

Acting Into the Living Present:

Taking Account of Complexity and Uncertainty when Leading
Consultancy Teams in International Water Projects.



June 2017

Leif Iversen

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Hertfordshire for the degree of Doctorate in Management

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Cover photo: 'No man ever steps into the same river twice' (Heraclitus; c. 535 – c. 475 BC)

To my four-legged companion, Shap, who listened attentively, patiently and silently to all my deliberations about complexity, uncertainty and irreversibility while we walked for many hours and many miles through fields and forests, along the coast, and into his sunset.

Abstract

This thesis addresses how leaders find themselves doing something even when they don't know what to do. It is based on my own practice as an experienced team leader and it deals with questions of action, time, identity and leadership.

A classic understanding of action usually reflects an expectation of a rational means-ends relationship where actions are designed and applied by individuals to reach well-defined goals within a certain context and within a certain time. In contrast, in this thesis, I describe acting as a much more complex process, as something becoming, as a patterning of activities involving multiple actors in a continuous and complex interweaving of relationships.

I describe my experience of leading a team of consultants in international development projects where I inquire into how we often find ourselves acting into uncertainty even when we are not at all sure what to do. Adopting the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, which combines insights from the complexity sciences, social psychology and process sociology, I have come to see acting in our projects as complex, unpredictable, emerging themes and patterns of dialogues between colleagues, clients and other actors, rather than as an activity undertaken by an individual such as a team leader. I do not have an outside position to acting in a project as I am fully involved in the process while this paradoxically influences me at the same time.

I argue that acting is related to identity, which can be understood as a sense of self, a person's moral self-interpretation which has a narrative structure and which is continuously being formed by (and is forming) one's acting.

I argue that my experience of our practice may be explained by the pragmatists' understanding of acting based on actual lived experience where the means paradoxically become our 'ends-in-view' and vice versa, meaning that we do not just try to maintain a theoretical, future goal but move forwards towards what is practically possible, what we find useful and what makes sense in the present. Acting happens in a living present, meaning that we understand the present through our interpretation of the past as well as our expectation of the future, and we construct this living present as something that works for us when we pursue our collective aims and interests. In the process of acting, there is an arrow on time, meaning that what has been said cannot be unsaid, wherefore it is important to reflect on the perspective of 'ends-in-view' and to understand how acting *into* a situation may reveal new opportunities.

The thesis contributes to knowledge within my profession as an original invitation to think differently about two aspects: first, seeing acting in a project with a much more processual, temporal and encompassing understanding where action is not located in an individual; second, understanding how acting is influenced by one's identity, a sense of self, which is paradoxically being formed by the acting at the same time. Further, the thesis identifies sociality, being different things at the same time (Mead, 1932/2002), as a new aspect in the theory of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey, Griffin, & Shaw, 2000), recognising its significance in the process of understanding of how novelty occurs.

The thesis contributes to my practice in terms of an increased reflexivity and acceptance that a team leader cannot determine outcomes in advance; that leadership is a complex process involving many actors; and that observing ends-in-view may create new and surprising ways forward. I find that these insights can lead to an increased acceptance of how we can act under conditions of uncertainty.

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Key Words: Arrow of time, acting, complex responsive processes, complexity, ends-in-view, identity, living present, pragmatism, process, temporality.

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INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT OF MY RESEARCH

I work in a major international consulting engineering company with international development projects and with frequent assignments at overseas destinations in Asia, Africa, or southern Europe where I engage with international and national clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders. In our profession, we have objectives, strategies, plans, and tools available for our work, however, in our daily practice as team leaders on international development projects we work without too many constraints or rigid tools and use practical judgement in our daily interaction with colleagues and clients. I also find that I direct most of my time, energy, and focus towards communication, dilemmas, relationships, personal issues, conflicts, surprises, paradoxes, and other complex aspects of our work which do not resemble what is described in most management literature. I have found it intriguing to try to understand how we often act into an uncertain future and need to take our bearings as we move forward.

