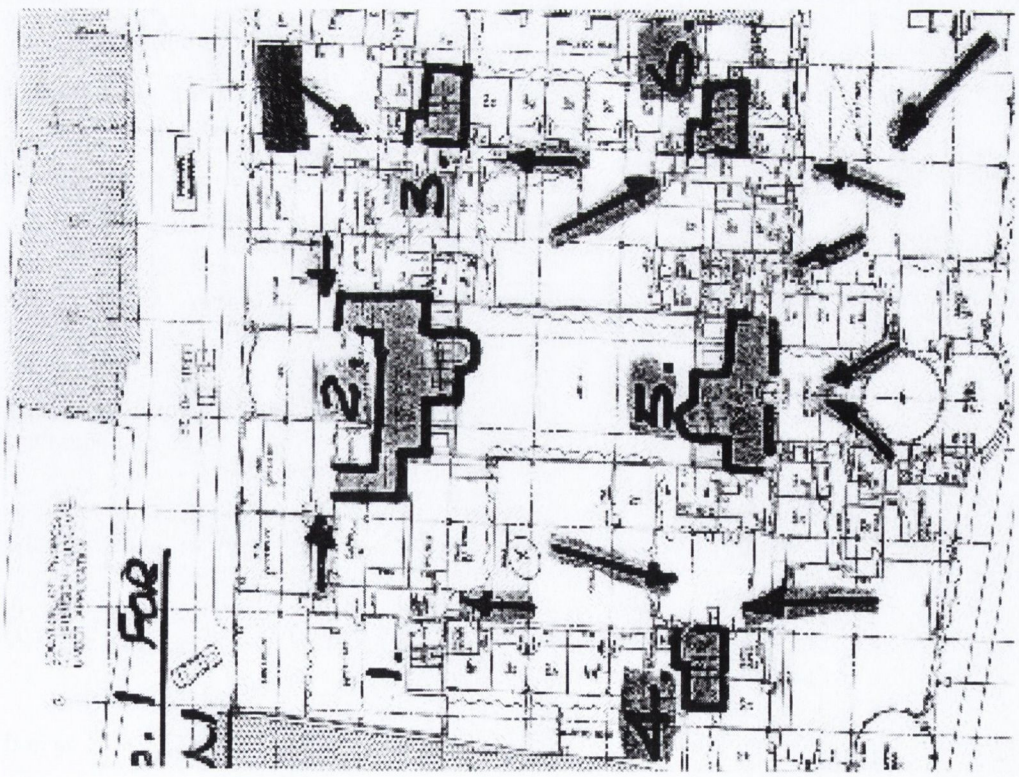


Figure 5: Architectural 'Map' of the offices of Irish Aid

Clearly this was not what I had meant by a map and my request had not even been understood. I found it interesting that new people were not given a map of the space where the organisation resided, or indeed where certain people or departments were to be found. Outside of the room that served as a tea/ coffee space there were no informal meeting areas, so the corridors were often used as a meeting space in a more informal capacity. Even though my background had been in social science I felt that I was starting afresh by studying organisational learning and conducting a literature review in managerial practice and organisational change.

The Knowledge Management Working Group

I asked one of the staff what they had previously done in this field and heard that they had set up a Knowledge Management Working Group (KMWG). This stemmed from a document created by the Irish Civil Service in 2005 entitled 'A Review of Knowledge Management in the Irish Civil Service.' Throughout the next eighteen months, in a piecemeal fashion, I collected information about Irish Aid's engagement with learning, in order to try and gain an understanding of their attempts to harness and systematise it. For example, in January 2006 the Knowledge Management Working Group produced a document entitled 'Knowledge Management and the Intranet in Irish Aid.' The document had a summary of what knowledge management was:

- Knowledge management is a systematic approach to identifying, creating, capturing, managing and sharing an organisation's knowledge.
- Knowledge management is an accepted business practice in many private sector organisations…and many bi-lateral organisations now have knowledge management strategies, including DFID and CIDA as well as Irish government departments.
- Knowledge management is particularly important for Irish Aid at this point given the complexity of its work as the programme will grow rapidly in the coming years.
- Developing effective and robust knowledge management strategies must become a corner stone of our growth strategy both at HQ and in the field.
- The intranet has a key role to play in knowledge management as a hub for the sharing and storing of knowledge.

The document had an explanation of knowledge management as having two key elements, collecting and connecting. 'Collecting' meant information storage solutions whilst 'connecting' meant putting people in touch, to share knowledge, by both 'meetings and seminars' as well as bridging the geographical divide between headquarters and the field offices by way of video conferencing, emails and conference calls. Both these aspects would become increasingly important as the organisation decentralised to Limerick.[18] This document outlined a 'six pronged approach' to attaining knowledge management in the organisation, amongst which, was the project I was researching. The six were the intranet, internal process mapping, the LEARN project, an assessment of learning needs, the introduction of video conferencing, and the development of an internal newsletter. Knowledge management was defined within this newsletter as:

> ...A Systematic approach to identifying, creating, capturing, managing and sharing an organisation's knowledge (Irish Aid newsletter, 2006: 5).

This definition seems to echo that of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources who state on their website that:

> Knowledge Management (KM) is an integrated, systematic approach to identifying, creating, capturing, managing and sharing all of the Department's knowledge (Irish Aid newsletter, 2006: 5).

Their website continues that the objectives listed are to 'assist the Department's ultimate evolution into a knowledge-based organisation.' I found this interesting as it seemed to echo a sense within Irish Aid that they were without officially sanctioned learning and needed to implement it, hence learning was seen as a deficit and something they aspired to. In subsequent interviews, this was reiterated:

> I think we talk a lot about being a learning organisation but the reality is less impressive, we are working towards it but we have a long way to go.
>
> (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 6 September 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded Interview, HQ Dublin).

[18] Decentralisation was part of the Irish Governments 2007 decentralisation strategy. It was proposed that a total staff of 123 would be decentralising to Limerick in early 2007 which would mean a significant turnover in staff and a serious depletion of organisation memory.

In reply to the question of 'What is organisational learning?' they said:

> James: It's what we are all supposed to be, to aspire to, but as a dysfunctional Government organisation, we're pretty hopeless.
>
> (Technical Specialist, 13 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin)
>
> Eimear: You would have a sense of where you were, you'd be clear about your aims and objectives and what you needed to do to fill in any gaps... and that shared learning is in addition to individual learning (pause) I suppose institutional memory.
>
> (Civil Servant, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin)
>
> Kieron: In a nutshell, it's the sharing of knowledge.
>
> (Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin)

Within the initial research phase, there was much more emphasis by the organisation and the LEARN project on the 'collecting' part as an understanding of organisational learning than that of the 'connecting.' This idea links into the research work conducted by Annalise Riles (2000), a legal anthropologist. Riles conducted an ethnography of women's organisations in the Pacific region (mainly in Fiji) as they prepared for Beijing 'Women's Decade' Conference in 1995. These organisations were 'facilitated' and funded by donor agencies, and Riles became interested in the way routines dominated the working lives of members of these development networks. Her underlying conclusion was that participating in the 'Network' was an end in itself, and this was echoed in the sentiments of those at Irish Aid.

Technical Solutions: Is the Intranet the Solution or Part of the Problem?[19]

I was often asked by organisational members in managerial roles about what other Government Aid agencies were doing in the area of knowledge management or organisational learning. According to a source at DFID who was working with the ODI on knowledge management strategies, 1995-2005 had been a period of intense scrutiny of learning within development organisations. Research conducted in 2005 by Ben Ramalingam of the ODI stated that practices in development (mainly based on work at

[19]Kieron, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, Interview, HQ Dublin.

DFID) had emphasised information management and tangible outputs rather than changed processes. The solution at Irish aid *also* appeared to be primarily technical. The intranet was part of the ICT aspect of the 'collecting' dimension that was being championed organisationally as being a part of a wider system, but this was already being questioned:-

> I see the intranet as being a small part of the picture, it's only a tool and I think it's of limited value, I think other aspects of knowledge management are much more important, the way the organisation is managed to some extent, and it's the way the organisation develops.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

With no consensus about whether the intranet was a solution, a part of the solution, or indeed a diversion, it did exemplify the numerous different discourses that emerged around the concept of organisational learning and knowledge. Within the data, organisational learning was referred to as:

> A set of systems and processes to look critically at what we have done to draw out positives and negatives, to optimise the positives – it's about systems and processes that allow that to happen.
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

They also spoke of organisational learning as being about a process - collecting information in order to improve efficiency:

> It's a process about gathering information to redefine strategies and policies to improve efficiency.
>
> (Kieron, Technical Specialist, 9 December, 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Linking the deficit of organisational learning to a breakdown in the system, pre-supposes that a system works like a machine that should function efficiently like clockwork, he spoke of the organisation as being 'like a watch going around and around, but it has to be tied into the system' (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from

tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin). It also implies that when the system is 'fragmented it needs to be re-connected.

Power and knowledge - producing texts

Knowledge management (and by default, organisational learning) was being associated with ICT, an intranet, and an electronic method of managing information. This tallied with what had appeared on the agenda of the KMWG with keywords such as 'systematic, capturing and managing.' There had been much talk of the intranet, but people were sceptical:

> Is the intranet the solution or part of the problem? Trying to grasp the source of the information flow, we don't have the technical knowledge.
>
> (Kieron, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Computer based information systems like the proposed intranet are ultimately embodiments of data flows but also are indicative of the organisation culture/s and everyday working routines. Computer systems interact with both the structure and the divisions of labour within each part of the organisation and also with the assumptions and cultural frames operating within that organisation (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002: 48). Within organisations, those who know and those who know less efficiently are part of a power play which can involve the circulation of knowledge itself. Knowledge, in this form is seen as an exchangeable value. The codification of knowledge as useful, good or correct, take place in what Gherardi et al. (1998: 37) call the 'micro politics of quotidian power relationships.' It seems that conflict and power plays may conceal the social conditions of how knowledge is produced. 'Collecting' information, codifying it, retrieving it and updating this information through computer networks seemed to be the intention of the intranet, yet this was in an organisation where some people felt that documentation was good business for shelf builders, as is shown in the following quote:

> They woke up one morning and realised the organisation was producing 10,000 reports a year…all it was doing was providing employment for shelf makers.

> (Cathal, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This type of collecting and storing was challenging for an organisation that was already time-poor in answering emails, electronic memos and documents and it seemed naïve to me, and others (Kieron and Michael) to imagine that the solution lay wholly with an intranet. It seemed that the electronic system that was already in place, was being used to hide documents and squirrel them away, rather than share them, as was exemplified in Daniel's initial interview where he said:

> We don't have a proper information system; all my stuff I file under my log in and it's not accessible to other people. If I want access to something someone else has I can't get it.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December, 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

An organisation that stresses collection over connection can easily result in a repository of static documents, as one member said:

> We are not an organisation of documents although you might think so; you have to see people as an integral part of the system.
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

As Riles (2000) states in her work on networks, the issue of being a document heavy organisation where one's working day was taken up with the circulation and dissemination of documents meant that organisation members were 'blocking their activity' (2000: xiv). In turn this was having an impact on knowledge practices. Within my own research it seemed to inform their idea of knowledge and exasperated them, as if knowledge acquisition or learning was only something to be done once the backlog of documents was cleared. One respondent in my research had spoken of 'sociological elements' (9 December 2005) coming into the discussion of the intranet but that the ICT 'didn't marry up.' It seemed that this organisation was telling me they were so busy with documentation and collecting that documentation, that they did not have time to ingest any learning at all. The producing of accounts, of written work, is perhaps thought of as a neutral act. Riles found that many organisational members spoke about sharing work,

but in reality were only concerned with 'appearing' to share, whilst often hoarding. In both Riles' work and my own research in Irish Aid, countless hours were spent producing documents more concerned with procedural and stylistic elements than usefulness or substance, exemplified by the idea put forward that nobody reads these documents that they spend hours creating. Chapter Five, 'Negotiating Development' in the subsection 'Working More Effectively' deals with this issue in regard to the creation of quarterly reports where the staff frequently claimed that there was little 'actual use' of these reports, as they were not shared between countries and hence an opportunity for organisational learning was missed. This was in line with what Argyris and Schön (1996) stated was a 'mismatch.' They noted that often in learning initiatives, there is a:

> surprising mismatch between expected and actual results of action and responds to that mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of organisation or their understandings of organisational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations into line (Argyris & Schön, 1996: 16).

This mismatch between expectation and actual reality correlated with my observations within Irish Aid, where issues around learning: secrecy, hoarding, active avoidance or blocking of documents meant that I was beginning to think, even at the start of my field work in Irish Aid that an ICT based system might not be the answer.

One early attempt at formalising connecting and collecting was the KMWG's Irish Aid Newsletter. It was strategically placed as a form of systemic communication, and had been decided upon as the most effective way of disseminating news around the organisation and creating connections through communication. According to a 2005 review, the organisation had not delivered on communication, as this was seen as key for their learning strategy:

> You know we have just done a review of our business plan …and one of the key areas we haven't delivered on is communication, and communication is the key component of learning within a learning organisation, regular communication, systematic communication, where key things are distilled and distributed throughout the organisation. We had agreed we would do four thematic newsletters this year and we haven't got one of them out, we agreed to pilot the intranet and I think that particular one has started …but it has been very limited.

(Niamh, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

The newsletter was produced in July 2006 and contained chapters on 'Corruption explained, connecting and collecting, knowledge management explained and an update on Sierra Leone', with a back page on recent events and staff changes.

WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL EDITION OF IRISH AID'S INTERNAL NEWSLETTER – *IRISH AID NEWS*

The need for this publication is borne out of a concern, shared across Irish Aid, that at a time of rapid budgetary expansion and programme growth, there is a need to strengthen communication within our organisation.

Figure 6: Excerpt from Irish Aid's first newsletter, July 2006

This newsletter highlighted these two elements in knowledge management on page 5 of the 'Irish Aid News:'

> Connecting means putting people in touch and building networks in an organisation; using tools such as video conferencing, e-mail and conference calling as well as more traditional methods such as training courses, seminars and newsletters; Collecting is about how we capture and store knowledge and includes effective records management and the use of databases (Irish Aid newsletter, 2006: 5).

I was interested to see how the newsletter had been received and attended the KMWG meeting on May 12 2006. I met one of the members outside who said enthusiastically:

> You'd be amazed how difficult it was to get this to happen, at the beginning everyone said no one would be interested, then it took an age to get it together, there was resistance, but once it was done people were ringing me to say it was good so there was a total turn around.
>
> (James, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin)

At a meeting about the newsletter the positive feedback was reiterated and there was some concern about who it was pitched at, with some members feeling it had been wrongly pitched at the management level and was too formal, there was also concern that it was perhaps boring and needed 'human interest stories to draw people in,' and the

feeling that it was the wrong tone. 'It should be about us, not them; you are just lecturing to us again otherwise.' Members of the KMWG were expressing a need for stories and for a more informal approach to connecting people and communicating with them as a learning mechanism. The formal solution to what *was* being achieved informally was not deemed successful. It seemed at this time that the documentation of stories was futile due to the history of document compilation within the organisation, with no other function.

Through my early field work and observations I was discovering through the data that some learning was happening tacitly, rather than formally and the organisational members themselves were providing solutions, to the 'problem' of learning, opting for a people centred, face-to-face learning system, not one based in ICT as is shown in the following data excerpts:

> How does an organisation with departments improve itself? It's about linking.
>
> (Breda, Civil Servant, 8 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

> We don't have the technical expertise of DFID but we have the skills to draw people together, with negotiation skills, cajoling, hassling skills.
>
> (Cathal, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

> I think the learning system it's going to be people on people and not going to be ICT based and I hope that people don't see the internet as sort of this grand solution I mean I don't think they will but … I would say we ought to put knowledge management in place and then bring the internet in rather than the other way around.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Yet, at the same time, I was struggling to see how an organisational learning system could be people based when their staff turnover was so large due to the ongoing decentralisation. Liam reiterated this point:

> Over the years, change has been rapid, so many people have come and gone, and while some people have made attempts to record and archive things, as they moved on people did not have the same interests and consequently a lot of the history has been lost, it's in people's minds, but they take it with them.
>
> (Liam, Civil Servant, 29 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Liam was linking 'people' to the organisational or institutional memory and in doing so, he made the point that the memories or knowledge belong to the individual, and not to the organisation. This suggests one answer to the questions posed above from the organisational learning literature – learning belongs to individuals too. Hence, as Charles Savage (2000) suggests, fostering organisational learning within development organisations, means adopting significantly different practices to ensure that the organisation cultures are those of trust, openness and sharing between the individuals that make it up.

Informal navigation of the organisation

However, I was researching at a time when deep instability was being felt and witnessed 'defensive routines' around learning. Stacey (1997) argues that at times of flux, people learn to self-organise, and that shadow systems prosper. In my own data these included tacit conversations in corridors, informal networks of passing motions, formally voted on in meetings, but pre-arranged beforehand, and unofficial ideologies being expressed which undermined the official ideology. As Niamh put it to me:

> If I want something passed I have to make sure I see anyone who might oppose it *before* the meeting, usually I'll grab them in a corridor or if worse comes to worst I'll talk to them just before we go in, otherwise all the time in the meeting gets debating the issue with probably just the one person who might oppose it, so if you want anything done, that's the way you have to operate.
>
> (Niamh, Technical Specialist, 22 May 2007, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This informal and social way of navigating around a rigid and formal process was to become pertinent as I spent more time there. There was a canteen area, where people brought their own tea or coffee and used the hot water from the large silver urns. I had heard that there was a rule of not bringing work into the conversation within that space. So people would ask about each other's weekends, children, hobbies, but invariably, whispers of work related matter would sneak in (Field notes, January 27 2006). The other social place that they met was the Cornerstone Pub. It seemed to be one where they could speak freely as they were away from the geographical base of the organisation. It was across the road on the corner of Camden Street and Bishops Square. During an

interview in the exploratory phase with James he had made reference to this pub in terms of being a 'safe space.' He was a technical specialist and very vocal about formal processes such as PAEG[20] which was part of the evaluation process:

> Our priority remains, the poorest of the poor, there are complex structural problems, we only deal in English, we need to address this, we need to be engaged and more proactive…That's my official response, I'll give you the other one some night in the pub.
>
> (James, Technical Specialist,13 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

It was in this pub that their hidden sense of disillusion was expanded upon, and the organisation was spoken of in a detrimental way, in hushed tones. This illustrates how different physical spaces can be utilised for different modes of sense-making: for example, staff who chat in corridors to get policies passed and those who bond over a pint in the nearest pub. The idea that there is a front-stage and back-stage within organisations stems from the work of Goffman (1959). For Goffman front-stage and back-stage are concepts used to describe the relationship between the roles that various actors play and the particular audiences that these roles may involve. The backstage is where the 'performers' speak of other things that would not be deemed suitable for the front stage audience. In relation to organisational knowledge, I take from this that there is a variety of arenas where current issues and problems are aired and discussed. The more that knowledge is situated and exchanged in a tacit and informal way, the more knowledge becomes an asset of the *people* of the organisation and not of the organisation itself (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002: 39). This again recalls Savage's view (2000) that development organisations must change their culture, from hoarding to sharing. However, Irish Aid is not a stand-alone organisation. It shelters within the shadow of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, any cultural change would be affected by its wider context as a Government body, an issue I explore in the next section.

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[20] PAEG = Project Appraisal and Evaluation Group

The Unique Positionality of Irish Aid

The Treaty of Rome (1957) had provided that the EEC would contribute to a campaign against poverty in the developing world. This was the beginning of the European Development Fund, and the Irish contribution was marked as Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 1973 at a conference in Iveagh House the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Garrett Fitzgerald, announced that Ireland would start its own development aid programme to administer the ODA. Murphy (2012) recounts how the Department of Foreign affairs was an exciting place to work in 1973, as changes meant huge expansion and new embassies had to be opened (Murphy, 2012: 24-25). Murphy was himself promoted and staff members were drafted in with development backgrounds to fill the new emerging roles. It was at this time they moved to a new headquarters building in St Stephens Green to house all the new staff. As an emerging organisation with its roots in the Department of Foreign affairs, it became an alliance of civil servants, diplomats and technical development specialists.

When I began research in this organisation another fundamental change was occurring. The issue of decentralisation was causing tension as some staff members were going to Limerick, mostly the civil servants and yet the technical specialists were remaining behind due to contact labour issues that were being fought through the Courts. This illustrated that one group was in a different position of power to the others. This was shown when a civil servant referred to the technical specialists as the 'real' organisation:

> I think the outcome will be some staff going down to Limerick to satisfy people but the *real* operation will stay in Dublin.
>
> (Liam, Civil Servant, 29 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

On Friday 13 January 2006, a letter had been sent to the Irish Times by technical specialists in Irish Aid who felt the need to publicly respond to comments made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs about decentralisation. The letter can be seen below:



THE IRISH TIMES Friday, January 13, 2006

Comment&Letters

Letters to the Editor

Email: lettersed@irish-times.ie (no attachments)
Post: Letters to the Editor, 10-16 D'Olier St, Dublin 2
Fax: 01-6758035
Note: Please provide name, postal address and telephone numbers. Letters may be edited or cut.

Tensions over decentralisation

Madam, - The local Impact union committee representing specialists in Development Co-operation Ireland (DCI), Department of Foreign Affairs, feels compelled to take the unusual step of responding publicly to recent public comments made by Minister Dermot Ahern regarding decentralisation.

In an interview with RTÉ yesterday, the Minister said the unwillingness of DCI specialist staff to move to Limerick was not a constraint to decentralisation. He also said new and younger people bring much better ideas than perhaps people who have been there for many, many years and that a "continuous change of specialities for people" was desirable. Specialists are employees of the Minister for Foreign Affairs whose input is essential for the planning and delivery of Ireland's aid programme.

The Minister's remarks are not only insulting but, in our view, they also undermine the current human resource strategy of the Department which recognises the importance of specialist input to the programme.

For the record, the Ireland Aid Review Committee Report, which was adopted by Government in 2002, recognises the need to develop an improved career structure "so that a long-term core of specialist staff can be assured for the programme".

In spite of the Government's assurances that decentralisation is voluntary, specialist staff now understand that for them, this is not now the case. Despite repeated requests from Impact for information on what alternatives are available for DCI specialist staff who do not wish to decentralise, no such information has been provided.

In this situation, the Minister's statement implies that for us decentralisation is compulsory.

It is unfortunate that the Minister has chosen the airwaves as the vehicle for voicing his concerns, rather than organising a meeting with his staff. - Yours, etc,

KEVIN CARROLL,
FIONNUALA GILSENAN,
FINTAN FARRELLY,
FIONA ENGLISH,
KEVIN COLGAN,
FARNÁN Ó CLÉIRIGH,
Impact Local
Union Committee,
Development Co-operation
Ireland,
Bishops Square,
Dublin 2.

Figure 7: Irish Times Newspaper, January 13, 2006, 'Tensions over Decentralisation' Letters to the Editor.

The letter was written by Development Specialists working in Irish Aid, many of whom I had come into contact with, and discussed the comments made by Minister Dermot Ahern. He was speaking on the topic of decentralisation in an interview with the national broadcasting station in Ireland, RTE. They stated that they were insulted by the idea that they could be easily replaced by younger people with better ideas, when they had opposed the decentralisation move to Limerick. The process of decentralisation seemed to highlight the tension between professional groups, and this was evident since the start of the research project. As already mentioned above, on the first day of the project in December 2005, the media had reported on problems with the Government's proposed decentralisation plan, with titles such as 'Big Move is a flop as civil service stays put' and 'Plan to coax diplomats into leaving.' Tensions were high over decentralisation and

the proposed changes, and this was why some of the technical specialists had written to the Irish Times to express their concern.

It was to become an embarrassment to them in later years when the Irish Independent newspaper reported (2012) that €170,000 had been spent on bringing Irish Aid staff to meetings in Limerick since the move in 2006/2007. The article quoted then Minister for Finance Charlie McCreavey (2004) as saying:

> I think that Irish Aid is an integral part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and has a policy implementation function and whether you like it or not, policy decisions happen in the capital and so moving this service out of the capital simply did not make sense.



€170,000 spent on bringing Irish Aid staff to meetings

Craig Hughes

SENDING officials from Ireland's overseas aid agency back and forth between Limerick and Dublin is costing taxpayers more than €170,000 a year.

Irish Aid – the State's charitable arm for developing countries, which is part of the Department of Foreign Affairs – was one of the first state agencies to be relocated outside of the capital under the controversial decentralisation programme in 2007.

But the move has added significant costs as officials still have to travel between both cities for important meetings.

The Department of Foreign Affairs incurred expenses of €171,906 in travel and subsistence costs ferrying 90 officials between its Limerick and Dublin offices in 2011, according to documents obtained by the *Irish Independent* under the Freedom of Information Act.

Joe Costello: critical of the high costs involved

Although the Government has indicated it wants to close the Limerick office because of the high costs involved, it has a lease on the property that does not expire until 2028.

The junior minister responsible for Irish Aid, Joe Costello, has ordered a full review into the cost of the Limerick base, referring to the situation as "unsatisfactory".

The cost of funding travel and subsistence has risen in recent years despite a drop in the number of officials needing to travel between both locations.

Initially, 134 officials were based in the Limerick operation, with an average annual cost of €150,000 in travel and subsistence costs.

However, while the number of officials has dropped to 90, the annual costs have risen to €170,000.

The figures show that almost €30,000 was spent on putting staff up overnight in hotels, €76,000 on subsistence, while a further €65,000 was spent on rail, bus and other travel costs.

Hans Zomer, director of Dochas, the umbrella group for development NGOs, said that the excess costs could have been avoided and that he believed the move was purely political.

Sceptical

"In relation to the costs, we have made it clear from the start that it wasn't based on a clear analysis. Irish Aid was one of the first services to be relocated and we were sceptical of the move initially when it was outlined by then Minister for Finance Charlie McCreavey in 2004.

"I think that Irish Aid is an integral part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and has a policy implementation function, and whether you like it or not, policy decisions happen in the capital and so moving this service out of the capital simply did not make sense.

Mr Costello said the situation was unsatisfactory but admitted it was unlikely to change anytime soon.

"Unfortunately, half of the department is based in Limerick and the other half is based in Dublin and that provides us with a serious difficulty, meaning there is no way to interface properly without staff travelling between Dublin and Limerick.

"It is one of the silliest decisions ever made, and it is one that we unfortunately inherited," he said.

"I am not sure how we are going to rectify it because we have a lease on the property in Limerick but I have asked for a full review of the situation. In the short term, we are going to have to accept the associated travel costs," Mr Costello added.

Figure 8: Irish Independent Newspaper, 7 August 2012, '€170,000 spent on bringing Irish Aid staff to meetings.'

Joe Costello, the Junior Minister responsible for Irish Aid (since December 2011) had ordered a full review into the decentralisation saying:

> Unfortunately, half of the department is based in Limerick and the other half is based in Dublin and that provides us with a serious difficulty, meaning there is no way to interface properly without staff travelling between Dublin and Limerick…It is one of the silliest decisions ever made.[21]

[21] With the clarity of hindsight I can see why the staff were so concerned given the existing communication problems when the organisation was single sited back in 2005/2006

With hindsight it may be easy to say it had largely failed, in that people were away from the area they needed to be in, to network and liaise with other development professionals, who were all based in Dublin. At the time of data generation, it had created a sense of powerlessness for many organisational members and undoubtedly affected how they spoke about the organisation at this time. They were plunged into insecurity and unprecedented change since the organisation's conception in 1973, and they were an already work-heavy organisation. For many members their time was taken up by dealing with backlogs of information and reading policy documents, with constant meetings which disrupted their day, so that they were always playing catch up, which left little space for reflection or learning from past events. If Savage (2000) was correct in stating that the key to becoming a learning development organisation was to change the culture of the organisation, then I had an insurmountable task on my hands, as knowledge was situated within a powerful bureaucracy, one where to 'get the job done' meant circumnavigating the formal system and harnessing tacit learning and working in some way. I felt as if I was being asked to perform magic.

Seeing the Invisible: Magical Transformations?

Ritzer states that as a result of rationalisation the Western World has grown disenchanted as the magical and mysterious elements of society have been replaced by logic, standardisation and routine (Ritzer, 1993: 148). He claims that anything magical or naturally emergent is considered inefficient. Predictability, stemming from a standardised system has undermined diminishes the magical qualities of life. On one hand, this development bureaucracy was chasing a standardised system of learning – yet being a *development* organisation, it is, by its very nature, often *unpredictable.* This 'Aidland' is referred to as as akin to Lewis Carrolls' *Alice in Wonderland* - something of a fantasy land detached from certain realities (Apthorpe, 2005). Elizabeth Harrison also states that 'there can be something fantastical about the workings of much aid work; it can appear to be sealed and separate - a bubble' where it is, on one hand, parochial, nostalgic and imbued with 'good intentions' yet it is also full of self-doubt, and fear, unspoken racism and hypocrisy (Harrison, 2013: 264). I was trying to standardise and implement a learning system through this project - yet as people talked to me about

what was going on behind the scenes – which was the antithesis of an efficient rational bureaucracy - the beginnings of what would come to be the concurrent themes of 'illusion and disillusion' were born.

In the vein of Sack's (1992) 'At first I had thought…and then I realised' I was beginning to realise that I would need more than a rational approach to fix this organisation, but I had no idea how to marry the tacit and the formal. Looking back on this time retrospectively, I can see how a theme of magic and illusion emerged. On the first day of data collection, December 5, 2005, I was struck by something said in an interview when I looked back at my notes:

> Lorraine: If I said the words 'organisational learning', what would that conjure up for you?'
>
> Cathal: We're missing something… Knowledge management and all that…It is about trying to make good decisions about everything you do, about not wasting time
>
> (Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

I had subconsciously used the term 'conjure.' Martin Parker, from Warwick Business School, and co-editor of the journal *Organization* wrote a much cited article in 2011 entitled 'Organizing the Circus: The Engineering of Miracles,' where he uses the institution of the circus to question forms of stability and classification, and then enquires as to how such effects are produced:

> I begin with the cultural representations of the circus, and then move through sections on community, movement and economic organization. This order is intended to illustrate that the production of mystery is a complex affair, and that cultural and economic descriptions of this particular form of organization are necessarily entangled; focusing on one at the expense of the other leads to either a culturalism which lacks an understanding of production, or a business model which is incapable of understanding miracles (Parker, 2011: 567).

I later found his article to be extremely pertinent when looking back at the generated data. I saw that by the choice of the phrase 'conjure up' I was asking inadvertently about what Parker (2011) calls the magic and miracles of institutional mechanisms where 'disorganization requires organization and vice versa' (Cooper, 1990 in Parker, 2011:

556). I had been channelling the idea of organisational learning as a magical transformative property, which echoed elements of Parker's idea of engineering miracles. As Parker describes:

> Normally, the organization is supposed to be invisible to the audience, who are expected not to want to see the machinery in operation. Sometimes, of course, it is seen (Parker, 2011: 567).

