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Chapter 2

Food for thought

Much of this chapter is written with Handel's orchestral works in the background. The clarity of the structure, combined with the flow and energy created a sense of ground in which the voices of the authors could come to the fore. I chose Concerto no 11 in A major, my favourite, to accompany this chapter.

Introduction

In this thesis I have drawn on a number of frameworks. Reflecting on my practice as a consultant from different theoretical perspectives was enlightening and on many occasions led to considerably different interpretations and experiences. Some of those frameworks are based on ontologically/epistemologically conflicting foundations, as some of my colleagues were quick to point out in our conversations about the mind-map in Fig. 2.1. Especially Stacey's take on complexity theory was deemed incompatible with psychoanalytic frameworks and I was strongly encouraged to declare my alliance to one or other school of thought. Stacey (2003) too would advocate caution. Working with inconsistent theories, he argues, obliterates difference, eliminates paradox, and thus obstructs the evolution of new meaning. I will return to his critique in the section on psychodynamic literature.

Rather than to declare an alliance, I make a case for the way I have worked with frameworks from different paradigms. I will then give you an overview of the various kinds of theories I have used and of how I encountered and used them. On occasions where an author had significant influence on my thinking or practice, but an elaborate discussion of the relevant concepts would have disrupted the flow of the text, I have inserted a textbox on the left page.

2.1 Making a case for an eclectic approach

"Whereas academic research is set up as a carefully designed response to a body of theory as it exists at a given moment, action research, having initially established the scope and significance of its provisional topic by reference to general intellectual and professional debates, then becomes a relatively free-flowing dialogue with various bodies of theory as the progress of the work brings new aspects into significance. Action research, therefore, does not aim to make an initial "comprehensive" review of all previous relevant knowledge; rather it aims instead

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at being flexible and creative as it improvises the relevance of different types of theory at different stages in the work" (Winter 1998).

I have described myself as a bricoleur-researcher in the previous chapter. I see the way in which I have worked with various frameworks as a similar, quilt-making (Denzin and Lincoln 2000), undertaking. I read eclectically, often without being clear about how a framework might be useful or not, for shedding light on my work or deepening my understanding; much as the quilt maker collects pieces of fabric, not yet knowing how they might fit in the quilt under construction. On occasions I only noticed long after I first came across a theory, that what I was working with in the present was connected with what I had read in the past. It is quite possible that my first encounter with the framework in question had influenced – outside my awareness - the subsequent direction of my research. Fletcher's (1994) article on relational practice is a good example. Although I read the article with interest (witnessed by my annotations in the margin) in 1999 it was only in 2002, when I came across her book (Fletcher 1999), that I was struck by the importance of her thinking for my work and research. To continue the quilt making metaphor, it was as if I had found a missing piece of fabric, with a texture and colour that would bring the quilt together.

I see this eclectic approach as congruent with a social constructionist perspective. Firstly, by using different frames, and noticing the differences that emerge in the meaning I make from those different perspectives, I acknowledge the constructed nature of knowledge and meaning, and purposefully explore the differences that emerge. Secondly, I do not take a traditional hermeneutic stance, exemplified by Hirsch searching for the *truth* in a text, the correct interpretation which coincides with 'what the author truly meant' (Gergen 1999). Rather I aim to enter in a dialogic relationship with the text, in which my own meaning and the meanings of the text are engaged in conversation (o.c.). My reading of a text is necessarily coloured by the question I am holding (or the questions I have not yet discovered). The questions I hold, as I am trying to make sense of an experience, are situated in my social context. They inform the meaning I make of the *text* and of my *experience*. That sense-making in turn informs my future actions. And, on occasions I notice that the

The complex interplay of the surfaces in Gehry's design for the home of the L.A. Philharmonic, the extent to which one's entire perspective can change as a result of the most subtle movement, reminded me of the changing meaning I make of a text from different vantage points.

meaning I make of the same text at one point in time may vary from the meaning I make the next time, and lead to different actions.

In addition, when engaging with an author's writing, I take a connected approach (Clinchy 1996). Rather than examining its arguments mainly with a critical eye, looking for flaws, I prefer to take an emphatic, receptive stance, trying to embrace new ideas, looking for what is 'right', even in positions that seem initially 'wrong'. Peter Elbow (cited in Clinchy, o.c.) coined the lovely terms playing 'the believing game' (connected knowing) versus 'the doubting game' (separate knowing). Clinchy points out that connected and separate knowing are not mutually exclusive and that the two modes co-exist within the same individual. Neither is connected knowing to be confused with an excessive open-mindedness. "Believing", she asserts, is a *procedure* that guides one's interaction with other minds, not the *result* of that interaction. It is a demanding procedure, a way of knowing that requires a deliberate imaginative extension of one's understanding into positions that initially feel wrong or remote. Clinchy further contrasts connected knowing with subjectivism (Belenky, Clinchy et al. 1997), the epistemological position in which one identifies with what intuitively feels right.

I think of connected knowing in a different sense too: sometimes a text gives voice to what I have struggled to articulate. Thus I had described, with some defiance, my way of engaging with texts to my ACL colleagues before I came upon Clinchy's description of 'connected knowing', which seemed to capture beautifully what I tried to articulate . Such an experience gives me a sense of being able to validate and extend my knowing in connection with others.

Finally, making sense of a particular experience from different frameworks is also congruent with the phenomenological imperative to "prevent the data from being prematurely structured into existing categories of thinking" (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p. 99): by exploring different perspectives and paying close attention to what emerges, new perspectives are allowed to surface.

In the remainder of this chapter I aim to show you my quilt (Mind-map, fig. 2.1) of
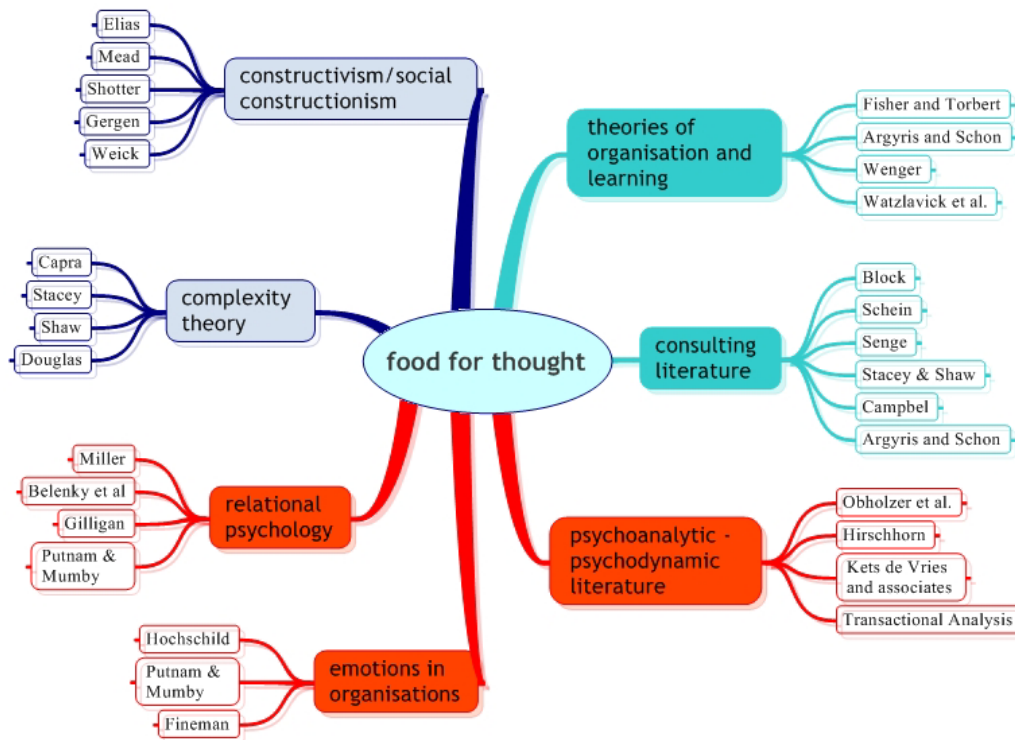
**Fig. 2.1 An overview of the frameworks that have informed my inquiry and
practice**

Legend:

Dark Blue: Underpinning frameworks

Red: Core literature

Aqua: Background and peripheral reading

This mind-map aims to give an impression of the kinds of frameworks I have worked
with. It aims to help you orient yourself in this chapter, but is by no means exhaus-
tive and has its limitations:

- The research literature, discussed in the previous chapter, is not included (with the
  exception of Torbert and Fisher

- Some authors defied categorisation and appear under more than one heading.

frameworks, explore them briefly, tell you how I have worked with them and where they appear in this PhD. As my research developed, and my research topic gradually took shape, I found new texts that helped me to explore the territory that was opening itself up in front of me. In other words, rather than to explore the territory from a given map, I have constructed a (mind)map as the territory unfolded.