I have chosen to carry out my research at the Doctor of Management (DMan) research programme at the University of Hertfordshire Business School with the expectation that I could research these complex and elusive matters and follow my inclination to apply an exploratory research method. As part of the programme, all DMan research students engage critically with the perspective called complex responsive processes of relating, a body of thought which is continuously being developed as the research community continues. The perspective draws on insights from the complexity sciences, process sociology and social psychology as well as perspectives on values, paradox, and temporality (Griffin, 2002; Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Stacey & Griffin, 2005; Stacey et al., 2000; Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

The DMan thesis is structured into four projects and a synopsis. The research and its method emerged over my four years of studies leading to a summary and further inquiry in the synopsis. The latter can be read on its own, but I trust that reading the four projects will allow a deeper understanding of my arguments and the development of my thinking.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

One year into my studies, I posed my research theme as

Exploring the nature of leadership in the face of uncertainty and 'stuckness' in my profession as a consultant and project manager.

I wanted to investigate what it means to lead when I, as a consultant, facilitator, or team leader *find myself in an unexpected, complex, or 'stuck' situation, not knowing what to do—and yet still finding myself doing something, taking the next step.* I have inquired into what is happening when I, as a leader, 'act on the hoof', improvise, and make decisions without seeing any obvious way forward. I wanted to investigate how I apparently leave behind 'rational' decision-making and I try to understand patterns of relating, communication, and interaction. I am curious about which processes are involved in us 'getting on' with the work and acting as leaders in messy or unforeseeable situations.

The research is relevant for a wider community as I am aware that many colleagues in our professional practice experience similar situations in similar contexts, where they are buffeted by multiple demands and others' requests and find that they hesitate, yet find ways to move forward.

The actual research question emerged as part of my inquiry in parallel with developing renewed insights as well as renewed doubts. I emphasise that I do not offer clear and rigorous answers to a specific question; rather, I describe an increased appreciation and a much deeper understanding of the nature of the complex processes of local, micro-interactions in which my colleagues and I are involved in our daily work. I suggest that such an understanding allows us higher degrees of freedom in our interaction with our colleagues and clients.

MY METHOD

The research is based on the pragmatists' idea of *taking one's experience seriously* (Stacey & Griffin, 2005). My inquiry draws on narratives from my daily professional practice as a team leader where I have experienced specific situations or patterns that have puzzled me. I draw on literature to elucidate these situations and to inquire further into any new questions that emerge.

In the tradition of the DMan programme, my inquiry and my choice of literature for this thesis emerged through the four projects and the synopsis. Project 1 is an experiential ‘intellectual autobiography’, a reflection on my life and professional development and how this has shaped the way I think and how I reflect upon experience. The subsequent three projects are written with an increasing depth of academic analysis based on narratives from my daily work which I discuss with support from classic literature as well as literature working with complexity perspectives. In the synopsis, I critically discuss key themes that have emerged and present new insights. Following the synopsis, I include a detailed description of my method and discussions of ethical considerations. Eventually, I present what I consider are my contributions to knowledge as well as to my field of practice.

The research is an individual as well as a social undertaking. The DMan students (at the time of writing, 16 students) and the faculty (5) meet every quarter for a four-day residential seminar, which includes presentations on key subjects, community meetings for the entire group in the tradition of group analytics, and learning-set meetings: All students work in learning sets with two to three other students and a supervisor. At these meetings as well as in between residential weekends, we share and discuss our research in order to iterate our work, develop new meanings, and validate our findings. The thesis is, though, the individual research student’s own work. The method is described and discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Projects 1 to 4 are included as I wrote them at the time (apart from minor editing or corrections) and may appear in a somewhat ‘raw’ form. This is deliberate as it leads to a research account that tracks down its own development as further reflexivity¹. In this way, I document my research activity, and the reader may note how my wording or perception of concepts or themes are developing. This also serves to document the value of an reflexive inquiry.

¹ In this thesis I refer to reflexivity as the process of reflecting on how I reflect and how I have come to think the way I think.

1 PROJECT 1 — AN EXPLORATION INTO UNCERTAINTY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This narrative is a reflection on my life history and how this shaped the way I reflect on experience. I have touched on key themes such as my upbringing, years of being engaged in voluntary work and leader training, my professional practice, a passion for exploration of the hills, and my interest in intellectual challenges, continued learning, and the complexity theories.