This echoes Apthorpe's idea of Aidland, a fantastical bubble, where instead of being like a machine, hopes, fears, intentions and selfishness exist, and this led me to start looking more deeply at how people interacted with the technology: if they were hoarding information, perhaps this was a key to understanding their ideas about learning, so I went back to the data with this in mind and was struck by the following exchange:

> Lorraine: How do you find information on the computer?
>
> Daniel: We don't have a proper information system. All my stuff I file under my log-in and it's not accessible to other people…If I want access to something someone else has. I can't get it.
>
> (Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This implied an extreme individualism with respect to knowledge within the organisation:-: despite there being an organisationally- sanctioned place for work to be shared within your particular section, Daniel preferred to hoard his work. It made me raise the question in my field notes of '*what happens to this information if Daniel is away/sick/leaves?*' (Field notes, 5 December 2005). This threw up the further question of common practice within sections: was Daniel alone in doing this, or did people work around the system with their own preferences? Daniel's analysis needs to be understood I terms of 'the relationship between the organisation and the social system. When the emphasis in bureaucracies is on getting the job done in the most efficient manner possible, what occurs is often a seeming paradox where bureaucracies, the supposed epitome of rationalisation, can act in irrational ways.

The theme of hoarding knowledge - the very *opposite* of knowledge sharing - seemed to be a way for some members to avoid the mechanistic approach to managing learning, and

also represented a shift away from the rational model of producing a replicable learning system. Stacey (1997) explored this idea, by dividing organisations into the 'Legitimate organisation' (of formal roles and procedures) and the 'Shadow system' (informal organisation) as mechanisms harnessed in situations of complexity. In a legitimate system, where the organisation is like a machine, the rules and controls make change difficult, and the complex interconnections between organisational members are ignored. The role of the legitimate system is to pull the organisation towards a state of stability. In my own study too, it is evident that the formal system was often equated with inflexibility

> 'It's not about designing an organisation to meet your needs, and there's inflexibility, *huge* inflexibility.'
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This inflexibility was also mirrored by how *I* was feeling, wearing the 'two hats' of academic researcher *and* consultant, I felt inflexible, in a formal sense, caught between two intended outcomes, the project and the thesis which will be further explored in Chapter Four.

Summary and Conclusions

I had first looked at the organisational learning literature to 'seek solutions' and knowledge about how to fulfil my role of producing a learning system. In the course of my early research in Irish Aid I explored the mechanised rational system, endemic in bureaucracies, whereby people try to fit into the organisation rather than it being built around their strengths. This was why people circumnavigated the formal system and met in corridors to pass motions for meetings. Within this framework it is difficult for people to show the extent of their talent and experience. Since knowledge is hoarded rather than shared. This may be due to the positionality of Irish Aid as a subsection of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Its positionality, impending decentralisation and hierarchical positioning were all affecting its organisational learning abilities and in turn, were affecting *my* role as effective quasi-consultant / researcher.

This chapter marks the beginning of Phase One, where I was conducting my research through the idea of being able to somehow provide an organisational learning system for the organisation whilst wondering how I was going put this data into my PhD thesis. This fits into the 'At first I thought...and then I realised' framework as at first I thought I could fix them. I had also talked of organisational learning in ethereal magical terms, by the unwitting use of the word *'conjure.'* Retrospectively, during Phase Two of the research when I reflected upon this language I realised (having moved from ethnography to autoethnography, in an attempt to make sense of my data) that I thought I would need to be magician to fulfil both aspects of my role. The complexity of the task was only beginning to be felt in this early stage and the pivotal part that I was to play within the research and data generation would not be acknowledged until Phase Two of the research. Having looked at their engagement and understanding of organisational learning I thought that exploring the organisational culture would help me to make sense of the growing complexity of the research. In one of the most quoted articles on organisational learning, Levitt and March (1988) suggest that one of the limitations of studying organisational learning is that the complexity of experience within an organisation may hinder organisational learning initiatives. I could see that learning and knowledge were clearly linked to power. The proposal of the intranet in Irish Aid was not only indicative of being an embodiment of the data flow around the organisation but also illuminated aspects of the organisational culture where knowledge was an exchangeable commodity. The next chapter begins with the premise of 'At first I thought...' I thought that by attempting to understand the specific organisational culture(s) I might be able to see where learning could be mobilised rather than limited, and knowledge sharing enhanced. The next chapter explores these notions of power and representation further as I examine identity, belonging and culture within the organisation of Irish Aid.

Chapter Four: Exploring Culture

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Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

> Culture is a notoriously elusive concept, despite being almost ubiquitous in the language of the social sciences and indeed of everyday life (Bishop et al., 2006: 2).

The possibility of studying organisations as cultures was brought into prominence in the 1980s (Morgan, 2006: 398) when the corporate world of managerial research looked to anthropology and appropriated the idea of myths and rituals as being applicable to an organisation. It not only provided a new vocabulary for organisational researchers, one where groups could be 'tribes' and the managers could be portrayed as 'heroes' but it also provided a new way of researching *and* conceptualising organisations. Prior to this the organisation was predominantly viewed as 'machine,' a rational entity where structure and linearity were fundamental to understanding how organisations functioned. Some researchers believe that culture resides in the stories, myths and legends, or the

symbols, rituals, ideologies or language of the organisation (Pettigrew, 1979). Gabriel (1991), Wilkins (1983) and Weick (1987) have all looked at stories; others such as Trice and Beyer (1984) have looked at rituals and rites whilst Ulrich (1984) combines three elements, and looks at myths, history and rituals together.

In recent years there has been an increased emphasis on ethnographies of aid and development which concentrate on *how* development works rather than if it does. Much of this work has derived from the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences. The 'cultural' turn acknowledged the irrational and emotional aspects of working and turned the emphasis towards the more symbolic aspects of life within organisations. From my early engagement (2005/2006) in Irish Aid I thought that perhaps the key to understanding this complex development organisation might lie in exploring the organisation's culture. By exploring the culture of the organisation I hoped that it may help me navigate the impact of the 'internal politics, conflict, and power differentials' (Roper and Pettit, 2002: 534) on a future learning system. This chapter documents the challenge of using culture as a theme for exploring this development donor, its people and their relationship to it.

Exploring Irish Aid through its Culture

There are complex issues around the exploration of culture within a development organisation. Some questions that arise are: 'Where does the culture reside?' Are there different cultures for the technical experts or consultants? Is there a unified organisation culture or many cultures residing under the guise of one? Is there organisational consensus as to what members constitute the organisation at any given time? These questions arose during phase one of the research where I felt that exploring the organisational through its culture would shed light on how to implement a learning system.

From the early literature review I had done, I found that organisational identity, often found in the form of culture, was often seen as being of the utmost importance to productivity, commitment, values, creativity and effectiveness (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). Much of the organisational literature stemmed from the manufacturing industries

and when applied to bureaucracies, an output model of efficiency, based on Taylorist ideals of production line work, prioritised conformity and rule adherence. When organisational norms force workers to prioritise one solution over another, it can create an 'iron cage' (Weber, 1922) that can cause employees to feel restricted. This can result in feelings of disillusionment as there is an inherent contradiction – on one hand to share, and on the other hand, only to do it in an organisationally sanctioned way.

Organisational identity provides the context in which organisational members interpret and assign meaning to their behaviour. It also helps members make sense of what they do (Fiol, 1991); understand what their organisation is; how it functions; and informs them how to function within it. According to Gergen (1992) this knowledge, informed by culture, it is part of an on-going unfinished discourse, unique to each subjective experience where members of an organisation may not experience the *same* organisation or even identify themselves as members. In my research, this idea of 'uniqueness of experience' resonated with the data, where culture was referred to through a myriad of manifestations, often contradictory, referred to as a family, as a struggle and as an anathema, actually contriving to prevent you from doing your work. These themes will be explored through the stories of Richard, Gavin and Deirdre.

<u>The organisation as family: wanting to belong - Richard's unmet needs</u>

Belonging to an organisation is about connecting to the culture. It is about how members of an organisation give meaning to their daily lives. People may not necessarily have a fixed idea of what it means to be part of the organisation. For some it is a family; for others an ideological stronghold; a source of livelihood or a bureaucracy, or perhaps a more fluid and contextual association. In dealing with an endless stream of decision making on a daily basis, there is often little time to reflect upon the bigger picture, or interactions within it. The idea of how people connect to an organisation can be explored through the way people enter the organisation. In Irish Aid this was through an induction process. In the first week of conducting research in Irish Aid I had been wandering about on an upper floor that was full of unused desks. Liam was at one of these desks working on a charity based venture in his retirement and was happy to chat to me about the way

the organisation had changed. Liam had told me that in the past (which for him was 1977 to 1990) there was no induction when you started, 'It was just, 'here's your desk, here's your pen...That has been the culture here since day one. You haven't a clue; you just start' (Liam, Retired Civil Servant, 29 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin). So I asked him about when you moved on: was there any kind of handover process? He laughed as if the very idea was ridiculous, 'No (laughs) you'd fly by the seat of your pants!' (Liam, Retired Civil Servant 29 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin). Liam had left the organisation before an induction process had been implemented.

I decided to look for the person currently running the induction process and had been told that the person responsible for the induction programme was also responsible for decentralisation. Once I found them, they had no time to speak to me as they clearly had an enormous workload with the relocation of the entire organisation and its staff. This formal induction process was first implemented in 2007 and consisted of three elements; a general introduction, a one hour presentation on *'who we are,'* followed by one and a half hours familiarisation in Irish Aid guidelines and procedures. This was referred to institutionally as being very important for the organisation's strategy:

> There needs to be a strong corporate response that needs to be institutionalised from the induction
>
> (Niamh, Technical Specialist, 22 May 2007, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

In essence the organisation was attempting to 'brand' new members through this induction, so that they would be certain of 'who we are' as a development organisation and ideally know their own place within it. However, the experience seemed to fall short of this expectation. When I had asked Richard, a new civil servant about his experience of the induction, he said:

> There was a one day induction, where they introduced the heads of different sections with a thirty minute presentation, very useful but too much information for one day, it should be two half days, as there was no time for discussion or questions really.

(Richard, Civil Servant, 30 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

He also expressed some ideas about how to make the induction more effective:

> One of the things they should do is to send out a questionnaire afterwards, asking if any one area interests you, to work on people's interests and skills, when people are really enthusiastic, like [name withheld], you could tell he really loved his job, and I'd have like the chance to talk to him more, but then I got caught up in my work and that opportunity was lost, I'd never be able to knock on his door and just say have you got ten minutes? Because *they* haven't.
>
> (Richard, Civil Servant, 30 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin)

Richard was expressing a need for social communication and networking. Clearly he felt inspired by the enthusiasm of his colleague but felt unable to pursue this further. He wanted to move into areas of development that interested him and to expand his skills and position. These data excerpts gave me clues to how the organisational culture operated, and I was seeing parallels to the incidents of hoarding information which was discussed in Chapter Three. At the time I felt that the emphasis on a need for enhanced communication fed directly into the proposed organisational learning system and I felt that it was giving me clues to unlocking the mysteries of this development donor organisation. For instance, Richard had also expressed feelings of disillusionment with the organisation about the reality of working in development not matching his pre-conceived expectations:

> I had an idea it was going to be a bit more glamorous, I spent sixteen years trying to get to foreign affairs, the idealised image of foreign affairs, I knew a few people, some diplomats, some general service staff and I had conflicting impressions of foreign affairs. When I heard it was Irish Aid I was coming to I had the impression I'd be involved with the programme countries, but that's for the technical section, you don't really hear a lot about them, it was a shock that it was admin, I thought I would be involved with the countries, that's what I wanted.
>
> (Richard, Civil Servant, 30 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

He had wanted to be involved with the programme countries, perhaps to interact more with the grassroots of what it was that development actually did, but was disappointed that he couldn't be involved in 'making a difference.' Referring back to what he had said,

I wrote in the margin of the notes when I transcribed them '*seems disappointed*' (Field notes, 30 June 2006).

> There should be more of an emphasis on the admin staff getting to understand the type of environment the Development Specialists are working in, to get to know the countries, its things like that that would really make a difference, so we all understand what's at stake and exactly how we all fit into the big picture.
>
> (Richard, Civil Servant, 30 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Richard continued:

> It seemed like a chance to do proper service work, rather than statistics that got very stale, I wanted to be involved with developing countries that it would be rewarding, I wanted to be a small part of it, to help the specialists do their job.
>
> (Richard, Civil Servant, 30 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Richard's idea that moving to a job in development would be more fulfilling, more 'glamorous' and in some way more rewarding was evident. He talked about how the organisation was daunting, about difficulties in communication, where social connections were desired but somehow not possible. This was interesting to me in view of the fact that Irish development workers often state that effective communication is their comparative advantage. This relates back to Kilcullen's idea (2010) that there is a quintessentially Irish attitude to aid, influenced by its history and the involvement of Irish missionaries in Africa which creates an overarching sense of 'wanting to make a difference' (Kilcullen, 2010: 17). O'Sullivan claims that there is an official adaptation of the past to suit present agendas (2011: 2) which link the past and the present to portray the Irish in development as different, as more caring or selfless than others.

There certainly was a sense of relating to the programme countries from the development specialists, but for the civil servants, there was a sense of dislocation, and a desire to be more connected. The civil servants did the administrative work, whilst technical specialists were often seen as the 'real face' of Irish Aid as they had direct development experience. Each specialised group related mainly to themselves as any type of 'family.' Each group sat together at coffee, socialised outside of work together and there was little,

if any, cohesion between them. I was beginning to see that there seemed to be different manifestations of belonging, of how Richard as a civil servant did not feel part of the development culture, illustrating a segmentalised culture along professional lines. It was not until September 2007, that I began to notice how different the culture was for the Irish working in the Headquarters in Dublin than for those stationed in programme countries, which is further explored in Chapter Five.

The organisation as struggle: Gavin's story - the conflict between 'well-meaning' and 'professional' in aid-organisation cultures

Organisational members generally responded vibrantly to questions about culture and they had much to say about the introduction of people into the organisation. These themes were discussed with emotion and passion, often stirring people to want to talk further. One example of this is given by my interactions with Gavin. I had first met Gavin when he was working for Irish Aid externally as a consultant. He had seemed to me to really care about development and the work that he did, and took his role in it very seriously. During our first meeting, his presentation of self, had been different from the rest I had seen - less formal and more impassioned. It was six months later when I met him again. I felt that by this time I had a bit of a grasp on the organisation, in terms of who they were and what they did:

> The reason I want to talk to you today is that you have a unique insight from outside the organisation to inside.
>
> (Lorraine, 21 July 2006, my spoken introduction, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Gavin had worked in development since 1996 mainly overseas, on projects funded by SIDA and DFID. He had met a senior member of staff whilst overseas who proved to be his link back to Irish Aid. After he had told me about his previous work I asked him what his 'job spec' was now, and he paused before repeating my question, 'Er, My job spec?' I then rephrased the question, saying, 'What's your actual job here, what's your title?' I had used this formulation in interviews previously as both an ice breaker and as a question to help me classify the many organisational members. He paused again,

laughed, and then said, 'Well, that's a good question!' I was intrigued as to why he had laughed. He then went on to tell me that there was a discrepancy between the contract he had signed and an informal comment made to him after about where he fitted into the organisational hierarchy. He had found this disconcerting:

> I found it a little throwaway in terms of figuring where we fit…I came in with a certain view of the role and 'quote unquote' status that I would have and it's not that way
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Gavin was talking to as an outsider struggling to understand what was required of him to become an insider, in order to do his job and to fulfil his role. Gavin described his posting as 'a trial on both sides':

> Gavin: I'm re-learning the culture here
>
> Lorraine: and was it put to you that it was a trial or a year's contract?
>
> Gavin: 'a year's contract, *I'm* seeing it as a trial and I guess, I mean, obviously I want to do my work and I want to make a contribution etcetera, in terms of work satisfaction, I'm not sure if this is satisfying enough for me.
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Gavin's reasons for wanting to be in development were akin to Stirrat's portrayal of the 'missionary' working within development: - he had worked in the field previously, and his motivation for working in development was 'making a difference.' Like Richard, he stated that the work was different from what he had expected and that it was proving to be less satisfying than other work he had done outside of the organisation. I was intrigued as to whether this was linked to the culture at Irish Aid, and asked:

> Lorraine: How much of that is to do with the organisational culture?
>
> Gavin: (small laugh) (pauses)…No, I'm not used to it at all so it could simply be culture, um (long pause) I don't know (almost a whisper) the jury is out on that, I think that some people, I've heard for example, people say, he loves his job, and he is clearly the right person, (pauses) and, I'm .. I guess I expected we would have team meetings and everybody would know what everybody else was doing; I didn't expect such a bilateral relationship.

Lorraine: What do you mean by that?

Gavin: What I mean by that is, the, because we are part of a team *(pauses and laughs nervously a little)* we are not the same office but on the same team, so I don't feel that I belong to a team and I don't feel that there's the information and the responsibility socialised as a team.

Lorraine: It's interesting that you mention a team because I haven't heard that from either Jane or Tom in random conversations that we have had, does that team meet regularly? Gavin: We have *never* met.

Lorraine: Right, is it a formally structured thing?

Gavin: Well, I've heard Tom say 'Now we have a team' but I guess what we have is a group of individuals as opposed to a team. I haven't actually said this out loud since I started, I don't know, I sort of feel, inappropriately self-conscious a lot of the time, I feel under, really under a microscope.

(Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

Gavin had moved from discussing how he felt isolated to a metaphor of surveillance, where he struggled with the culture. He was not Irish but had worked in a development context for many years assimilating into different cultures and prior to this particular role he had worked with Irish Aid for many years as a consultant.

Well it's also the person I am too, you know, that there's ways in which you can be direct and there's ways in which you can't, and now I'm learning the Irish Aid cultural thing and I'm feeling that it is a struggle. I'm currently going through a period of feeling quite insecure and a little under…they see where I'm fitting in, where I'm not…it's because I came in with an assumption and operated according to that…and you know culture is that way, I've been reflecting on that since I've been here, you don't know more than anyone else, you don't get too big for your boots and don't get too small for your boots, so there are very subtle nuances about how to bring a group into line, I've been reflecting on that, growing up in it, stepping out of it and having that noose around my neck and now I'm back in it again.

(Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

The struggle he described seemed to be about more than Irish cultural differences, they seemed to be very specific to the organisation itself. Gavin's insecurity was based upon his inability to 'fit in' whereas as a consultant, he had been able to do that effortlessly. This mirrored by inability to fulfil a consultancy role as an academic researcher. In his

statement he had referred to the 'noose', inferring a sense of being stifled, suffocated and unable to breathe feely was also mentioned in an earlier sentence:

> It's a trial period (pause) I understand that the rope might be a little less tight around my neck if I inspire trust, do you know what I mean?
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

Put in this way, the control was in the hands of the respondent, but as we talked Gavin became more vocal and shifted the onus onto the organisation itself, arguing that it was restraining him through its nuances and its culture. Out of the analysis and coding of my data this indicated to me that the respondents were communicating a sense of powerlessness, where they felt separate from the organisation.

> Well I think that I have, to be absolutely honest, I actually have zero influence...no, that's not strictly true but it has a derivative influence and it's not a way that I find comfortable to work.
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

I also felt this way, and at the time Gavin's words resonated with me, and I felt myself identifying with him in a deeper way than I had with other organisational members. Another area that resonated strongly with me was in the ownership of my research. I felt torn, that my work was intended for two projects, the LEARN project and my PhD, and my growing disillusionment was partly due to not feeling that I was fulfilling either remit. Gavin had said:

> Gavin: Work satisfaction would be better for me if I had a couple of things that were *really mine*, to work on in development (Technical Specialist 21 July 2006, Interview, HQ Dublin).

His identity was reflected through an idea of power and ownership in his professional role:

> Gavin: I've just lost my identity (sighs)
>
> Lorraine: I mean, you spoke to me before and said, when you started this job about the reason you were in the field of development was to make a difference, do you still feel that? *(He sighs again).*

(Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

I also felt this at the time that my identity was confused; Gavin's statement echoed my own. I too felt that I had intended to 'make a difference' – to achieve a PhD within the funded timeframe of three years, to be 'successful' and efficient - to produce a learning system - I *too* was disillusioned. It was ten months later on May 29, 2007 that I was able to ask about Gavin's experience from the other side, speaking to the person whom he reported to in the organisation. Gavin had since left the employment of Irish Aid.

Lorraine: You've lost Gavin? Was it illuminating to have someone at HQ that had done a lot of field engagement?

Niamh: To be very honest it didn't work out. As you probably know his contract was to go to the end of March but we cut it (29 May 2007, Interview, HQ Dublin).

She continued as if to validate herself, changing the tense of her sentence:

Niamh: ...he wasn't able to make that shift, um, and was I would say, was quite, very focused on how NGOs work, and not again able to make the shift between how NGOs operate and how development agencies such as Irish Aid operates, the different processes and structures that we work through, at country level, he wasn't able to make that shift at all.

(Niamh, Technical Specialist, 29 May 2007, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Niamh mentioned the term 'shift' three times, in terms of 'making that shift' into the organisation, but more importantly, shifting into the organisational culture. This was something I thought at the time and made an entry in my field notes: *Struggled with institutional culture?* (Field notes, 29 May 2007). 'Shifting' implied moving from one arena into another, from outsider to insider, from NGO worker in the field to development professional within a donor organisation, Stirrat discusses this shift as a part of professionalisation:

Finally, and leading on from the last point, missionaries frequently become mercenaries. In part this is the result of NGOs becoming increasingly professionalized... In part it is the result of individuals creating a career path which takes them from the world of the

> NGOs to the world of the development professionals. Occasionally there are cases of people moving the other way but these are rare. Experience built up in the world of the missionaries forms the basis for a career in the world of the mercenaries (Stirrat 2008: 413).

This point made by Stirrat (2008) whereby those categorised as missionaries can morph into mercenaries, more concerned with money than making a difference, was problematic in this case, partly due to the sense of belonging and feeling that the role and its expectations were not a 'good fit', but it is indicative of a struggle with the organisational culture and the notion of belonging:

> So I think it's a self-effacing culture that doesn't do justice to the professionalism that's required [tape change] I think the culture is struggling with, obviously, change management, hugely, and it's struggling with being well-meaning to being professional - the bureaucratic approach is that anybody can do it, you keep changing person and anybody can do it - to people who believe *not* anybody can do it and its struggling with all of that, and Irish NGO culture is pretty much the same way. It's struggling with its transition from well-meaning to professional and they are not there yet, so partly it's just that thing, aside from how the culture operates within itself, but partly it's just that thing, the transition from well-meaning to professional.
>
> (Gavin, Technical Specialist, 21 July 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ, Dublin).

Gavin uses the phrase 'struggling with being well-meaning to being professional' which encapsulates development culture more accurately than Stirrat's rather clumsy classifications. What Gavin's experience shows is that when a particular meaning is ascribed to 'we' in the organisation, signalling to those who belong to a particular normative order, a message is simultaneously sent out to organisational members who do *not* belong, or feel alienated from the organisation in some way. This exemplifies Weber's distinction between a 'consciousness of kind' and a 'consciousness of difference' (Weber, 1922) where cultural meanings have the potential to both create congregation and segregation. As shown in Gavin's story, the culture of belonging can be a more fluid struggle than inhabiting one typology over another. As Gavin lamented the struggle between formerly being a consultant and 'fitting in' and then not 'fitting in' when his role changed to a role of development official – I too was secretly lamenting that I was fulfilling neither role ascribed to me, I was not able to give them an ICT based learning system *or* fulfil my requirement in producing a PhD for my supervisor. The next

section explores a different narrative, one where the experience of belonging manifested itself in the perceived alienation from, and conflict with, the organisation itself.

The organisation as an anathema: Deirdre's Story - conflict and disharmony as the organisation is seen to be preventing learning

Deirdre echoed Gavin's sentiments, yet with a different emphasis. For Deirdre, the system was what prevented her from doing her job; she did not struggle with feeling outside of it in the same way as Gavin but felt that she was somehow working against the organisation. Deirdre, a technical specialist, was speaking to me on the first day of my entry to the organisation and introduces the idea that the organisation was working against its members, actually preventing them from doing their work in an effective and productive manner, and that this may somehow be linked to organisational culture. Deidre had been discussing the organisational culture at Irish Aid and I had commented upon decentralisation and made reference to the fact that many staff members seemed concerned over the impending changes. There had been a long pause and I had made another comment to try and get Deirdre to open up to me.

> Lorraine: I think across the board there are concerns about the quality with decentralisation looming, a very large percentage of staff are dedicated and specifically so in the technical section with enormous workloads *(Trying to prompt commentary from Deirdre).*

The prompting worked as Deirdre launched into a speech about organisational culture where she explained the structure to me:

> Deirdre: I think the… if you look at organisational culture you will find among specialists there's a different culture than the general civil service culture, and it comes out of the backgrounds of the specialists who, for the most part, have spent quite a number of years working overseas in developing countries, with NGOs as volunteers, semi volunteer status, out of an interest and commitment to the needs in developing countries, come back and joined an organisation where they can use their skills and maintain that commitment
>
> (Deirdre, Technical Specialist, 25 April 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Within the organisation Deirdre was quite specific about her sense of belonging; she acknowledged this professional role whilst seeming knowledgeable about the organisational culture as being a role culture.

> Deirdre: ...but there's a way that you work in that context, especially NGOs that's very different from the way Government works because Government organisational culture, if you look at that, it's more of a role culture, more focused on process rather than results, it's not results focused at all, that's not the way civil service works, the civil service is designed to serve the politicians and their needs, it's not about visibility, it's not about producing results primarily...and I think the specialists as a group find that a difficult environment to work in, where some of the way decisions are made make no sense whatsoever.
>
> (Deirdre, Technical Specialist, 25 April 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

The perceptions of the organisation as harmonious and consensual, or alternatively conspiring against organisational members doing their work, may be simplification, as organisational members juggle with their identity within it and their sense of belonging. Like Albert and Whetten (1985) who studied an organisation beset by a double identity, consisting of both a normative dimension and a utilitarian one, I found elements within this organisation also to have a conflict between the *'Gesellschaft'* type of social relations (a hypothetical mode of society made up of self-serving individuals linked by impersonal ties) which are largely based upon interest and exchange, requiring a partial inclusion of the personality of the organisational member and the '*Gemeinschaft's*' type of solidarity and a communal sense of collective identity. Consequently a disjuncture emerges between 'who we think we are as an organisation' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 271) and who we might actually be.

Exploring culture through a member's sense of belonging or allegiance to an organisation is not without its problems. Culture originated from the social sciences however became appropriated by the rational tradition whereby a technical and positivistic approach used this new ideology to benefit management and help consultants who were looking for new ways to create a more effective organisation (Alvesson, 2002: 32). Culture therefore became seen as a mechanism of control, and corporate culture functionalists saw culture as social glue (Alvesson, 2002: 32), one that could command loyalty and strengthen organisations to give them the competitive advantage. This incorporation of culture into

the mainstream usage of consultants and management gave them supposed quasi-magical properties whereby corporate culture became a widely used tool for managing both the beliefs and the ideals of organisational workers, fuelled by a functionalist perspective of fixing the organisation to make it more efficient.

The disharmony and disillusionment expressed by organisational members, was mirroring how I felt within the organisation, unable to find harmony between my two statuses, and I *had* unwittingly used terms like conjure, inadvertently falling into the consultants role of proposing quasi-magical solutions. As Adams and Ingersoll (1988) state, the socio-historical context of technical rationality that characterises many organisations does not merely disappear because the problems of organisational life are formulated in terms of organisational culture. I needed to further explore this idea of conflict and disharmony.

This analysis of the cultural landscape in which conflict, disharmony and blame were prevalent and linked to organisational learning stems from Weber (1922). Drawing on the tradition of conflict, we can see certain groups within organisations who develop various ways of upholding the status quo, for instance, terming *certain* individuals as belonging or not, as insiders or outsiders and legitimating covert power struggles against other types of employees. This struggle can be seen also in the development of the'expert' culture where those with the 'knowledge' impart their wisdom to others, initiating them into their arena of becoming knowledge experts themselves.

Specialised groups with their own values and expertise and often express them in their own terminology. It can be complex to bridge the internal boundaries that emerge between groups and therefore prove difficult to integrate the learning from each of them into a wider goal of organisational learning. Transmitting knowledge involves the transference of values, and power is exerted in the form of those who 'know' and those who do not. We can see this as a form of conflict in the cases of Gavin, Deirdre and Daniel who each had a certain worldview to which they wanted me to conform. I was at the time though unaware of the role I wanted *them* to perform for me.

Morgan (2006) discusses the metaphor of politics as highlighting issues of conflict and power, where tension arises between the bureaucratic ('we are supposed to do it this way'), the technocratic ('it's best to do it this way') and the democratic ('how shall we do it?') and states that in each case the paths of action depend upon the power relations of organisational actors (Morgan, 2006: 156). One instance of conflict was perceived to be between organisation actors and the organisation as if existing independently of its members, as illustrated by the quote below:

> It's not about designing an organisation to meet your needs, and there's inflexibility, *huge* inflexibility...and I think a particular set of frustrations among specialists around the changes that are taking place, that are linked to that, people who are here because they want to get a job done and the organisation *seems to contrive to actually stop you doing your work.*
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin, *my italics*).

In essence the system is perceived as being hugely inflexible which was frustrating for the technical specialists, as the system itself became a disincentive to getting work done. If the system does not motivate people, this may manifest in the feeling that the organisation itself doesn't want you to achieve. This form of conflict may be built into various structures, roles or attitudes, or may arise due to professional categories and different treatment of each group, or perceptions of inequality. Organisations are often systems of competition and collaboration and therefore tension invariably *must* arise. Within Irish Aid, much tension seemed to arise from the different professional categories that co-existed. I asked one organisational member about the perceived disjuncture between the working groups within the organisation in June 2006:

> Lorraine: How do you see the different groups working here?
>
> Cathal: Each group has its own way of working, of language, ultimately the different sectors or groups all have different goals, the civil servants, there is a civil service structure, you might spend your whole career in aid programmes, there's a permanency, that you don't have if you have technical specialists for example, they don't have that career structure, they're just on contracts, there isn't a permanency like with civil servants and there's a cleavage between civil servants and diplomats, because they both progress on different tracks.

(Cathal, Technical Specialist, 29 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This interplay between professional identity and desired organisational image or position mirrors the imbrications of both identity and culture. This cleavage of differences highlights how the 'other' is perceived. This interrelatedness can be seen in the connections people draw between professional cultures:

> Lorraine: I'm very interested in DCI as a mixture of cultures…how do you feel that technical fits in with the other sectors?'
>
> Daniel: I wouldn't say it's a straight forward fit, I think there's a sense that the real organisation is the civil servants and the diplomats and the technical staff are support staff to an extent, not central to the running of the programme.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Culture was seen as emanating from divisions that separated working groups, like profession, position and working status within the organisation. Yet, simplifying an organisation to a *single* culture belies the internal divisions and groups that often arise. Large organisations often have multiple subdivisions or subcultures which may form according to technological innovation, segmentation, ideological differences or different career paths (Van Maanen and Barley 1985). When these groups were referred to in interview settings in the exploratory phase, the organisation had been referred to as 'schizophrenic' (Kieran, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, Interview, HQ Dublin). The differing perspectives on conflict, tensions, fragmentation and professional roles are interesting because they all highlight some area where tension is being exacerbated, either by pointing the finger at staff turnover, moving location or differing subcultures or roles. These tensions are not fixed, but are changing, temporal and fragmented, not to be seen as representing subjective reality but as indicative of the changing nature of the problem. Subsequently 'belonging' itself becomes contested and changeable: who belongs and who doesn't is transient and fluid, and fragmentation occurs. This notion of belonging - of being inside and outside of the organisation - was played out as being partly the reason as to why conflict existed and cited as having an impact on daily working lives. One person spoke of an inner circle (the politicians) and everyone else

being 'out in the cold' and 'being in the outer circle' (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, Interview, HQ Dublin).