The section below elaborates on the various branches of the mind-map. Some of the models are expanded upon here. Others can be found in the remainder of this thesis. I indicate where they occur.

2.2   Underpinning frameworks

Complexity theory and social constructionism are congruent paradigms, which inform the way I currently think about the world and the way I engage with it. They inform our consulting practice at ACL. My understanding of the implications of both paradigms for my practice is an ongoing inquiry.

2.2.1 Complexity Theory

I was introduced to complexity theory upon joining ACL. "Our consulting practice is underpinned by a complexity perspective" said my mentor. I had struggled to make sense of Capra's Web of Life (1996) whilst at HPA and it was therefore with some apprehension that I immersed myself in complexity theory. I quickly discovered that there were various complexity perspectives, that some colleagues tended to be more attached to one than the other and that the dominant perspective in ACL was based on the framework advocated by Ralph Stacey and colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire.

At an ACL workshop on the application of complexity science to organisations interesting questions were raised about the seemingly direct and uncritical application of models and analogies from natural sciences to organisational life (Lewin and

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Birute 1999; Pascale 1999; Wheatley 1999), often within the dominant organisational discourse which Schon (1995) has called 'technical rationality'. The interest of some colleagues in Stacey's work began to make sense. I also had my personal questions about what this application of complexity science appeared to be in service of. Lewin and Birute's (o.c.) work, for instance, seemed to advocate (or at least admire) a total surrender of employees to their employment (as illustrated in the title of the book) with few questions about the ethics of some of the demands put on employees in their case studies.

Stacey and colleagues (Stacey, Griffin et al. 2000) argue that one cannot simply apply ideas from complexity sciences on organisational life. In the dominant management discourse, they suggest, the individual is seen as self-contained, masterful and at the centre of an organisation. They criticise the complexity theorists who operate within that discourse, by talking about complex adaptive systems as networks of autonomous agents and about complex systems as objective realities that scientists can stand outside and model. Those theorists, they argue, emphasize the predictable aspects of systems and view their modelling work as a means to increase human control over complex worlds, thus perpetuating the dominant organisational discourse. In contrast Stacey and colleagues start from a participative perspective, viewing human beings as members of the complex networks that they form and are formed by, interacting with one another in the co-evolution of a jointly constructed reality. They draw attention to the impossibility of standing outside those complex networks in order to objectify and model them.

The authors situate their framework in the Hegelian tradition. It is informed by relational psychology (see chapter 7) and social constructionism (discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter) and draws upon Norbert Elias' view of social processes, and George Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism. Integrating those frameworks a perspective emerges of organisations as complex responsive processes of people relating to each other, which are characterised simultaneously by stability and instability. Organisations are thought of as being formed, sustained and transformed primarily through conversations (Shaw 2001). Stable patterns of interaction in organisations tend to be maintained through designed, legitimate

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networks of roles and accountabilities through which people pursue official goals and policies. Instability, and hence the possibility of transformation, emerges in the simultaneous operation of many informal networks in which significant political, social and other processes are at work that contribute in vitally important ways to the effectiveness of the organization (Shaw 1997). This perspective can be put in contrast to the prevailing assumptions that inform much of the management and consulting literature and practice, which tend to over-emphasise the importance of, and need to control the legitimate system, through structural, procedural and programmatic solutions.

For my consulting practice and that of ACL colleagues, this means that we aim to increase the client organization's capacity for self-organization, whilst working with managers to explore the paradox of "being in charge without being in control" (Streatfield 2001); and to sustain the formal procedures necessary for operational effectiveness, while stimulating, encouraging and promoting the less formal emergent processes in the organization which are a source of innovation. We invite clients to pay attention to how things are actually done, rather than how they should have been done, or ought to be done. We aim to perturb current, taken for granted ways of constructing meaning, and to challenge assumptions and repetitive patterns, so that differences might emerge. This aspiration is reflected in some of my client accounts.

2.2.2 Social constructionism

My first encounter with social constructionism was of an experiential nature. Upon my arrival in the UK in 1987, at the age of 30, I became acutely aware of how living in a different language, and in a very different social environment, opened up new perspectives to me, not only on the 'world' but also, and more surprisingly, on myself. From a socially cohesive and stable, provincial, predominantly catholic social setting, I was thrown into a vibrant, metropolitan, multi-cultural, multi-lingual community, with more religions than I had ever known to exist. From being a senior person in a social work setting, where I had worked previously, I found myself in the role of a junior member of a finance team in a private bank. Much of what I had

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taken for granted about the world and myself seemed to be under re-construction. It was a difficult time. Without a framework to help me make sense of my disorientation, it was tempting to ascribe my confusion and anxiety to my personal inability to cope and to begin to see myself as inadequate.

Thus it was with a sense of relief that I encountered constructivist and social constructionist theories, as they helped me to understand why and how my taken-for-granted assumptions had come to be so profoundly uprooted.

Constructivism and social constructionism

Alvesson offers the following definition of constructivism:

"Constructionism (sometimes also called constructivism): A theoretical perspective emphasizing that we do not have any direct access to an objective, independent reality, but by trying to describe it we create a particular version of it. 'Reality' is always filtered through the perspective taken and the language used" (2002 p. 177).

Gergen (1999) concedes that many scholars use the words constructivism and constructionism as interchangeable. However, he sees a fundamental difference between the two: for constructivists, according to Gergen, the process of the world construction is psychological, its takes place in one's head. In contrast, what social constructionists take to be real is an outcome of social relationships.

In the early 90's, I had come across the constructivist perspective in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, with its underlying premise that 'The Map is Not the Territory': "As human beings we can never know reality. We can only know our perceptions of reality" (Dilts 1994 p. 204). In other words, knowing is not passive, a simple imprinting of sensing data on the mind, but active. The mind does something with these impressions, at the very least forming abstractions or concepts. In this sense, constructivism asserts that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it (Schwandt 2000).

Constructivism helped me to make sense of the very different meanings people seemed to ascribe to a particular situation (e.g. what happened in a particular

In the previous chapter I have already mentioned that I do not fully agree with the relativism of strong social constructionism (Schwandt 2001) and its emphasis on the 'self' as constructed through language (Gergen 1991). Rob Farrands (CARPP6), in his comments on a draft of this chapter, suggested that a community of intellectuals – naturally interested in language – may have constructed a reality theory based on their love of language? I raised his comment at a CARPP6 meeting in March 2004. We discussed strong social constructionism and its implications for the many clients of Alan Kellas, one of my CARPP colleagues, who do not have the ability to develop a verbal language. Do they not have a sense of the world and themselves? I argued that I see 'language' as broader than verbal language and rather as 'gesture' (Mead 1967), and that most human beings have the capacity and drive to communicate through gestures. Nevertheless I agreed with colleagues about the importance of the embodied self and its impact on my experience of the world.

Social constructionism, even in its weak form, remains a challenge for me. Socialisation in the Western paradigm is proving hard to un-learn, for reasons I discuss in this text.

meeting) but not of my gradually disintegrating sense of myself. The social constructionist position that individual selves are socially defined (Gergen) however, put my unnerving experiences in a new light.

The concept of Self in social constructionism

<div align="center">

"In the beginning is relationship"

(Martin Buber, I and Thou, cited in Gergen (1991))

</div>

In "The Saturated Self", (Gergen 1991) explores how the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history, is being eroded:

> "As the modernist is drawn into the socially saturated world, the dominant sense is that of being a strategic manipulator: committed to a sense of substantial self but continuously and distressingly drawn into contradiction. As the moorings of the substantial self are slowly left behind and one begins to experience the raptures of the pastiche personality, the dominant indulgence becomes the persona – the image as presented. Yet as all becomes image, so by degrees does the distinction between the real and the simulated lose its force. At this point the concept of the true and independent self (…) loses its descriptive and explanatory import." (p. 156).

Norbert Elias (1991) speaks of the social being the plural, and the person being the singular of the same processes of relating. We are always, whether in silent imagination or overt communication, relating ourselves to others.

Thus, as the romantic and modernist traditions, with their central emphasis on the individual as autonomous agent, are replaced by the postmodern turn, the concept of autonomous self is profoundly challenged (Gergen 1991). As self-constructions cease to refer to an object (a real self), and we come to see those constructions as a means of getting on in the social world, our hold on them is slowly relinquished. Our role then becomes that of participant in a social process that eclipses our personal being. The role of language in self-construction (the words and phrases we use to characterize ourselves) illustrates the point. Language is not an outer expression of an inner reality, but is inherently a form of relatedness. Sense is derived only from

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coordinated effort among people. Any gesture becomes language when others ascribe meaning to it. In this way meaning is born out of interdependence.