1.2 TRYING TO ESTABLISH AN IDENTITY

When I was one year old, our family moved to southern Iraq and lived four years in Suq Al-Shuyuk, a small village near the Euphrates River in the marshlands, at the time known from the writings of the British explorer Wilfred Thesiger (1964), today probably better known from the later devastating draining of the marshes. Obviously, my memories of the people, the marshes, the boats, and our pets (dogs, cats, otter, ducks, lambs, wild boar piglets...) are mainly based on many colour slides and anecdotes that became part of the family's narrative and part of our identity. Back home in Denmark, the artefacts and my father's continued travel as an engineer kept the stories alive, and I believe that this later inspired me to create my self-understanding as one who took an interest in travel and had an international outlook. I also ploughed through my father's stack of National Geographic Magazines, looking for stories and photos from distant lands and explorations into the high mountains.

I was probably born a reflector. As a toddler, I allegedly was considered a philosopher because I often looked very pensive, and at school some teachers were concerned because I looked stern, unhappy, and absent, to which my mother reassuringly said, 'Don't worry, that's his natural expression'. When I grew up, I was somewhat concerned that I often found it difficult to form an opinion; I was usually able to see and understand the viewpoint of everyone and I became worried that I might appear somewhat indecisive. Many years later, I would be exposed to Kolb's test on learning profiles. Kolb suggested a circular process where *concrete experience* is followed by *reflections and observations*, *abstract concepts*, and *generalisations* (Honey & Mumford, 1986) and defined four corresponding learning styles with a test to match; every time I did this test, my result would end up on the far right end of the *reflector* scale, sometimes off the sheet.

My mother also said that I should be a leader, and yes, I tended to be elected to make the speech, lead the teams, or chair the meetings, and I did like to take on these roles, even if I usually felt apprehensive about it. In my early roles as a leader, I just used my instinct as I had no formal training, but I was probably usually seen as someone who had the overview and a certain presence. In later years when I became a scout leader, trainer, or chaired various committees, I was sometimes seen as somewhat distant, slightly aloof, and possibly judging people and their statements without revealing my thoughts. Some friends later expressed how they or others had been apprehensive and even nervous in my presence as I was obviously the one with power, knowledge, and a calm self-confidence.

Little did they know that even a tall, skilled, and eloquent man could have problems with self-esteem and many doubts about his abilities which would often be reflected in his silence, thinking, indecisiveness, and body language. This has been with me all my life, and in this respect, I do not believe that I am very different from many other people. What may have been different is that at an early stage I became aware of the issue and kept reflecting on it. Initially, I would blame my parents, but then I realised how modern thinking, which I later came to understand as a humanistic psychology approach, emphasises our ability to become aware of our feelings and our power to initiate changes and development in our lives (Miell, Phoenix, & Thomas, 2002). I also tried to adjust my verbal and non-verbal communication as I tried to be aware of my body language, and I tried to be open about my uncertainty rather than using offhand, casual remarks which often left others feeling insecure.

I became interested in psychology and remember how I took an interest in talking to school friends who had personal issues on their minds. I came across books on group psychology and later read about transactional analysis (Berne, 1964), which I found immensely interesting. I started to understand some of my own 'I'm not OK' reactions, and I also enjoyed the structured analysis of transactions which led me to further study what happened around me, between friends, and in group processes.

For instance, I recall an incident at our parent's home. A friend of the family had been off the rails for some time and we had not seen much of him. Eventually, he came around one evening, and my brother and I had a relaxed chat with him, possibly about everyday issues and his recent whereabouts. I noticed his body language, his openness and eloquence. After he left, I commented that he had been in a much better state than before and my brother asked me 'what do you mean?' I pointed to some of the ways our friend had reacted and readily responded to our questions. My

brother said, 'I didn't notice. You seem to always observe what people do and say—I just had a chat with him!'

1.3 SCOUTING LED TO LEADER TRAINING

I became a boy scout and at the age of 15, I was made patrol leader as a natural progression and succession. Initially, I was enthusiastic about trying to develop a programme for the five to six boys in my patrol, however, I found it difficult to engage them, to invent exciting activities, to keep my motivation, and we also went through a period with no real adult support. I read and re-read the exciting handbooks with photos, sketches, and structured programmes (detailed to the minutes), but I never really managed to follow through. What we were able to achieve was not as shown in the well laid out plans and programmes and I kept blaming myself for not being a better patrol leader.

A boy with cerebral palsy joined our patrol. Although he took part in most events, it was often a logistical nightmare to go on trips with his heavy three-wheeled bicycle and walking sticks, and there would be a number of outdoor activities in which he could not take part. It was hard work and I felt that we couldn't always do what others could. However, we managed, and I recall many open discussions and disagreements amongst the boys where his disability was openly talked about in a natural manner. It later dawned on me that even if I felt no good in organising a perfect programme and if we just somehow 'muddled through', we also taught each other to be inclusive. The task of getting him involved—also in practical terms—was as formative for us as many other pre-planned activities. I slowly realised that maybe I should see it as a sign of trust that the disabled boy had been placed in my patrol.