This separation of belonging was also reflected in the many discussions on role culture and professional status. By naming different groups as being in an 'inside' role, and then those named groups naming others as belonging to the 'real' organisation it became evident that organisational identity shifts according to perspective. 'Belonging' was therefore a shifting dynamic, a fluid entity masquerading as a static one. Tensions can be seen in conflicting discourses, but tensions are changing, not fixed, temporal, fragmented, and emergent - not to be seen as representing reality but as indicative of the changing nature of the problem. Ethnographers can gain insight into these tensions, conflict and resistance through interpretation of meanings by 'listening to dissonances between formal systems of control and the reactions of workers to them' (Smith, 2001: 224). When respondents blamed the system for being inflexible and frustrating, or expressed feelings such as 'the organisation itself doesn't want you to achieve,' this gave me a feeling of a monolithic, never-changing bureaucratic system, where a person was pitted against the system. Daniel's vocal exasperation with the system – as being out to spite him -was reiterated again within the meeting that is discussed in Chapter Five.

The Researchers Story - Struggling to Find My Place

It was the first day in the organisation and my palms were sweating. I was making mental notes to not gabble as I had a tendency to when I was really nervous; Daniel held the door open for me that separated the rest of the building from Irish Aid. 'What part of IT is your speciality?' He asked, I looked at my shoes and tugged at my ill-fitting newly bought suit, 'Erm... I'm not in IT' I answered, 'I'm an anthropologist.'

My identity as perceived 'expert' was in essence a cultural one, where 'experts' exercise power over those 'being developed' through both professionalisation and institutionalisation. Institutionalisation is achieved through aid agencies, universities, international organisations and voluntary organisations which work 'as a network that organizes visibility and makes the exercise of power possible' (Escobar, 1988: 431). Yet

despite the involvement of researchers entrenched in the social sciences, many of the ideologies that circulate in development organisations seem to emulate the idea that planned interventions and policy models are able to predict and control the future; that knowledge is neutral and objective; and can be collected and recast as a one-size-fits-all approach. This ideology is clearly rooted in a positivistic framework. However, what emerged from many interactions within my own data was multiple and contradictory ideas around the collection of such knowledge and even what constituted such knowledge.

I sat with my head in my hands in the toilet cubicle; where was I going with all this, where was my researcher objectivity, how would I pass this as proper research? 'Why are you looking at culture?' he'd asked me, and he seemed so sure I was wrong, but everything screamed out to me this organisation's culture was why it was like a silo, so lacking in communication, so stubborn in the face of wanting change on one hand, and defying it on the other; it was all a mass of contradictions and my head was swimming. I sat there for a while; got up when I was sure no one was there and splashed my face with cold water. Taking a deep breath I smoothed my suit down, pushed open the door and went back out there.

Baumard states that 'knowledge is paradoxical: the more we see it, the more it escapes us, the more we contain it the more it evaporates' (Baumard, 2000: 111). Writing research has a social effect of its own; you are detached from the relationship when you take time to reflect upon it, and this detachment re-determines the relationships as you reflect upon it. In Baumard's own words, the study of knowledge 'returns us to the question of our own awareness.'

Peddling snake oil?

The interview with Gavin was more personal than others I had experienced; there was an emotional connection that went beyond the boundaries of professional researcher. I found myself entering the realm of colluder, of therapist and confidante (of which much was said in confidence and cannot be used as data). I was in a position whereby the 'expressive coherence' (Goffman, 1959: 141) of 'the detached researcher' had been disrupted - the professional image had shifted and a different identity was emerging.

Gavin had been talking to me about a piece of work he had done that was badly received and how his sense of self changed, through the perception of what it was that he had done wrong. In telling me the story, I found myself acting as therapist, where I made statements like:

> 'Did you feel powerless in this situation?'
>
> (26 July 2006, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin)
>
> 'Do you think that's because of the working environment or something more personal?'
>
> (26 July 2006, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin)
>
> '...and what was it that surprised you about that interaction?'
>
> (28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin)

The therapist role was not the only one I freely adopted during interviews. I was clearly moving from one identity - that of objective researcher - and into a more personal space, but my role changed according to whom I interacted with. I was also manifesting the power relations as external to myself, as if I was not a part of the fabric of the power knowledge discourse too. I was still struggling to feel like a detached researcher, and was secretly growing uneasy that I had 'contaminated my data' by getting too personal.

It is in the fieldwork setting that the respondents learn who we are, and as we actively interact with them we shape both of our experiences through the telling of stories. This was evident when one particular member of staff opened up to me. I had asked her if she felt her experience was utilised at Irish Aid:

> Sorcha: No definitely not, the issue there is (whispers) the close link to civil service, I mean we are not civil service, we are contract, but the idea of it is that we are all generalists, that we can be dropped anywhere and we can do the job, and the civil service don't want to acknowledge that, they need expertise, sometimes you see people that just don't match, acknowledging that they need expertise, there's a struggle there with how they operate.
>
> (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Respondents react to us as individuals, they 'size us up' and may see us as something other than researchers. In this process, ethnographers frequently find themselves in a process of denying one social self over another. Researchers are often 'in different guises [that they are] using their professional selves to deny or isolate other selves' (Davies 1990: 228). This was true of me in this role as the fixer, the 'provider of the solution.' As Okely suggests:

> The autobiographical insertion is different from the stamp of author's authority: not simply 'I was there', but the self and category whom the others confronted, received and confided in (Okely, 1992: 24).

Reflexive fieldwork is undertaken not only from 'an outside looking in' perspective but is also informed by the inner experience. I had attempted to approach my semi- structured interviewing in a professional manner, wearing the 'researcher hat,' but in this setting the self invariably leaks out. My own preconceptions, opinions, experiences and attitude invariably filter through and are communicated to the interviewee, sometimes passively and sometimes more directly. The interaction of the 'ethnographer as self' and 'ethnographer as other' became more complex as I delved deeper into the organisation and became more socialised into their way of being. It was only upon deep retrospective reflection, that I began to realise that I had also become 'ethnographer as informant' in *my own work*, talking to organisational members in a disclosing fashion, sharing with them my personal insights and facilitating an atmosphere of almost conspiracy - conspiring with them against this bureaucratic 'machine.'

Tension was rising as I felt conflicted by the very same paradoxes I saw in the organisation I was studying. On the one hand, I was to present a document telling them how my research would be useful and how it would practically solve their problems, and on the other hand I was sympathising with some interview respondents as to their daily pressures and exasperation at the conflicts they faced in their search for belonging. The irony was not lost on me. Due to this internal conflict I felt that I was perhaps trying to peddle managerial snake oil (Sorenson, 1999). Ramalingam et al, (2008) apply this term from Sorenson to organisational learning and complexity theory, meaning Western confidence tricksters who offer shares in a highly valuable but fictional commodity.

Inability to act: 'why didn't you just introduce them?'

> *Which hat am I wearing? When am I supposed to be a researcher exploring their meaning making? And when am I supposed to be a consultant fixing them? (Field notes, 27 July 2006).*

Part of the feeling that I may be 'peddling snake oil,' selling an idea of a solution, a highly valuable but fictional commodity, emanated from the dual role I held. I was seen as a quasi-consultant, but I had no expertise in creating organisational learning systems for companies. At times I transgressed the boundaries of a traditional type of consultant, being less professional and more relational, and was also always conscious of generating data for my thesis, in which I also felt I was transgressing boundaries, as my objective researcher status was far more subjective and involved than I had anticipated. The struggles between different identities that emerge during the research process are exemplified as I felt unable to act, to intervene, and link two people together. The interaction occurred after a previous respondent, who I had interviewed in June 2006, mentioned that there was another person that he thought I should speak to:

> There's a girl in my section, who's doing a Masters in development, and when she started she was asked would she like to go to any particular area and she said, 'I'd really like to be in an area I could put my studies to good use', so she assumed she'd be in the technical specialists area, and now she's doing work for admin, it's very disconcerting for her, to know that she said it to them and then it seemed to be ignored. If something doesn't happen she will have to go and find another job, which is a huge shame, because she is actually studying this area but doesn't get to use it.
>
> (Richard, Civil Servant, June 6 2006, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

It was not until eleven months later that I finally met her and asked her if we could have a chat. My first question to her was about her position in the organisation and she had seemed a little confused:

> Lorraine: And you're working in what capacity, with whom?
>
> Laura: Well… it's kind of…not really…I don't really know exactly what my job is yet… but it's basically sort of managing the admin function out there, but there's going to be some extra stuff as well…hopefully.

(Laura, Civil Servant, 16 May 2007, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

She had been in the organisation a year and had just changed to the technical section in order to avoid going to Limerick (the technical section were staying in Dublin). Another reason for her move to this section was to avoid the largely administrative nature of the role she had held as a civil servant in her previous posting. She told me that she had really wanted to work in development as she was doing a Master's degree and that her thesis was on development and that even by taking an admin officer post she stood a better chance of 'doing some work that I would like to do, here I've a better chance.' So here was a member of staff that had a clear goal, was furthering her education to get her closer to that goal and had moved from one civil service department to the technical section within Irish Aid in order to try to achieve that. But she seemed troubled and when I probed a little further she told me:

> I know my function is in admin and I said that, and I don't have an issue doing admin but what I do have an issue with is doing only administration and....that's why I had to get out of [her previous job] because that's all I was going to be doing, here I think I see, more of an opportunity of doing stuff other than administration; like helping out with the pulling out of the statistics, doing a bit of reading, so that's the kind of thing I want to be doing ...so you've a better chance of getting some kind of meaty work to do.
>
> (Laura, Civil Servant, 16 May 2007, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This perception of 'meaty work' meant the policy and statistics side of work in the organisation. She also told me that if she was to do just admin, even though she had more skills to offer, that she could be 'just anybody'; by developing her skills she was inferring she could be 'somebody' within the organisation. She was frustrated about this and said:

> I don't see the point in them spending and putting so much of our tax-payers' money into developing education and skills in the people that they have in the jobs and then completely ignoring them when they're there which is what it seems to be.
>
> (Laura, Civil Servant, 16 May 2007, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

As I concluded the informal interview with her I felt sympathy for her frustration and hoped that she would end up working in a job that would be more fulfilling. A few days later, after a coffee and some lunch, I had returned to an available desk in the technical section office and made myself comfortable to type up my notes. One of the technical specialists asked if I had a few minutes and I popped into his office. This office was one of the four closed offices that flanked the civil servants' working spaces in the middle of the room – open-plan tables with screens cutting the tables into quarters. He asked me if he could have a quick chat with me about statistics as they were 'short in areas and needed someone'. I told him I was not trained in statistical analysis, made some small talk with him and returned to my desk. I wrote in my field notes at the time:

> *One of the managers asked me a question about stats... Question to self... There must be someone in Irish Aid that could do this and gain credits for this but they have no skills basis/list., have overheard them say all the learning goes on for the consultants and leaves with them... Speak to human resources about this skills list. Do they know who can do what in the org? NO!'* (Field notes, 16 May 2007).

I had the ability to hook those two people up, to tell that person, 'Hey, there's somebody who's been here a year who feels unfulfilled, who has moved just a few feet away from you, and you have no idea what skills she has generated, how she longs to be given a chance to get into a 'meatier' role, and you need the skills she has right now. But I did not. I wrote about it in my field notes. It was not until five years later, when I was recounting this story to my supervisor that she exclaimed 'Why didn't you just introduce them?'

Such a simple question, so why hadn't I? In my normal everyday life of being quite an extrovert personality, a teacher, a confident woman, why on earth hadn't I just sorted it out? This position was complicated by the multiple changing dialectics of identity within the research meaning that I felt unable to operate as a 'human being' and merely connect the two people together. It was as if working under the opposing paradigms of positivism and interpretivism were paralysing me - as if caught in a cross beam. A complex interplay of meanings was reflexively created as a result of the interactions between researcher and researched, and I came to realise that it was not only due to my interactions with the respondents that I felt my role changed, but that *I too was searching*

for belonging within this organisation, I was adjusting myself and my roles to be seen as one of the rebels, someone who was critical of the bureaucratic machine and its manifestations. It was certainly strange behaviour once I began to reflect upon it: what had prevented me being myself? And why couldn't I do that - if I could collude freely with Gavin, even offering him career advice, off the record, that was about perhaps leaving the organisation. Reflecting upon this, I realised that it resonated with an important question in ethnography, and indeed of autoethnography as an extension of it, namely that of the position of the researcher. It came back to the notion of belonging and relationships: to Laura I had represented a researcher, and even though she had spoken from her heart, there was not the same relationship present as there was with Gavin. I identified with Gavin: I too felt outside of the organisation, unsure of how my research would be received, I too felt organisational disapproval when I was told 'what use is there looking at culture?'

Challenging my Cultural Approach: Daniel's Expectations of a Learning System

This section describes how I felt when told that looking at 'culture' would be possibly futile – it illustrates the challenge I felt, between my natural default position of anthropologist – where looking at culture would be an obvious entry point to an organisation and the project's remit. My exchanges and interactions with Daniel are indicative of my early feelings of conflict.

When I had first expressed an interest in exploring the organisation culture to Daniel, the gatekeeper of the project I had asked Daniel who he liaised with, and if he could show me on the organigram. His role as gatekeeper was to be the interface between the LEARN project the organisation. For me, part of exploring the culture was finding out who interacted with whom. However, he was not happy with this idea. His tone became a little gruff and he seemed dismissive of my request:

> Daniel: It's not an easy way to focus it, I engage with all the sections, I would engage less with emergency and recovery and that's interesting in that they don't tend to look to technical section for support in health…on country side both programme countries one and two…not so much on corporate services…

> Lorraine: Would it be feasible to draw up a network plan of who you interact with on a weekly basis?
>
> Daniel: What would that tell you? Because it varies so vastly, there's no representative week, there isn't a pattern to it.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 25 April 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Even though I was beginning to feel disillusioned I was persistent, so I changed tactic and asked another question:

> Lorraine: Ok, so, to put it another way, where does your engagement start and stop.
>
> Daniel: There isn't a clear boundary...looking at these issues...what is the objective of what you (Lorraine) are trying to achieve? I don't have a handle on that now, what is going to be the practical outcome of looking at organisational culture? Linked to organisational learning?
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 25 April 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

At the time, I felt that I was getting nowhere and felt that he did not like the idea of exploring the culture, as he did not see the value in it - looking at culture seemed to have no practical outcome for him, and he continued to reiterate this point:

> What practical outcome is there? Organisational culture is not changeable, deficiencies are recognised but we can't do anything about them for organisational reasons...like we need more staff and can't get it, that has a huge effect -What can you offer us though looking at culture that helps us in what we actually do?
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 25 April 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

This was challenging for me as a researcher, Daniel had expected an IT expert, and yet here I was, an anthropologist, concerned about generating data for my PhD. Yet within the same interview of interaction Daniel did a turn-around, when only two minutes later he stated:

> Where am I going with all this...just to say not to focus too much on where this is going to lead practically on technical section or my role, but linked to the management of the organisation and the kind of things that might be done in a practical way to make our organisation more effective, that's really what this is about...if we don't get something in

> that area we won't feel satisfied that it's really helped us...organisational culture is a fascinating area...and if you can get people to talk frankly here, it's a very interesting case study...but don't make too many assumptions about decentralisation...don't assume anything will happen.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 25 April 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Daniel's statement was contradictory: to paraphrase his words, he seems to be saying, 'I don't know why you'd look at culture – it won't be useful - but it's a fascinating area - and it could be interesting'. If Daniel was viewing me as a consultant, with an alleged speciality in ICT, looking at the organisational culture might seem an unusual choice. However, for an anthropologist defaulting to ethnographic observation, culture as an entry point into the organisation made much more sense. It was perhaps not the choice of entry point that was so important, but was the dual roles I inhabited that this illustrates.

Struggling with Dual Roles: What does it mean to be a Consultant?

Even at the time, I could see that I was struggling with dual roles of researcher and consultant, and those in turn were informing my outlook and experiences. The contextual and subjective nature was not restricted to the research subjects but also to my own experiences. Traditional scientific approaches require the researcher to put themselves aside, viewing the self as a contaminant (Wall, 2006), and this is often in line with a positivist paradigm. I was unable to put myself aside; I was unable to see organisational learning and my research as something outside of myself, and consequently my own journey was becoming as much about paradox, conflict and dysfunction, cohesion and harmony (Gluckman, 1955) as the organisational culture that I was focusing on. Looking at culture, and framing my first research questions around culture, had been the entry point for exploring disharmony as well as consensus, and was uncovering a myriad of manifestations of both illusion and disillusion: both in the organisation and within myself. When Gavin stated that he didn't expect a 'bilateral relationship' he intimated that he was expecting more cohesion from the organisation, but found it to be disillusioning due to being caught between expectation and reality. This was also my experience. It echoed the work of Albert and Whetten (1985) who stated that a disjuncture emerges between 'who we think we are' and who we might actually be.

This 'disjuncture' can be explored through my perceived role as a consultant. I have spoken of it as a 'quasi' role, meaning apparently but not really or seemingly. It was not a role I knew I had upon entering the organisation, I hadn't really given it much thought, possibly due to the quick nature of my entry to the organisation, only a month after being accepted onto the funded PhD programme. It was really during the first week there, on the exploratory phase that I realised I was not 'researcher,' but occupied a new liminal space between academia and practice. The movement between 'composition of selves' within social spaces (Young, 2005: 154) (as documented in Chapter Two: Between the Two Phases) became more important as the research advanced. In Chapter Three (Summary and Conclusions) I pondered over whether the positioning of Irish Aid, both culturally and historically were affecting my role as consultant, in that they were decentralising. However, it is this Chapter that really questions what this ascribed role meant.

Short term consultants are employed in development agencies in a range of activities, from assisting policy formulation to monitoring or evaluating particular projects, and what characterises their work is that they are hired to produce a particular output that feeds into a larger whole (Stirrat, 2000: 34). The ability of a consultant to perform is an 'expected professionalism', but according to Stirrat (2000) what this *actually* means is vague as it could refer to technical competence. Stirrat states that most consultants operate through a formal commitment to a particular reality with a faith in rationality:

> The task of the consultant is to identify, through the exercise of rational thought and investigation, these systematic linkages. Thus the basic questions which are asked are 'why' or 'how' questions based on the principles of cause and effect (Stirrat, 2000: 36).

Stirrat further states that it is due to this rational framework, that planned interventions with pre-designated results are possible. This resonates exactly with the Learn project's mandate of providing an organisational learning system as a pre-designated solution. Had I been solely a consultant, with a different sense of defined professionalism perhaps this project would have been different. However, as a quasi-consultant with a secondary role as academic researcher, the boundaries were more fluid. Gavin lamented his

struggle between 'fitting in' and 'not fitting in' and at different times I felt both of these emotions. This theme is further expanded upon in Chapter Eight.

From substantialism towards relationalism?

The idea of 'managing for results' within development is according to Eyben an expression of a historically dominant mode of thought in international aid that she calls 'substantialism' – which sees the world primarily in terms of 'entities' (Eyben, 2010: 382). Eyben believes that substantialism persists as the dominant mode of thought and representation of aid practice. This perspective, of dividing the development world into entities such as 'poverty' or 'rights' essentialises and separates, rather than seeing connections between them. This echoes Ritzer's idea of mechanisation and task orientated frameworks. Knowledge itself can be viewed through this perspective, as asking how an organisation thinks (or learns) echoes the silo'd mentality of organisational learning being an add on, rather than intrinsically connected to all aspects of the organisation and one where problems are conceptualised in terms of mechanisms and results (Eyben, 2010: 389).

Eyben sees the opposite of substantialism as being relationalism. Rather than being observers, we ourselves are in the system according to a relational view. Eyben (2008) notes how 'there is a perception of aid as a contract and exemplifies the dominant 'philosophical plumbing' of donor organisations (Eyben, 2008: 3). Eyben (2008) proposes that aid should be viewed through a lens of 'relationalism'which highlights how people act shaped by their position in relation to others. This, I argue, was the case in my interactions with Laura. Eyben continues that:

> 'relationalism'understands entities as mutable, shaped by their position in relation to others. Relational notions, married to ideas of process and complexity illuminate the messy and contradictory quality of aid relations that substantialism finds difficult to cope with (Eyben, 2008: 3).

Eyben links this idea to the embeddedness of the relational context to the social sciences, where ethnographic work is undertaken through many relationships and personal connections:

> Many social anthropologists are relationalists, considering individuals as inseparable from the relational contexts in which they are embedded. Anthropologists objecting to methodological individualism explain the connection between individuals and their social world as a simultaneous process of people making society and of society making people (Eyben, 2008: 20).

A relational framework can illuminate cultural assumptions that can impact upon learning; 'opportunities [for learning],' Ashton suggests, 'are provided through the operation of interpersonal relationships in the workplace' (Ashton 2004: 49). De Long and Fahey (2000) similarly argue that cultural assumptions can shape both the form and function of social interactions and relationships within organisations:

> The rules (e.g. 'don't interrupt a superior'…) and practices (e.g. meeting formats and frequencies…) that determine the environment within which people communicate (Fahey, 2000: 120).

The operation of interpersonal relationships had been mentioned by Daniel who had spoken about leaning and capacity in the relationships he had fostered:

> I must say … and so much of what I've done over the last year, I spent a lot of time developing relationships, people, institutions…and I really worry that I'm doing things that are not rooted and grounded in the organisation.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 26 July 2006, transcribed from tape recorded interview, HQ Dublin).

Like Gavin and Daniel, I could identify with belonging and not belonging, inhabiting and enacting the role of the insider and outsider simultaneously, intertwined with the notions of power and knowledge. Eyben (2009) calls this 'a condition of permanent liminality' (2009: 85) and proposes that:

> without learning to critically engage with and respond reflexively to the dilemmas of power and knowledge that shape the aid system, international aid organisations cannot be effective in achieving their goals of poverty reduction and greater social justice (Eyben 2009: 72).

To respond to these dilemmas she advises that:

> The critically constructive anthropologist is best positioned as neither insider nor outsider, retaining the empathy for the insider's position while sufficiently distant to cultivate a critical faculty' (Eyben 2009: 72).

I felt challenged by this idea, I certainly had empathy for the insider's position, but whilst I was there, generating data through an interactive process, I was also trying to alternate between being 'sufficiently distant' and being in collusion based on identification, relationship and emotional connection. This resonates with what Eyben states, that:

> Sustained liminality and the accompanying identity confusion make life complicated and full of quandaries (Eyben 2009: 72).

Being in such a place of liminality, however, offers surprise and 'intellectual excitement and the possibility of discovering unexpected pathways of personal and organisational change' (Eyben 2009: 72) which Eyben finds can often lead to discovering ways of helping development organisations achieve their objectives and aspirations. This liminality is also the edge whereby I moved from illusion to disillusion and back again, a state of research flux which is difficult to analyse and write up, but may enable the researcher to play:

> ...a role in supporting critical learning and reflection by aid agency staff, helping them also to be inside and outside at the same time (Eyben 2009: 95).

Acting 'strangely' within the research situation is indicative of the tension between being insider *and* outsider, a tightrope walked by the researcher, but also by the recipients, in knowing what to disclose to whom and when. Laura's seeming lack of relations within the organisation and connection with me, rendered me feeling that I was more objective and impartial than I had been with Gavin, based upon our relationship and sense of intimacy through our relationship.

Summary and Conclusions

Using Sack's first 'Thought/Realised' alternations 'At first I thought...' led me to think that looking at culture would engender an understanding of organisational learning in Irish Aid. I began this Chapter by stating that by exploring the culture of Irish Aid I had

initially hoped it would help me navigate the internal politics, conflict and power differentials that were emerging from the data. I began with many questions, exploring where culture resides, and whether a unified organisational culture existed, or a multitude of fragmented ones. I was also interested to see if the appropriated anthropological discourse of organisation as 'family' resonated within the organisation.

I came to realise that when people spoke about the induction process (entering the organisation), they were also expressing a need for further networking and a desire for social communication that went beyond their professional group, to engage with development in a deeper and more informed way. This was an interesting point, as the external view of *how* the Irish *do* development, in being seen as effective communicators (Kilcullen, 2010) was questioned by those working *within* the development donor organisation of Ireland. The idea of the Irish doing development differently from other nationalities resides in this discourse of empathy and friendliness (Murphy, 2012:8), and within this 'official adaptation of the past to suit present agendas' (O'Sullivan, 2011: 2) the interplay between identity and desired image can be seen.

Using Sack's second 'Thought/Realised' alternations - 'And then I realised…' led me to believe I had exposed certain illusions within the organisation. If the Irish within the development field *were* more friendly, better communicators and more empathetic than their other Northern counterparts, a disjuncture exists as within their own aid agency the organisational members spoke widely about the organisation *shutting down* learning, about a culture *preventing* sharing, about a *lack* of communication and *struggling* to find a sense of belonging.

My own role was also full of disillusion - I was beginning to see that my role and that of those I was interacting with were mirroring each other. When Daniel told me he didn't see the value of looking at culture as it had little practical output, I felt disillusioned as I was sure that it was the right entry point. It was only later in retrospective hindsight that I could see a parallel that having me in the organisation as an expert; to implement an organisational learning system was futile. I didn't see the value in it, as I knew that the organisational members themselves had the solutions to what they needed to make

learning more effective. Suggestions like the 'yellow pages' (or the quarterly reports that are in Chapter Five) were made, all practical solutions to learning, if only the organisation could hear them. Yet as is clear by Laura's story, I was clearly unable to connect people, or even to be the conduit that they needed to suggest their ideas to management as part of the proposed learning system. This inability, led by consciously and unconsciously responding to rhythms and patterns as immersion proceeds (Okely, 1992: 17) is best explored through Sirrat's work (2000) on short term consultants. As Stirrat states, most consultants enter an organisational project with a faith in rationality (as I had when I started), however, when Gavin spoke about the organisational culture being a 'noose around his neck,' I connected to this feeling, as the requirement to produce an organisational learning system was becoming my noose. I was 'peddling snake oil' and these opposing paradigms, of positivism and interpretivism, of wearing two 'hats,' of having to produce a practical output, were paralysing me - to the point where not only could I not produce academic work, I also could not fulfil the projects requirement. I had ceased to function as a normal human being, connecting two people, who needed each other. I was stuck, as Eyben (2009) says, between insider and outsider, stuck between power and knowledge in a state of liminality. The next chapter documents explores a meeting with field officers and Headquarters staff in attendance and shows how one discourse becomes powerful in a situation of multiple realities. It also further explores the emerging idea of disjuncture, where the actual lived experience of the meeting seemed to work in contrast to the aims of the conference that were expressed as intended learning outcomes.

Chapter Five: Why do all the Satellites Point to Dublin? Negotiating the Organisation at a Meeting in Dublin with the 'Programme Countries'

Introduction

My due date: are you having a baby?
In search of meaning

Day One of the Dublin Meeting: Expectations of Sharing and Learning

Expectation: sharing and communication Actuality:
why do all the satellites point to Ireland?

Day Two of the Dublin Meeting: The Difference between Rhetoric and Reality

Sneezing against a hurricane: one way communication to the field

People are our most important resource: managerial rhetoric and practice The disjuncture: the agenda keeps closing us down

Self-organisation and reflexivity: reflecting on centre-periphery relations
Power and knowledge: representation

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter examines how the development process is negotiated within a learning context. It explores a meeting with field officers and Headquarters staff in attendance and shows how one discourse becomes powerful in a situation of multiple realities. I question the rhetoric and the reality of development to see why they seem to be drifting further apart than ever before. There is a paradox within development where the discourse and the practice of development administration are at odds with each other. This has been labelled by some authors as a 'disjuncture' (Albert and Whetten, 1985: 271), between 'who we think we are as an organisation' and who we might actually be, which in this case also refers to the mechanical output oriented mode of thinking and the 'messy' reality of development. I will also explore where the researcher, as insider, examines her own place in the research experience, and moves through multiple roles associated with the development paradigm. There exists a series of disjunctures,

incompatibilities or contradictions, both in the daily routines of development and in its macro context (Quarles Van Ufford et al., 2003: 3).

My due date: are you having a baby?

I had been in the organisation a year when I was asked if I wanted to sit in on a three day HIV/Health Advisors meeting. It was to be the fourth one there had been and this was the first time it was to be held at HQ in Dublin. It was the 4th of September and my baby was due on the 5th. I figured that first babies don't usually come on time and that this was too good an opportunity to miss as I was about to go on maternity leave and had a hunch that this would be great data. I was hoping some light would be shed on the relationship between the HQ part of Irish Aid and the field part, that perhaps this was the opportunity for some dialogue between the advisors working 'in country' and the Dublin HQ staff who e-mail them and are at the start of the chain of funds that filter through to the various countries. Interestingly there had only been one reference made in the last six months to my growing belly, from a male member of staff who said, 'Are you having a baby? I thought you were just putting on weight...' Hardly the most PC of comments I thought. Being that pregnant though was a real ice breaker when it came to the three day meeting. When it came to introducing ourselves, I told the group of twenty Irish Aid staff sitting around an oval table that I was doing research into Irish Aid as a learning organisation and that my baby was due at any time, but if I left the room at any point not to fear the worst. A ripple of laughter and nodding of heads made me feel instantly at ease and had broken the ice between the advisors, some of whom were in Ireland for the first time ever, and I felt a connection with the predominantly female members of the group. All throughout the three days women were asking me if I felt all right, and I felt very at ease in their company; when I was in the breakaway groups I felt I was not so much an outside researcher, but I felt included. This may have been in part to my very pregnant condition, as many of the women there smiled and spoke kindly to me, as if I was about to enter a secret club, that only they knew about.

In search of meaning

This autoethnographic reflection was the beginning of a growing realisation that personal subjective status and the embodiment of my circumstances (in this case being *very* pregnant) affected the data that was generated. No longer rational objective observer (as I had felt was my initial role), instead I connected in yet another role or identity, that of

'mother-to-be.' Worried by the way my research was going, and the confusion caused by trying to harness learning, culture and explore organisational identity I was relieved when I was told by a supervisor on the project that the data from this three day meeting would be sufficient for my thesis work.[22] At the end of a calendar year, I was expecting to have all I needed to be able to go off, have my baby, then to come back after maternity leave and analyse it, decipher it, and write it up. My supervisor reiterated this point, telling me that the data from this event would give me more than enough data for my PhD research.

All I needed was for my baby *not to make an appearance on her due date* to enable me to attend the meeting, tape it and make notes. At that same Supervisor meeting in May 2006, I was advised to keep a clear focus on research questions, to look for evidence of cultures, subcultures, and conflict, and to ask myself how I might fix them with the phrase, 'This is how it might work better.' I was told to view the three-day meeting as a 'natural experiment' of seeing how tension, observed and spoken about in data collection prior to that period, works its way through to the field. This was coupled with unease, but I tried to bury it, concentrate on recording the data necessary and then take time off to have the baby. Since my baby was due (she was actually born a week later on September 12, 2006) and the data un-transcribed, I produced a quick one sentence research outline directly after this meeting, which shows my thought process at that time. It states:

> *My research considers how a bureaucratic development organisation becomes a learning organisation (Field notes, 10 May 2006).*

It was a simple case of cause and effect: - 'Do -'this and this'- and you will become a learning organisation,' or alternatively, 'identify barriers to this and find a solution.' It was still steeped in results based rationality. Lewis and Mosse (2006: 3) state that anthropologists should be concerned with setting aside representations of rationality in order to uncover the inner workings of development organisations. However, part of my dual role, was to provide results, not merely interpret data or describe social phenomena for academic work, so putting aside rationality, where results can be seen, evaluated and possibly replicated, was beginning to be an issue. I had considerable knowledge of the research situation, after a year spent in the organisation but I was not sure how much

[22]Notes from supervisory meeting May 3, 2006

knowledge I had of the meanings inherent within that setting. Searching for meaning meant asking questions such as 'what does this mean for organisational members' and 'how do they create meaning out of daily work situations?' In pursuing these questions I was hoping to gain a deeper understanding of the organisation and its members.