"And because there is no self outside a system of meaning, it may be said that relations precede and are more fundamental than self. Without relationship there is no language with which to conceptualize the emotions, thoughts, or intentions of the self." (Gergen o.c. p 157).

Erez and Early (1993) view the self as a socially situated "dynamic interpretive structure that mediates most significant intrapersonal and interpersonal processes" (o.c. p.26). They further state that the processes that develop a person's changing sense of self serve three needs:

1   to seek and maintain a positive cognitive and affective state about the self (self-enhancement)

2   to perceive oneself as competent and effective (self-efficacy)

3   to experience coherence and continuity (self-consistency).

My arrival in the UK caused everyone one of those needs to be threatened. I liked myself less for having exchanged a social work environment for that of banking (of all places) and for having left my family and friends behind. I felt incompetent both at work and in social settings, where I struggled to make sense of what was going on and why people responded the way they did. And finally, just about every pattern and routine in my life had been disrupted: from a being feminist, single woman, sharing a rented accommodation with friends, I found myself married, with an admin job, a mortgage to pay and no friends within visiting distance. In a letter to my sister (January. 1989) I wrote: "I am exhausted, but I don't think it's the work, the commute and having to speak English. It's as if I am coming apart at the seams, and trying to hold myself together is more tiring than anything else".

According to Weick (1995) the need within individuals to have a sense of identity – a general orientation to situations that maintains esteem and consistency of one's self-conceptions - triggers a sense-making process. Sense-making is self-referential, in that it is triggered by a failure to confirm one's sense of self. Weick suggests therefore that self, rather than the environment, may be the text in need of

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interpretation. In my experience it was both. I found myself needing to re-construct my sense of myself, as well as having to continually deal with the difficulty of making sense of the situation I found myself in. Weick explains how the processes of identity formation and making sense of a situation mutually influence each other: what a situation means to me is dictated by the identity I adopt in dealing with it. And that choice, in turn, is affected by what I think is occurring. The more selves I have access to, the more meaning I can extract and impose in any situation. An abundance of possibilities can become confusing, unless I incorporate flexibility and adaptability as central elements in my self-conception. A perspective I found helpfully explored in my NLP training, where I was continually invited to notice how the limiting beliefs I held about myself hampered my sense-making and social efficacy, and to open up new choices for myself by exploring alternative beliefs.

Gergen (1999) points out that the consciousness of relational selves is far from widely shared in Western culture, in which the assumption of private, individual thought is still deeply ingrained. The individualist tradition, he argues, is considered essential to the institution of democracy: the stronger the minds of individuals, the more effective the democratic process. Further, without belief in individual agency, our institutions of moral adjudication crumble. We hold each other responsible for our actions in so far as we believe people are capable of individual choice. If we find the individualist construction of the person flawed, how can we conceptualize persons so that the possibilities for more promising forms of societal life are opened? Social constructionism traces commitments to the real and the good to social processes. The conception of relational being moves us beyond the problems of the self-contained individual: the debilitating gap between self and other, the sense of oneself as alone and the other as alien and untrustworthy. There is no longer a reason to be 'self-seeking' or to treat others as instruments for self gain. "We are made up of each other" (o.c., p. 138).

The (English) language we have inherited, with its wealth of terms that refer to individual mental states, and dearth of terms that refer to relationship, does not serve us well to develop a relational perspective (Gergen, 1993). Nor does our scientific heritage serve us well. Social psychology could have developed in directions that

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emphasized relationship over the individual, but did not. Developmental psychologists have followed the direction of social psychologist and traditionally defined human development in terms of the self-contained individual, based on a notion of separation; maturity being defined as reaching a stage of independence and autonomy (Miller 1986; Gilligan 1993).

The emphasis in relational psychology on the ability to engage in mutually empowering interactions as a criterion for maturity, is an exciting contribution to the social constructionist consciousness of relational selves. It is addressed later in this chapter, and returns in Chapters 3 and 8 of this thesis.

The implications of social constructionism for morality

If my construction of a situation is no better, more truthful, honest, ethical than that of anyone else, does that leave me with no argument against what I consider morally wrong, unethical, unacceptable in my life and my practice as a consultant? Does constructionism tolerate commitment to any set of values? Gergen (1999) points out that it was the hegemony of the scientific world-view that eroded the discourse of ethics and morals. In the first half of the twentieth century, a view developed that science ought to deal with facts, that the realm of values is separate and that scientists can make no claims to expertise in such matters. However, by the 1960's the scientific establishment seemed almost invariably found on the side of domination by the powerful over the weak. Constructionism's axiom that language (including scientific language) is never value-free, invites us to open up all scientific propositions to questions of morality and politics. It opens up a space for challenging the 'truth' of the dominant order, and respects all traditions of value, without championing one ideal over another. There is nothing in constructionism that argues against having values. However, there is the recognition that strong commitments lend themselves to eradicating any voice antithetical to one's own. Constructionism favours transformative dialogue and advocates the transformative potential of self-reflexivity. As I question my own position, reflect on my stand-point, I must adopt a different voice. In self-questioning I must relinquish the firm posture of conflict and open possibilities for conversations to take place. Having grown up in a strictly catholic family (and having spent the first 20 years of my education in catholic

Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research, developed initially by Cooper-rider and Srivasta (Cooperrider and Srivasta 1987), as an alternative to the hitherto largely problem focussed forms of action research. The authors argue that, to the extent that action research maintains a problem-oriented view of the world, it diminishes the capacity of researchers and practitioners to discover life-giving forces and to nurture and sustain them. Appreciative starts with unconditional positive questions to guide the inquiry agenda and to focus the attention on the most generative aspects of organisational life in order to unleash positive change in organisations and unseat existing reified patterns of deficit discourse (Ludema, Cooperrider et al. 2001). It seeks out the very best of 'what is' to help spark the imagination of 'what might be'. The aim is to generate knew knowledge which expands the 'realm of the possible' and helps members of an organisation envision a collectively desired future, successfully translate the images of 'what might be' into possibility, intentions into reality and belief into practice (Barrett and McLean).

In the table below I show the essential difference between a problem-solving focus and appreciative inquiry:

Problem-solving focus	Appreciative Inquiry
Identifying a problem	Valuing what is
Analysing the causes of the problem	Envisioning what might be
Generating possible solutions	Dialoguing what should be
Action planning	Innovating what will be

Instead I aim to engage in conversations with my clients, paying attention to how they construct their organizational reality and genuinely trying to understand what the world looks like from my their perspective. I am interested in who is involved in what kind of conversations, whose voice is privileged, whose is suppressed (and how can I help those voices being heard), what is the dominant discourse and what perspectives are made invisible in that discourse, what possibilities for new conversations are suggested. As Patricia Shaw (2001) puts it: I am interested in changing the conversation in an organization.

institutions) this advocacy for dialogue and self-reflexivity strongly appeals to me. Too often have I witnessed, the deplorable effects of 'one single truth' on myself, families, communities, and currently on a world-wide scale. There is no (longer) an answer out there, no authority upon which I can draw. I must take responsibility for my actions, as I go on with others.

Implications of social constructionism for my consulting practice

Karl Weick (1995) suggests that the process of generating realities is a central to organizations as it is to personal or family well being. Everywhere in the organization, participants are continuously generating their local sense of the real and the good. Gergen (1999) points at the potential for conflict to arise in this sense making process, resulting in the organisation to seek help:

> "Realities and moralities will necessarily conflict, and with such conflicts often come suspicion, animosity, loss of morale and more. These are the daily challenges of organizational life and when the problems prove intractable, they become the challenges for a host of organizational consultants" (p 176).

When I am invited by a client the expectation is often that I will (re-) diagnose the organizational ailment, and prescribe a solution, the expected solution often being a re-structuring, a strategic plan, a management development programme. In other words, on many occasions I am offered a diagnosis and a cure, and seen as the provider of the cure. For a constructionist, says Gergen (o.c.), problems exist if we agree there are problems, and any situation may defined as problematic or not. He advocates Appreciative Inquiry (see textbox on the adjacent page) and Future Search (a methodology dedicated to locating and building common ground among people) as methods congruent with a constructionist perspective. Although I have enjoyed using both, and will most probably do so again, in my experience it can be all too easy to use either of those methods as a 'different kind of cure' (the problem around here is that there's too much problem focus, what we need is an Appreciative Inquiry).

An important aspect of my consulting work is to foster curiosity and inquiry. Through encouraging conversations between people who don't usually get to talk to each other: customers with employees, senior with junior managers, 'front office'

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with 'back office' staff; I can begin to explore, with my clients, the constructed nature of our view of the world, the organization, the 'problem' and to a create space for new constructions that open up new opportunities for action. Sometimes I find myself employing some of the tools Gergen (1999) associates with transformative dialogue: story telling, in which participants are asked to speak from their personal experience, rather than using abstract arguments; co-ordinating rhythm through rapport building (Richardson 1987); linguistic shading: noticing the different associations that occur when we substitute terms with a near equivalent (Robbins 2001); imaginary moments in which clients join in visioning a future for the organization; affirming the other through curiosity and attentive listening and through exploring perceptual positions (an NLP technique that is elaborated upon in Chapter 4).