I became a senior scout, and at the age of 18 I hesitantly left the comfort zone of my local area, travelled across the country, and participated in an Easter training programme—camping, learning, working, and having fun. I met 23 other young, enthusiastic people and became totally absorbed and energised. I soon became involved in local training events, and after this, I never looked back. Over the next 30 years, I would pursue my interest in adult training and facilitation at local, national and international levels, and I would later in my life take this interest and these skills with me into my professional career as an international consultant.

I soon went on my first training-of-trainers courses and found these the most interesting. I believe that working with the metacognition, thinking about how you think (Colman, 2001) and thus how you train, really worked for me. I went through hundreds of events as trainer and course leader and eventually took over the role as national training commissioner, that is, overall responsibility for

developing and executing all training at national level. The boys and girls' organisations had been merged in the 1970s which had given new dynamics to the activities and most importantly led to new insights and increased quality of our training programmes. Nobody told us how to train or which theoretical thinking should underpin the programmes apart from the scout movement's basic principle of 'learning by doing'; the international associations had guidelines, but in many ways, we found ourselves far ahead of these and saw ourselves as rather progressive in terms of pedagogy and approach to the development of children and adolescents.

The national team of trainers was easily seen—or we considered ourselves—as an elite group, and there was great enthusiasm about developing new skills and methods. We would be looking at established models and at the same time develop all our own courses and training methods. I recall that my very first encounter with leadership models would be one of 'democratic/autocratic/laissez faire', democratic leadership being the right thing to do, of course. We advocated this at length until a trainer introduced the *Situational Leadership Model* (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) based on two fundamental concepts, leadership style and the individual or group's level of maturity. The model appealed to me for its contents but also for its nice structure, illustrated in a 2x2 diagramme for ways of leading.

Our trainers' backgrounds were quite varied, but the people at the central, national level would generally be well educated and brought to the table many theories and new models. These would, over the years, include a variety of models such as Belbin's team theories (1981), which describes personalities in terms of team roles; de Bono's lateral thinking (1975) on creativity and problem-solving; androgynous management; neuro-linguistic programming and Adizes' PAEI model (1985), suggesting different management roles and management styles. We also learned from gestalt therapy as described by Perls (1972), where we were exposed to processes and activities which we by no means could take on ourselves. It did, however, inform our work with groups on our advanced training courses. We frequently used the *Forum Theatre* developed by Boal, described, for instance, by Larsen (2006), an interactive form of theatre where the audience becomes involved in trying to find solutions to problems illustrated in the play. All these activities were meant to be inspirational, and we relied on the training teams to develop their own training methods although we kept communicating, guiding, and discussing the ways forward. These models provided me with some overview, an insight and they sometimes gave me an 'aha' feeling when something suddenly made sense to me. At the same time, I was aware that none of the models would be a 'truth', as I sensed that there would be something else, something more elusive and messy.

1.4 LEARNING TO LEARN

In the early days, the Shannon and Weaver model of communication would be presented at our first-level training-the-trainers' courses. It describes such concepts as *information source, message, transmitter, signal, channel, noise, receiver, encoding, decoding, channel capacity*, and so forth. (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Also, Bloom's classification of learning objectives as described, for instance, by Anderson (2001) helped us to target the proper level of understanding. Bloom—and a team of co-educators—suggested six levels in the taxonomy where the idea was to suggest, using verbs, what the trainee would be able to *do* after a learning event.

We did realise, however, that the picture might be more complex, and I recall a seminar for some of the most experienced trainers where our invited guest, a scholar on education, Knud Illeris, said (paraphrasing): The biggest misunderstanding within education is the notion that people learn what you teach (Illeris, 1980). We were totally taken by surprise and struggled to come to terms with this. Why would we then be planning and discussing at length the objectives and contents of our leader training courses? Illeris developed a *Three Dimensions of Learning* model suggesting that learning includes three dimensions, namely the cognitive dimension of knowledge and skills, the emotional dimension of feelings, and the social dimension of communication with the environment (Illeris, 2003). Illeris suggests that this triangle describes a *tension of field of learning* as stretched out between the development of functionality, sensibility, and sociability, or, as Illeris says, Between the realms of Piaget, Freud, and Marx.