Day One of the Dublin Meeting: Expectations of Sharing and Learning

This meeting was between staff at the Dublin Headquarters and staff from some of the programme countries that Irish Aid was involved with. In total the programme countries were Ethiopia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Lesotho, Uganda, Mozambique, Tanzania in Africa and then also Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Timor Leste. At this meeting eight of those countries were represented: Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The members of staff from the programme countries were both indigenous and Irish, and worked within the embassies; however, Irish was the dominant nationality of the staff at HQ. All those present were involved in the field of health and/or HIV/AIDS. This was the first meeting of its kind in Ireland, and for most from the programme countries, this was their first time in Ireland itself. The meeting began with a welcome address by a senior member of the technical section:

> I have found these meetings to be extremely useful both for the formal proceedings but also the informal discussions and getting to know colleagues from other fields and getting to exchange what the issues are. They also constitute something that we are not very good at in Irish Aid and that is taking 'down time' and standing outside our day to day preoccupations and thinking about them and this is an opportunity this week to actually do that and I think it's important that the 'down time' is both supportive and also challenging and that we are not afraid to bring that challenge and we are not afraid to be honest with one another about what the limitations are and what the difficulties are.
>
> (Brendan, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

He then continued with stressing the importance of practical output from the meeting, with the impetus to sharing the information and knowledge creation, emphasising that the information from this meeting would also be shared and circulated in Headquarters.

> I think what is also important is that we bring the issues that we discuss back to our operational context and that we share it with our own colleagues in the embassies and

> that we share it with our own partners and from our perspective here at HQ its equally important that we reflect in our own internal discussions and the ways in which we work so that the meeting is actually helping to effect change across the organisation
>
> (Brendan, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

The opening speech concluded with:

> I encourage you to listen, to challenge, to learn and to engage and to enjoy. Its in everybody's interests that we do have a good working relationship and that the commitment to deliver on health/ HIV/AIDS is integrally linked to all of the objectives of Irish Aid and it's our collective responsibility and for us to see how we can better recognise the resource that we have right across the organisation to deliver on that commitment rather than feel it's the responsibility of just a few. We have that resource and we probably haven't institutionally recognised that we have such a wide variety of skills in the organisation to deliver on it.
>
> (Brendan, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

It was a rousing opening speech, and had highlighted certain issues about the organisation not allowing the time for reflection, and about being able to provide support to their field staff, with the outcome of bringing positive change within the organisation. I immediately started writing in my journal that here was a moment that had the capacity to be a learning event, organisational learning in essence, where the staff wanted open and truthful exchanges and where networking and sharing could occur in a safe environment and that the agenda would reflect these intentions:

> *Looks promising, highlighting learning, exchange, honesty, sharing, reflecting (Field notes, 4 September 2006).*

Everyone around the table was asked to respond to the opening speech by saying what they wanted from the three days and it seemed that there was a consensus of opinion between the members from the different programme countries and the staff at HQ. I was part of the meeting too, as I was sitting around the oval table with the staff from various programme countries, and was involved in the discussions, not as objective researcher, but as participant observer, I was taping the three day meeting, and was also taking notes. I had obtained signed consent from all involved. They knew I was an outside researcher and why I was there, i.e. to look at this as a 'learning event.'

Expectations: sharing and communication

We were asked to share with each other what we each wanted out of the experience and the woman sitting to my right stated:

> To touch base with other colleagues; some networking and learning opportunities and to talk about the role of professional development – how the role is changing and how we are equipped to deal with that change. As Irish Aid changes, is the field equipped to deal with the changes going on at HQ?
>
> (Ruth, Field Advisor, 4 September 2012, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Other colleagues from field offices wanted to get 'networking and learning' out of this meeting, as an objective, which was echoed by further participants who said they wanted 'to meet colleagues and establish relationships' and to 'to be able to interact and to hear some voices from the field.' There was an overt emphasis on this being a 'learning event', where communication and networks would be forged. Senior management urged them to:

> Listen, to challenge, to learn and to engage and to enjoy.
>
> (Brendan, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Each person was then invited to turn to the person on their right and 'interview' them as to their expectations. The woman I turned to was from Lesotho. We shared our exchanges around the table which was a 'getting to know you exercise' as most of the people in the room had never met in person before. This exercise was an exploration of how members present in the meeting were seeking meaning from it, expectations, and needs. The next section will examine their responses in detail. Some people spoke of wanting to understand the organisation at a macro level, with quotes such as:

> ...To understand the institutional vision
>
> (Thandi, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Others searched for more practical understanding of the workings of the organisation:

> ...To see the mechanics of how Irish Aid operates and see what technical expertise is available that can be drawn on
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

> ...To understand the strategic priorities for Irish Aid and how this can be translated into action
>
> (Irene, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

> ...To learn more and see how the recommendations of this meeting will be implemented when we go back to our countries
>
> (Gabrielle, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

However, by far the most responses of what they wanted from this meeting fell into two distinct categories: on the one hand understanding 'the other' within the organisation as can be found in the quote below; and on the other hand, the importance of sharing experiences or the social networking aspect. The facilitator of the meeting stated:

> We are complete outsiders here and we recognise the importance of these kind of meetings because it is all of you coming together to share experiences and plan together, this is what makes Irish Aid such a successful donor organisation...it's very important that you feel you can share your expertise with your colleagues around the table.
>
> (Eileen, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Eileen, was speaking as 'an outsider,' - she was from the LEARN team from Trinity College Dublin, and was acting as facilitator on the basis of her academic work in development and health. The 'you' she was referring to were the development practitioners from Irish Aid. Other responses from field staff echoed this wish, of sharing expertise, of networking and learning about each other:

> ...To share information and experiences with colleagues

(Busu, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

...To see how we can complement and support each other

(Lerato, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

...To learn from each other, to take comments and become like a team with Irish Aid

(Peter, 37, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

What followed was a series of conflicts around learning. They were between the proposed idea of communication, sharing and learning, and lived reality which was fundamentally different. Eyben (2010: 390-391) believes that this disjuncture between expected intention and lived reality is linked to the difficulty with reporting complexity into the neat categories of the feedback or evaluation systems. This can often result in *'avoidance'* practices:

> These contradictions between real-world mess and demands for simplicity may lead to staff in country offices seeking to avoid reality – for example, by ignoring recent calls to encourage them to make reality checks or immersion visits (Irvine et al., 2006 in Eyben 2010: 390-391).

I was keen to explore this further, and to see the consequences of the growing sense of contradiction. The opportunity for this came in a discussion on inter-country communication, to which I now turn.

Actuality: why do all the satellites point to Ireland?

The emerging idea of conflict or disjuncture between the intentions and the practiced reality became clearer when Adila, a field advisor from Tanzania asked:

> Is it possible to satellite link us, so we can talk for free? I can talk to Brendan at HQ for free for hours on end but there's no communication between the embassies like this. It's incredibly difficult to communicate with the countries. It would hugely facilitate our discussions, if I could pick up the phone; trying to get through to Mozambique is a complete nightmare. Why do all the satellites point to Ireland? *(All laughed)*

(Adila, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

I understood the meaning of this to be that if one programme country wanted to communicate with another, it seemed as if the communication process had to go via Dublin and then back to Africa. My thoughts turned back to what Ruth had said when I asked her earlier, in the same meeting, 'How do you hear about changes at HQ? She had answered 'By osmosis' with a wry smile, so when the lunch break was announced I made a bee line for her. I wanted to understand what she meant by this idea of 'osmosis' and whether she was speaking tongue in cheek; - I therefore asked her about how she communicated with headquarters in her daily work:

> Ruth: My main communication would be with Tom, now there's also the desk here for [country] and I have to say that I have very little contact with them…to be honest it's a mystery what the desk does, you know our appraisal document? That goes through the desk and we copy the desk, in terms of supporting the work I do. It's technical section; contact with the desk is just cc, so they know what's happening.
>
> Lorraine: And the desk contact would be who?
>
> Ruth: Actually I don't know it's a new guy who started two weeks ago; I'll meet him this week
>
> (Ruth, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of interview, Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

It is significant that this person, (who was South African and who held a substantial position of authority within this country's embassy) was not informed about a change of desk officer back at HQ. The desk office would have been the interface through which their daily work was communicated.

> Lorraine: And your communication with people in similar posts in other countries?
>
> Ruth: There's not really a structure for that, and I have to say it's quite limited, the amount of communication between the country programmes, and most of the time when I do have that kind of communication it's because I know that person. You can send an e-mail to the advisors, you have their addresses, but you don't really.
>
> (Ruth, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of interview, Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

This seems in line with Eyben's (2010) observations about the difficulties with a system that is based on relationships. Something very similar to this idea of 'relationalism' was

proposed in many interviews as being the basis for practising development effectively. For instance:

> I spent a lot of time developing relationships with people and institutions in Ireland, I've built up relationships internationally, you build it up because of who you are and your background and what you know and that's the way you actually achieve things, but it's not organisational and I really worry that I'm doing things that are not rooted and grounded in the organisation and so you have to address that so you don't lose connections.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape recording of interview, HQ Dublin)

Daniel emphasises the personal connections he had made through his professional role that enhanced his capacity within that role, and that this networking was not encouraged or appreciated by the wider organisation. He felt at odds with the bureaucratic machine, which did not value this interconnectedness and more social, tacit way of working in development. Certainly my role as 'mother-to-be' was impacting upon the way people were connecting with me, over coffee and during breaks, people asked me questions about whether this was my first child, joked about whether the baby would come today, and gave me more of an 'insider' status within the group of advisors from overseas than I would have had otherwise.

Despite this being a meeting in Ireland where advisors and specialists from all over Africa were meeting in person, possibly the first time and were all colleagues working for Irish Aid, they did not seem connected. There was no framework in place for them to communicate between themselves once back in country posts. The significance of this opportunity seemed enormous. I asked Ruth about this:

> Lorraine: What changes would make communication more effective for you?
>
> Ruth: Well firstly although it's quite informal, I think the communication works, but it's up to you to make it work, one problem is staffing at HQ, if I want to speak to someone in technical section they might be out of the office for two weeks, so that's a problem, only recently could they access their e-mail while travelling, so that's an improvement, the main thing is they are totally overstretched…and it's hard to get hold of people.
>
> (Ruth, Field Advisor, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of interview, Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

Communication was obviously a key concern for all, and one that I hoped would be addressed, as communication was a fundamental part of the learning process that I was there to observe. However an actual lived disjuncture was about to occur that would oppose the official narrative of sharing and communicating. As the room was just beginning to buzz and people were getting to know each other around the table during this sharing exercise, the facilitator called time, and said:

> Sorry we are running out of time, if there is anything that is a burning issue for you, write it on a 'post it' and post it on the wall.
>
> (Eileen, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Despite open dialogue being cut off prematurely, when the room had started a lively discussion, exchanging ideas and learning from each other, I had hoped at the time that there would be further discussion emanating from these 'post-its.' However, these post-its were collected at the end of the meeting but did not make it into the final official report of the meeting. This represents the futility and the disjuncture between the rhetoric of the senior management who stated at the beginning of the meeting that:

> I think this is a key opportunity for sharing and learning, we hope that the agenda that we have prepared with a lot of input from you will reflect and allow for those processes to take place.
>
> (Brendan, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, transcribed from transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Closing down the session and asking people to post what was important to them became a statement of power. It is within this disjuncture between rhetoric and lived experience that structures of power emerge, often found between social interactions and interfaces Mosse and Lewis (2006: 4). If this interpretative aspect of the meetings that was emerging during data collection had been purely about concealed power relations this would have been relatively straight-forward; however, it seemed to be more of a complex set of daily negotiations. The next section examines how power was played out within a particular session.

Day Two of the Dublin Meeting: The Difference between Rhetoric and Reality

We all filtered in to the conference room just before nine and headed straight for the urns of coffee and tea. There were small pastries on paper plates and we stood about for a few minutes. One lady asked me how I was feeling so close to my due date and I smiled saying 'just fine.' The facilitators came in calling us in to the oval table where we had sat for most of yesterday. The windows had been opened and a slight breeze was banging the blinds against each other causing a jangling sound. There was no opportunity for any comments as the agenda was due to start at 9.15 and we were already running over time. Quickly the presenter was introduced and a Power Point presentation put up on screen. People shifted around in their chairs and one or two got up to get a second cup of coffee. A presentation was given on Power Point slides on Global health partnerships where they were defined as 'a collaborative relationship among multiple organisations in which risks and benefits are shared in the pursuit of a shared goal.'

When questions were taken from the floor the advisors were asking about the purpose of partnerships and the role of each country. As a large discussion evolved around the table between members of different country office, time was called by the facilitator. The discussion that had arisen was not factored into the timetable. Another Power Point presentation was planned on the agenda. However, a few members felt that the discussion was more important. The group was asked if they wanted to break into groups for discussion. The consensus was that they would and they were allocated twenty minutes for discussion on points raised in the presentation. They were assigned a question from the board that had been written down during questions from the floor, and each member was given a number from one to four to get into groups. They were told that group discussions would be collected and put into a report to be discussed tomorrow morning due to lack of time.

Sneezing against a hurricane: one way communication to the field

I followed one group into an office outside of the main conference room consisting of six members from different programme countries and one person from Headquarters. The questions they were assigned by the facilitators were:

Q1: how can we ensure that capacity is balanced between country and global level?
Q2: what is the role of the country office?

As they sat looking at each other the tension was broken by a development specialist stating honestly 'I don't really understand the question'...Irene added that it was about internal capacity and finding the time, to which Mosa replied, 'even if you go to all the trouble you will be sneezing against a hurricane.'

> (Mosa, Field Advisor 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Mosa was a strong personality in the group. She was South African with much practical experience in development and had a commanding manner. She was fond of making herself heard and joking at the expense of the 'development machine.' A ripple of laughter went around the small room as if they all knew what she meant, and someone else said 'We have to have communication between us where there are problems about communication' (Lerato, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin). Another ripple of laughter went around the room followed by a long pause. Adila sat upright after what seemed like a long time and said:

> Listen, do we really want to discuss this question? What do we want to talk about? What's really bothering us? For me it's all about our role in country offices.
>
> (Adila, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

There was a nod of heads collectively and I wrote in my field notes:

> *Was not allowing free flowing communication / discussion, discussion was broken and hesitant yet its all about Q2 was the one they all wanted to discuss (Q1 was imposed; Q2 was emergent) so Q1 was quickly shelved after just two minutes and Q2 was jumped upon (Field notes, 5 September 2006).*

A brief but lively discussion followed about communication. Daniel started as the only representative of headquarters in the room by trying to pin the discussion to the meeting's objectives:

> Daniel: We need to have clarity around what we think we should be doing...

> Adila: When I read through all the things we should be doing, all the reforming that is going on there, you know, it's really impressive, it's a real loss, if it doesn't have an influence in the country, it's a loss of energy as its not institutionally linked up
>
> Lerato: We should be feeding back to HQ about what is actually happening, to inform some of the higher level discussions
>
> Adila: I would also say it's to feed it back to other countries, I feel that so much of our communication is just with head office but actually I'm interested to know what's happened in Mozambique. I want to know what's happened in Zambia, if there's been a change in the way things worked, we are really bad at actually communicating which I think would be a very good role for our regional programme, actually *(all laughed).*
>
> (5 September 2006, transcribed from group, tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

At the time I made a note of the time on my voice recorder and quickly wrote in my field notes *'Very important'* (Field notes, 5 September 2006). They laughed as a regional office was being discussed as a possibility but due to the bureaucratic machinations, they were wondering if it would occur.[23] Lerato continued 'it's one of the proposals I've made actually (5 September 2006, transcribed from Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin). Just then, as I was waiting to find out what the proposal was, the facilitator popped her head around the door and called time. Ten minutes had been too brief and the group was grumbling quietly as we were shepherded back into the main room so that points raised could be written on the board in bullet points. One of the members of the group from headquarters raised his arm to give some feedback:

> Just to say if you go to some of these international meetings of these global initiatives that there is developing country representation but their voice…they are not well heard or listened to. We can say the same thing and get listened to, that's the reality, and you have an opportunity to influence. I find when I've asked for inputs from countries, one or two examples from countries is really effective, and this is what it's about - international dialogue, it's getting them to understand realities of countries and responding to them, there's a depth of engagement that strengthens capacity.
>
> (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Daniel was critiquing his own role, as a representative of headquarters, by stating that he could speak for both the group and the country advisors present. He was cut off as the facilitator called final time, and another member of my group said loudly:

[23] Said to me during lunch, from memory put into field notes on 5 September 2006

> I'm sorry but I'm concerned about the fact that there is not enough time in this agenda for discussion, these long Power Points could have been sent by e-mail, which would have allowed us to discuss them ourselves, cross country. All the members of my group are frustrated (to which everyone murmured in agreement and nodded) now we've no time for coffee and chatting about these issues and now we have to end our discussion because of the agenda. I'm frustrated.
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

The frustration felt by the group was because of a direct conflict with the intended outcomes of the meeting. It seemed ironic that team-building and networking, the sharing of experiences and the identification of 'challenges and opportunities for improved communication and knowledge sharing between Irish Aid HQ and country level' should be closed down and frustrated by an agenda designed to encourage the very thing it stood in the way of. I made frantic notes in my field note journal, '*Closing them down- shutting down communication – frustration – agenda too packed – too many presentations – not enough talking (Field notes, 5 September 2006).*

Upon later analysis - almost five years later, this earlier notation in my field notes of 'Very Important' had greater significance. The need for clarification about what the organisational members *should* be doing (Daniel, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006) resonated through most of my research. A disjuncture exists between the intended output, and the actual output, where often organisational members feel 'at odds' with their role/their understanding of the organisation and even of development itself. All Irish Aid workers told me how they felt time pressured, that they didn't have time for reflexivity or more face to face communication. They didn't have time for applying knowledge or learning in any given organisational situation.

However, citing the lack of time is somewhat of a misnomer; instead the problem lies in the underlying principles by which certain spaces and tasks are given priority. The idea of learning as a more interpreted, collaborative organisation reality began to emerge through the example recounted in the next section. The interpretive paradigm sees relationships as socially constructed and continuously negotiated and sees an organisation's subjective reality as fictional. Realness is a product of human agency, and we can see every person living and experiencing their life according to their own

subjective identity and understandings, understandings that are continuously in flux. This paradigm sees social order as resting in the web of relationships and interactions that occur on a daily basis and sees organisational reality as contextual, not factual. It also examines how organisational members construct their own reality, power and control over certain situations and where this power is contested.

People are our most important resource: managerial rhetoric and practice

The group members were then split into four groups according to professional role: HIV/AIDS advisors, Health Advisors, Technical Specialists and Headquarters Staff. I found it interesting that the staff at Headquarters, who were made up of advisory board staff, technical specialists, consultants and civil servants were lumped together, as if being in Dublin was an occupation in itself, and made a note of this in my field notes (Field notes, 5 September 2006). Each group then went to a corner of the large conference room where there was a flip chart which had on it the following:

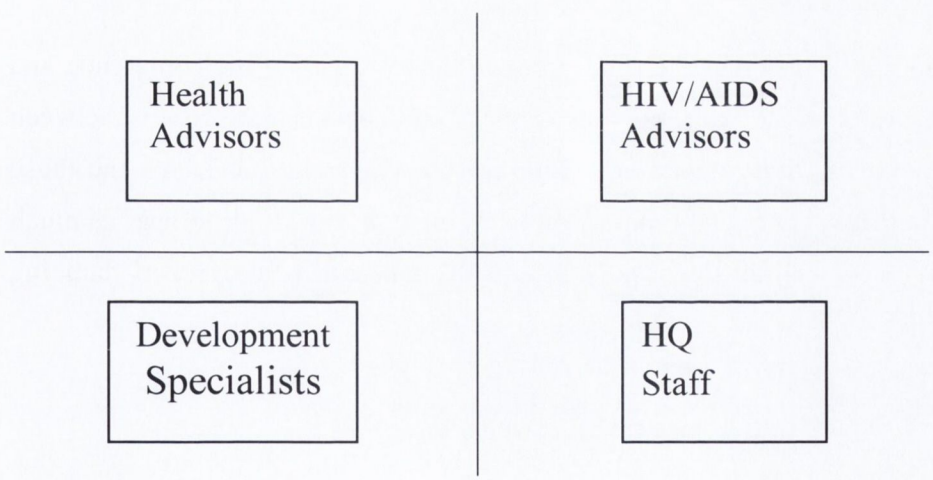


Figure 9: Chart of the different professional groups at the September 2006 meeting

The facilitator announced that 'the most important resource of the organisation is the people' (Field notes, 5 September, 2006), and then they were then posed the question,

'What is it like to work with the other groups?' and were assigned twenty minutes for discussion. I sat briefly with the HIV/AIDS advisors group and then a few minutes later moved on to the Health Advisors to take notes. As I sat with the group of five health

specialists from Lesotho, Tanzania and Zambia and South Africa they leapt into the discussion with fervour and all started speaking over each other. The four corners of the room were alive with voices and the volume in the room went up dramatically. I taped as much of the discussion as I could and later transcribed it along with field notes. I was excited by this: they had said they were frustrated by the agenda and the closing down of discussion time, and here was a chance for them to really communicate their true feelings. I had been feeling disillusioned with the previous sessions and felt frustrated for them; here was a chance to hear them vent, and I was surprised by how emotional I felt about it as I felt myself getting indignant at the tightly packed agenda. As I sat, almost hovering, with the first group, one member illustrated the confusion they had between work and designated roles:

> There is conflict between HIV/AIDS and health, conflicting roles…in reality the health sector seems to think that all the money is going to HIV/AIDS, I'm talking about at country level…Anything that's not health goes to HIV/AIDS advisors.
>
> (Ruth, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Before this discussion, I had felt a tension between those attending the conference and those at the headquarters side, but now I was feeling tension between the groups, between Health and HIV, and this soon spread to include the Development Specialists and those representing Headquarters. I quickly moved on to the next group, eager to hear as much as possible. They were in mid-flow and I caught the tail end of a series of damning declarations:

> …yeah well, HIV/AIDS advisors don't link with other sectors.
>
> …HIV/AIDS advisors are facilitators for mainstreaming, even for gender or environment, but what about health?
>
> …But what about Development specialists: what are their role and their responsibilities? When do you contact them? I never know?
>
> (5 September 2006, transcribed from transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

I wrote in my field notes:

> *Confusion existed around the roles of others ('yeah but what about Development specialists: what is their role and their responsibilities? When do you contact them? I never know?') This was echoed with statement: 'That's because no one knows when to contact headquarters, with whom or how to communicate (Field notes, 5 September 2006).*

My journal was full of exclamation marks as I realised there was little or no formal knowledge about this field/headquarters relationship, that *'improving links'* between country and headquarters needed to be taken back to basics. The field advisors spoke of it as a lack of clarity, and I wrote in my notes *'Underestimation!!!'* (Field notes, 5 September 2006). Development specialists came under fire with:

> Development specialists are authorities on all matters, on everything technical, but we don't know who we seek authority from and when we need to seek it…I'm not clear when I need to get authority from the development specialists, I'm making decisions and I don't know if I need authority from the development specialists…development specialists are so stretched that those in the field are loathe to call upon them.
> Headquarters see us as transgressing our lines of authority because we don't know where things start and stop, sometimes they think we have gone beyond our role.
>
> (5 September 2006, transcribed from transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

It was apparent from the time I transcribed my data, listening to the meeting over and over again that what was especially interesting about these discussions was that there were a series of honest and forthright exchanges about assumptions that each group had about another, and a very clear message: If there were no clear lines around roles or communication, if people within the organisation did not know who to contact, or even what those they could contact did, how could a learning system be built into this culture?

At the time I had made frantic notes in my diary such as: '*Need to go back to basics? But where to begin?*' (Field notes, 5 September 2006). Many approaches to researching organisations are dominated by an oppositional approach, where individuals or groups are pitted against each other, but organisations are more complex than this binary opposition of groups. Organisations are continuously emerging, and investigation must surely move away from oppositional categories or explanations and instead towards representational strategies that shape subjectivity and experience. This will be further explored in the following section.

The disjuncture: the agenda keeps closing us down

When the session resumed back at the big oval table in the centre of the room, the facilitators asked those that were in the headquarters group to expand upon how others might see them. They stated that colleagues may see them perhaps as attention catchers, with technical know-how, but they were also aware that they could be seen as time-wasters, or as having an easy job. Here were good honest disclosures that opened the lines of communication between groups and these were very well received, judging by the murmurs of agreement and nodding of heads. There were some laughs, especially around the words attention-catchers, and when they said they were too busy at the international level and over-focused. They agreed they send mixed messages to the field and were not sufficiently proactive when communicating with people they did not know personally. A different atmosphere was emerging, one that was jovial, as if this frank discussion had somehow cleared the air. The facilitators made a summary, talking about the need to share information, exchange stories and make time for each other. With the room in a different mood, with high levels of chatting and two presentations scheduled for the last hour, one of the presenters made a speech:

> Can I have everyone's attention please, after the session yesterday many of us felt that we hadn't had time due to the agenda, to discuss what we feel is really very important, what we want out of this three-day meeting? So when we got back to our hotel last night we sat up as a group and worked on what is going to follow, so this presentation was the result of a group collaboration at a meeting yesterday evening between all the advisors where it was decided to split the two presentations into what we do, and what we would like to happen.
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

The presenter, Mosa, who had been so outspoken, continued:

> So this will be a presentation on what the advisors believe are ways of addressing the problems and the frustrations within their role as advisors.
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Impassioned she declared that:

> Development is an industry and must be run by professionals, so how do we optimise that? By getting professionals with the right skills mix, developing their skills and taking good care of them. This organisation needs a continuous commitment to the advisor's role; it starts in recruitment and continues in induction and requires an organisational context and an organisational culture that is conducive to and receptive for contribution by programme advisors. These are the frustrations being experienced by advisors at country level and it cannot be viewed in isolation of the broader organisational and institutional context.
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

It was a bold and impassioned speech that hit the nail on the head as far as I was concerned. I underlined her words as I jotted them down with big bold lines. It occurred to me that I was perhaps siding with the country advisors; frustrated myself at the lack of platforms for discussion, I did not feel impartial, or objective, I felt a part of what was going on. According to Mosse and Lewis (2005) one of the challenges in anthropology is to break free from policy discourse and even one's own preconceptions (2005: 17) and try to understand perceptions from another perspective, one way of doing this is to write as an insider, being involved in organisational meetings and highlighting inherent contradictions and how they are generated, lived and resolved (2005: 22). I was involved in this meeting and felt as though I was in some way part of the changing situation where power was being reclaimed, whereby the agenda was being blocked, the topic was being changed; it almost felt revolutionary and I felt excited. Mosa continued, eloquently:

> What are our roles here in this organisation? We need clarity on the roles, what are the roles and responsibilities in relation to the other positions, to the development specialists, to senior advisors at HQ level. Where is the accountability and authority with regard to programme management, how can we optimise the local knowledge and expertise brought to the table by advisors? We need very clear line of reporting and communication, what needs to be communicated to whom and by whom?
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

Despite the closing down of their learning experience the day before, by the agenda being so full and time being short, they had taken it upon themselves to self-organise, change the presentation, use their own 'down time' to get what they wanted or needed out of today's session. I thought them brave and admired their *'chutzpah'* (Field notes, 5 September 2006). Because only half an hour had been allotted for this session, the

coffee-break time was used, and people grabbed cups and biscuits and returned to the table to listen. Mosa continued:

> I mean, Irish Aid, the organisation - who's who and what do they do? And what are the processes we have to engage with? PAEG[24] 'I can't remember what that stands for' CSP's[25]...? It's a complicated field that you have to work out for yourself taking time and causing embarrassment, believe me. When you start, you need to know what this development landscape I'm walking into is. What are the household / office arrangements? Do I bring my own tea and coffee? How do I get a parking space?
>
> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

People roared laughter in response and clearly she was centre stage by this point. One of the facilitators stepped in and said:

> We had allocated an hour's time for open discussion between HQ on the field and we are losing that hour by doing this so perhaps we can just highlight the issues that need to be discussed?
>
> (Eileen, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

So it was agreed that there would be a breakaway session of two groups, one group to move to a smaller room down the corridor and the other to stay in the main conference room, and that they would discuss three points: continued professional development, what happens between HQ and countries, and communication. This was emergent learning. Since participants had deciding upon the topic themselves, and they were forcing the agenda to be turned to what they wanted, I wrote in my field notes:

> *[this is an open space, emergent themes, order/group established to fit needs of all wider group, need to meet more often, need for training and order from chaos; real mixing of advisors, HQ, DS no boundaries as to roles or power] (Field notes, 5 September 2006).*

Complexity theory is one area that has recently been used to explore areas such as these within the fields of development (Fowler, 2008; Mowles et al., 2008; Ramalingam et al.,

[24] PAEG = Project Appraisal and Evaluation Group

[25] CSP = Country Strategy Programme

2008) and puts forward the idea that self-organising systems or networks can be key areas in organisational (and societal) change. Faced with a set structure, a predisposition that this would not change much or that discussions would not occur here, I had wondered at the futility of a meeting like this, with its grandiose intended outcomes and packed agenda that did not allow for discussion, but rather closed it down, even when it was seemingly productive and in full flow. Faced with a closing down of time and spaces for discussion during the first day some of the members of the organisation had decided to meet in their own time and force the agenda. This meant that this 'not being the forum to exchange discussions,' as was raised by Sorcha at the start of the meeting, was overturned by some organisational members in an example of what Eyben (2010) calls 'Subaltern resistance.' The tactics of such resistance emerge when an organisation 'separates itself from its environment to establish a panoptic position' (Mitchell, 2007: 99). Eyben, in turn, suggests that:

> International aid is exaggeratedly panoptic, purporting to observe and explain the whole world from its historically derived locus of power...[but] less attention has been paid to staff in official aid organisations and the different relational arenas that shape both subordinate practice and panoptic representations of top management (Eyben, 2010: 384).

Self-organisation and reflexivity: reflecting on centre-periphery relations

One way of looking at Eyben's idea that relational arenas shape subordinate practice and management's panoptic representations is to look at the issue of the Quarterly Report. Beginning under the heading of 'sharing experiences' one field advisor stated 'It's very important that we learn how to 'share experience' (Peter, 37, Field Advisor, 5 September, 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin). Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin) and instantly the group started to discuss the information overload that had been mentioned many times around the organisation.

> What we need is one page for each section, in each country. I think I need an overview, not a fifty page document, and it would show continuity and an overall idea of what's happening in the organisation generally *(murmurs of agreement)* I was actually sent...I wrote into...I don't know who it was now, and I got sent this huge amount of stuff that was going on that I had to trawl through, and I still didn't know quite what I wanted, I

thought, great thanks for those leads but it didn't actually answer my question *(all laugh in agreement)*

> (Adila, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

I suggested this at an education advisors meeting a year and a half ago and it never happened.

> (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

Potentially we are missing important opportunities around procedures and processes that are already in place, we do quarterly reports to headquarters but we never get feedback, so that an opportunity, it's a system that's in place but if we take it full circle, it will be very important for communication.