Sometimes I see my role as disrupting existing patterns (often formal meetings where not much seems to be really talked about). On other occasions I aim to enable people to hear and work with conflicting views. I seek to avoid being constructed as the expert, the holder of 'the truth'. Instead I aspire to be one of many voices, sharing my expertise where appropriate whilst encouraging clients to honour their own knowing. Establishing a relationship of mutuality is an important aspect of this (see chapter 7).

I do deliver management development programmes too, in which I aim to create an opportunity for inquiry, for honouring participants' knowing, for valuing what is good about the organization and the leaders I work with, for discovery of possibility and potential. I aim to approach any leadership development work from a perspective of leaders not as lone heroes but as people-in-relationship.

2.3 Core literature

The term "Core Literature" is potentially misleading. The frameworks discussed here are in many ways not more core than social constructionism or Stacey's work but

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A note of caution on terminology

In this thesis I have attempted used the terms 'psychodynamic' or 'psychoanalytical' according to the label respective authors accord their work. The distinction is blurred, to say the least. I have failed to find a clear differentiation between psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approaches. From conversations with a number of psychoanalytically trained colleagues (personal conversations with Erik De Haan, Kamil Kelner and Gerhard Wilke, February 2004) I understand that the terms are used interchangeably. A search of the internet delivered similar results, with one exception where psychodynamic theory was described as 'Neo-Freudian'. A number of sites distinguished between psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, with psychodynamic psychotherapy being described as evolved from Freudian psychoanalysis and based on the same theories, but usually involving shorter courses of less frequent sessions, during which the psychotherapist usually faces the sitting client, rather than putting the client on the psychoanalytic couch.
(source: www.**behavenet**.com/capsules, 2004)

In "Organizations on the Couch" (Kets de Vries and associates 1991; Winter 1999) both terms are used, without any real clarification of the difference between the two. In the listing of authors using psychoanalytic conceptions of organizational behaviour, Hirschhorn, associated with a psychodynamic approach, is listed amongst Kets de Vries, Bion, and Zaleznik, who are associated with a psychoanalytic approach.

they have played an important role in my day-to-day reflections on my practice. They take a prominent place in a number of chapters in this thesis and I will indicate where you can expect to encounter them.

2.3.1 Psychodynamic/Psychoanalytic Literature

The psychodynamic perspective on organizations does not claim to provide a comprehensive explanation (Halton 1994) but aims to offer a framework to clarify life in organizations and deal with issues concerning career, individual and organizational stress, corporate culture, entrepreneurship and leadership (Kets de Vries and associates 1991).

The application of psychoanalysis to organizations was pioneered by scholars and practitioners working at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. Psychoanalytically informed practitioners criticize the mainstream management theory of rational organizational action for ignoring subjectively determined self-interest and motivation. They view organizations as cauldrons of unconscious thoughts, fantasies and hopes and assert that people's behaviour, including that of key players, is influenced by concealed personal agendas (Kets de Vries and associates 1991). They claim that anxiety distorts individuals' perspective on reality and undermines organizational rationality. Anxiety in organisations may be caused by external threats, internal conflict or by the nature of the work (Halton 1994). In order to deal with the anxiety of work employees develop coping strategies: social defences. According to Klein (1959) adult unconscious and self-protecting defences have their roots in infancy. By distorting perception of the difficult reality, they provide a way of coping with it.

Social defences can take different forms:

- Avoidance of the primary task (the task an organization must accomplish in order to survive). Wilfred Bion (1959) who made a detailed study of unconscious processes in groups, distinguished two main tendencies in the life of a group: a tendency towards work on the primary task, which he called 'work-group mentality' and a second, often unconscious, tendency to avoid work on primary task, called 'basic assumption mentality', in which the group behaves as if the sole

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purpose of the primary task is to provide for the satisfaction of needs and wishes of the members; or as if there is an 'enemy' or danger out there that should be either attacked or fled from; or as if a future event will solve the present problems and needs of the group. 'Basic assumption mentality' is regressive: members of the group resort to behaviour associated with infantile stages of development (Diamond 1991). Isabel Menzies (1960) provides an example of regressive behaviour in her classic study of staff retention amongst nurses: the strict routines, hierarchies and impersonal ways of working (e.g. referring to patients by their bed number or disease) screen nurses from dealing with the anxiety of death, disease and distress.

- Splitting, whereby conflicting feelings are divided into differentiated elements. Splitting is often linked to the process of scapegoating and projection, which involves locating feelings in others rather than in oneself. When people feel vulnerable, inadequate, guilty or inferior, they project these feelings onto another, who is then experienced in just these ways (Hirschhorn and Young 1991).

The psychodynamic perspective considers it imperative that the organisation consultant, in order to recognise organizational defences, reflect on and interpret her own experience and treat it as diagnostic material, rather then feel angry and frustrated (Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997).

I have found the concept of organizational defences a useful framework, particularly when working with challenging clients, or trying to make sense of what I experience as my own or others' irrational or incomprehensible behaviour (see Chapters 4 - 6). When I suspect organizational behaviour to be a 'defence against anxiety' I can help the client to understand what is going on, or refrain from doing so if I think it will be unhelpful (see below: drawbacks), and aim to direct the organizational energy towards task activity.

In my inquiry into joining ACL (chapter 6) I draw on the psychoanalytic perspective on belonging and attachment. Bion (1961) describes man (sic) as a group animal, and sees our inherent 'groupishness' as a vehicle for our primitive drives for survival and reproduction. According to Winnicott (1965) some individuals demand excessive

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association that represent a compensatory need for a sense of self and identity that is otherwise lacking from a workgroup or organization, expecting the organization to provide them with the stable holding environment lacking from their past.

Of particular interest to me was the work of Bowlby (1989), who made the understanding of attachment behaviour his life's work. Rather than to start with a clinical syndrome and tracing its origins retrospectively, Bowlby built his theory of personality development on *observations* of children in specific situations, including the feelings and thoughts they expressed. Bowlby rejected the hitherto widely held view in psychoanalytic circles of dependency as a secondary drive. He viewed attachment as a fundamental form of behaviour, with its own internal motivation distinct from feeding and sex, and of no less importance for survival. He defined it as follows:

> "Attachment behaviour is any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious whenever the person is frightened, fatigued, or sick, and is assuaged by comforting and caregiving. At other times the behaviour is less in evidence" (o.c., pp. 26-27).

A central concept in Bowlby's attachment theory is the secure base, which he describes as:

> "(…) a base from which a child or an adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened" (o.c., p. 11)

In contrast to dependency theorists, Bowlby does not perceive the urgent desire for comfort and support in adversity as childish. Instead, he regards the capacity to make intimate emotional bonds with others, sometimes in the care-seeking role and sometimes in the care-giving role, as a principal feature of effective personality functioning and mental health. He further states that healthy adults can display attachment behaviour when they feel under stress and that this display is to be seen as a healthy response to a difficult situation.

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In his exploration of pathogenic childhood events Bowlby asserts that the systematic threat to withdraw love as a means of controlling a child leads the child to grow up anxious to please and guilt-prone. I have found this helpful when trying to make sense of anxiety and guilt which appear out of proportion to the context I or others find themselves in. Taking feelings of anxiety and guilt seriously, whilst asking gently probing questions about them, can in my experience be a helpful approach.

Overall I believe that psychodynamic concepts have helped me to better understand the other-than-rational aspects of human behaviour in my consulting practice. However, taking a psychoanalytic approach can have drawbacks:

- Over-emphasising the grip of early-life experiences can underplay the effects of the social and organizational structures of power (Menzies 1990; Mosse 1994; Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997; Fineman 2003). I have wondered to what extent my psychoanalytically informed reflections were in themselves a 'defence against anxiety', for instance as a strategy to avoid addressing issues of power.

- Helping clients to develop their insight into their own and the organization's psychological processes, while ignoring the systemic elements that affect the work, can increase clients' frustration and have a negative impact on the organization (Fineman 2003).

- Mosse (2001) warns against the risk of 'character assassination', in which psychoanalytic theory is misused to disparage character.

- Not being psychoanalytically trained I need to use the framework with caution (Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997).

- Shotter (1993 (2002 edition)) reminds us that psychoanalysis is one way of making sense of reality, another storytelling enterprise. It is, in other words, just another framework. Working with a model that is preoccupied with anxiety (Gould 1991) I may be at risk of *finding* anxiety, and responding to what I find. As Ludema and colleagues (Ludema, Cooperrider et al. 2001) remind us: the question guiding our inquiry is all important.