Initially, I did not quite understand the need for tension (were we not looking for harmony, consensus, and coherence?), but my closest friends and co-trainers soon lectured me and I slowly started accepting the notion of *fields of tension* as a dynamic area where new insight could potentially be developed.

Organisers/trainers would often ask you to write down what you expected to get out of an event. I would have no idea! And I would be suitably embarrassed that I had come unprepared compared to many others who, obviously (I thought), had a clear plan for what they wanted to take home.

Then, at a seminar in Malta, I was introduced to Edward de Bono's learning styles. His theory placed us into four categories: The *train driver* would be seeking knowledge about the new timetable and driving skills, the *farmer* would be looking for knowledge to increase his yield, the *doctor* would be looking for information to solve his problems, and the *fisherman* would be sailing out and hoping to catch something, not knowing what. The *fisherman* is not an opportunist, though. He relies on his

experience and skills, and he is convinced that something will emerge. That day, I became a *fisherman* and de Bono became my hero. I kept reflecting on this and realised how it illustrated the way I think and the way I work (unfortunately, I have not later been able to identify the article or textbook behind the model). Today, I may see a more varied picture of how I learn and act under different circumstances, but I have no doubt that my intuition and an open space work for me.

I became a skilled facilitator and enjoyed working as such. Initially, I would not know my strengths at all, but over the years, friends and trainees would give me feedback, which implied that I was good at maintaining an overview of the process, sensing the atmosphere, and at the same time take a keen interest in the group and the individual. I have later seen it as a paradox that I could be involved and empathic, sense what was going on, and at the same time, have a somewhat analytical understanding of the process.

The interest in group dynamics informed our intensive, week-long training courses for experienced scout/guide leaders, where we did not teach or promote any subjects or 'models', but tried to take the individuals' experience seriously by listening, commenting, probing and discussing, and where we would never know which turns the discussion would take. The focus was the movement's values and principles, but inevitably it also touched strongly on the individuals' values and personal development. During one plenary session, I became engaged in a discussion where I was directly addressing a participant. I became passionate and expressed my personal feelings about the issues he touched upon, to which he reacted positively and the discussion took new turns. Afterwards, my close friend and co-trainer Jean was quite emotional and explained how I had shown a spontaneous and personal side of myself and that it had had such a positive impact on the situation.

'Yes, I know', I said.

'What do you mean, "you know"?''

'I could see as I spoke that it touched him and that he was OK with it.'

'But how?'

I tried to explain, 'I was very much aware when it happened that I was emotional, and I saw that it touched him, and I was aware of the impact it had on him and on the group when I continued.'

Then she got really upset and started crying, complaining that I had faked my emotions, that I had not been authentic. I tried to explain that, no, I was what I showed, and I was just very much aware

of the developing processes at the same time. She did not accept this and I kept thinking about it for years. I recall that I initially reacted with my 'I am not OK' feeling—I wanted her acceptance—and wondered about whether it was true that I did not engage myself fully. However, I eventually concluded that I did believe that I was authentic and had the ability to act and be aware of it at the same time, probably a paradox of detached involvement.

1.5 EXPLORING THE HILLS

Scouting led to hill walking, skiing, and mountaineering in Scandinavia, the Alps and later also in Britain and more remote areas. I always wanted to walk further, higher, for longer and carry more weight. Trips had to be away from the trodden paths, through new valleys, and across the white glaciers. Skiing meant carrying backpacks, tents, and provisions, moving across the country—which is not the same as cross-country skiing in well-prepared tracks. I also went on a few solo trips, walking, skiing, tenting, and snow-caving. I also remember how, if there was an element of challenging myself, I felt exhilarated but relaxed by being on my own, finding my way, having to make critical decisions and stick to them, making full use of my body and my mind. I felt that this was yet another kind of exploration in a sometimes risk-filled environment which fused me and strengthened my confidence.

Having been away from (proper) climbing for many years, I took it up again only a few years ago, joining a couple of trips to the mountains of Central Asia on the Chinese border, dragging myself to the peak of beautiful, unclimbed summits where the only tracks in the snow were those of the snow leopard. I found this immensely satisfying—not so much because the peaks were untouched but rather because we were in uncharted territory where exploration was the objective of the trip.