> (Mosa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

Yeah but we can't sit around chatting all day, and that's what this looks like, it needs to be formalised, we can share good practices, and say what's working, or not, in each context, but we need to share organisationally, that's what's necessary for us to learn as an organisation, we just don't share enough, what happens to the quarterly reports for example, we spend all our time on them, but where do they go?

> (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

The above contributions show a growing expression of frustration at the information overload, received by email mainly to the field offices of the various programme countries. They express a sense of isolation though what they perceive to be the lack of communication around the reports they spend so much time creating. Their isolation is not just geographical but also within their sense of achievement, through feedback not occurring and a lack of communication around roles, ownership and missed opportunities. Quarterly reports were put together in each programme country, and take up a large chunk of their time in preparation; one member expressed the view that they 'just go into a black hole' (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin) and the advisors nodded agreement. 'Well, those reports are a way of informing what's happening in country, something that doesn't need feedback, but feedback on performance is good', so in response Sorcha said:

> Would it be possible for somebody in HQ to take all the quarterly reports, copy and paste the health and HIV/AIDS section and send them to all the programme countries then we have one document and it's up to us then if we want to follow something up or if we have a similar situation and then we do it by a natural process.
>
> (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

There was group agreement. At that moment the facilitator poked her head around the door and called time. The group asked for fifteen more minutes and she said 'Then that's it, ok?' and left. An advisor who had previously been silent said:

> I don't know whether it's part of communication or not but what we're talking about is not cross country...not communication but it's experience, the experience at country level, that's there, it's not exposure we are talking about, its REAL experience sharing.
>
> (Lisa, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

I had first heard of the quarterly reports done by each programme country in the exploratory phase:

> There are systems set up for quarterly meetings and a report that's produced but an evaluation in June 2005 found there's evaporation between HQ and the field. Things could be decided here that never make it to the field.
>
> (Cathal, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, transcribed from tape recording of interview, HQ Dublin, Interview, HQ Dublin)

This 'evaporation' seemed to be confirmed by Sorcha again in Kampala in November 2006. At the end of this session there was clearly a demand for group discussion around issues arising, the facilitator called, 'we had allocated an hour later for open discussion and if we break away now to discuss what's arisen and not on the agenda we will lose that hour' (Eileen, Technical Specialist, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin). But the staff members were insistent. I noted in my field notes that:

> *'This is the only opportunity they have had for emergent thought and discussion' (Field notes, 5 September 2006).*

Groups broke away into rooms, a mixture of advisors, technical staff and HQ staff. One specialist started by reiterating the point previously made, by saying:

> The information we are receiving in this three day meeting, we could have been briefed in advance so there wouldn't be so many Power Points, we could have been up to speed on and given us more time for discussion.
>
> (Adila, Field Advisor, 5 September, 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin).

The staff themselves had many suggestions as to how this disjuncture between possibilities or expectations and actual experience could be bridged. In terms of the quarterly report produced by embassies it was felt that they could somehow be collated and used as a learning tool. As there was group agreement by nodding, I had written in my field notes:

> *[Brilliant suggestion for cross country learning – did this happen?]'*
>
> *****

When, a whole year later, I tried to follow up on this note to myself I asked Niamh at Headquarters in Dublin what had happened after this suggestion:

> Lorraine: Firstly the quarterly reports…they were going to be cut and pasted, has that happened….will that happen?
>
> Niamh: The quarterly reports, it hasn't happened. The quarterly reports from the field are coming in and we haven't cut and pasted the sections together. We have agreed now that we will try and move the action plan forward, and we as a team will try to do a quarterly report ….we need to get a system in place, we are actually starting to talk more now about the whole knowledge management system
>
> (Niamh, Technical Specialist, 20 September 2007, transcribed form tape recording of interview, HQ Dublin)

It was interesting that Niamh herself had linked this to learning and knowledge management systems, and this need for a 'system' again was interesting, as the need for bureaucracy and action plans seemed to complicate something quite simple, which could possibly have been very effective as a learning tool based on the sharing of knowledge and experiences. This idea of sharing the quarterly reports was linked to telling stories, not as informal exchanges but in a manner that would allow other countries to understand

what each were doing and where the similarities and differences lie, and allow for possible collaborations or learning from each other. All the reports were sent to HQ in Dublin, and I felt this was echoing and responding to an earlier statement:

> There's no communication between the embassies like this, it's incredibly difficult to communicate with the countries… why do all the satellites all point to Ireland?
>
> (Adila, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006, transcribed from tape recording of Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin)

Quarterly reports offered an 'entry point' for the sharing of experiences and those stories were a valuable way of communicating cultural context and subjectivity. Yet something that seemed straightforward, such as the cutting and pasting of each country's stories and updates on training, work, policy changes had fallen foul of 'the system.' Bureaucracy had stood in the way of communication, and like the IT people who were suspicious of the intranet falling on their workload, no one person seemed to want ownership of the task of sharing. Documentation for the sake of documentation was always present:

> …the organisation was producing 10,000 reports a year…all it was doing was providing employment for shelf makers.
>
> (Cathal, Technical Specialist, 9 December 2005, transcribed from tape recording of interview, HQ Dublin)

These issues of information overload been flagged by previous evaluations and reports which stated that the problems with the organisation were:

> …Information overload, access to a learning culture, not being a learning culture, and a culture of keeping information to yourself within a competitive environment.
>
> (Chris, Technical Specialist, 14 December 2005, transcribed from tape recording of interview, HQ Dublin)

Yet when a possible solution to these issues offered itself up, in the form of narrative exchanges, it seemed that a number of factors prevented it. When management had paid lip service to the idea that was put forward by their staff, one that would aid their learning by enhancing communication and allow the sharing of experiences, we can see how the relational aspects of this dysfunction operate. Ultimately it lay with management to put this initiative into practice. Yet a year after the event, this still hadn't happened. It was

seemingly a simple solution. It was organisational learning in essence. But it did not happen.

Power and knowledge: representation

All organisational members have the possibility to use power, whether it is used creatively, or used with discretion, but once in the employ of a bureaucratic organisation, power could only be used in certain social relationships (Weber, 1922: 217). So by factoring in creativity, and the use of the self-organising system, organisational members like Mosa had used their relationships to rally around a certain issue and make sure that their voices were heard. Arturo Escobar (1992), on the other hand, adopts a Foucauldian concept of power to shed light on the ways in which power pervades systems of relationships at all levels of social norms and cultural practices and customs and not merely at the 'centre.' Every discussion of learning, or indeed of development, needs to address the concept of power (Rhodes, 1996). Rhodes states that 'knowledge and power are two sides of the same question -something is declared to be true based on the legitimising power of the person who makes the utterance' (Rhodes, 1996: 2). Meetings like the one discussed are a familiar mechanism for dissemination of knowledge and information. Meetings often exist as a potential forum for learning. However, large bureaucratic organisations appear very poor at having effective meetings since often such meetings are poorly time managed, as was the case with the one discussed in this chapter. Within the field of organisational learning, one practice or trend is often replaced by another, and another set of 'buzzwords' (Cornwall, 2007) are introduced, theoretical solutions are provided to the challenges of organisational learning. This is all in the 'guise of progress through the manipulation of power relations within the organisational system [yet] there is no real change in the system or discourse itself' (Rhodes, 1996: 2).

Another aspect of the power play relationship that also needs to be addressed is that of the researcher's role. What was my role in this meeting? I was participating, yet observing, I was taking notes and taping, yet I was also commenting and speaking when asked to. The difficulty of this fluid role and the power that may or may not lie with the researcher's role, albeit unbeknown to the researcher at the time has been a recurrent

theme of this research. I attempt to expose the power-play relationship through my subsequent use of autoethnography, by making my position and feelings at the time known. Issues of ownership emerge (Tolich 2010: 1606) where I have asked myself the question 'Do I, as the author, own their stories because I write them?' How have I represented these organisational actors in my representation of their stories? Certainly through the subsequent use of autoethnography it became clear to me, late in the writing up stage (December 2012), that perhaps I was seeing myself reflected in their words.

Mosa's impassioned speech about her frustration within her role resonated for me, but at the time I was busy trying to be detached.

I was trying to make myself unobtrusive. Mosa turned to me and said 'Can an institution such as Trinity take the generic induction on board to link it to the Masters in Global Health...to give you credits?' All eyes looked to me for a response when it was suggested, and I realised I was straddling roles, indeed I was a representative of Trinity.

Mosa spoke of these frustrations not being 'viewed in isolation of the broader organisational and institutional context' and I saw myself partly as activist/ rebel, where I also could not shut off who I had been before joining this academic context and view myself totally in isolation as 'researcher.' Reflecting upon my position as quasi - consultant within this meeting, it was clear that this meeting was boundaried as slightly separate from the previous research encounters, I was not expected to 'fix' them in any capacity, in fact, I was introduced as a researcher, hence the pressure and complexity of dual roles were absent. I felt I was part of the meeting, evidenced as I was part of the meeting too, as I was sitting around the oval table with the staff from various programme countries, and was involved in the discussions, not as objective researcher, but as participant observer.

I was not 'a complete outsider' like the other two from Trinity College facilitating the meeting, instead I had a privileged position of being uniquely familiar with the organisation, yet somehow also detached from it by my researcher status. Again, I could see that I had chosen sides, colluding with the field advisors, who saw me as researcher, not part of the organisational fabric or as a consultant and this gave me a sense of

inclusion. I had already transgressed an objective position by being so *very* pregnant. I was related to differently, people were more open in break-away groups with me present, and were more guarded when others, such as management from Headquarters or either of the facilitators from Trinity entered the room. It was as if, by being so pregnant, I was not part of the establishment. By turning to autoethnography as a retrospective sensemaking tool I was able to see this more clearly, documenting my own changing role within the research (and my own life outside of the organisation). These ideas will be further explored in Chapter Six.

Summary and Conclusions

> I will begin with the magic, and then pull the curtain aside to see the machine that systematically produces disorder (Parker, 2011: 556).

Retrospectively as researchers we can sometimes have the clarity of hindsight that can afford us a different perspective, and make links between previous unnoticed aspects of research. This retrospection can bring to light a multilayered analysis that can be complex to document, as there are many layers of 'At first I thought...and then I realised.' Parker's quote about beginning with magic and then pulling the curtain aside to expose the machine evokes the Wizard of Oz in my mind. Mosa's impassioned speech, illustrated in this Chapter, where 'the agenda keeps closing us down' had the effect upon me of metaphorically pulling the curtain aside on the organisation. It was a form of retrospective epiphany, important at the time, but grew in significance in later years. Years later, I realised a parallel between how *she* felt, and how *I* felt, that the LEARN project remit *itself* was closing down my research, as I struggled to represent it as a thesis. Part of this was due to the perceived power of the 'Wizard.' In my case, the 'wizard' represented a multiplicity of things. Firstly, my early supervisor, with his constant focus on the output of journals and publishing, before I even felt my analysis was completed. Secondly, was my perception of the 'academic machine' itself, with its formalised way of conducting research, what can and cannot be considered thesis research. And thirdly the 'development machine', that does so much 'good' in the World yet I felt it was working against itself in so many instances, closing down learning opportunities by a packed agenda, and excessive workloads turn that bureaucratic cliché

into a reality. This was in spite of claiming that they wanted to be a learning organisation and that 'people are our most important resource.' This meeting highlighted how feelings of outrage and lost opportunity were expressed in a continued sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction that even the smallest of tasks recommended to improve communication were not carried out.

I realised very late in my analysis that what I had been looking for in highlighting the machine metaphor was not just the bureaucratic organisation as machine. It was also in a more subconscious way about the many wheels that are turning in the production of a PhD, the output oriented approach of my first supervisor, and the LEARN project itself informed by management based organisational learning theory. Much of what was missing from the process in Irish Aid was *learning*, that is, discovering what works by action, reflection and listening. I discovered that during the various write-ups of my thesis, this too was missing from much of my representation.

The next chapter explores this further. It is located in a gender-mainstreaming learning event in Kampala, Uganda. It examines how organisational members use storytelling for sensemaking, learning and communication, and also shows how David Boje (1991) began to influence my thought processes and rationale, as I came to see storytelling as a *collective* learning process. It was after this event that *my story* became pivotal in making sense of the organisation and where I retrospectively begin to question my own power and role in the research.

Chapter Six: Room for Manoeuvre: Telling Stories

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Two Stories: Discourses of Development
Going to 'The Field': A Trip to Kampala is planned
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Landing
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Echoes of Colonialism
Telling Tales: Juxtaposing Stories
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Introduction

This chapter tells the story of an organisational learning experience in the form of a gender-mainstreaming training seminar in Kampala, Uganda that took place in November 2007. It examines the role of stories, both in a macro-perspective, in the official development discourse and a micro-approach, examining the stories generated within the data that help to make sense of *how* the Irish do development. It also considers how organisational members use storytelling to make sense of change which gives important insights into what they understand by a learning process. This idea is based upon an assumption that organisational realities are reflected in the stories that people tell (Gabriel, 2000), which are often complex, ambiguous and contradictory, revealing how organisational members experience daily life working for a development donor organisation.

This chapter was named after a recommendation by my supervisor, who asked me if I

was going to have a chapter illustrating room for manoeuvre after discussing the theory of development. It seems I have also unwittingly borrowed the title of this chapter from Hilhorst (2003) who uses this subheading when discussing NGOs. She rightly states that 'the concept of room for manoeuvre is apt for understanding the dynamics of development intervention' (Hilhorst, 2003: 106) as it refers to the social space for interaction available to members of a development organisation.

Using the 'At first I thought' - 'and then I realised' formula, that has run throughout this thesis marking my theoretical and analytical development, this Chapter marks a turning point. It is one that is made retrospectively, where 'at first I thought' I was writing about how the organisational members in Kampala used storytelling as an organisational learning tool. The 'and then I realised' part was that I was telling 'the story of their storytelling.' This may seem obvious, at first, but in my role, as researcher, the story/stories I chose to represent I later realised were power-laden, and told to portray my personal view of how I saw learning occurring within this embassy office. My own role in this lay hidden within the data, obscured originally by my somewhat blinkered search for organisational learning. It came to light later in the data re-analysis - that occurred after a change in supervisor and re-appraisal of my own role within the research. Much of this retrospective analysis is informed by memory. Coffey states that 'ethnography is an act of memory' because fieldwork and the resulting texts cannot be separated from the memories that shape them' (Coffey, 1999: 127). This process of remembering began with the autoethnographic excerpts, 'Flying, Landing and Floating,' which put the reader into the present, and then continued as I questioned *my* role, subjectivity and representation of the research participants. As a consequence there are multi-layered stories and storytelling that occur within this Chapter.

It has been argued that academic research into stories and the use of organisational storytelling 'has produced a rich body of knowledge unavailable through other methods of analysis' (Stutts and Barker, 1999: 213). However, there is little consensus as to what constitutes a story within the field of narrative enquiry. Significant researchers in this field, such as David Boje (1991), Barbara Czarniawska (1997), and Yiannis Gabriel (2004) all have different understandings of what a story is. Gabriel, for example,

suggests that:

> Viewing every type of text as a story obliterates those qualities that make stories vivid and powerful but also fragile sense-making devices, obscures the skill and inventiveness entailed by storytelling and reduces the usefulness of studying stories in organizations (Gabriel, 2004: 63).

For the purposes of this thesis, 'story' refers to the reflexive and fragmented accounts of a sense-making process, in which organisational members and myself reframe their experiences to make them both meaningful and contextual. To define 'story' I am using Boje's (1991) broad definition of story:

> ...as an exchange between two or more persons during which a past or anticipated experience was being referenced, recounted, interpreted or challenged' (Boje, 1991: 111).

As Reissner notes, 'stories are the building blocks of both individual and organisational identity and form beliefs of what is true or real' (2004: 31). Stories are a major factor in organisational communication and as Boje states stories are the most prevalent organisational currency (Boje, 1991). However, it is more than just the 'telling of stories'; Czarniawska (1993), believes that organisations are better understood as the process of construction of meaning, and that learning occurs through adopting shared meanings and practices. Unlike the predominant view in organisational studies where stories have to have a clear beginning, middle and end (Czarniawska, 1997), I also encountered stories as fragments, often partially completed or told, or re-told with their meaning changed. As a story can begin in the middle, or emerge in fragments without an ending, I have drawn inspiration from Boje's work on fragmented story parts (2001) to extend the definition of story to be *either* the more traditional format of beginning, middle and end, or fragment part of the whole. To contextualise the stories, the following section explores the macro-setting and historical context of the Irish in Africa and the discourses that surround their engagement with development.

Stories within a Story: Using a Fragmented Approach

I had started to explore the possible potential of storytelling research around the end of 2006. Storytelling research emerged as a subsection within management strategy and organisational studies in the 1990s. It gained further momentum in the 2000s as numerous organisational consultants turned to stories to effect change, performance and learning (Denning, 2000, 2002, 2005). However, it was Boje's work on storytelling as a sensemaking tool that really resonated with me (1991) and particularly his identification of story fragments. This was due to the fact that researchers rarely obtain a whole story with a beginning middle and end; they mostly deal with fragments of stories they are exposed to or interact with which are often constructed with multiple voices. For example, in Kampala, it was said to me:

> It's hard for people to get into gender, they say they are doing it [mainstreaming] and the boxes and ticked, but does anything really change?
>
> (Mercy, Field Advisor, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

Mercy didn't tell a story with a beginning, middle and end, yet what she did say was a fragment and from it I deduced sadness and a sense of frustration that regardless of training and up-skilling, people paid lip service to mainstreaming gender, but actual change often didn't occur. People often tell stories in code, and expect others to be able to fill in the silences through assumption or prior knowledge of a given situation. As the researcher I became complicit in translating their story - to make meaning of what they were telling me. This is in line with Boje's (2001) idea of 'story fragments' where the story told is often incomplete, fragmented and terse, and he believes we undertake acts of translation making narrative 'a retrospective explanation of storytelling's speculative appreciations' (Boje, 2001: 3).

Boje distinguishes this form of dialogue by introducing the idea of the 'antenarrative,' which highlights 'the speculative, the ambiguity of sense-making and guessing as to what is happening in the flows of experience' (Boje, 2001: 3). 'Antenarrative,' before, refers to the complex, ambiguous, fragmented state before a narrative can exist (Boje, 2001). This

distinction demonstrates the difference between organisational stories and the telling or performance of them (2001: 6). Narrative is defined as retrospective sense-making of a more distant past; whilst 'story' is defined as a more immediate-present sense-making. It is used in the current moment and context and also in relation to the living stories of others. Therefore narrative is 'a retrospective explanation of storytelling's speculative appreciations' (Boje, 2001: 3). The antenarrative-narrative approach also allows for uncertainty and frustration to be written into the research texts, and helped the analysis process by enabling me to re-visit experiences and writing about the embodied experience of the research process. Like identity, learning is both active and continuous. I hoped that a storytelling approach to the learning event might help me advance towards my goal of giving the organisation 'something' that would pass as an organisational learning strategy.

Two Stories: Discourses of Development

It is important to locate my research in Uganda through the story of Irish involvement in Africa more generally. O'Sullivan documents the historical role of the Irish in Africa noting the link between the 'missionaries' involvement and the perception of Africa by the Irish:

> By 1965 there were 6,517 Irish catholic missionaries – priests, brothers, nuns and laity – working in the developing world…Through relatives, neighbours, 'penny for a poor black baby' collections and the distribution of missionary magazines…most households had some relationship with Ireland's 'religious empire.' Africa assumed a central role…there was little effort made to distinguish Nigerians, Kenyans, Ugandans and Congolese from a mass of 'Africans'. What the Irish lacked in understanding the subtleties of that world, however, was made up for in an overwhelmingly positive attitude and pride in Ireland's role (O'Sullivan, 2012: 15).

This role in Africa also fostered Irish interest in the Continent as a whole and created a link between the activities of Irish men and women and African nationalistic aspirations (O'Sullivan, 2012: 16). However as O'Sullivan states, by its very formulation this was an imbalanced account of Ireland's role as it ignored the differing African views and the many experiences of colonialism. There was also an anomaly in the Catholic Church's aim of alleviating poverty, and empathy for developing nations, as areas of Asia and the

Philippines were also underdeveloped and English speaking, but did not attract the same attention as the involvement of the Irish in Africa. There seems to be a 'special relationship' between Ireland and Africa that can be explored through their relative histories.

The prevailing official Irish discourse was one of connection to the African continents through empathy and a shared history of 'knowing' Famine. However, this relationship may be more one sided that many would like to imagine, as O'Sullivan notes, that it was debatable that 'African elites knew - or cared - about Ireland' in return (O'Sullivan, 2012: 16). Certainly Ireland's post-colonial identity helped to shape its relationship with the developing world. However, it is perhaps too simplistic to assume the idea of a shared history was solely the reason for connecting to Africa as there was also a wider issue of assuming an identity through the expanding international relations:

> The Irish Government developed this image of the country as unique in its post-colonial experience in Western Europe and thereby able to pursue policies unavailable to its contemporaries in a manner that allowed it to assume a particular identity in its international relations (O'Sullivan, 2012: 30).

There are two different stories at play here – a formal discourse, lauded by politicians and dignitaries, one where the Irish have a unique empathy 'to understand poverty in its real form' (Murphy, 2012: 9) as is expressed by the former Taoiseach, that 'Ireland can rightly claim to empathise with those who are suffering from disease, poverty and hunger every day around the globe (Bertie Ahern, DFA, 2006: 3) and by the former President of Ireland, that the Irish can 'empathise with people living in the developing world…and see things from the point of view of the poor' (Mary Robinson, Foreword in Murphy, 2012: xi-xii).

The other story – a more informal insider discourse, tells the story of the reality of Irish's engagement *within* developing countries and the reality of day-to-day engagement. It is easy to contextualise through Stirrat's classification (2008) of mercenaries 'wanting to make a difference' with the juxtaposition of the mercenary role where 'development professionals [are] simply…interested in the material benefits they gain from working in the aid industry' (Stirrat, 2008: 407). However, suggesting that 'they are motivated

solely by this self-interest and not by any higher morality' (Stirrat, 2008: 407) or engaging in development for altruistic reasons negates the fluidity of identity, it's changing nature and complexity. There were moments within the generated data that discourses conformed to one or other of these classifications, but also where stories illustrated a more complex interaction with the field of development.

The next section situates the researcher into the context of arriving in Uganda and uses autoethnography to communicate her feelings at this time. The autoethnographic reflection also seeks to highlight difference between my quasi-consultant/researcher role and that of the other fixed term consultants from Dublin.

Going to'The Field': A Trip to Kampala is planned

In April of 2006 I met with the gatekeeper, Daniel, who suggested that perhaps I could shadow a learning event on gender-mainstreaming later that year which was to be held in Uganda in November. I was very keen to do this, thinking that I wanted to explore how the organisational culture manifested itself within a programme country and embassy office. There was some concern about the event as it coincided with the end of the biennial Heads of Government meeting which was called CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting), but eventually it was agreed and I received the following email:

> We would appreciate it if you could prepare a short synopsis of what you are going to cover during the week in Uganda and share this with us here in HQ. Following your visit we request that you prepare a short report on the outcome of your visit. We appreciate that the visit will feed into your overall work on institutional learning within Irish Aid but as a short term output from your visit an overview of the issues pursued and results from your week would be appreciated by both HQ and the Irish Aid Uganda team (August 20, 2007, E Mail).

Flying

As I sat on the connecting flight from Nairobi I stared out of the window into the black night sky, the red wine sedating my nerves and my mind swinging wildly from elation to the emotional pull of leaving my baby for the first time. I was heading off for a week to Kampala, capital of Uganda, and had little idea of what was going to happen. My flight

was paid for by Irish Aid and I was being flown business class. This was the first time I had ever flown business class and I was excited. The remit was a gender - mainstreaming training seminar, with two consultants from Irish Aid and one member of staff from headquarters in attendance. But I hadn't known this, even a few hours earlier. At the private lounge for transfers in Nairobi I was excited at the opulence surrounding me for my few hours wait. A waiter asked me if I wanted champagne and I nodded excitedly, feeling like an impostor in another world. I'd been minding my baby and completing six months of participant observation in Dublin before this, there was little opportunity to relax as my daughter was now fourteen months old. Across the room I noticed three women, two older than the other one and they seemed to be in intense conversation. Everyone else seemed to be of African origin, mainly businessmen with briefcases and suits. I downed my glass with the bubbles going straight to my head and nervously walked over to them. 'Hi' I said 'Are you from Irish Aid?' They looked up at me quizzically and said 'Yes'. 'I'm here to observe your training session as an independent researcher looking at learning' I quickly said, to which they looked very surprised and none too pleased.

Landing

The airport had a very shiny marble floor, polished to within an inch of its new life, with black and gold diamonds patterned throughout giving it a very regal feel. It was certainly more impressive than I had been expecting. I waited for my bag from the carousel and wheeled it out of the airport following the other three. There, was a man holding a sign saying 'Irish Aid' and as we walked towards him, the two older women recognised him and greeted him by name. He took our luggage and loaded it into the back of a 4X4 and we all climbed in. The air was balmy and warm outside and as the windows were closed and the air con started my head began to pound. The roads were dusty and full of bumps and as we sped towards wherever we were going I took in the little shacks with corrugated roofs and watched as the car turned each corner, unsure of where we were going or what I was going to discover.

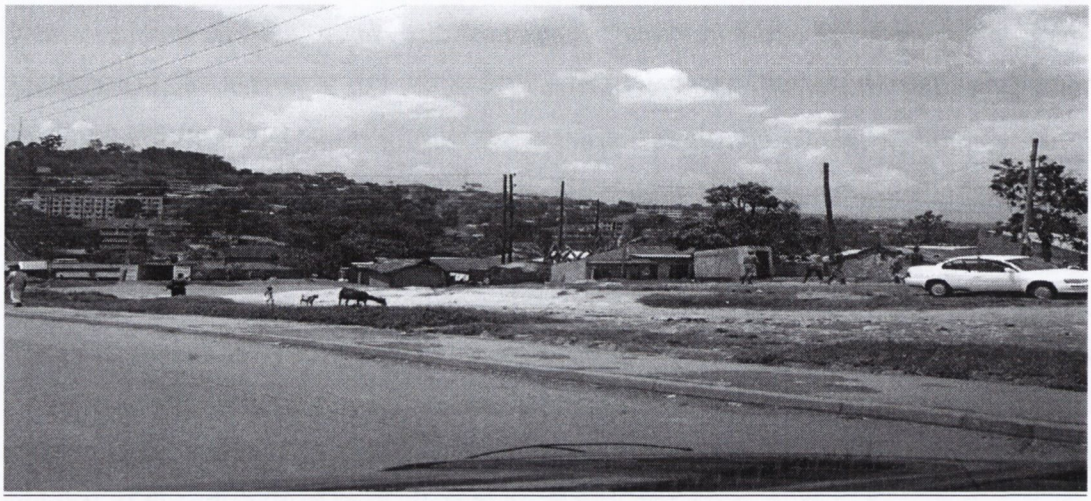


Figure 10: Photograph of a scene along the drive from Kampala Airport

Floating

The Kabira country club was a complete surprise. I awoke to the sound of birds singing and looked at my phone, it was 11am and I'd slept in late. When we'd checked in there was a message saying we weren't expected till lunch time at the Embassy due to our late arrival. I looked out of the balcony window and saw a large and inviting pool, what bliss I thought, and after freshening up, walked down to explore. At a large table almost pool side were the consultants looking at official looking papers. I sat down with them and rubbed my sleepy eyes, 'First lie in - in fourteen months' I smiled as way of an excuse, they looked up and smiled weakly. I ordered a coffee from a passing waitress and soaked in my new surroundings. Large leafy plants surrounded the perimeter and sun loungers were placed on all four sides of the large sparkling pool, the restaurant was open plan and off to the side, with a reed ceiling and large fans. Birds sang from the trees and the sunlight bounced off the water. It was glorious. Back home it was November, dull and cold. As my coffee was placed in front of me I jumped back into researcher mode:

> *Lorraine: 'Can I ask you about the training you are doing here over the next few days?' I placed my little Dictaphone on the table in front of me as I said it.*
>
> *Joan: Yes (hesitantly) sure, we are using a tool kit based around Irish aid policy with some more popular gender analysis tools and based upon best practice to implement gender- mainstreaming training, have you got that pack ? (Technical Specialist, 27 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of interview, Kampala)*

'I haven't, no, I've only ones from other organisations', I said with a bit of a giggle, as it seemed a bit bizarre to me that I hadn't been given anything, and the consultants doing the training had no idea about the fact I was to join them either until the day before in Nairobi. 'OK, well here's my copy of the main mainstreaming document which is much bigger.' She tailed off and there was an awkward silence, I was aware of the clatter of cutlery and plates being collected, and took a sip of the last of my coffee which was now cold, as a distraction. The two consultants turned to each other and began talking quietly again as they had been before I arrived. I felt odd, out of place, and decided to go for a swim before the Embassy trip. The cold water was a shock to my warm sweating body as I broke the surface with a dive and felt the water rush into my ears and eyes, the pressure from holding my breath broke as I reached the surface again and exhaled loudly. My eyes sprung open momentarily stunned by the brightness and a huge smile spread across my face. I loved to swim, loved the feeling of freedom, the immersion, the opportunity to stretch and glide, water was very comforting to me, perhaps the cocooning of it being a primordial instinct. By swimming here, in this country club pool in Kampala I felt strange, like I was being unprofessional almost, that I should have been reading documents or something, but it was too good an opportunity to miss. I swam lengths till I tired, showered and changed. The car was to collect us at one. Even that seemed strange; I'd never had a car sent for me before. This was a whole new world.

These fragments of auto ethnographic reflection are included to communicate to the reader how I was feeling at the time, in the present tense, they were not written at the time, but from memory. It was upon later introspection during the final editing process that it occurred to me that these seemed symbolic as being about the research process as a whole.

'Flying' seemed to summarise how it felt at the start of the research, keen and enthusiastic, full of confidence and enthusiasm. 'Landing' seemed to be the reality of the situation becoming clear, where confusion sets in as contradictory data emerges, and relationships either prosper or struggle between the researcher and the respondents. 'Floating' in this sense then seems to be the liminal state between the collected data and the findings, between the organisational setting and the academic setting, and in the relationship between self and data.

These auto ethnographic passages were written retrospectively, to help situate the reader

with the researcher's view and to give narrative visibility to the self, and my internal dialogue as well as setting the scene for my relationship with the consultants who also flew out from Dublin. At first I had thought I was there to look primarily at a learning event they were running, and that I was primarily in attendance to look at the gender mainstreaming learning event. Both my involvement and that of the consultants delivering the learning was peripheral to my first stage analysis. However, as an ethnographer, I had taped *all* my interactions. It was at a much later stage of analysis, after I had written the autoethnographic excerpts that I realised that what I had thought was peripheral, was actually central to my sensemaking experience. The autoethnographic parts of 'Flying, Landing and Floating' were introductions to the dynamic between me and the 'other' consultants. Upon analytic retrospection, I realised that the positioning and discourse of the consultants could shed light on *how* the Irish did development overseas – and raise some interesting questions about what the researcher includes or omits from her work.

The next section will explore the discourse of one of the Irish consultants and illustrate how her interactions seemed power-laden and resonated with the colonialist diatribe that the Irish formally claimed to eschew.