- The psychoanalytic literature on consulting (Kets de Vries and associates 1991; Obholzer and Roberts 1994; Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997; Neumann, Kellner et al. 1997) encourages consultants to be aware of the impact emotional aspects of organizational life and their relationship with the client has on them. Consultants

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are encouraged to seek support for themselves in order to cope with that impact. Where they might find such support is rarely discussed. Bolton and Roberts (1994) mention support groups, but warn that they often fail because they tend to be "off-the-peg solutions to an ill-defined problem for which they are not appropriate". Supervision is recommended (Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997), but in the first instance to ensure the quality of the consulting work. The extent to which I have found supervision helpful has depended on the quality of the relationship. In traditional psychodynamic supervision that relationship is considered irrelevant (Howard Atkins, personal communication, August 2004).

Transactional Analysis

In chapter 3 you will find references to Transactional Analysis (TA) and a discussion of some core concepts. TA is a framework developed by Eric Berne, who aspired to make a contribution to psychoanalysis and develop a new approach to psychotherapy. The result of his work has become a permanent part of the psychotherapeutic literature (Source: http://www.itaa-net.org/ta/bernehist.htm, 2004).

2.3.2 Emotions in organizations

My first interest in 'emotions in organisations' was sparked by Arlie Hochschild's (1983) work, as I was inquiring into my experience of joining ACL.

The 'Managed Heart'

In 'The Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling' (1983) Hochschild shows that much work, especially providing a face-to-face service (such as the work of flight attendants, debt collectors, waitresses, secretaries and fast food operators), involves having to present the 'right' (that is, managerially prescribed) emotional appearance to the client, which requires real labour on the employees' part. Hochschild distinguishes emotional labour from emotion work. *Emotional labour* is the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display. Sold for a wage it has *exchange value*. *Emotion work* or *emotion management* refers to the same acts done in a private context, where they have *use value*.

In order to comply with managerial/cultural expectations, according to Hochschild,

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employees need to engage in surface or deep acting. In surface acting we deceive others about what we really feel, but we do not really deceive ourselves. In other words, we pretend to feel happy, or friendly towards a person, even if we may be inwardly sad, detached, or angry. In deep acting, we actively work to feel a particular way and we display a particular emotion as a result of that work, which "from a certain point of view involves deceiving ourselves as much as deceiving others" (o.c., p. 33). Thus I might find a particular person demanding and petulant and, in order to remain composed and friendly, make myself think of him as a difficult child that needs my attention. Deep acting, according to Hochschild, has the edge over simple pretending in its power to convince, and is preferred by managers of people who deal with the public. She stresses that emotion work comes at a personal cost. Although managing feelings is fundamental to civilised living, when we succeed in deep acting, for the sake of the requirements of our role, we may lose the signal function of feelings. If, on the other hand, we resort to a displaying a thin veneer (surface acting) we pay a price of being phoney or insincere.

How do we know what kind of emotional display is expected? Feeling rules, a cultural prescription of how one ought to feel in a particular circumstance, set out what is owed in gestures of exchange between people. We recognise a feeling rule "(…) by inspecting how we assess our feelings, how other people assess our emotional display, and by sanctions from ourselves and from them" (o.c., p. 57).

'Bounded emotionality' (Mumby and Putnam 1992)

Mumby and Putnam (o.c.) aim to confront the basic assumptions underpinning mainstream organizational research, which they view as incorporating masculine systems as normal and rational, thus reproducing certain (patriarchal) perspectives on organizational life. They pursue their project by deconstructing – dismantling the apparent fixed meaning – the concept of 'bounded rationality' (Simon 1957). They see 'bounded rationality' as similar to emotional labour, in that it alienates and fragments the individual and strips away the individual experience, relational context, and the intimacy that typifies the expression of personal feelings.

In Simon's concept rationality is defined as intentional, reasoned and goal-directed

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behaviour. The modifier 'bounded' suggests that optimal choice is limited because individuals act with incomplete information and explore only a limited number of outcomes. Simon (1989) views decisions based on emotions as *irrational*. Mumby and Putnam (o.c) draw on feminist deconstructions of the false dichotomy between rationality and emotionality, the privileging of cognitive functioning and neglect of emotional issues to develop an alternative construct, 'bounded emotionality', as a means to open up a space for thinking differently about organizations.

"The concept of bounded emotionality refers to an alternative mode of organizing in which nurturance, caring community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness are fused with individual responsibility to shape organizational experience" (o.c. p 474).

Thus 'bounded' in this concept refers not to human limitations, as in Simon's term, but to the individual voluntarily constraining of emotional expression in service of the community. Individuals choose an appropriate course of action based on tolerance of ambiguity rather than reduction of it, recognizing divergence and even contraction between the positions of organizational members. Instead of hierarchical decision making, this perspective advocates a heterarchy in which goals and values are flexible and governed by contextual relations. In response to the fragmented forms of self-identity and labour, which according to Mumby and Putnam result from and reproduce bounded rationality, organizations that adopt bounded emotionality aim to preserve the integrated self-identity of employees, rather than the mind-body dualism. Instead of feelings being prescribed and co-opted to achieve organizational ends, they should ideally, according to Mumby and Putnam, emerge spontaneously from the ongoing process of task and social activities. Feeling rules should function not as organizationally ascribed norms, but as a means for individuals to interpret and adapt to organizational context and relationships. Feeling rules can be contradictory and ambiguous and differences between expressed emotion and inner feelings can be genuinely paradoxical.

Martin and colleagues (Martin, Knopoff et al. 2000) suggest there is a risk of bounded emotionality becoming a revised pressure for conformity, not allowing for some people's preference for impersonality and reserve. I think that risk is real. The concept implies a level of maturity and acceptance of interpersonal differences that is perhaps somewhat idealistic. However, Mumby and Putnam state clearly that it is not

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their intention to offer a new prescription; rather they aim to open a space in which we can develop a richer discourse about organising. In place of an instrumental view of emotions they advocate reconceptualizing the relationship between rationality and emotionality and reconstructing rationality to include intersubjective understanding, community and shared interests.

Martin and colleagues (o.c.) further question the extent to which bounded emotionality, which they consider to be time consuming and non-instrumental, is feasible in publicly owned companies under the pressures of the market place, and suggest that those pressures may cause organizations to revert to impersonality or emotional labour. The extent to which the current pressures are sustainable is questionable (Senge, Scharmer et al. 2004). Whether it is justifiable that we expect to continue to cope with those rising pressures is a question I return to in chapter 7. Even within Martin's instrumental discourse I would still argue the value of bounded emotionality. I have found 'unbounded' emotionality, rather than impersonality, in commercial and public sector organizations (aggression, intimidation, unbridled pursuit of one's personal agenda at the expense of the organization's well-being). It often leads to stress, absenteeism and eventually poor performance. The need for an increased awareness of others' feelings and a willingness to take them into account is often the underlying reason public and private sector organizations' request for management development and leadership programmes.

2.3.3 Relational psychology

I first read Carol Gilligan's "In a different voice" (1993) in 1997. It was a revelation for me, especially her concept of balancing duty of care for self with duty of care for others struck a chord. In an inquiry into holding that balance whilst taking care of my family, I explored Gilligan's work in more depth (see Chapter 3).

Building on Gilligan's work Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997) developed a theory of women's development of self, voice and mind. They were motivated to extend and critique the theory of William Perry (1970) about intellectual

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and ethical development of male Harvard students. They analysed the life stories of 137 women from a demographically heterogeneous sample, starting from the assumption that gender is a major social, historical, and political category, affecting the life choices of all women in all communities and cultures. Their research focussed on family and school as two important socializing institutions. As a result of their inquiry they distinguished five knowledge perspectives: silence, a position of not knowing in which the person feels voiceless; received knowing, in which knowledge and authority are constructed as outside the self and invested in powerful and knowing others; subjective knowing: in which knowing is personal, private, and based on intuition and/or feeling states; procedural knowing: in which techniques and procedures of acquiring, validating and evaluating knowledge claims are developed and honoured; constructed knowing: in which truth is understood to be contextual, knowledge recognized as tentative rather than absolute, and the knower is understood to be part of the known.

In 1996 the same group of women edited "Knowledge, Difference and Power" (Golberger, Tarule et al.), a sequel to the above study, which examines how their theory was used, evaluated and criticized, extended and elaborated. They answer some of the critiques and develop their thinking further. The work discusses topics such as power differentials in the construction and evaluation of knowledge, silence and power, collaborative learning, connected knowing and teaching, and the epistemological crisis of the West. My first reading of it was in the context of exploring social constructionism. In that exploration I had been struck by the absence of references to Gilligan and Belenky and her colleagues' work. Absent in Shotter's "Conversational Realities" (1993 (2002 edition)), the authors are mentioned once only in Gergen's "An invitation to social constructionism" as "classics in the effective use of first hand accounts" (o.c., p.95). The same is true in the opposite direction, Gergen and Shotter, both influential authors in the social constructionist debate, are not mentioned in Gilligan's work, nor in that of Belenky and colleagues. One can only guess why this should be the case, an indication of the fragmented nature of knowledge development across the academy perhaps?