1.6 EDUCATION—HYDROLOGICAL MODELLING

I studied civil engineering and found that hydrology was fascinating! Hydrology is the study of the movement of surface water, and I can still not quite explain why I find analysis of graphs of rainfall and runoff so exciting. Maybe it had to do with my interest in hill walking and mountaineering where I observed the water courses' meandering through the hills. At the time, it was rather unusual in Denmark, but it just had to be my thing. Today, it is highly relevant because of the changing weather patterns and extreme rainfalls.

Runoffs will usually follow a combination of cycles (e.g., peak flows in the rainy season and low flows during a drought), trends (e.g., decreasing precipitation due to climate changes) and 'white noise' (Wilson, 1969). I kept wondering (and asking) what this white noise would represent but never got an

answer—it was considered uncertainty, randomness, or something you could not measure or explain. This intrigued me, and I kept thinking that I would like to know more. Further, I had followed a challenging course in uncertainty theory, and during lectures, I had had some unusual experiences of trying to grasp and just about understand some rather complex concepts which would then immediately elude me. I realised that I was never happy with only understanding the maths—I always wanted to be able to sense what the equations represented in physical, tangible terms.

My dissertation was based on an application of a hydrological (computer) model to a Greenlandic river basin and assessment of the stochastic processes. This was interesting for planners of hydropower schemes who would like to have data for many (20-40) years of a river's flow. They had measured daily runoff only for the last three years, but we had daily records of precipitation and temperature from the last 20 years. I would initially analyse the river basin and throw in key parameters such as areal size, slope, snow melt, radiation, and retention in lakes, and by calibrating the model on the three known years, I could generate an additional seventeen years of daily runoff data. Obviously, these 17 years were only estimates—but how good were they? I therefore used uncertainty theory (Gottlieb & Rosbjerg, 1980) to establish the theoretical value of the information in my modelling. I could now tell the hydropower planners that my 17 years of modelled data would equal say 12 years of measured data—in addition to the three years already measured. The examiners gave me top grade, although I doubt that they understood the details of the modelling or the uncertainty theory. I was not too worried; I had enjoyed working on these very elusive and complex theories.

1.7 MY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

After a few other employments, I was offered a job in 1988 in a Danish consulting engineering company, which today is part of a major international consulting group. The company was considered to have a modern and refreshing outlook with a high degree of freedom for its employees. The founder was still the chairman and was quoted as saying that the company would develop like an amoeba. We would expand where there was a vacuum outside or sufficient pressure from inside, a pragmatic combination of what I later came to know as 'strategic fit' and 'resource-based strategies' (Grant, 1999). The *strategic fit* suggests a pragmatic alignment of the company's activities to the outer environment, and *resource-based strategy* suggests that the organisation leverages its key competences such as skilled staff. I thrived in this environment, felt that there was

ample opportunity for me to develop, and from early on, I worked exclusively on international projects within the fields of water and environment.

TAKING ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT

‘So, Mr Leif, what is your expertise?’

The question was asked by Mr. Hong, our local representative in Vietnam, where I had just arrived the day before as team leader for 12 international and national consultants on a six-month feasibility study for water supply and wastewater improvements. I struggled to answer Mr. Hong as I had never really done any technical work and felt very apprehensive about my first team leader role. I said something about ‘water resources’, which made him really pleased as he was a hydrologist himself. Now, I just hoped that he would not want to discuss technical issues. I often got this question about my expertise, and I learned to answer, ‘common sense’. The Vietnamese would initially look bemused; then they would start laughing.

Initially this response would be a deflective reaction, but I later came to acknowledge my common sense and intuition as an important team-leader skill. Linking directly to my earlier experience as a *fisherman* and Stacey’s understanding of practical judgement (Stacey, 2012), I have come to appreciate that these non-tangible skills were in fact some of my strongest assets as a project manager.

Our key clients were the international development agencies. At the time, all these organisations would be using a planning framework called Logical Framework Approach (LFA), which should be used to 1) establish a shared understanding, 2) monitor progress, 3) identify risks and assumptions, and 4) evaluate the outcome (Danida, n.d.). The beauty of the LFA is that in its purest and final form it does give a simple logic and overview. As part of preparing an LFA, the team and stakeholders would identify and describe all possible problems in short statements and then link them together in a *problem tree* to establish causalities. A perfect problem tree could then be flipped over to show how the right interventions would lead to solving the key problems and eventually create improved health and prosperity. Based on this *solution tree*, one could prepare the framework which would guide the implementation. I liked the logic, excelled in getting it right, and conducted training events on the subject.