Echoes of Colonialism

In the same way that forms of knowledge were generated under colonial rule and linked inextricably to asymmetries of power, so too are the discourses of development (Stirrat, 2000: 33). The development world is not homogenous, with a single common discourse, and as there was no single discourse of colonialism, neither does there exist a single discourse of development. As was noted in Chapter One, even though the Irish were not officially colonisers like the English, Garner states that: 'there *was* a significant Irish contribution to the day to day management of the 'Empire' [where] the Irish [were] carrying out the functions, and appropriating patterns of exclusion and oppression' (Garner, 2004: 129). Interestingly, a recent newspaper article about the forthcoming European elections in Ireland stated that:

> In Ireland we have, of course, no colonial history. We didn't conquer …ironically our lack of colonial conquest has closed us off to diversity and has created a propensity for racism' (Irish Daily Mail, 8 May 2014).

Thus calling into question the way that the Irish often frame themselves as victims of colonial exploitation, whilst also creating distance between themselves and certain other racialised populations – especially if this separation is leading to racism and ignorance about multi-culturalism. Evidently, Irish identity and its relationship to Africa are more complex and multi-layered than the simple doctrine of Irish friendliness and empathy.

Despite the rhetoric of 'difference', in some ways Irish Aid may operate like any other Northern development institution through a power play that echoes the discourse of the colonisers. This is illustrated in following story, which emerged as the consultants from Ireland first engaged with the field staff in Uganda. The consultant who had flown out on the same plane as me was speaking to Mercy, who was Ugandan and the instigator of this embassy training. She had organised this session due to her own colleagues' view of what they needed in terms of training after consulting with other embassy members through a questionnaire and meetings. We had entered through the main doors and past the security man who signed us all in, continuing past a large bricked wall made of glass blocks and a seating area with Celtic harp and knots sewn into a piece of material. The embassy was open plan with a set of stairs and a grey metal handrail that went up four flights of stairs. You could hear the clatter of heels on the red tiles as people hurried about their daily work. We were in a large room with a poster about HIV prevention in Uganda on the wall and as I excused myself to the toilet before we got started I noticed there were condoms in the cubicle with the same prevention message.

> 'It's good to see you all, it's taken months, time flies, and we don't get time to what, with emails? Read through!' *[Laughs]*
>
> (Mercy, Field Advisor, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

Mercy spoke loudly as she entered the room; she was instantly likeable, gregarious and with a kind face. She had a way of asking a question as she spoke, I assumed it might be a particularly Ugandan way of speaking, to say *'to do what?'* and then answer herself

when making a point. Grace, the facilitator turned to her sharply indicating my presence and said 'Does Mercy know why you're here?' Mercy did. Grace had been put out by my arrival, she hadn't known I was coming, and as the Kampala embassy staff had been told of my arrival, it seemed likely that it wasn't thought relevant to include them in this. Consequently, they were not happy about me shadowing their training event, and as I was an 'outsider' in my role as researcher, they were unsure of me, perhaps wondering if I was reporting on their training capacity or effectiveness.

> Mercy: Yes, yes they said there's somebody coming, and the more the merrier, you're very welcome, you're very lucky you've come after CHOGM, the police, the roads closed, so even though we were off we couldn't work we are so dependent on our emails, and we couldn't get into the office so things got backed up
> Grace: It was a big success *(statement not question)*
>
> Mercy: It could have been better
>
> Grace: (*starts to disagree)* oh I don't know, well done to Uganda (*sounds patronising),*[26] were people happy?
>
> Mercy: The rural people were happy but not the middle classes
>
> Grace: Yes but we saw a huge state house on the road in from the airport
>
> Mercy: Yes, yes, but imagine all the schools that could have built
>
> (28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

I found this exchange to be patronising on the part of the consultant, she had an air of 'knowing better' and slightly arrogant, that a State visit was unwaveringly positive for this developing nation. She was using her previous 'knowledge' of Uganda to assert a position of power whereby her definition of progress was linked to success and advantaged over Mercy's local knowledge of a deficit of educational facilities. Whilst Stirrat (2000) says it is misleading to characterise consultants as agents of neo-colonialism, there exists an imperialism of thought (Stirrat, 2000: 41) brought by consultants, in asserting themselves in a position of power, feeling they know more than their indigenous colleagues.

[26] Field notes, 28 November 2007

After this exchange, the two consultants then asked Mercy about the level of input from the other colleagues and find out about what she wanted to get out of the training, especially the experiences exchanged as she had set out very clear ideas about that and she began by telling us how this training had come about (28 November 2007). Mercy had previously sent out a questionnaire to the Ugandan embassy staff based upon an internal self-assessment. At this meeting each of the sections, such as the HIV/Aids section was asked what they wanted from the training and people were asked to write anonymously on pieces of paper what they did and did not want in terms of the gender-mainstreaming training and they were very specific about what they did not want. They did not want academic theory around gender-mainstreaming or effectiveness, and they did not want the training to be 'unrealistic'. Instead they emphasised a need for practical hands on tools.

> What we would like from this training would be practical hands on, it may seem like we are doing something, but we need this sort of training, we have had the broader approach to mainstreaming but we need more, tools, in the practical sense, sometimes we do it without knowing we are actually doing it.
>
> (Lerato, Field Advisor, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

The learning outcomes were very similar to those stated within the meeting in September 2006 (Chapter Five), concerning understanding Irish Aid's policies, implementation as well as learning tools to help with this process, strengthening gender-mainstreaming and sharing experiences at country level. The objectives at the 2006 September meeting were also based upon this idea of sharing experiences, of social learning and emphasised improved communication and knowledge sharing. However, many of those present felt that it fell short of its objectives through a crowded agenda, lack of space for group work and communication and prioritisation of the pre-set agenda over reflexivity and shared experiences. I was keen to see how this one would work out in comparison. At the end of the preparation meeting they made arrangements for the next morning.

> Mercy: What time do you expect us to start tomorrow?
>
> Grace: Very promptly at nine sharp…yes, that was one of my concerns, I know how Ugandans are … *(nervous laughter from all)*

(28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

Grace then continued with a story:

> I remember sitting in the boardroom of the Department of Gender Labour and Social Development. It was an internal meeting with people from all the different sections, I was there on time, and about one hour later the meeting started and I had done an analysis and said 'do you know how much time and money this hour has cost by having us sitting here twiddling our thumbs? It got a bit better and instead of losing an hour, we lost half an hour but yeah, anything you can do to get that message across, the bottom line is, if they are late coming, they will have to be late leaving
>
> (Grace, Technical Specialist, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

The tone was quite hostile - like a headmistress chastising her prefects and there was some tension in the room. However, a few people laughed, more out of politeness I thought, and someone mentioned the impending gridlock of Kampala's traffic, and they filtered out of the room. The tone was set for the training by these exchanges, clearly the consultant was stating her role, as one who has travelled widely, who knows 'the real Uganda' and in asserting her position in this way, she was demarking herself as in charge, in control and authoritarian. These echoes of colonialism were not the happy, friendly, approachable way that other Irish staff would claim to be their comparative advantage in development. This exchange juxtaposed with a second story that I had recorded and transcribed on the first day of training.

Telling Tales: Juxtaposing Stories

The next morning, bright and early, the meeting started in an upstairs conference room at the Kabira country club where I was staying. There were fifteen embassy staff, as well as myself, and three consultants. The session started with an introduction from Mercy and a ratification of the training programme based upon what people had expressed the day before in their anonymous notes. Mercy then introduced a Governmental Commissioner for gender who was speaking on behalf of the Ugandan Government. As she stood up, it was clear the room was very receptive to her. He voice was loud and she had a wide smile, making everyone feel at ease. She decided to open her speech with a story, and the

room fell silent:

> I'd like to share a story with you…one year we had a great harvest yet the following year the harvest was only half the size despite the conditions being similar for growing so we, at the Government, decided to look for the answer why. In 2004, I think it was, it had been a bumper year for rice production, and everyone had done very well from it, the men had gone off to the market and had a merry time, some men took more wives, and the men didn't return to their households for days. So the next year, we were expecting the same, as the conditions for growing were similar, but the harvest was only half as good, why?
>
> The women, cross at their husbands for disappearing with the money from the harvest the year before, and having had a merry time, and some had even married four wives, they had got together and decided to boil the seeds before they planted them, only half of them sprouted, and the men could not afford to make merry in the market that years but stayed at home. The women had carried out passive resistance at a household level, and this act affected the national economy. This is my story to you, to show how gender, economics and well-being are all related in Uganda.
>
> (Ugandan Governmental Commissioner for Gender, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

Everyone in the room laughed and smiled at the story and immediately they were at ease. The story had illustrated the importance of gender in a way that was accessible, relatable and culturally specific. It occurred to me retrospectively when I was writing this chapter (November 2012) that I had heard two stories, or parables, in these opening hours. One story that seemed reminiscent of colonialism, with a stern quality and a chastising tone to it and the second story was warm and illustrative of gender and cultural ways of affecting the national economy. This juxtaposition was very interesting to me, as one story had made *me* feel uncomfortable, questioning how others in the room saw me, whilst the other story was one I identified with and repeated many times when teaching as an example of the complexity of looking at gender and development. These parables reflected aspects of power in both their morals and by representing the storyteller in a certain light.

Engaging in the Field: The Irish are like Family

These two stories were fascinating to me, I recorded and transcribed them at the time, but it was much later in the analysis when their resonance really became apparent. It was after reading O'Sullivan's work (2013) that I began to link the themes of Irish identity,

and development together. By looking at the narrative and public discourse of 'empathy' which links Ireland and the Irish to the developing world in a specific way, it is perhaps not difficult to see where the idea of the Irish as a 'family' rather than employers has originated. If the Irish have been more able than some of their counterparts to 'see things from the point of view of the poor' (Mary Robinson, Foreword in Murphy, 2012: xi-xii), then perhaps it is this emotional connection, steeped in the history of the 'penny for the black baby' mythology that pervades. Retrospectively I looked back at the transcriptions I had from taking a trip to a field office in Kampala, funded by Irish Aid for some clues to making sense of this idea. I had asked the embassy staff if I could visit one of the partner organisations funded by Irish Aid. They suggested TASO, the AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) which is an indigenous HIV and AIDS NGO operating in Kampala. It is one of the largest health institutions there, providing comprehensive HIV prevention, care and support services in Uganda, with programmes for children, adolescents, men, women and couples. The senior manager explained to me that it was back in 1982 that the first cases of AIDS were identified in Uganda. However, it was not until 1986 that the new Government came up with a vibrant campaign against HIV and AIDS. Over tea, he told me the following story about the organisation's beginnings:

> A small group of people affected and infected by HIV started meeting in Mulago Referral Hospital. This small group included a radiographer, physiotherapists, doctors, nurses, patients and their families. They met informally on the ward and at their homes. Eventually, they were given a room in which they met to share ideas, unburden to each other and offer comfort to those who needed it. The small group became a family united by a common enemy. This is the foundation on which our organization, the AIDS Support Organization (TASO) was built.
>
> (Transcribed from tape recording of interview with TASO, 29 November 2007, Kampala)

After he talked about his organisation as a 'family', I had asked him how it was to interact with Irish Aid over funding, and he responded that this same family feeling within their organisation was felt with the benefactors, that they appreciated their relaxed manner, their sociability and casual nature, which marked them as different from their other Northern counterparts. During that same trip I had also casually chatted to the Ugandan driver who said he liked working for the Irish as they were friendly and relaxed compared to staff from other embassies. 'We eat lunch together' he had said, 'other embassies stick to their own – but the Irish are good, we just get on.' I had coded during

my initial analysis for 'family,' and Richard had talked about his disappointment that there wasn't more of a family feeling, rather that they struggled to see how they could all fit into the development picture (Richard, Civil Servant, 30 June 2006, transcribed from tape-recorded interview, HQ Dublin). It struck me in later analysis that perhaps 'family' was reserved for those doing the 'real' development work – technical specialists, and those in programme countries – as there was little 'family' feeling in the September meeting amongst visiting advisors and headquarters staff. However, this story was not altogether pervasive, as at other times, it seemed that Irish aid was very much like other development donors in Uganda.

Is Irish Aid Really that Different from Other Development Donor Organisations?

Other stories told to me in Uganda resonated with the idea that the reality of day-to-day life within Irish Aid was *not* so different from other development institutions. This story, told to me in the embassy during the learning training came from a technical specialist who talked to me about the irony of being trained in gender mainstreaming within an organisation that had gender-biased practices.

> It's a boys' network, I'm sure you'll hear that from several people, an *old* boys' network…this organisation is set in stone…you've the politicians and then the rest of us are out in the cold, then even in HQ there's an inner circle and an outer one and especially in the field, if you've never worked in headquarters you're out somehow, new people might bring change, it's not clear though about why certain people get certain jobs, there's a lack of transparency and also in who gets posted where. You fill in your preferences and then somebody gets their first preference and somebody doesn't - on what basis was that decision made? There are steps towards that like the work the unions are doing but it's not perfect, a system that treats everybody equally, in some ways they are in a different era, when you look at working in the field, if I'm working and my partner isn't, he isn't recognised, if we aren't married, there's no equality.
>
> (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

It illustrated the point that Irish Aid Irish was similar to its Northern counterparts through a pervasive system of being an 'old boys club' and entrenched in bureaucracy:

> It's staggering really, when I got pregnant they e-mailed me to say your health insurance does not cover maternity and if there's any illness that's pregnancy related you're not covered, can you believe that?

(Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 28 November 2007, transcribed from tape recording of Gender-mainstreaming Meeting, Kampala)

These stories, illustrated a disjuncture, between an official discourse and an unofficial one - in the case of the gender training, the protocol of mainstreaming gender was promoted as a cross-cutting issue for Irish Aid; whilst the very ethos of the organisation was thought of as unequal and gender biased. It was clear that not *all* those in Irish Aid, held the view of family – in fact it seemed quite elusive.

I thought I was exploring how different the Irish were in their engagement with the field, friendlier, more empathetic and connected to their African counterparts than other Northern institutions, but the colonialist echoes surprised me, where an attitude of condescension, albeit subconscious perhaps, prevailed for the consultant. This contradiction manifested itself in informal conversations, outside of the formalised learning and created a paradox of professionalism linked to casual colonialist undertones.

It was the later stages of analysis that drew these 'shadow side' stories out. They were often hidden within the data, where development practices often remain covert and subterranean (Gabriel, 1998). Other stories manifested within the research from the Dublin headquarters in the same way. Stories were said in hushed tones or outside the work premises and not recorded, presented, published and preserved. Another employee had spoken frankly about organisational learning, and said it amounted to them being a dysfunctional organisation, but at the end of the interview said 'you won't quote me on any of this?' and I have taken steps to make him anonymous. Due to the nature of my presence there at this time, I was able to record the 'unmanaged organisation,' the shadow side, which Gabriel refers to as 'a kind of organizational dream world in which desires, anxieties and emotions find expressions' (Gabriel, 1995: 477). When I looked analytically at the stories they told, there were many fragments of disillusionment and discontent. When told during times of profound change these stories help to illustrate the tension underlying everyday work, and often 'rebellious accounts' emerge reflecting disillusionment. Stories undoubtedly release tensions arising from awkward situations and they offer insights into the multi-vocal and situated dynamics of an organisation at a particular time, facing particular challenges through change.

Boje's work on ante narrative resonates strongly here, as it is the speculative, *my* second guessing, as to hidden meanings and inferences that helped me to make sense of the data retrospectively. It is, in one part, the stories that communicate a message, but also in the performance of those stories another message is given, at first I had thought Grace to be representative of a Northern 'expert' rhetoric, that resonated as power play and thinly disguised colonialism, but I was also interpreting her in terms of how *I* wanted to be seen, to separate myself from the standard consultant role, as I seemed to occupy a lineal space in between consultant and researcher. This often enabled me to be privy to accessing the feelings and thoughts that a consultant would not get due to the nature of their singular role. This enabled a multi-faceted type of engagement where I often straddled the divide between insider and outsider, able to be both part of the organisation and yet separate from it.

Dorinne Kay Kondo's work (1990) on resistance within organisations has influenced much of the background to this idea. Kondo questions other academic work on resistance and by using examples from Japanese shop floor workers she shows that workers are often caught in contradictions, engaged in simultaneously legitimising managerial dictates whilst also challenging them. Thus the issue is not simply that 'some workers are disillusioned' and 'some are fulfilled' but is instead about interplay between emotions where workers can quite happily be questioning the 'organisation as family' metaphor whilst simultaneously taking pride in it. This was evident in much of my research, as people told stories to elaborate upon this seeming paradox, belonging and yet not belonging. Kondo concludes that identity and selves are not fixed or coherent but are created continually and often bounded with contradiction and irony. How people cope with change, new knowledge, uncertainty and flux at any given point in time is intertwined with a complex series of subjectivities and contested meanings. Kondo's idea of the interplay can be seen in the following story.

Seeking difference: smoked salmon in the diplomatic bag

It was my last day in Kampala. I had been invited to dinner by a senior official at the embassy, and it was my first time to see how the Irish development professionals lived in their host country. I was collected from the country club where I was staying by a driver and notified of his arrival by the reception staff. We left the dusty roads of the city centre and entered an area that was noticeably greener and full of gated communities. Upon arrival at some huge gates we were met by security staff that let us in, so we could proceed up the driveway to the house. It was an enormous house, with an open veranda along the whole front supported by large white pillars. The veranda looked out onto a lush green lawn full of sprinklers with gardeners pottering about in the dusky light. We were met by the official with staff waiting in attendance behind him to take our jackets and serve us drinks. As we sat, I could see Ugandan women working behind the scenes and felt distinctly uncomfortable as Irish whisky was served by Ugandan staff in a distinctly non indigenous setting of green lawns and white pillars. The people present engaged in casual small talk until dinner was ready, we were then asked to take our seats in a grand room around a long table complete with white Irish lace tablecloth. As the entrée was served, a small laugh tittered around the table as we were told the Irish smoked salmon had come over in the diplomatic bag.

This expatriate way of living has its roots in colonialism. It was the way that the colonisers had lived for centuries, the same ones that the Irish were so keen to distinguish themselves from. Stirrat (2008) emphasised this when he discussed the group of development workers classified as 'mercenaries':

> Cocooned as they are in their expensive hotels and air conditioned vehicles, their contact with 'real people' is mediated through government officers, interpreters and go-betweens of various sorts. Only slightly better in terms of morality are longer-term expatriates employed by these agencies. Even though they may be living in poor countries, they are again seen as being out of touch with the 'real world' of the poor, living in expatriate enclaves and enjoying a quality and style of life which makes it impossible for them to know the 'real world'. These people, it is argued, are only in the business for the money (Stirrat, 2008: 40).

Obviously these classifications are overly simplistic and Stirrat states how the nature of development has changed that has led to the 'angst' of development. This is due to the uncertainty of development itself, a sentiment that was vehemently expressed throughout my time researching Irish Aid. Stirrat notes that this uncertainty is pertinent to all development work which has become less visible and less tangible (Stirrat, 2008: 411). This angst fuels the mercenary self-image, which may be formed as a mechanism of self-defence, against accusations of failure or lack of commitment to the changing objectives of development. As the system changes, so does the intention of identity of the development professional, those that began as empathetic care givers determined to 'make a difference' become disillusioned and succumb to roles and power play traditionally aligned to those in the colonialist past. Stirrat's classifications are entry points for looking at the values, identity and image of those working in development, not necessarily accurate portrayals. Stirrat's work has resonated with my research, in trying to differentiate whether the Irish *are* indeed different when working in development, or if this is rhetoric of inclusion to a misappropriated partner – the Irish seem to have less in common with their African counterparts and more in common with the despised colonisers than they might imagine.

However, this was not only true of those I was researching, but also of myself. In the autoethnographic excerpts I had been at pains to express *my* difference, in noticing how I wasn't part of the group of consultants, even though I travelled out on the same plane as them, business class, was staying at the same hotel, driven by the same driver, and had decided to swim in the pool, to what I imagined was disapproval, because this routine and life, was something they were very used to, and their professionalism meant they didn't take advantage of the free champagne or use the hotels facilities as if they were on holiday. As Kondo notes, workers are often caught in contradiction, and this was as true for me as it was for those formally employed by Irish Aid. The interplay between questioning the organisation, and also being part of it, is not uncommon, yet for most of the research journey I could only see that *they* were manifesting power, not that I too, was by proxy, part of the expatriate group, to all extents and purposes, a white educated Western women, brought in by Irish Aid, just like all the others there, partaking in Irish whisky and smoked salmon.

Like Kondo, I too was told many stories of belonging and yet not belonging. Yet overall it was *my story* of navigating this research that was possibly the most illuminating. My own identity was not fixed or coherent but was continually created and bound with contradiction. It was not only their fluid identities that linked them to illusion and disillusion at various times – but also my own. At first I had thought that I was to observe a learning event, I realised quickly that they were telling stories which was organisational learning in action. This creation of 'new meanings' within the organisation was undoubtedly a learning experience. As I started to analyse these stories, I realised that there were multiple layers of storytelling occurring, not least, my own story – of the story – Boje notes how the storyteller and the listener become co-constructors of each story event and multiple stories are enacted simultaneously in and around organisations (1995: 1000). In this way, storytelling becomes a collective process.

Summary and Conclusions

I began this chapter by looking at the idea of social spaces for interaction, trying to find room to manoeuvre. I found that telling stories was an effective way of organisational learning, but I also found that stories are power laden, in choosing whose voice to privilege as not all voices are heard equally. As Hazen states, 'some voices are louder, more articulate and more powerful than others' (Hazen, 1993: 16). Exploring stories as a learning tool was an entry point to looking at learning within a programme country setting, proving them to be an effective organisational currency (Boje, 1991) but I found that the contradiction, and the multiplicity of stories, and their fluid meanings to be unexpected. There were not *two stories*, an official and an unofficial discourse, around how the Irish do development, there were many. On one hand they were seen to be friendlier and more empathetic perhaps in their engagement, yet not to the extent that it is mythologised within official discourse by Irish Government officials. On the other hand, the 'non-colonialists' card seems to be overplayed when the Irish development professionals and their consultants expound a similar expatriate lifestyle and discourse as those in other Northern development institutions.

Whether or not this is unique to development officials is questionable, or is perhaps just symptomatic of large bureaucracies where contradictions and disjuncture's occur between policy and practice at many levels. What is certain though, that through retrospective reflection I was able to highlight my own contradictions within the research journey, and to see that my experiences in 'Aidland' were also bounded with irony and contradiction. This marks the turning point between Phase One and Two of the research, where I began to analyse power and knowledge through my own positionality. I began to see that the originality of my work lay not in representing their learning experiences, but in the relationship between my own learning and reflections, as I tried to grapple with understanding Irish Aid.

Chapter Seven: Success, Multiple Realities and the Aesthetic Experience

Introduction

My Struggle to Formalise Organisational Learning through Storytelling: Conflicting Loyalties and 'Letting Them Down'

Issues of Personal Disclosure and Hoarding Knowledge The

Messy Reality of Research: Things that cannot be told

Representing the Multiple and Overlapping Loyalties to Individual Members

The aesthetic experience

Emotion and the research landscape

Using Emotion to Understand Conflicting loyalties: The Learn Project and Thesis

Evaluating Success

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

On this research journey, I have often struggled to represent the multiple and overlapping loyalties: to the organisation; to individual members, to the LEARN project, and to my thesis work. This struggle exemplifies what Staples (2007) calls an 'ethical precariousness'- where loyalties are divided, and work in contrast to each other. Each struggle is indicative of wider conflict between representation and communication. For each separate grouping represented within the research, the concept of success will differ. This chapter examines these ideas further to show how these struggles manifested with a deeper exploration of the two distinct phases of research and their significance.

My Struggle to Formalise Organisational Learning through Storytelling: Conflicting Loyalties and 'Letting Them Down'

As researchers we are under pressure to conform to a neat linear sequence of chapters: methodology, literature review, findings chapters and conclusions but the issue of representation must be called into question. I agree with Clifford and Marcus (1986).

who state that writers are obliged to 'find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multi-subjective, power-laden, and incongruent' (1986: 8). In using data, theory and autoethnographic reflections within most chapters of this thesis I have attempted to create a continual appraisal, re-appraisal and interpretation of my experience of the organisation's story. However, it is only once the issue of representation is questioned and examined that the research process is exposed as being 'messier' than was originally anticipated[28] and upon each re-analysis, the research stream gets murkier.

When I returned from the gender-mainstreaming training seminar in Kampala, Uganda at the end of November 2007, I was asked to attend a meeting to present a report. This was to be based upon my findings of what I had observed. When it was my turn to give feedback, I summarised by explaining how the teams had succeeded in organisational learning by exchanging stories. A sense of cohesion amongst embassy staff had emanated from these stories and I gave a few examples to those present at the meeting. This was organisational learning in action.

However, I realise now that what I did *not* do was to represent the stories as had been recorded and transcribed in my data. One team that proved how effective stories could be in sharing information was the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS) team, who told a wonderful story about how gender-mainstreaming was working in practice - information that was previously unknown to the others sharing their professional space in the embassy. Other stories emerged after watching a video about inequalities within Uganda between men and women. One advisor told the story of how helping women inevitably helped men. She shared her personal reflections on how an aunt, who lived in a rural area had received micro finance funding for a mobile phone, which she had turned into a profitable business. Her uncle had then been able to take time off and the whole family had benefited due to his growing health concerns, as he had contracted malaria. She concluded that helping women to become economically independent would help more than just the women; it would help the family and also the community. The stories were numerous and rich in detail, facilitating organisational learning, communication and

[28] See Sambrook, S., Stewart, J., and Roberts, C. 2008. Doctoral Supervision: Glimpses from Above, Below and in the Middle, *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 32*(1), pp.71-84.

undoubtedly building organisational capacity.

It is striking to me now that my formal report had no details of these stories; nor did it give any precise examples of how they had affected learning or been successful communication tools. Instead, what I had delivered was one page (as had been requested) on the 'bare facts' as I saw them. I had translated a rich diverse and successful event, into a dry page. My report stated:

Gender Mainstreaming Training Feedback

The teams exchanged experiences through organisational narrative and storytelling, between teams and in an easy and fluid manner during the training sessions. Storytelling built confidence, enhanced cross-embassy learning where there was other embassy staff present, and built organisational capacity. However, when asked to formally document their stories, there was reluctance and an organisational capacity barrier. When asked to document stories over the next six months in similar reflexive meetings, this was met with trepidation.

The stories told in organisations offer researchers and those looking at organisational learning a natural entry point to understanding and intervening in the culture of an organisation. In other words, to aid an organisation that aims to become a learning organisation. However, organisations are not one made up of one story but are a multiplicity of stories and story interpretations that inform their daily working lives.

Research has highlighted the connection between the sharing of experiences through story (as case studies in this example) and a larger organisation reality as storytelling communicates the culture, history and beliefs of a group. Stories connect facts in retrievable and understandable form and help people understand complex environments. Stories can be extremely helpful in presenting multi-dimensional ideas, and aid the learning organisation by making tacit knowledge explicit. Thus within this organisation stories have the potential to:

Facilitate adaptation to change; share tacit knowledge; generate emotional connection; Engender cross country communication; develop trust and commitment and build organisational capacity.

Figure 11: Extract from my report to the Irish Aid gender- mainstreaming committee

As I passed the document around the mainstreaming training team, one woman said quietly to me:

> We used to have someone who collected stories, don't know what happened to them though, probably filed away with everything else (Niamh, Technical Specialist, 30 November 2007, gender-mainstreaming meeting, HQ Dublin).

Upon hearing this, I felt deflated. This resonated with comments quoted in the exploratory phase about documents only creating work for shelf builders (Cathal, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, Interview, HQ Dublin, Interview, HQ Dublin). I felt as if anything I was doing was a waste of time. Nothing else was said about my report; it was glanced at, with a few murmurs, and then the chair stated that they needed to move on to any other business. I felt I had so much to say yet I didn't. I had moved beyond looking at knowledge to identifying where certain loyalties lay – it was no longer about the LEARN team, my loyalties had shifted to certain members of the organisation I was studying – and I had let them down. I had done a disservice to those Irish Aid workers in Kampala. They had shown me that storytelling *does* work as an organisational learning tool, but I had failed to convey the usefulness of it to the managers back at headquarters.

It was only much later in Phase Two that upon deeper retrospection and analysis I realised that, like those I had interviewed and analysed as being disillusioned, *I too* felt this way. I had been able to tell stories yet couldn't seem to document them; rather I had reverted to the 'organisational way of doing things' in producing an 'objective' account. I had adjusted the rich and vibrant nature of the learning event and turned it into a generic bland document. I had hidden the rich data and texts I had collected, and conformed to an essentialised version of what had occurred. Like Daniel, I was guilty of protecting and hoarding knowledge, and not sharing. At the time I felt that perhaps I lacked the expertise to translate what I had observed into a successful document, but it was upon re-analysis and retrospective reflection at a later stage that I realised there was more going on than merely an inability to perform the task. I was starting to realise that it was less about 'knowledge' and more about interpersonal loyalties. In order to shed light on my feedback from Kampala, it is important to look at how I dealt with being asked to produce *overall* feedback eighteen months later.

Issues of Personal Disclosure and Hoarding Knowledge

On July 17th 2009 I received an email asking me to present my research findings. The organisation wanted my three year's research in a fifteen minute presentation. I had

reams of data, hundreds of hours of transcribed notes, and I was in the midst of feeling adrift with my PhD. I had just changed supervisors and my entire research was in flux. The email read:

> Lorraine,
>
> The rough plan is that following introductions to the session to LEARN you will make a 15 minute presentations of your findings, and put out issues for discussion. Then, we will have the discussion around the issues, and a wrap up identifying next steps. We would like you to reorganise your short contribution to cover, in this order:
>
> Preliminary findings, the sources of the data you used, and issues for the discussion. The paragraphs might look like:
> 'Findings indicate that ...'
> 'These findings are based on data from meetings, etc' 'Issues which should be discussed are ...'
>
> Irish Aid are keen to know what you have found from all the data they let you have access to and is anxious to know what you have found and what we want to discuss, and hence who should come to the meeting.
> Try to keep it to one page.

'One page?' I said incredulously to my supervisor. How could I disseminate my entire eighteen months of data collection into a single page? She looked at me quizzically, 'there's not a hope' I said, 'and it's so complex that I'm going to struggle to put this into a thesis let alone a single page. The feedback I gave to them after Kampala about storytelling as a learning mechanism just got shelved somewhere, how can I give them a page on <u>all</u> the things I found?' I asked imploringly.

However, I *had* done this before – I *had* produced a one page document from the Kampala learning event – essentialising rich data into a single page. Retrospectively, and with the clarity of hindsight, I can see that what was occurring at this time was an unwillingness to do this. I was digging my heels in and stating that it couldn't be done.

This tension was indicative of an inner battle of representation. This was based on what I perceived as a type of forced censorship, or battle over ownership, and a fear of being exposed for having not yet made full sense of the data.

The idea of assimilating all my findings into one page of neatly produced bullet points meant compacting depth and thick description that I felt the complexity of the

organisation would be lost. Also, I had data that was highly personal. Even years later, I am forced to withhold data because it could damage certain individuals' careers and standing within the development community. Through siding with organisational members over sensitive issues to do with Irish Aid confidentiality agreements mean that not all is disclosed here or can ever be. I had ownership over sensitive data – and even though I have tried to include all aspects where possible, the reader must be aware that not all data can be revealed.

It was also personal in the sense that I felt ownership over it, and perhaps, an unwillingness to share. Perhaps, like Daniel and others in the organisation, I *too* wanted to hoard my knowledge. My only power, I realised retrospectively and was aware of much later, was to withhold. I *could* have given one page for them to evaluate as a success or a failure yet I didn't *want* to. My supervisor accused me of fetishising this aspect, as I had mentioned it several times. This was the culmination of all my fears. This was the start of Phase Two.