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Other authors on relational theory (e.g (Miller 1986; Rafaeli and Sutton 1987; Fletcher 1994; Fletcher 1999) are further explored in chapter 7.

2.4   Background and Peripheral reading

The status I have given in my mind-map to consulting literature and organizational theory may not do justice to the influence those frameworks had on my thinking about my practice as a consultant. They were important sources for me in my first years as organization consultant, but became secondary to literature on emotions in organizations, relational theory, Stacey and colleagues' complexity thinking and social constructionism, as my inquiry progressed and my practice developed.

2.4.1 Consulting Literature

This thesis aims to make sense of my experiences as a consultant, in order to improve my practice. Much has been written about consulting, and yet, relatively little of that literature appears in this thesis. You may well be wondering why that is so. The truthful reason is that I didn't really find much of it all that helpful in making sense of my experience, which was more complex, unpredictable, and did not seem to fit the available moulds.

The consulting literature that did inform my practice is explored here.

Schein's (1987, 1988, 1992, 1999) concept of 'process consultation' (as opposed to expert consultation) shed light on the difficulties I had encountered in my 'expert' oriented approach to consulting in HPA. Schein encourages us, consultants or managers, to maintain a spirit of inquiry (1987), to develop increased self-awareness and to pay careful attention to our relationship with our clients. As a budding consultant I found his specific guidance, case studies and analyses of the various phases in a client engagement (each with its own potential pitfalls) helpful and you will find his work referenced in my reflections in chapter 4 and in subsequent

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chapters. My main critique of Schein is the rationalist-realist – as opposed to social constructionist - and mechanistic view that underpins his work, as illustrated by terminology such as : "Unfreezing, Changing Through Cognitive Restructuring, Refreezing" and "Intrapsychic Processes" (1988, XII). According to Schein the consultant needs to be a skilled observer of human interaction, always maintaining the role of audience, with the clients in the role of actors in the "Drama of Human Exchange" (1987, p. 82). In my consulting practice I have began to doubt the possibility or desirability of 'staying in the role of audience'. I do have a different role from that of my clients, but I do not experience it as, nor aspire it to be, that of a rational (note the mind-body split resurfacing), detached observer.

Schein further asserts that consultants make sense of human processes through simplifying models. He conceptually distinguishes the 'task' from the 'process', and emphasises that those conceptual, theoretical distinctions are not so clear cut in practice but insists that they are essential for making sense of experience and for guiding action. In her critique of Schein, Patricia Shaw (2001) argues that this distinction is not essential: "Instead of thinking as if systems behind or below or above our immediate interaction are causing our actions" she proposes "that we think as participants in the patterning process of *interaction itself* as the movement of experience" (o.c. p. 129, my italics). In other words, the notion of systems brings a spatial metaphor to what is a temporal process, and the notion of a 'system' unjustifiably reifies that process (Stacey, 2003, p. 59).

Peter Block's "Flawless consulting" (1999) (The title is ironic, I assume?) brings a pragmatic approach to consulting, whilst sharing generously of his experience. It was a rich source of tools as I developed my practice. Initially attracted by Block's claim that authenticity, defined as putting into words what you are experiencing with the client, is the most powerful thing a consultant can bring to a relationship with her client, I subsequently found myself asking questions about the complex nature of the deceivingly simple term and of the feasibility and desirability of 'being authentic', and have noticed similar concerns exist for consultant clients.

Block and Schein provide recipes. Playing the believing game (Clinchy 1996) I can read them much as I read cookery books. Their works are full of helpful, interesting

I notice how difficult I find it to play the 'doubting game', especially in writing. I can enjoy the 'doubting game' in conversations, where it doesn't seem to matter too much whether I'm the lone doubting voice or in agreement with other doubting voices. In writing I feel the need to be balanced, give credit, be fair in criticism. The playful, light, quality of conversations seems to evaporate.

tips and techniques. However, in my work with clients the tools they offer sometimes come to mind, but mainly fade in the background, as a reality unfolds that is always so much more complex than the best description or prescription can capture. Thus the consulting cycle, an interesting and valuable concept, becomes a messy process of jointly discovering what we are trying to do, turning back on our steps, leaping ahead, getting stuck. "Client resistance" (Block, 1999) takes on a whole new meaning if I am prepared to deconstruct my frame of my client's behaviour and to see it as my client being pulled by a different 'attractor'. When I play the doubting game, I think of consulting not as a 'rational' process. I doubt the mind-body split that suggests we can operate as if we were able to separate thought from feeling (Fineman 1999). In my experience a rational, analytical, structured approach does not allow for the political and emotional aspects of people relating to one another in the pursuit of their agendas, nor for the power of informal networks. McLean and colleagues (McLean, Sims et al. 1982) point out the discrepancy between theoretical descriptions of interventions, as contained in case studies and OD texts, and the reality of OD as it is practised. The prescriptive stance of many OD (and consulting) writers, they state, is mainly based on post hoc rationalizations of their own actions.

In "The Socially Constructed Organization" , David Campbell (2000) invites consultants to reflect on the nature of the consulting relationship from a social constructionist perspective. Rather than to offer recipes he tells stories from his personal experience, which emerges as rich, competent but flawed nevertheless. An example of his approach, is captured by his thoughts on contracting:

"The aim or function of the conversation I must have with the organization is to continuously construct together through dialogue some shared notion of a consultation process. (…) I have an obligation, as a consultant, to maintain this ongoing conversation through sharing ideas and actions, as well as through my speaking and silence, so that the "consultation relationship" is continually being constructed, or perhaps de-constructed and re-constructed" (o.c., p. 73, quotation marks in the original).

Campbell takes a pragmatic approach. He views both systems theory and social constructionism as metaphors that enable us to function in a particular context.

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"Whereas the metaphor of systems thinking helped us to make sense of interconnectedness and ecology, perhaps the metaphor of social constructionism facilitates an understanding of the way realities are construed from the voices of many people from many parts of the world" (o.c., p 10).

He incorporates many concepts from a systemic framework, such as feedback, meaning systems and seeing a 'whole made up of parts'. Like Wenger (1998) he points at the interplay between structures and policies (reifications) and the socially constructed view of how the organization should be. I enjoyed his pragmatic approach and story telling. In some ways Campbell's book may not have contributed much more to my practice as a consultant than what I had already gleaned from social constructionist writers and Stacey and his colleagues' perspective on organizations as complex responsive process, but his approach, e.g. working with some of the existing forums and structures, to create new kinds of conversations, was easier to relate to in my practice than the work of Stacey and colleagues.

I found Shaw's "Changing Conversations in Organizations" (2001) seductive and inspirational. The conversational tone, the continued reference to her underpinning perspective on organizations, the clear differentiation between her practice and that of others, made it easy for me to understand what it is she is trying to achieve in her consulting practice. On occasions I struggled to connect with her work. That is partly, I think, because I am only gradually developing my ability to work in informal client networks, partly because many of my clients would not agree to that level of lack of boundaries (do Shaw's clients have budget limitations, I wondered). Nevertheless, it has inspired me to work hard at changing the nature of the management development work I am invited to do. Until I find ways of engaging with informal networks, I try instead to change the nature of conversations in my client organization by changing the nature of development activities: e.g. moving away from seminars, workshops and the like, and towards action learning and action inquiry. At the time of writing (May, 2004) I have received enthusiastic responses from a few major clients.

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I would like to conclude this brief exploration of the consulting literature re-stating that it's had its place. It has informed my thinking. But in developing my practice I have found other frameworks more inspiring: psychoanalytic frameworks, emotions in organizations and relational psychology literature, social constructionism and complexity thinking.

2.4.2 Theories of organization and learning

I chose the authors on the mind-map under "theories of organization and learning" because they had a strong influence on me. Here I discuss some of the core concepts in their work, how I have worked with them, and where you will find some illustrations of that work in the remainder of the thesis.

Fisher and Torbert's Personal and organizational transformations (1995)

I was introduced to this framework at one of the early CARPP4 workshops (1997). It was a time when I was uncertain, even scared, in my new role a change agent at HPA. Coming to CARPP, looking to find support in my aspiration to improve my practice, I had unwittingly added the burden of another new role, that of inquirer. In the midst of the, for me daunting, explorations of ontological, epistemological and methodological issues (what some of us laughingly called 'our ologies' – gallows humour no doubt) their work appeared accessible and grounded in organisational life as I could recognise it. I enjoyed the practical nature of it, the invitations for personal reflection, the stories. I was seeking to extend my toolkit at the time, and this book offered useful tools for both my inquiry and my practice. I will not elaborate on those tools here, they appear in chapters 3-5 of this thesis, where I also offer some critical comments. I still use the 'four figures of speech' (inquiring, advocating, framing and illustrating) on a very regular basis. It helps me to remain alert to the balance in my conversations and has helped my clients to understand what I mean when I say 'at ACL we take an inquiring approach to consulting'.

Peter Senge's early work

I remember the excitement with which I discovered "The Fifth Discipline" (1994), as a budding change agent. Here, I thought, was valuable inspiration for going about my

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new role. The sequel, "The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook" (Senge, Kleiner et al. 1995) provided many suggestions for further reading and tools I could, or thought I could, work with. I was in for a rough ride, as I discuss later. First I'd like to say a little more about Senge's work.

The Fifth Discipline popularized the concept of the 'learning organization'. Senge defines learning organisations as:

> "Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (1994, p. 3).

The central message of 'The Fifth Discipline' is that "our organizations work the way they work, ultimately, because of *how we think and how we interact"* (o.c., p XIV, italics in original). In other words, we need to understand that while we redesign the manifest structures of our organizations, we must also redesign the internal structures of our mental models.

Senge distinguishes five disciplines as the means of building learning organizations: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning, and describes them as follows:

- Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that helps us to see patterns clearer and to see how we can change them effectively. Systems thinking has the distinction of being the "fifth discipline" since it serves to make the results of the other disciplines work together for business benefit. The essence of the discipline of systems thinking lies in seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains, and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots. The practice of systems thinking starts with understanding a simple concept called "feedback" that shows how actions can reinforce or counteract (balance) each other

- Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, focusing our energies, developing patience and seeing reality objectively. The discipline of personal mastery starts with clarifying the things that really matter to us.

- Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions that influence how we

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understand the world and how we take action. In the discipline of working with mental models we unearth our pictures of the world, bring them to the surface and scrutinise them rigorously.

- Building shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment rather than compliance. Trying to dictate a vision is, according to Senge, counterproductive.

- Team learning starts with dialogue, the capacity of team members to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together. It also involves learning how to recognize that patterns of interactions in teams that undermine learning. Team learning is vital, because teams, not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations.

Senge provides case studies to show how the disciplines have worked in particular companies.

Senge warns the reader that building a learning organization, in the way he describes, requires sustained effort and profound culture shifts, away from wanting to be in control, having answers, and forcefully advocating one's views so as to get others' buy in. When I incorporated some of Senge's disciplines in a paper outlining a vision for the OD department in the Health Professions Agency (HPA), colleagues were quick to point out how very naïve I was (see Chapter 4).

Mark Smith (http://www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm, 2004) points out that very few organisations come close to the combination of characteristics that Senge identifies with the learning organisation and that, in a capitalist society most companies are mainly concerned with profit and share value. To assume a fundamental concern with learning and development of employees, according to Smith is simply idealistic. HPA was (and still is) a not for profit organisation, and professed a fundamental concern with learning and development, nevertheless, I found Senge's approach difficult to work with for reasons I explore below.

- I wrongly assumed that the organisation, and I as an OD practitioner inside HPA, had the know-how and willingness to implement the complex disciplines. 'Systems thinking' as described by Senge, for me the most intimidating of the five

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disciplines, required a level of sophisticated understanding which I was sorely lacking, despite my willingness to learn and the course I undertook at London Business School. Earlier in this chapter I have discussed my current critique of systems thinking.

- The process, suggested by Senge, of working with the different disciplines, of exploring one's mental models, performance, fundamental aims in life, and personality can be daunting (Smith, o.c.). My advocacy that we really needed to do this in HPA to change some of the dysfunctional patterns (I am not sure I was aware of the paradox at the time – Senge encourages us to accept that we're not in control and do not have the answers, and yet prescribing the answer and trying to be in control was precisely what I was doing) started from the assumption that people would be 'up for it', an unlikely situation in an organisation where people felt unsafe and commitment to change was not much in evidence. This is also the case in many of my current client organisations. Many people do still come to work to earn a living, rather than to go on a spiritual journey.

- The 'shared vision' discipline appears to be in tension with the advocacy of dialogue as a means to explore and work with difference. "While Peter Senge clearly recognizes the political dimensions of organizational life, there is sneaking suspicion that he may want to transcend it" (Mark Smith, o.c.). Senge's 'Shared Vision' appears to betray a dislike for organisational politics and an assumption that building a strong shared vision can overcome them. A perspective on organisations I found myself caught in whilst working at HPA.

- Finally, although Senge attends to values, his theory largely operates at an organizational level. To put it bluntly, do I really want to help organisations that do not take their social responsibility seriously to learn how to go about there business ever more effectively? It was not a question I had considered working for HPA, since I whole-heartedly subscribed to the contribution HPA aimed to make in the world of health care, but it is a recurring question in my current practice.

Argyris and Schon's 'action science'

I have already mentioned Argyris and Schon's action science in chapter 1, I elaborate some of their concepts here which I have used in my consulting practice. The following is mainly based on Argyris' work (1990; 1991; 1993; 1994) and on a joint

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publication with Donald Schon (1996).

Argyris and Schon were interested in understanding why in situations where organisations or individuals are free to act as they wish, they may choose to act in ways contrary to their best interest. According to the authors this pattern in human behaviour is the result of defensive reasoning. Defensive reasoning occurs when individuals hold premises the validity of which is questionable, yet they think it is not; make inferences that do not necessarily follow from their premises, yet they think they do; reach conclusions that they believe they have tested carefully, yet they have not because the way they have been framed makes it impossible to test them.

Defensive reasoning and actions that are skilful, yet produce unintended consequences (of which the actors are often unaware) are encouraged by *theories of action*. A theory of action is a set of rules that individuals use to design and implement their own behaviour, as well as to understand the behaviour of others. They are often taken for granted assumptions which people use unawares. Paradoxically the theory of action people think they use – their *espoused theory* - is rarely the one they actually do use – *their theory-in-use*. Thus people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use.

The authors further argue that most theories-in-use rest on the same set of governing values:

- To remain in unilateral control
- To maximize "winning" and minimize "losing"
- To suppress negative feelings; and
- To be as "rational" as possible, by which people mean defining clear objectives and evaluating their behaviour in terms of whether or not they achieve those objectives.

They call theories based on the above assumptions 'Model I' theories, which typically lead to the following action strategies:

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- Design and manage the environment unilaterally
- Own and control the task
- Unilaterally protect yourself
- Unilaterally protect others

To the extent that I behave according to one of the above action strategies I will tend to behave unilaterally toward others and protectively toward myself. If I am successful, my behaviour will control others and prevent me from being influenced by them. As a consequence I will be seen to be defensive, and interpersonal and inter-group relations will become more defensive than facilitative, more win/lose oriented than collaborative. Those effects in turn tend to generate mistrust and rigidity.

Because most individuals use these action strategies, they become part of the fabric of everyday life and come to be viewed as rational, sensible and realistic. For that reason, and because our theories-in-use are rarely tested publicly, they are apt to generate self-reinforcing, *defensive routines*: actions or policies that prevent individuals or segments of the organisation from experiencing embarrassment or threat and that simultaneously prevent people from identifying and getting rid of the causes of the potential threat.

One way of examining the assumptions underpinning our actions is the *'ladder of inference'*, a two-column analysis in which I describe in the left column what I think, the assumptions I am making; and in the right column what was actually said. The ladder of inference can help to surface how both parties in an interaction blame each other in similar ways.

The authors suggest that organisations can achieve long term effectiveness by adopting a Model II theory-in-use based on the following variables:
- Valid information
- Free and informed choice
- Internal commitment to the choice and constant monitoring of its implementation
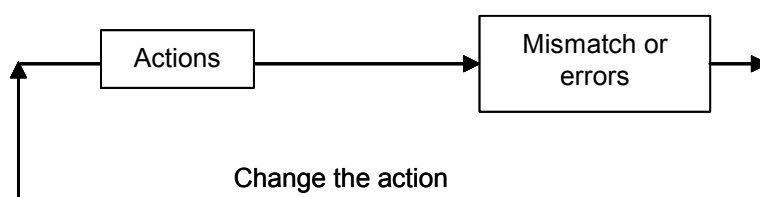
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and leading to the following action strategies:

- Participants originate action and experience high personal causation

- Tasks are jointly controlled

- Protection of self is a joint enterprise and oriented towards growth, leading to minimally defensive interpersonal relations and group dynamics

- Bilateral protection of others, which enables risk taking

Model II couples the articulateness and advocacy from Model I with an invitation to others to confront the views and emotions of self and others. It seeks to alter views in order to base them on the most complete and valid information possible and to construct positions to which people can become internally committed. This requires the actor in Model II to be skilled at inviting double loop learning on the part of other individuals.