I was also struggling with my fear that I didn't know what I had found. I had some ideas about things that would work to enhance organisational learning; reflective space for storytelling as knowledge exchange, organisational yellow pages so staff could find each other – but as to an analysis of my research; I wasn't ready. It was half way through 2009 – and our initial remit was to present findings by the end of 2007:

> Stage Three: Jan – Dec 2007: Presentation of Findings Analysis and development of Organisational learning System

I had just changed supervisors, and my whole analysis and approach was in disarray. How could I tell the organisation in hadn't analysed my research yet?

So here I sit, the little black letters whirling before my eyes like ants on the page, I rub my eyes and try to refocus, I'm surrounded by piles of articles, other people's research on this topic, on organisational learning, ethnography, stories, methodology; on the other side of the room, tapes and folders of transcriptions, library books, the printer whirring to churn out more of other people's ideas. It's getting dark outside and my mind turns to picking Edie up. She's five, and it's

the highlight of my day to have her rush into my arms and tell me about what she did at school. Then I remember her Dad's collecting her today and I'm forced to stare once again at the screen. No excuses now, got to plough ahead, 'Come on' my brain urges me, 'write'!

For years now I had been struggling with how to put it all down on paper, ideas whirling around my head, usually peaking in the half hour just before I go to sleep, keeping sleep and rest at bay, such a journey, so complex, how could I represent what happened? A project that started and finished without closure, a change of supervisor and department, a child coming into my life and another one not, then more recently my father dying. An organisation that needed fixing, that decentralised to the other side of the country a year after I started data collection, a one-size-fits-all solution to incredible complexity. 'One page' and 'keep it simple' it was like trying to write 'War and Peace' on a postage stamp. I found myself shrinking away from them more and more lost in the thesis process. How to distinguish my research from my task? How to produce both an organisational learning system and a PhD? How could I orientate myself through the problem of being both researcher and consultant?

It wasn't until this point – which marks the beginning of Phase Two – that I realised (with the help of my second and current supervisor) that I couldn't make sense of it without putting myself into the data. 'It jumps off the page when you say I' she told me 'why are you afraid to use your own voice?' But it was more than just confidence; it was about my conceptualisation of what it was that I was doing, how I was trying to find a solution to a problem. It was also about how I struggled with reconciling what I was trying to look at - the organisation culture and portrayed experiences of learning. It became about representation.

In order to do this, I had to re-transcribe my data and insert my own questions into the conversations I had recorded. I had to let my own field notes guide me and become a primary source of data *myself.* This reworking of my data allowed me to look more deeply at the interactions I had experienced. It was a fundamental moment when I rewrote my data to put myself back into it. Working retrospectively in this way, I saw the data with a fresh perspective, where the machinations and problems I had experienced in analysis were due to the exclusion of the researcher as a 'self' within the data. *I* had played such a pivotal role in the relationships and interactions that had generated the data.

I realised retrospectively that this is as much a thesis about me as it is about the organisation and its members that I first sought to understand. I also had to question some of my interactions, my changing attitude and my *own* aims of this research. For example, in Kampala, I had documented informal conversations between the consultant facilitators of the learning event and other field staff. All this data now became usable data, not just what had been formally said in meetings. In doing so, I highlighted what I felt was a questionable conversation between two staff, that I later recounted as a story echoing colonialist discourse. In re-evaluating my role, after I had written the autoethnographic parts 'Flying, Landing, Floating,' I re-evaluated *my own role* in what data I had selected, realising that I too had an agenda, I was keen to disassociate myself from the role of 'white expert woman.'

The Messy Reality of Research: Things that cannot be told

> Recognising emotion as part of the mess of doing research is not a reason to disregard it, but a reason to highlight its purpose and value. Writing emotion into development research is critical on two specific levels, firstly in the way that the 'field of research' is constructed and approached by the researcher and secondly, in recognising that not only is emotion instrumental in the production of data but that it is itself also data (Humble, 2012: 80).

In academic research, Cook (1998) states that 'mess' can be considered to be the feelings, experiences and processes that occur during the research process. Humble (2012) proposes that emotion should be added to this list, arguing that the core challenge in development work is in 'recognising the importance of mess to the research process' (Humble, 2012: 80). He goes on:

> Confusion or mess is potentially invaluable to the research process and should not only feature in accounts of research, but should be recognised as an integral and productive part of the research narrative (or process) (Humble, 2012: 80).

A similar argument is put forward by Bansler and Havn (2003) who make the case for research perspectives to take the 'messy reality of systems development practice seriously and so make it possible to grasp its non-methodological, un-planned and fortuitous aspects' (Bansler and Havn, 2003:1). Cook states that the acknowledgement of

this 'messy area' is essential for rigorous research to take place, and that it needs to be celebrated for the positive role it plays in creating depth and rigour within the participatory research process (Cook, 2009: 289). The very nature of collecting data is built upon relationships of trust and disclosure which are bound to be messy due to their fluidity, contextual nature and continual negotiation. For example, in my interactions with Gavin, I found the empathy that I had with him becoming 'messy' when he confided in me, and what had been wonderful, insightful data, illuminating many aspects of this 'hidden world,' became dangerous. His future engagement with this organisation and others funded by it - in essence his entire future career - could be sabotaged by my disclosure. When I saw him subsequently he was very anxious about this, and once away from the environment of disclosure he had worried extensively about what he had said to me. I gave him the draft of his words that I was including in the final thesis to show him how I had changed any possible identifying features and to reassure him of anonymity.

The inconsistency and messy nature of research is often swept under the carpet, with disclosures left unsaid. Even though we try to disregard the mess, it still remains. According to Cook (2009) the mess is often disregarded rather than being part of the disclosed process, and emotion often suffers the same fate. My own conclusion is that if we try to create a seamless, smooth and linear piece of research out of 'a messy reality' then we are in fact creating misleading research. The term 'mess' refers to aspects of research which cannot or do not fit into the finished piece of research.

The first 'mess' was due to the context of the research. It was research conducted during a time of extreme change due to decentralisation, meaning that many staff members moved to Limerick or left the organisation before I could get 'follow-up' interviews with them. However, this 'chaos' worked beneficially in providing rich data where some staff questioned their role in this development organisation. It brought to fruition more emotional responses than might otherwise have been shown. The second 'mess' represented was when my supervisor sent me to the Sociology department, which set of a chain of events, causing me to request a transfer to that Department and a re-configuring of my research. Both these examples illustrate how 'chaos' and 'mess' can be a necessary part of a journey.

Another type of 'mess' can be the enormous amounts of data that a qualitative study can create. I had been struggling with hidden meanings as I attempted to bridge the tension between adopting a creative style and trying to write with clarity which was a messy and hectic process. My office was full of piles of notes, transcriptions with hundreds of post-its attached from various attempts to reframe and analyse organisational member's words, piles of journal articles with every manner of approach as I looked and then as time went on, more and more frantically searched, for a mechanism, a methodology that could tie both my insight, hunches and ideas, with what I had felt had *really* gone on. Not the nice sanitised version, of going in, collecting data, analysing data, and sending them the results; what I had was messy, confusing, and full of confidences, things said 'off record,' full of collusions and secrets. I had data that was full of contradictions, disjuncture and chaos. Paradoxes abounded, and I searched for an answer as if my data were a code to be cracked. But as other authors have shown, this feeling is illusory, and we need to accept the 'mess':

> I am led to question my approach to managing 'mess', and indeed my need to manage it, a degree of messy thinking is indeed useful as structured, organised thinking can limit creativity (Walsh, 2007: 16).

To quote Charmaz (2004: 981) 'through struggling with ambiguity and bewilderment you may sense hidden meanings and gain a deeper understanding'; and it was armed with this sense of how hidden meanings and a deeper understanding may arise, that I came to see author-reflexivity as the missing piece of the jigsaw. In such a 'messy' reality, reflexivity becomes a useful tool for sense-making. However, in order to portray multiple selves and use multiple texts such as field notes, journals, diaries and autobiographies, reflexivity *must* be carried through to the production of texts (Okely and Callaway, 1992: xii).

Representing the Multiple and Overlapping Loyalties to Individual Members

Part of the 'messy process' was exacerbated by the type of research I had conducted. I had not been an objective researcher, with a clipboard of standardised questions - my research had been very emergent, subjective, and relational. I had felt an empathetic connection with some members of the organisation over others. For instance, Gavin and I had formulated a relationship where we were almost in collusion as he spoke about

feeling like an outsider, and I commiserated with him, feeling the same. Much of what was said 'off record,' was of a personal nature, which fell outside the boundaries of what I perceived to be 'formal' research.

An example of this was when I was asked to help a member of staff gain inside information about a development post outside of Irish Aid: another example was when I was advised against speaking to a particular person due to them being branded a 'trouble maker.' One person with whom I connected was Mosa. Her fiery spirit during the three day meeting explored in Chapter Five resonated with me, yet although I shared her frustration at the way the agenda was closing down communication, I could not help her when she asked about accreditation and linking her work to the Masters in Global Health at Trinity. I had not challenged *my own role* in a discourse of power. I documented my unease at being thought of as expert, or in the role of representing Trinity University, when asked about whether I could help them attain professional qualifications as a reward for distance learning.

> *Mosa turned to me and said 'Can an institution such as Trinity take the generic induction on board to link it to the Masters in Global Health...to give you credits?' All eyes looked to me for a response when it was suggested, and I realised I was straddling roles, indeed I was a representative of Trinity within that room, yet unable to represent the role of having responsibility or authority.*

I didn't have the power requested by Mosa. It was a perception of power based upon the institution (Trinity College Dublin) through which I had gained entry into Irish Aid. It reinforced my feelings of uselessness. I only knew that I was sometimes uncomfortable with power *and* powerlessness. I sided with those who were on the periphery, disgruntled with the organisation. When I could have helped Laura, I didn't. Her plight didn't resonate with me. My own helplessness was ultimately reflected in hers.

In retrospective hindsight, I can see that it was there, at that periphery that I had felt most comfortable, since I was used to protesting over social injustices and defending those that were less visible. To some extent there was a sense of protecting those that I had connected with. Simultaneously I had exposed others, particularly those whose epistemology clashed with mine, such as Daniel, with his emphasis on practical output

and who couldn't see why looking at culture might be useful documented in Chapter Four: Challenging my cultural approach: Daniel's expectations of a learning system. At other times, I used my power and position to expose others as colonialist and belittling in their professional engagement (Chapter Six, Echoes of Colonialism) – where they deviated from my world view. This wasn't apparent to me throughout Phase One, but after writing the autoethnographic excerpts, and reflexively re-analysing my data, I could see how I shifted in my position and use of power according to the context. My research offered many organisational members a 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959: 22) where the staff would speak of things that would not be deemed suitable for the 'front stage audience.' However it also offered me, the researcher, and narrator, an arena in which to choose to disclose various aspects of the self as a sense-making activity. Like Ellis (2004) and Lentin (2001), I refuse to apologise for putting myself on the front stage instead of at the back, behind the scenes, where so many researchers dwell. I do not wish to be apologetic about what I have disclosed – and what I have not – but it is fundamental to be honest within one's research, and to questions one's own motives.

Fieldwork can be a lonely pursuit and the relationships that we form often echo our own needs for reassurance. In adopting a role of therapist, perhaps I felt as if I belonged, was *needed,* albeit on the 'shadow side' of the organisation, questioning its authority and the need to conform (as is exemplified in Chapter Four, Peddling snake oil?). I felt I couldn't effect change by simply telling them what other aid agencies were doing; nor could I create a learning system by relaying simplistic-seeming notions of 'tell more stories.' I could only reflect, in a mirror-like way, what my subjective interpretations of their daily struggles were as I did with Sorcha, Richard and Laura (Chapter Four, Peddling snake oil?).

This realisation was the turning point for making sense of my research. I realised that the limitations I had felt - of feeling emotionally based responses to much of my research experience - defined whom I talked to, connected with, what data I picked up on and what I ignored. In fact the entire research trajectory had been based on an *intuitive emergent type of gut reaction.* I am aware of a possible charge of narcissism and self-indulgence. This chapter is the rationale for such self-indulgence. My voice(s) may be

included from a sense of loneliness, disclosure or identification with organisational members, or indeed from sudden clarity or epiphany, of 'the multiple layers of consciousness' (Ellis, 2004: 37). But all link the personal to the cultural which forms the basis for sociological enquiry. For me, establishing reflexivity through an autoethnographic voice was *not* a celebration of the self instead has been a strategy for a more reflexive approach and a more honest account of the research process. By allowing the 'self' back into the research, dilemmas of representation eased. The next section expands on some of these points and explores the 'aesthetic experience' of research.

The aesthetic experience

> Look at the corporate landscape as a materialization of a worldview, and strive to interpret the aesthetic code written into the landscape as a privileged pathway to the quiddity of a culture (Gagliardi, 1996: 318).

The term aesthetic comes from the Greek 'aisthá-nomai' meaning to perceive or feel with the senses. It can refer to knowledge, in its tacit form, not translated into speech, or communication but as ways of passing on feelings. The aesthetic experience is one of sensory knowledge, expressive action and communication of sharing feelings. It also encompasses emotions like shame, sadness and guilt as well as enthusiasm and passion (Warren, 2002). Gagliardi (1996), states that the 'aesthetic experience' is the basis of 'other' forms of experience within an organisational setting.

Researchers such as Czarniawska (1997), who uses a narrative approach, and Fineman (1993), who looks at emotion, have helped to explore the spaces between the regulatory organisation and the lived experience. Intrinsic in this space are emotions. The way we view emotion in the workplace is inextricably tied to the way in which we view work itself. Fineman (1996) explains that deep rooted beliefs which illuminate cultures are tied to the understanding that order and worker efficiency, are rational (and therefore non-emotional) matters (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This non-emotional, rational view of the organisation echoes Weber (1922) who argued that the ideal bureaucracy is unsullied by 'love, hatred and all purely personal irrational and emotional elements' (Gerth and Mills, 1958: 216). In the 1970s organisational psychology attempted to address issues around

the 'quality of working life' under a more liberal research agenda, but nevertheless, representations of emotion and passion were *still* pigeon-holed. Consequently, Fineman notes that organisational workers are portrayed as 'emotionally anorexic' (Fineman 1993). Perhaps this is why so much of the emotive and impassioned data generated in my research was said to me 'off the record' or under the cloak of confidentiality, as emotion has no formal place within work. Emotion is often pigeon-holed as being for the troubled, the weak and the marginal, yet it filtered into so much of my data, involving many complex emotional manifestations and personal judgement calls (Fineman, 1996: 296).

Emotion and the research landscape

Arlie Hochschild (1983) in her seminal work on emotion, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* proposed that a sociological approach to emotions is a new way of seeing the world and conceptualising our embodied experiences within it. She states that this approach to emotions requires going beyond social, cultural and ideological realms, but that we must remain embodied and within it rather than separated from it. This is due to our emotional enactment within the given culture we are experiencing (Hochschild, 1983).

Our engagement with the field of development and development organisations is underpinned by a whole range of emotions such as joy, fear, hope, guilt, and frustration. The reason for conducting research - deciding *who* the focus of our research is - and deciding how we approach the ethical dilemmas in enacting that research - are all underpinned by emotion to some extent. Rationales for including emotion in development research have included how emotion can help fulfil 'a cathartic role' (Widdowfield, 2000: 200) or can enrich research; however, most consideration of the role of emotion in the development field is reactive. It largely focuses on what happens when research is inextricably linked to emotion, for example, in such a way that research does not go according to plan. This can be seen in the work of Meth and Malaza (2003) who wrote about how certain research questions around violence in South Africa proved distressing to the research participants. They found that although they had considered the role that ethics would play in their research, the implementation of the research practice

was more complex in reality. Similarly, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) discusses the political economy of emotions in her work on *nervios* in Brazilian shanty-towns and explores the complexities and connections between research, power and emotion.

The popularity of emotions in research (Gabriel, 1999, Fineman, 2000) has led to an 'entwinement hypothesis' where rationality and emotion co-exist. Williams and Bendelow propose that one way out of seeing these concepts as opposing is to:

> View emotions as existentially *embodied* modes of being which involve an *active* engagement with the world and an intimate connection with both culture and self (Csordas, 1994, cited in Williams and Bendelow 1998: xvi).

This form of embodiment forges connections between mind and body, identity and culture, and researcher and researched.[29] Retrospectively I can state that the entire trajectory of my research was shaped by my emotional engagement with the people I came into contact with. I made decisions based upon shared feelings of 'not belonging' or feeling uneasy about my role. These feelings informed how I reacted to the consultant facilitators in Kampala. My presence was welcomed by the embassy staff, but not so by the consultants who were used to working without being shadowed. There are internal divisions that we experience in the field as feeling both 'same' yet 'different' according to the context of our emotional feelings and background. I felt colonialist undertones to their way of working, their small talk seemed patronising and power laden, as if *they* knew Kampala and Ugandans from an insider's perspective and felt therefore that they could make inferences about laziness and unpunctuality. I distanced myself from them, creating a space for myself as separate, not wanting to be categorised as the same.

Other members of staff were represented in my field notes more positively - those who were showing subversive tendencies, as I empathised with their rebellion. This was a subconscious decision within Phase One, yet became apparent upon later Phase Two retrospection. In Phase Two, influenced by the death of my Father and re-evaluation the research process, I could see that I had unconsciously sought to represent those

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29 See Renato Rosaldo, 'Grief and a Head hunter's Rage' in *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

organisational members that made *me* feel comfortable and connected. For instance, when Laura told me 'I don't want to be just *anybody*', I think in retrospective hindsight that I unconsciously allied my fears with hers. Yet I did not help Laura, which with hindsight I realise I could have done by simply helping connect her to someone looking for her skill set.

All these engagements were emotionally led. This fundamental statement can only come at this late juncture when I am nearing the end of my thesis, since the thesis itself has been written as a sensemaking journey, and it was in retrospective sense-making that the tangled emotions became part of the process itself, *and* as fundamental as the interview data or field notes. It is this process that has shown me that emotions *do* matter in organisational research. The embodiment of how I experienced various roles affected the stories that I told and that others told me. I wrote the retrospective autoethnographic piece about swimming in the pool in Kampala from memory in 2009. Swimming to me has always been a way of feeling centred. Yet this piece of writing also serves as a metaphor. The pool is amorphous: fluid and a journey, offering me a type of meditational space, or a space of liminality where I am neither in one world or another. In the section based in Kampala, the pool offered a sense of belonging and solace from a sense of awkwardness with the facilitators, which is alluded to in the 'Floating' section of
Chapter Six.

Cunliffe and Coupland argue that embodiment is integral to sense-making and define embodiment as an emotional, personal, felt and sensed bodily experience embedded in words, and gestures (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012: 68). I have used sensory explorations of feelings, emotions, experiences and internal conflicts at various stages of retrospective analysis to redress the imbalance of what Fineman (2000) sees as lacking in organisational research, the individual biography. Ellis (2004) writes that:

> The personal experiences of fragmentation and the representation of multiple selves - both of the researcher and the researched - also coexist with a sense of embodiment and this research has used an autoethnographic methodology to connect the personal to the cultural and social (Ellis 2004, xix).

This, in turn, leads to the intertwining of sociological introspection and emotional sociology. Whilst on this research journey I was affected by life events, such as the death of my father, and becoming a mother. In her book *Co-memory and melancholia: Israelis memorialising the Palestinian Nakba,* Ronit Lentin (2010) tells the story of her late father's involvement in the war of Haifa. In an autoethnographic extract, she ponders upon the question of whether her academic work is reintroducing her to her 'lost city'(Lentin, 2010: 66). In my own case, I feel that through my academic work in the course of this thesis, interrupted by grief, I was reintroduced to my lost father. This place of grief and liminality took me initially deep into sadness at the loss of his life, yet his very diagnosis of cancer had brought us back to him. By 'us' I mean his estranged son, his daughter, and his ex-wife, all of whom were with him when he died. Around his death-bed, a sense of peace ultimately pervaded.

I am flying down the Grange Road at full pelt, at the bit where the bike starts freewheeling because of the steep decline; I whiz around the bend to the left and feel the tears stream down my face. I close my eyes for a split second and when I open them again I am still soaring along, the colours blurring either side of me, the pain in my whole body keeping me alert, my head is pounding and I'm so very, very sad. I am on my bicycle, my trusted steed that gets me to college and back every day, my rucksack is on my back and something inside is sticking into me. My dad was dead and I had no idea what to do with the feelings. He was gone, and my childhood history with him.

I was challenged with the death of my father, and through therapy and grief counselling I began to try and understand the notion of belonging, and similarly of not belonging. This made me aware of elements of my personality that were previously hidden to me, and in turn, I became aware of performing certain roles 'for approval' within both my personal and academic lives. This type of retrospective grief induced analysis was written about by Renato Rosaldo (1989). Rosaldo writes of the 'devastating loss' of his wife, his inability to cry, his internal rage and his subsequent understanding of the Illongot tribes' method of dealing with rage and grief.

> My own inability to conceive the force of anger in grief led me to seek out another level of analysis that could provide a deeper explanation for older men's desire to headhunt (Rosaldo, 1989: 598).

I was struck by the forceful nature of the emotions of grief, for a man who had hardly seen me since fifteen, who had never come to visit me in the twelve years I had lived in Ireland. It seemed entirely irrational, yet I was so profoundly grief stricken. I was rendered inconsolable. It was with hindsight a few months later I realised I was mourning, not only for the loss of that father figure, and what he represented, but also for my childhood years. I knew I had been loved, he had provided me with a safe place to grow up, and I was luckier than many, for my father had adopted me, he had chosen me and I had known to whom I belonged. But why then had I struggled to belong in my adult years? Why did I seek approval, something that had got me into this PhD process in the first place, needing to prove I really did belong somewhere?

Understanding my own emotional changes became a key to understanding the people I was researching. In analysing how I felt about my work and how I interacted, through what was going on in my personal life I could see that I was looking for acceptance. For example, I understood, much later on, that I admired Mosa, and the way she stood up for herself, because I hadn't been able to with my first supervisor. I had performed a role with him of assurance, of convincing him I was 'on top' of it all – whilst really I was sinking further into confusion. Even though my father's death was not directly linked with my research like Lentin, and I hadn't been studying grief, like Rosaldo – however, it was deep introspection brought about by his passing, that made me aware of my own insecurities. It was these insecurities that manifested throughout my research journey, as illusion and then subsequently, disillusion.

Using Emotion to Understand Conflicting loyalties: The Learn Project and Thesis

This section does not tell the whole story of the LEARN team or my thesis, as these are interspersed throughout the thesis, but instead it explores the role of emotion in my interactions. Emotion played a considerable part in my engagement with the LEARN team. It hadn't seemed so, at the time, but upon retrospection, emotion has played a fundamental part in the role I chose to play with them. I was a late-comer to the team, starting six months after they had, and I was competitive, I wanted to succeed – to be seen as professional, competent and academic. I over-prepared for meetings, gave lengthy

presentations, and always had a smile on my face. It was this 'performance' that had not alerted my supervisor to the turmoil I was really going through. I had also had a baby at the end of the first year, and with my supervisor on sabbatical, no one noticed my floundering. It wasn't until I was asked to feedback to Irish Aid to showcase 'my contribution' in 2009 that this came to a head and I panicked. My performance as consummate professional and driven doctoral student had been masking a deep unease about the research. The team were travelling to Limerick a few weeks later – and I knew there was no way I could go. I was terrified. I emailed them the following short message and a power point presentation of slides expanding on the following points:

15 minute presentation of findings:

> An induction covering actual peoples experiences in the field and a more comprehensive effort to including *all* members of Irish Aid (civil servants, diplomats, managers, technical specialists) in how they are contributing to development initiatives.
>
> Findings indicate that reflective space is fundamental to organisational learning in Irish Aid.
>
> This is evidenced by storytelling as a natural mechanism for knowledge exchange. This was observed at the three day September meeting and in the gender mainstreaming training
>
> Findings also indicate that staff experience is not utilised, consultants are being drawn in where staff in situ already have the competency skills and experiences to do the tasks. A comprehensive skills audit would be of benefit.
>
> There is no staff directory, and as such, staff often does not know whom to contact for knowledge exchange and work related capacity building - a yellow pages directory would solve this (as seen in DFID)
>
> These findings are based on data from multiple interviews, meetings and observations.

It was rather lacklustre and certainly did not represent my research. It was a quick summary of some important points raised by the Irish Aid staff. They had the answer to organisational learning initiatives *themselves*. They did not need an expert, or an IT based system adding to their workload, they need face-to-face time with each other. They needed connection – both to the development organisation they worked for – and to each other, where a sense of 'family' could be fostered, rather than the silo'd approach creating schisms between the professional roles that they currently occupied. The next

section builds upon my feelings that I had *failed* - failed to produce anything of *real worth* to the organisation, failed to analyse my data for my PhD thesis, and by the time the funding had finished in 2008 – there was no discernible output from my work – or that of any other LEARN team member. From these feelings of failure, I next turn to how to judge 'success' and explore this in relation to development.

Evaluating Success

Evaluating the success of a project is extremely complex. Berg states that the primary objective of a development programme evaluation *should* be to improve performance (Berg, 2000: 9). However, in reality it is often about achieving predicted results. This discourse of 'results based management' echoes back to 'projects of governance of earlier times, whether 1960s budget support or, further back still, the carving up of colonial dominions between the world powers of the age' (Cornwall, 2007: 476). It also echoes the Taylorist standardisation of tasks whereby predictability becomes the most desired element. Organisational learning is often based on an unquestioned belief that learning will lead to success, or best practices, or better projects: in fact, that learning is the key to success as an organisation. The concept of 'best practice' is highly contentious within certain critical development discussions. Andrea Cornwall writes that:

> Best practice – with its implicit assumptions that practices can be found that are 'best' for all – is part of this ever more homogenising world of development prescriptions, indicators, and 'results' page (2007: 477).

Through a lens of social constructionism, 'best practice' as a generic term is contested because it negates the idea of contexuality; what is 'best' in one situation will frequently not be the same in another. Often what is appropriate for one group of people may be highly inappropriate if 'cut and pasted' onto another culture or country. This 'one-size-fits-all' or replicability of best practice sees learning as a one-off event, rather than a continual process that should instead be about ongoing practice and reflection on one's own experience (Chapman, 2004). Such scepticism has also been voiced in the field of organisational learning:

> Scepticism towards the 'truths' and 'best practices' presented in conventional approaches to organisational learning and the knowledge practices that it entails (Garrick and Rhodes 1998)[30]

Yet the world of development seems somewhat preoccupied with this idea, as if what works in one country or organisation will work in another, regardless of the context, the people, the culture and the experiences. Development's most well known tool to measure 'success' is the log frame that operates under the premise that that 'if activity A is done, Output B will result, leading to Outcome C and Impact D' (Ramalingam et al, 2008 : 26) as was highlighted in Chapter Two. But context matters, as Eyben rightly states;

> A concept of top-down linear policy implementation can seriously constrain an imaginative search for more appropriate understandings of the context and possible responses to that context (Eyben, 2010: 55).

What had worked in Uganda and emerged at a storytelling seminar, effective for knowledge transfer, would not necessarily work in another country in the same way. When I had asked at the September 2006 meeting what would be effective for organisational learning, I had been told:

> Irish Aid would be a learning organisation if we could document our experiences, what works in one situation, won't necessarily work in another, we can learn from each other, and then tailor ideas to our own contexts, and then we can perform in a more holistic way (Kaleb, Field Advisor, 5 September 2006).

However, mere documentation only leads to 'shelf building' (Cathal, Technical Specialist, 5 December 2005, Interview, HQ Dublin, Interview, HQ Dublin) if there is no reflection upon the experiences.

It would certainly have been easier to apply a learning tool kit, like the one applied in the gender mainstreaming training by the consultants in Kampala. This approach is commonly used in development where 'experts' in the field of organisational learning roll out workshops and toolkits to engender learning. But one of the reasons that a generic approach to learning cannot fully succeed is that development work is often about the relationships people build and these relationships help define our own identity:

[30] http://www.aare.edu.au/98pap/gar98008.htm

> As agents we are involved in a web of relationships in which our identity is distinctive and fluid. [We have distinctive narratives which] make it possible for us to learn and find our place in a basically plural situation in which the narratives differ and can be exchanged (Quarles van Ufford and Van Den Berg, 2005: 207).

This often culminates in a project's evaluation that has little bearing on the *actual* project but serves the bureaucratic purpose of fulfilling a particular stage of the project's documentation as required by the organisational process. This critique of the evaluatory process resonates with the problems discussed in Chapter Five, 'Negotiating development' such as that of getting the quarterly reports from recipient countries disseminated and made 'useful' through Irish Aid itself. Many hours were spent producing these documents, which were sent to Headquarters in Dublin to fulfil the requirements of an organisational evaluation. Yet the learning experience that could have been so useful was lost, simply because no one would take responsibility for the cutting and pasting, and disseminating each other's experiences. If this simple task had been taken on, these documents, if the staff had time to read them, would have provided the cross-country communication and learning that was so sought after within the organisation. Changing the *way* the organisation works is often the most difficult task:

> I think as an organisation we are guilty of…we are always doing lessons learned but then not translating it into changing the way we work, and if we document we document the last phase of our programme, and lessons learned but if you look it up in a few years' time, did it really change the way we worked? (Eimear, Civil Servant, 5 December 2005, Interview, HQ Dublin).

Opposing change was referred to in many ways and often, my questioning around organisational learning and change led to respondents expressing disillusion. For instance, when I asked what a particular field officer did, she replied: 'increased monitoring and reporting and lesson-learning, but lessons learned do not filter into any change, so what is the point?' (Sorcha, Technical Specialist, 4 September 2006, Interview, Health and HIV/AIDS Advisors meeting, HQ Dublin). These reminders of the belief in the futility of increasing amounts of evaluation where no *real* change was occurring are somewhat mitigated if we look at actual changes that occur for different people at different levels. For instance, some organisational members self-organised, as

was the case in the September 2006 meeting in Dublin, and were successful to some extent in hijacking the agenda (Chapter Five). Others successfully told stories to exchange information as was documented in Kampala in November 2007 (Chapter Six) and so brought about 'organisational learning' in an informal sense. My ethnographic approach showed that all over the organisation, people were finding their own ways around the daily workload to learn from each other, or get amendments passed, tacitly, in corridors or at the pub. I wish to suggest that this implies that, while there are patterns, each person experiences their organisation differently, and that each learns in their own way. People find solutions, and make judgements about 'successes' according to their own changing sense of self. What can be considered a success or best practice, I would argue, is context specific.

The concept of success is interesting when applied to other aspects within the project. I am more than aware that publication of this thesis might have an undesired affect for any that can be identified. If I had successfully designed and implemented an organisational learning system, this project might have been considered a success by members of the organisation. My time in Irish Aid came and went, years of work culminating in a sub-standard one page document that was probably filed away and forgotten. I can categorically state that there was very little that could be considered successful from my engagement with them.

Neither was the LEARN project a success. No journal articles came out of it, and out of four funded students only one PhD thesis has been published to date. However, this is considering success narrowly through an output results based model. I prefer the way Ramalingam et al. use success: they were talking of development programmes but I think their ideas are equally applicable to my research and that of others:

> Since the context in which a programme is operating is continuously changing, and it is not possible to plan for all eventualities, a successful programme is one that assesses and adapts to changing situations in an intelligent way based on thoughtful reflection (Ramalingam et al., 2008: 43).

This is the sense in which I consider this research to have been successful. Traditionally

the concept of success for a thesis is to be published – however, I feel that having the content reflect the lived experiences of my informants and myself - is my personal definition of success.

Outside the library it is eerily quiet, students that were normally buzzing in and out of the heavy swing doors with armfuls of books and faces full of concentration were gone and the place felt eerily silent. A chill cuts through the air blowing the last of the blossoms and drapes them across windswept puddles. It's chilly and changeable, as if May has become April this year with its showers and unpredictability. I pull my jacket around me and shiver. I had taken half the morning to get here, had cycled in with Edie on the back of my bike, dropped her at crèche and grabbed a coffee to walk across the campus with, no matter how organised I tried to be I was always in rushing to get to where I needed to be. The students were all in exams save a few loitering around the 'pav' and I found myself staring intently at pages of A4 which were blowing in the wind. I smiled wryly to myself as I remembered what an ordeal the exams used to be, the stress and the nerves, god I was glad all that was behind me.

As I walked across the cobbles I thought about how at home I felt here now. It had taken me a while, years in fact, but these cobbles under my feet were so familiar and strangely comforting. To get to the sociology block I had to leave the security of the antiquated campus and always felt a bit exposed as I passed under the old arch and suddenly you were thrust out onto Dame Street in the middle of the hustle and bustle of central Dublin. It hadn't always felt like home, there was a time a few years ago that it felt quite the opposite, full of menace and imposing, as if the buildings themselves were mocking me for still being there with 'no words on the page'. But five years later I was striding out of campus and across the street with an air of purpose. Coming the other way was a familiar face, a student from last year, her name escaped me, 'Hi' she said with a beaming smile, I responded with one back and wished her luck in her exams, I continued smiling until I got in to the building. I loved teaching and hoped I'd get a third year at it. I had such a great rapport with the students on the gender course, and I felt quietly content as I pressed the button to call the lift.

The weight of the door causes me to stagger and I propel myself inside just in time to see an undergrad leaving the room I was headed for.

'Hi Barbara' I say as my eyes adjust to the darkness of the unlit room.

'Oh Hi' she responds, looking up from her desk piled high with papers and letters and articles.

'Can you find a space to sit? Just put them anywhere' she says as she gestures to a pile on a chair 'Will I make tea?'

It always felt indulgent, tea and an hour's talking, as I knew she had a million things she could be doing, but she made time for me and gently asked after my dad. It was funny but even though I felt fine with it on the surface, just the asking of it made tears prick the back of my eyes. I swallowed the lump in my throat and took a deep breath.

'Ok for now' I said and took a large gulp of tea. 'How's your writing coming along?' she smiled sweetly and I was glad for the change of subject. 'Do you know what?' I smiled back with eyes glistening, and watching the last of the blossoms blow off the trees outside 'I know I can do it now[31]*.'*

Summary and Conclusions

This Chapter has been pivotal in explaining how I have struggled to represent the multiple and overlapping loyalties within my research. The 'ethical precariousness' (Staples, 2007) of conflicting and contrasting elements are fundamental to the sensemaking process. Ultimately, the use of emotions in organisational or development research may help us to move away from an objective, linear, causal and modernist approach, where rationality is based upon the premise that the organisational system and evaluation processes are linked to predictable and quantifiable results.

To have left out the emotional aspects in relation to both the research journey and the interactions between respondent and researcher, or between supervisor and student, would have been to belie the contributions they made to the final product of this thesis. Within this research, emotion was socially constructed in fluid and shifting relationships. To have ignored its effects, (for instance, when I was being asked to keep things strictly off the record, or to impart advice about how a person felt they weren't valued or did not belong) would have been to ignore some of the epiphanic moments or turning points in my changing identity as researcher. This would have negated my deeper understanding of the organisation as a consequence. This emotional engagement is normative within

[31] 25 April 2011

development work, but is largely omitted. Engaging with the varying emotions of development research provided me with an opportunity to challenge the experiences of both researcher and researched.

Those involved with development must find a way of understanding and reframing the unpredictable and messy nature of the work that they are involved with. I propose that reflection, and the analysis of emotion within development work can provide deeper insight into the issues we are exploring. I also argue that organisations cannot be fully understood *without* this type of reflection. In this way, emotion becomes of fundamental importance to the fluid development landscape in which we are operating both as practitioners and researchers.

Chapter Eight: Illusion and Disillusion Revisited

Introduction

At First I Thought and Then I Realised…

Learning: Exposing the Informal Nature of Knowledge Exchange

Irish identity: the impulse to help

Exploring my own identity: to help or hinder?

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Introduction

This thesis sees the lived experience as an interpretive story; it is about interpretation and is a story of pluralities, of multiple discourses and interpretations. It is a narrative that began by seeing the organisation as a series of solvable problems. It then attempts to capture the complexities and paradoxical attributes of this development organisation, to illuminate the mysterious tacit dimensions of what it was like to work there at the time of the study.

This final chapter completes my PhD journey. In this chapter, I wish to draw together the different threads of this work: theoretical and methodological, as well as the processes, and the words of the participants. By drawing all of my theoretical and empirical findings together I aim to explore the implications in terms of:

- The advancement that this contributes to theory within the fields of development theory, organisational learning, storytelling and reflexive methodologies.

- The new insight this reveals into the complex and dynamic relationships between organisational learning, identity and research practices.

- The more detailed picture this contributes is to the study of development donors and explores how reflexive research can engender a better understanding of organisational identity and learning within the development donor context.

At First I Thought and Then I Realised…

This thesis has used Sack'-s theory of 'Thought/Realised' alternations. There are many places within this research where both I, and the organisational members expressed the:

'At first I thought X and then I realised Y' type of statements that are encapsulated by the interweaving of illusion and disillusion throughout this thesis. Each Chapter has its own unique slant on this statement. In Chapter Two on methodology, I have concluded that:

'At first I thought' I was there to deliver an output based system of learning, a measurable and commodified tool to enhance their capacity as an organisation. 'And then I realised' that this was based on the 'McDonaldization' of standardised knowledge activity, which didn't fit the reality of what I observed at Irish Aid. In Chapter Three, I built upon these foundations as I tried to 'fix' them and struggled to fit the generated data into a 'results based' mechanism. Chapter Four's 'At first I thought…' led me to think that looking at culture would engender an understanding of organisational learning in Irish Aid. However, I soon felt that I was offering no real solutions, instead caught up in empathising with organisational members over their search for belonging, which I explored in the sub-section 'Peddling snake oil.' The second part 'And then I realised…' led me to an awareness of certain illusions within the organisation, which became foundational blocks for looking at Irish identity in development. These run through Chapters Five and Six. These Chapters were all written in Phase One.

In Phase Two, I became aware of a number of contradictions that had appeared in Phase One but I had not fully realised their significance. Looking back at the data in Chapter Five, I began to see the parallels between organisational members 'being closed down' and the LEARN project remit. Chapter Six marks a turning point. It is one that is made

retrospectively, where: 'At first I thought' I was writing about how the organisational members in Kampala used storytelling as an organisational learning tool. The 'and then I realised' part was that I was telling 'the story of their storytelling' and was complicit in the power play of representation - in *how* I represented them and *who* I chose to represent. This highlighted a contradiction not only around Irish identity in the field but also made me aware of my own positionality and role in this. In doing so, I was later able to re-evaluate *my role*, and the part I was playing in representing the 'development machine' in Africa. Through exploring the two phases, I came to accept the 'messy' (Rossman and Rallis, 1998: 10) nature of development research and became increasingly concerned at the way in which this complex reality is often interpreted into neat parcels of deliverable outputs.

Learning: Exposing the Informal Nature of Knowledge Exchange

During the course of this research journey various realisations and ideas became illuminated along the way. The most important of these is that learning *happens* in Irish Aid but in a more *informal* way than was expected. Within this development donor organisation, organisational learning was not occurring in the bureaucratised 'box ticking' way that was often spoken about, in the form of measured control and standardised procedures. It was happening tacitly, often to the side of the formal procedures and implementations, often lurking in the 'shadow side' of the organisation (Stacey, 1996) happening *despite* the organisation and not *because* of it. My research contribution highlights that Irish Aid is not a uniquely dysfunctional development bureaucracy, but it needs to be more aware of the way that its' staff are interacting, learning and communicating. The development organisation studied in this thesis can only be understood in relation to its *dis*organisation. It is through this tension of contradictory meanings, de-centred and interpretive understandings, and disillusionment shown throughout the research process, that everyday life is constructed and deconstructed, and understood.

Often researchers are left little room for critical exploration outside of the formal and the expected (Hilhorst, 2003: 2) yet despite the formal level I was brought in at; I found a

way to the informal level within the organisation. The subtle life of the organisation is hard to capture and my research found that it lay within the subjective experience of the researcher as much as in the organisation itself. In exploring how workers interpreted formal rules and translated them into everyday working practice, I was able to document both *coherence and chaos* of a snapshot of their daily lives. What emerged throughout the data was a sense of *informality within the formality*. Whilst there were no informal meeting areas within the organisation itself, the corridors were often used as a meeting space in a more informal capacity to ensure motions were passed in time-pressed agenda heavy meetings.

This informal communication mechanism highlighted the need for face-to-face contact outside of the formalised meeting arrangement with its fixed and often rushed agendas. I was able to explore this idea further in Chapter Five. Communication was reiterated by management as being of importance yet the formalised agenda closed down the limited opportunities that emerged for knowledge sharing. Their constant preoccupation with formalising systems led to a loss of value being felt in the informal ways of working, where workers felt they needed to hoard and safeguard information and relationships, which manifested in disillusionment and de-motivation echoing the work of Stacey (1996) where the shadow side of the organisation creates communities of practice. Conversational 'themes' relating to 'official topics' are intertwined with informal 'shadow side' ones (Stacey, 2006: 26). These can occur anywhere, and can reflect personal idiosyncrasies, informal relationships and cultural tendencies of the organisation. For many of the staff, this tension resulted in expressions of de-motivation and frustration. Staff often felt their work was futile, and expressed this as disillusionment. This illuminated a disjuncture between the reasons they had given for joining this development organisation, of 'making a difference' and the work they felt they were doing.

Irish identity: the impulse to help

Another disjuncture also emerged from the data; the idea of Irish development identity as being different from that of their other Northern counterparts. I explored what O'Sullivan calls 'the official adaptation of the past to suit present agendas' (O'Sullivan, 2011: 2) where Irish identity is inextricably linked to the history of the Famine. This adaptation of the historical *past* has a bearing on the development *present* where the Irish are seen more selfless, caring and generous than other nations. Tied to this, is the impulse to help. As Murphy unequivocally states, this 'impulse to help…that recurs so often as to make it a feature of the Irish character' (Murphy, 2012: 7) and renders the Irish as having a 'unique personality' within the development context. He even named his book *Inside Irish Aid: The Impulse to Help* (2012) to emphasise this point.

This development discourse is about being seen as 'noticeably separate from the colonisers' yet despite this rhetoric, Irish Aid seems to operate like any other Northern development institution. This highlights an interplay between identity and desired image. This disjuncture between desired image and actual image ultimately made me aware of *my own* limitations. Retrospectively I could see that I too had entered the organisation to *help*; to create a learning system; to be part of something tangible. In this respect, I fitted Stirrat's classification of a missionary, having 'a sense of mission…with a vocation driven by a sense of duty' (Stirrat, 2008: 412). My duty was to my funded position on the LEARN team, to my supervisor, to my family, to better myself and to complete a PhD.

Retrospectively I could see that I had performed one role for the LEARN team, and another for the organisation, tailoring each image towards what was expected of me, bringing my angst home about being caught between researcher and consultancy roles. This ultimately created difficulty as I struggled with the research remit, with analysis and portrayal. Despite setting out to 'help,' much of what occurred was a struggle. In analysing how I used the term 'struggle' I can see that I applied it to Gavin, as he 'struggled' with fitting into the culture of Irish Aid, and Daniel who had struggled with the organisational mandate of sharing. I made much of these interactions, mirroring my

own struggle with a professional role, one I questioned throughout the thesis. My final struggle was evidenced by my last report to Irish Aid; a few bullet points and slides, belying my innermost thoughts, reflections, ideas and analysis (Chapter Seven). Reflection upon this led me to understand *why* I had not delivered to the organisation, which was tied to my own identity outside of my research work.

Exploring my own identity: to help or hinder?

I was searching for belonging – finding connection and solace, to some extent, a sense of family, like others I became close to within the organisation. This was exacerbated by my Father's death, and in using autoethnography, I was able to see the parallels between performing a role of both competence and compliance with my first supervisor and searching for belonging *within* the research setting. This highlights another disjuncture around informality – in using an informal research methodology which must be rendered through *my own role.* I applied a storied approach, through starting with ethnography, and ultimately using autoethnography that enabled me to tell my own stories. The storytelling approach allowed for uncertainty and frustration to be written into the research texts, and helped the analysis process by enabling me to re-visit experiences and write about the embodied experience of the research process. Stories undoubtedly played a fundamental role in my own sense-making processes. This was not limited to the informal stories I documented through fragments within my field notes, nor the more formulaic ones that had a beginning, middle and end. It was also the story of the research journey itself, through the two different phases *and* the changing evolving story as I re-analysed my data to realise my own complicities in how I portrayed one story/staff member over another.

I challenged prior assumptions by making the autoethnographic shift. It was not the 'cultural turn' which I thought could have been the key to understanding the organisation as was explored in Chapter Four, but the 'autoethnographic turn' which illuminated aspects of my own understanding and in turn illuminated previously hidden aspects of understanding and sense-making experiences within the organisation. I start to 'appear' in my thesis in Chapter Three in a more emotive, self-reflexive and self-challenging way.

I first appear in the subsection 'Peddling Snake Oil' where I liken myself to feeling like a Western confidence trickster offering shares in a highly valuable but fictional commodity (Sorenson, 1999).

However; it was *more* than just self-inclusion, as these retrospective acts of sense-making extended to a deeper understanding of how the research was conducted. My own biases, contradictions and experiences skewed both my data and my portrayal of the organisation. I championed some over others, stood by whilst I could have helped one, yet helped another. Moving from ethnography to autoethnographic reflection made me aware of how I had formed unofficial alliances with certain staff members over others, how in research based relationships I had sought to differentiate myself from what I perceived to be the somewhat colonialist approach of certain staff members and how I had held certain assumptions about the organisation, its members and my role in researching them. These biases could only be realised through my use of autoethnography and retrospective reflection. It seems that as narrator of this story, I have found my place within the research process. This is fundamental – not only to document the confusion and despondency, that can often accompany ethnographic work, but also to validate the inclusion of such emotions. Chapter Seven defends this point extensively. This thesis couldn't have been written truthfully without my evocative account of the changing and multiple accounts of self-portrayed within it.

Adding to the inclusion of the self as a retrospective sense-making tool

Nancy Scheper-Hughes has likened the ethnographer to the artist, since we are both engaged in a special vision quest through which 'a specific interpretation of the human condition, an entire sensibility, is forged' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992: xii). We live part of our lives in the field as we conduct our research and we find ourselves as anthropologists 'betwixt and between' in a state of liminality. We are simultaneously immediate and intimate, as well as being distant and unknowably 'other' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992: xii). We are as partial and fragmented as our research recipients, yet what emerges is highly subjective, emotional and personal. In my aim to represent the muddles and messy reality of the lived experience of organisational members within this donor organisation, I

hope to contribute to an understanding of what it is like to work within aspects of the development arena.

The title of this section 'Adding to the Inclusion of the Self as a Retrospective Sense-making Tool' is inspired by the work of Ellis (2000) who has had a profound effect upon this research, however, I believe that this research goes further than the illumination of the self. Even though I have documented my journey, through anxiety, analytical paralysis, soul searching and frustration, this was not to indulge myself, but to illuminate the complex nature of representing multiple realities, voices, perceptions and intentions that emerge from research interaction. In using an autoethnographic approach I refute the challenge that autoethnography only tells you about the person, but that its power lies in its ability to answer previously unanswered questions, and build upon a familiar qualitative research term, that of ethnography, whilst introducing a whole new way of pursuing social knowledge. Reed-Danahay (1997) argues that autoethnography is *more* of a valid methodology than many other methods because of this involvement. There is no *one* voice speaking from a societal framework of co-constructed meaning (Wall, 2006) but polyphony of voices and selves. This provides not just thick description (Geertz, 1973) but combines rich meaning with culturally relevant context and experience.

Further exploration of the role of the researcher

The second question posed in Chapter One was about the role of the researcher:

- And what of the researcher? What of any change brought about by the way interactions within the organisation might change them? How then do we represent this?

This section will attempt to address these issues. I have already stated that it is not only the relationship between anthropologists and the development donor that needs reflecting upon, but also any researcher's experiences and interactions within the research process. In disclosure, of inviting the reader into my personal feelings, emotions and experiences, I, like Barbara Jago (2002) who chronicled her academic depression, may be altering my professional status as an academic. This throws up some interesting questions about

disclosure and protection. Most ethical considerations are about the research participants, yet researchers themselves may be put off from using an autoethnographic method because of the perceived impact it may have upon their career.

I would agree with Tami Spry who argues for the epistemological and ontological centrality of the researcher to any research process (Spry 2001: 710). However, I am not advocating that all research *must* include autoethnographic elements. That is entirely a matter of preference. What I believe is that autoethnography has much to offer by connecting the personal to the cultural, and in this case exposing the tacit nature of organisations. The centrality of the researcher to the academic output means that sense-making and emotions in the field should be incorporated if we are to understand how research is conducted, analysed and experienced. In order to connect with a reader and to portray a subjective journey research must resonate with the reader and have 'verisimilitude,' in other words; this autoethnographic research must evoke a feeling that the experiences are life-like, believable and plausible (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 751).

I feel that the autoethnographic elements of this thesis were not only fundamental in the sense-making process, in connecting with the reader and in creating an honest account of what occurred; but that they also add to the ethnography of Irish Aid as an organisation. As Brambilla states, ethnography is able to grasp the 'realms of the social that are ignored by formal institutional narratives' (Brambilla, 2012: 218). When applied to the organisational workplace, ethnography is a method that offers a chance of making the invisible visible, since the life worlds of bureaucrats and other development workers within development institutions are largely unknown. Autoethnography offers a methodology that makes researchers accountable to their process. Accountability as academics is crucial, since the audience for anthropological research is not merely limited to other academics, but also includes wider sections of society who engage with development. Development needs new approaches and one of those approaches must be to de-mystify and disassemble the complex hidden world of the development donor. This de-mystification includes exposing relationships between experts, advisors, specialists, fieldworkers and the recipients of development as well as the researchers themselves. In doing so, knowledge, as a product of social and power relations can be further explored

in development research to understand the dynamics between intended and actual outcomes. In using an autoethnographic approach I have attempted to 'reveal the fractures, sutures and seams of self-interacting with others in the context of researching lived experience' (Spry 2001: 712). Within the sphere of development this approach offers avenues for exploring progress which may help development organisations move further towards the goals of development, of eradicating extreme poverty and inequality.

As development itself is an emotive force, I am making the case for situating emotion as an integral part of development research rather than as a disclaimer, or as something incidental referenced in footnotes. As such, I am advocating that my work adds to a growing body of literature that aims to extend theorising about the self, identity, emotion and relationships within the field beyond their current status.

Research Contributions

This research is an ethnography of an international aid organisation/government bureaucratic department. This type of work is under-researched in organisational studies mainly due to problems of both access and disclosure. Whilst access was assured, in this case by the project's remit, disclosure has been problematic. The particular contribution of this thesis to the anthropology of development lies in its particular application of topic, method, and authorial voice. The reflexive autoethnographic approach to a research project is not a new way of approaching research, but it is not widely used within development research. I hope that through reading my autoethnographic reflections, future students may be empowered through connections they make between this approach and their future research work. I also hope that some of the reality of conducting research has been portrayed and that this work will prove to be informative through its discussions of methodological approaches. This approach allows the researcher to connect intimately with the personal and the cultural through a peeling back of multiple layers of consciousness, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. I did not set out to write in this way, yet the authorial voice, so often silenced from a final draft or journal article could not be omitted as it proved to be the lynchpin for the entire journey. It was ultimately *my* sense-

making that made its way into the pages of this thesis, and through using the words of others verbatim and contextually, I hope to have assuaged some of the critics.

One of the contributions that my research makes is in its broad stance across intersecting areas of theory and literature. I began with the organisational learning literature, mainly stemming from an organisation management perspective, and then moved into the social sciences looking at how sociology and anthropology crossed over into understanding organisations. Through these intersections I was able to explore the positivistic approach of development to learning. This in turn led me to sense-making through social constructionism and a more interpretivist approach to my work. It is the tension between issues of representation that led me to autoethnography.

The insight this thesis contributes is to the practice of development by using reflexivity, emotion and subjective experiences within the research process. This research has significant implications for development organisations which are still in need of rich narratives to explore what learning looks like and to identify some of the struggles and tensions that surround it. My approach has helped to reframe some of the paradoxes and contradictions found working in a development donor. As Clay and Schaffer state, the world of development policy is a 'chaos of purposes and accidents' (Clay and Schaffer, 1984: 192) but many of its workers refute this publicly, only to expose it privately. Epistemologies such as autoethnography allow for hearing the voices of these previously silenced groups which adds to transparency, and may bring about much needed changes within the organisational world of development.

I defaulted to an ethnographic approach due to my background in anthropology, and by embracing a reflexive autoethnographic methodology I was able to make sense of my experience and ultimately the organisation itself. However, in less constraining circumstances, using research subjects as co-learners could be beneficial. Action research offers a way of understanding past *and* present phenomena (Aryris, 1970) by generating second person data from organisational members that help to give staff members agency in changing how they work. As Irish Aid's staff *knew* how to make their organisation a more efficient learning organisation, and had many solutions based

on their own experiences, in hindsight, action learning could have been an alternative methodological approach. By using my own subjective voice, and portraying organisational members through *my selection* of their voices and stories, I am only telling a partial story. Second person inquiry would have given a more rounded approach, with multiple subjective voices. This can be useful in organisational members assessing other member's interviews, allowing an interweaving of feedback and a layering of sensemaking.

Co-researchers engage in cycles of action and reflection, much as I have done in this thesis, but as a team, rather than a lone researcher and within this approach lays co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996). This is where all those involved in the research endeavour become co-researchers. Joint research renders the role of 'expert' as invalid, and may well have assuaged some of the turmoil I experienced. In different circumstances, without the decentralisation process, staff changes or organisational turmoil, this approach would have suited the organisation well. One area that would have especially benefitted from this approach was in my observations of 'Echoes of Colonialism' discussed in Chapter Six. As my voice and interpretation is the only one present in narrating this point of view, I may have been biased in how I interpreted this exchange. By being able to get feedback from the Ugandan members of staff present, I would have been able to further analyse how these comments were perceived and further offset my position of 'white expert woman.' However, there were also many times, when 'disclosure' during interviews would not have made this possible.

Quality of Research

Having presented my conclusions, it is also important to consider the quality of my research. An autoethnographic approach is about writing oneself into culture, but is also about representing one's experiences in the context of wider issues within society.

Reissner (2002) discusses the possible transferability from the 'persuasive narrative' of a pluralist autoethnographic approach to a more practical use with wider applicability. This is the hope of this thesis. I have used an amalgamation of my own introspective experiences and those of the organisational members. Where co-construction was

possible through feedback and verification of meaning and context, it was carried out. I have aimed to produce a woven and integrated account of my time at Irish Aid, in the hope that this account has provided a partial yet very necessary story of the development experience. Rather than a linear process, the autoethnographic method helped to capture the contextual, subjective and fragmented nature of learning, interwoven with discourses about the quality of life working in Irish Aid.

For Fineman (2000), an autoethnographic reflexive methodology places emotion in its wider context, both structurally and culturally and emphasises the 'dynamism of the subject matter, where the researcher's emotions cannot simply be factored out' (2000: 13). As has been said, the research simply did not make sense without me in it.[32] I hope I have avoided some of the common pitfalls associated with this type of research. Chang (2008) warns of excessive focus on self in isolation from others, overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation, exclusive reliance on personal memory as a data source, negligence of ethical standards regarding others and inappropriate application of the label autoethnography (Chang, 2008: 54). I have attempted to address these issues throughout this thesis.

Sparkes (2000) states that there should be different criteria for assessing the success or validity of autoethnographic work and despite this not being an autoethnographic piece of research from its conception, I feel that many of Ellis' evaluatory points (2000: 5) stated in Chapter Two, are relevant to *this* research as retrospective sensemaking. I believe I can make legitimate claims for this research and that I *did* learn something new about myself during the course of the research journey. I believe that this thesis offers a way of understanding - albeit partially - the secret world of the development donor organisation. Finally, this research *does* promote dialogue about how development and development research is conceptualised and practiced.

However, despite the best intentions and the most rigorous attention to detail research will always have limitations, and I will consider some of them here. Selecting one

[32] See 'Taking myself out of the equation and the data left me floundering, unable to make sense of the experiences within the organisation and only once I put myself 'back into the data' was I able to understand what had gone on' in Chapter One.

development organisation may be considered a limitation. However, I have intentionally chosen an in-depth study, over a period of eighteen months, of emergent ethnographic data collection. This was in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of working in a development donor organisation. Selecting a multi-sited organisation has enabled me to explore this subject through multiple lenses. However, there is further scope to extend this research to include other development organisations and thus generate different findings.

Related to this limitation is the issue of generalisability. I believe this to be the wrong criteria for evaluating this research since the epistemological tenets of reliability, validity and generalisation are treated very differently within a research approach that incorporates autoethnography. There is undoubtedly an academic preference for validity and reliability within research which makes the use of the autoethnographic method open to criticism. If research that uses an autoethnographic approach is truthful, evocative and emotionally connects with the reader, then it has illuminated aspects of research that other methods cannot, this is especially true of the hidden world of the development donor. My application of the autoethnographic method, albeit partially used - as this is not written solely from the ethnographic 'I' - was made due to changes in how I read and understood the data. In an ideal world I would have liked to have shared these ideas with the research participants themselves. However, as the organisation decentralised, there was enormous staff turnover and many staff either moved and were non-contactable or were unresponsive to email. Where possible transcripts were shown to organisational members but this was not possible in all cases.

Illusion and Disillusion Revisited

I stated at the beginning of this thesis that illusion and disillusion are a substantial part of the research experience. It is important to revisit them here in order to retrospectively make sense of the varying manifestations. Disillusion was more prevalent in my analysis of this development organisation and in my interpretation of how some of them were feeling: frustrations, disappointment and de-motivation were present in their accounts. This was evident from field notes where I had written:

Overlaps...problems with basic communication between organisational members...even the most basic stuff is problematic, like knocking on a door of someone they don't know, organisation is very fragmented (Field notes, 30 June 2006).

In Chapter Four I discussed a sense of belonging and wanting to be noticed and documented a tension, illustrated by the story of Richard and Laura who felt stifled by the lack of opportunities to make a difference or to have their skills in development recognised and utilised. The organisation was often spoken of in a negative way that was linked to a sense of disillusion exemplified by a need to speak in hushed tones and off the record about the 'way things really are.' This was also exemplified by Sorcha's statement that this *was not* the environment for exchange right at the start of the September meeting in Dublin despite the overarching agenda being one of learning, exchange and enhanced communication. Other examples of disillusion were also due to the perceived lack of equality in opportunity caused by what was perceived as a gender difference. This was highlighted in Sorcha's observation that the organisation was difficult for women to work in because it was 'an old boy's network' operating under old unseen rules and gender biased.

I also explored in Chapter Four how culture had become an entry point for exploring disharmony as well as consensus, and it was by questioning assumptions about organisational culture that I could begin to question my own assumptions. It was *my* illusion that by researching this organisation's culture I would uncover both the way that it worked and a way in which I could implement a learning system for them. As I grappled with the various contradictions, representations and multiple divides within the organisation, I was becoming disillusioned with what I was there to do - with the tension of roles and expectations of being between consultant and researcher. I began to see how this self-positioning became mirrored in the words of others. In Richard's story for example, where he finds the induction too generic and feels disillusioned with not feeling he was making a difference. In an attempt to alleviate some of this unease I became aware of how I was representing some staff over others, and how this 'mirroring' of the self was being enacted.

In revisiting 'illusion,' there were many that have unfolded throughout the thesis. The first being that I could 'fix' the organisation – providing them with an ICT based learning system. Tied to this was the second illusion, that I entered the organisation as an organisational learning expert – instead of a student new to the topic with a background in anthropology. This had an enormous impact upon my research as I defaulted to ethnography early on. The third, was that I could fulfil the project remit, producing analysed data, written articles and a PhD within the three years of funding. Other illusions include not realising that I was complicit in the power play of representation throughout my research - or that my research could somehow be separate from the other experiences in my life.

At the same time a growing sense of embodiment within the research was occurring as my personal roles changed. I documented being pregnant, being in grief, and I grappled with how to solve the dilemma of how to position oneself within research, not as an outsider, but in an embodied way through the use of retrospective autoethnography. Research is an embodied experience. The liminality 'whereby I moved from illusion to disillusion and back again, a state of research flux' is often left out of research work, but can help make sense of one's own assumptions, biases and representations.

Retrospectively I explored how the manifestations of illusion and disillusion were dealt with within the generated data and sense-making experiences. Tension was often alleviated by the telling of stories or sharing of experiences. This was true for Richard, Laura, and Gavin as well as for many of the staff at the September meeting in Dublin and the subsequent meeting in Kampala the year after. Some employees share stories as a means of survival within the organisational structure; others use stories to challenge and criticise the dominant organisational power structure or bring to light accounts of managerial conflict.

As Kondo (1990) questioned in her study of Japanese shop-floor workers, expressing disillusionment cannot always be taken at face value, to do so would be to immerse oneself in illusion. The paradoxical nature of fluid and changing identities mean that organisational members are often caught in contradictions whereby they are simultaneously legitimising managerial dictates whilst also challenging them. This can

be illustrated by the fact that whilst talking about the organisation as dysfunctional, the organisation are clearly still functional and successful as an aid donor. The tightly packed agenda of the September meeting in Dublin as explored in Chapter Five, that prevented reflexivity and learning, and produced frustrations amongst many staff members, was what I concentrated on at the end of my first year of data collection and generation. However, in hindsight I can see that it is not what *happened* that is important; rather, what is important is that the tension between all the elements that enabled and disenabled the bigger process of achieving goals was played out. Despite the bureaucratic system making life difficult for some people, those people make the system work. Thus perhaps I could surmise that there is an *illusion of disillusion.* This may have been magnified by my use of methodology which ignored the hidden aspects that helped organisational functionality and concentrated on the disillusion that I felt manifested so strongly. However, I believe it was the opposite that I tried to offset assumption and subjective bias by my use of the autoethnographic method. The most pertinent illusion is that organisational learning was lacking in Irish Aid, and that an *expert* needed to be brought in to implement a formalised toolkit or system so that a generic version of learning could be rolled out across the organisation, evaluated by checklists and box ticking. Organisational leaning occurred in an informal and tacit way, the organisational members themselves had the answers for how to make their organisation more effective, and undoubtedly the organisation's biggest asset is its staff. My ethnographic and autoethnographic approach was akin to a mirror, held up so the staff could see themselves, and as researcher, I could examine myself too within that context. My moods, experiences and moments of rapport are stamped upon this work (Humphries et al., 2003: 11) as this work is people-centred – as was so often said in Irish Aid: 'people are our most important resource' - they just need to believe it.

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