Single loop learning is focussed on problem solving:

```
        ┌──────────┐              ┌──────────────┐
   ┌───▶│ Actions  │─────────────▶│ Mismatch or  │──────▶
   │    └──────────┘              │    errors    │
   │                              └──────────────┘
   │                  Change the action
   └────────────────────────────────────────────────
```

This form of learning may solve the presenting problem, but does not address the more basic issue of why these problems existed in the first place. At best this creates short term solutions.

In *double loop learning* individuals reflect critically on their own behaviour, identify the ways in which they often inadvertently contribute to the organisation's problems, and subsequently change the way they act. In particular, they learn how the very way in which they identify and solve problems can be a source of problems in its own right.

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       ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
  ┌───▶│ Governing values │───────▶│ Actions  │─────▶│ Mismatch or  │──────▶
  │    └──────────────────┘    │   └──────────┘      │    errors    │
  │                            │                     └──────────────┘
  │                            │      Single loop learning
  │                            └─────────────────────────────
  │              Double loop learning
  └──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────
```

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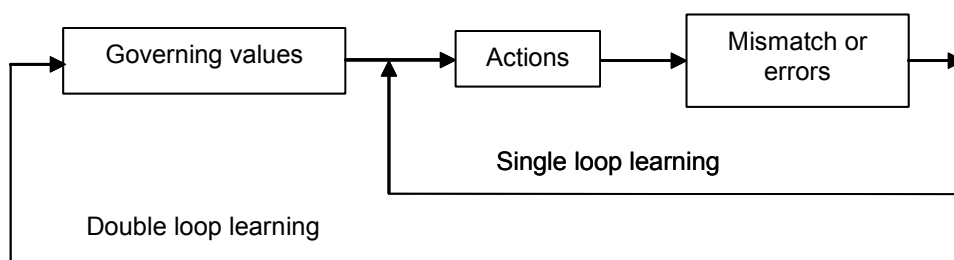
The authors point out that Model II represents an ideal state that may never be achieved, only approximated.

Under the effort to close the gap between 'espoused theories' and 'theories in use' lies an assumption that rational inquiry into the basis of our actions can lead to causal explanations of the outcomes. By intensive cycles of collaborative inquiry people can discover what really guides their actions, instead of what they said or believed was guiding them. This in turn will allow them to design and produce more effective action. Argyris admitted that this undertaking is far from easy and became rather pessimistic about people's capacity to engage in this kind of inquiry and learning. I have already voiced my concerns about a rationalist approach to people's behaviour in organisations. Nevertheless, the concept of espoused versus enacted values has been greatly valuable to me in my inquiry into my practice on many occasions. At HPA I often used 'ladder of inference' (which Shaw (2001) somewhat disparagingly compares to double-entry book-keeping) to help me inquire into my own contribution to the difficult situation I found myself. I have since introduced it to some of my clients, who tell me they find it equally valuable. I have, on a number of occasions, shared with clients Argyris' description of the paradoxical nature of our culture, in which we are socialised into wanting to stay in control, to win, to save face, whilst simultaneously espousing values of equality and collaboration. It sometimes enabled them to see the cultural context of their behaviour, reduced their sense of personal inadequacy and helped them to change some of their patterns. This work is not without risk. One group of clients really took up the challenge, inquired deeply into how they allowed themselves to become stuck in the same old patterns, and openly discussed implications for their future behaviour. I was impressed with the honesty they brought to their inquiry and the changes they achieved. The manager of the team however felt deeply threatened by the experience and, despite the positive outcome of our work together, has chosen not to work with me again.

Wenger's communities of practice

Wenger's (1998) theory of learning is based on the assumption that learning fundamentally happens through engagement in social practice. He proposes a framework for thinking about learning in terms of communities people form as they
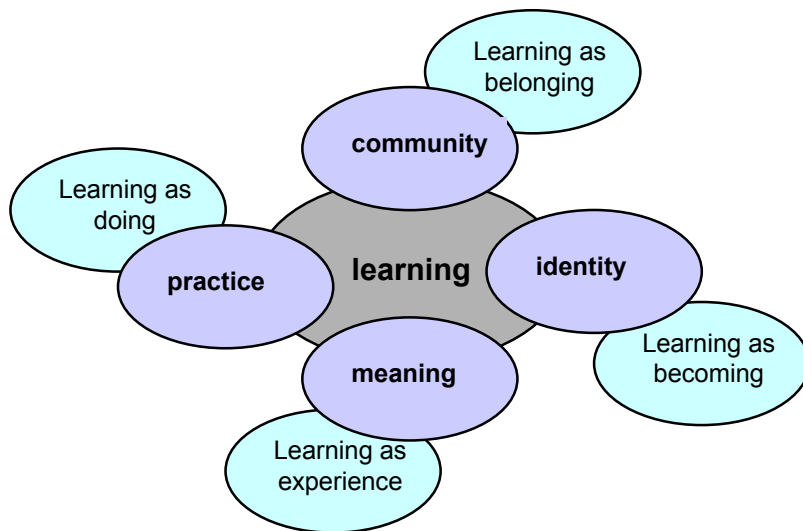
Fig. 2.2

Wenger's integrated model of learning as a process of social participation

engage in shared enterprise over time, the practices of those communities, the meanings they make possible, and the identities they create. Communities that accumulate collective learning, Wenger argues, have been around since the beginning of history.

Wenger's social theory of learning is based on the following four premises:
- Humans are social beings. This is a central aspect of learning
- Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises
- Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises. It is an active participation in the world
- Meaning is ultimately what learning is to produce

His theory integrates the following components of learning as social participation (see fig. 2.2):

- **Meaning** refers to our ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful
- **Practice** refers to the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that sustain mutual engagement in action
- **Community** refers to the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth while and our participation is recognisable as competence
- **Identity** is a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

Wenger views organisations as constellations of interconnected communities of practice. Since knowledge in practice is a living process, and an act of participation, rather than an 'object', he argues that in order to foster learning, organisations need to give those communities of practice a central role in the organisation, rather than to focus on complex information systems and large training departments in an attempt to 'manage knowledge'. The latter approaches are attractive, according to Wenger, because they seem tangible and amenable to formal design, implementation and measurement. However they deliver mixed results.

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Wenger's work presents a refreshing perspective on learning. Many of my clients are almost exclusively focussed on the reified aspects of knowledge: procedures, guidelines, manuals. Senior teams congregate over considerable periods of time to hammer out a strategy, and then 'cascade' this strategy in reified form down the organisation. The communication strategy rarely delivers its purpose: to engage people in the implementation as it was intended. The result is often more documentation and increasingly detailed guidelines. Wenger's advocacy of reification and participation as complementing each other in the negotiation of meaning provides a framework – and vocabulary - for beginning to explore why this approach may fail:

> "If reification prevails – if everything is reified, but with little opportunity for shared experience and interactive negotiation – then there may not be enough overlap in participation to recover a coordinated, relevant, or generative meaning. This helps to explain why putting everything in writing does not seem to solve all our problems." (o.c., p. 65).

His exploration of belonging and identity formation also helped me to make sense of the difficulties I (and others) experienced in joining Ashridge Consulting as a community of practice (see chapters 3 and 5).

Watzlawick and colleagues' work on problems in human interaction
In 'Change' Watzlawick (1974) and colleagues draw on their work in the Brief Therapy Center at Palo Alto to examine how, paradoxically, common sense and 'logical' behaviour often fail, while 'illogical' and 'unreasonable' actions can sometimes succeed in producing the desired change. Starting from the assumption that ineffectual behaviour is a communicative reaction to a particular situation, they draw on Group Theory and Theory of Logical Types to develop their concepts of first and second order change. Group Theory provides a framework for thinking about the peculiar interdependence between persistence and change in situations where change occurs within a system that remains itself unchanged. The Theory of Logical Types is concerned with logical levels (the member of a class, versus the class itself), and the nature of shifts from one logical level to the next. The authors define change that occurs within a given system which itself remains unchanged as of 'first order', and

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change that causes the system to change as of 'second order'. They explore how attempts at first-order change may cause further problems (more of the same, terrible simplifications, the utopia syndrome and paradox), and offer suggestions for bringing about second order change. I discuss some of those problem formations in Chapter 4, and show how the framework helped me to make sense of my failed attempts at bringing about change in HPA.

The concept of first and second order change has been a helpful addition to Argyris' and Schon's work on single and double loop learning. The witty, memorable examples Watzlawick and colleagues offer are particularly useful in heat of the moment reflections when feeling stuck, and I have continued to work with them in my reflections on my client work (Chapter 5).

In this chapter I have shared some of the conceptual frameworks that have informed my inquiry and my practice. Having shown you some of the fabric, I will now turn to the quilt.