However, to make a proper LFA was incredibly difficult, and it easily became an exercise for the sake of the exercise. The notion that all the stakeholders would understand the LFA, participate in a

workshop, and prepare the framework was in my mind an illusion. I came across several cases where the logic did not work out and my problem tree suddenly became cyclic and sometimes rather messy. Further, it was a problem that an LFA for a project often had been prepared by other consultants who also struggled or failed to get it right.

In Asia, we implemented water supply for 200 villages over a six-year period. My client in the International Financing Institution (IFI) had recently taken over the project and went through her annual staff appraisal. She was given a mediocre assessment as the project did not follow the outline in the LFA made six or seven years earlier. In our view, she (and we) had succeeded against all odds: 300,000 poor people had been provided with basic water supply despite that the project assumptions had never been fulfilled, the promised government input had never materialised, and the country had undergone a revolution in addition to other unforeseeable events. To me, this was a clear example of how the LFA had failed its purpose, and the organisation had failed to recognise how it should or should not be used.

I became convinced that project management should be based on other frameworks. Furthermore, I realised that decisions on a project design were based on many parameters and agendas which were not necessarily obvious to everyone. Rihani (2005) suggests using complexity as an appropriate framework, and Mowles, Stacey, and Griffin (2008) suggest that 'understanding the process of organising as contingent, paradoxical, and experiential could profoundly refocus the attention of managers and practitioners alike'.

Over the last few years in our tenders for international projects, I have tried to suggest a more flexible and contingent approach to project implementation and some clients are actually interested—others are stubborn and dismissive.

MY DREAM JOB—BEING A BUSINESS UNIT DIRECTOR IN LONDON

In 1996, I was asked to take up a position as managing director of a small business unit, the international arm of our UK operation with about 30 staff spread over three offices and a team in North Africa. In our global matrix organisation, I would be employed in the overall UK company but report to the global (Danish) international director Peter, who would support from the distance. Initially, he said, 'We needed to sort out' a team of five over-the-hill directors who would report to me but quite clearly thought they should focus only on management, marketing, and old privileges, which was totally unsustainable. Our global CEO (also in Denmark) was adamant that my new organisation should be based in London near the City district (I forgot to ask why this was important

to him; we designed sewers in Libya). I was informed that the UK management team was fully supportive, also with practicalities. I thus understood that my global top management had a clear strategy, and I was apprehensive but enthusiastic. It was my dream job because I had always been very anglophile; I loved London as a city, wanted to take on a management role, and couldn't think of anything more interesting than international work.

What happened was that the UK management had not prepared for my entry, they closed the existing London office soon after my arrival, and it was virtually impossible to make the old rogue elephants retire as the redundancy packages would kill the business. I had not yet learned that any shrewd new director would take all the potential write-downs—the expected losses—on day one. My mentor in Denmark, Peter, was made redundant (for other reasons) and I realised that the UK management had no fancy for an international strategy. I struggled on for two years, got some very good staff on board, and picked up work in new countries and new sectors. However, UK was reducing staff, they realised that I was far too expensive, they closed my office and I was sent home to Denmark to my old job. The entire experience was frustrating and caused a lot of grief, but it was my first and most effective learning about strategies and their implementation. Within a very short time, I had realised how apparently thought-through plans and highly coordinated strategies showed to be highly emerging, changing, dreamed up by individuals' career aspirations and wish for status (London City), torn by tensions and power plays, hampered by conflicts, twisted by individuals' agendas, and so forth. Today, I'd probably be much less harsh and realise that my operation would just be one of the many activities on the company's agenda and that I would just have to fight it through and understand/experience the ever on-going and changing processes, rather than expect someone to have and implement a plan for me. The experience provided me with many interesting reflections when I immediately afterwards started on an MBA course.

1.8 FURTHER EDUCATION — A NEW BEGINNING

THE MBA COURSE

I decided to do an MBA as a potentially interesting experience relevant for my work and career opportunities. Initially, I did not tell friends or company about this new venture as I was not sure at all if I would have the capacity to do what I considered a highly prestigious degree at such a high academic level and with such a big work load. I chose the distance learning programme at the Open University Business School which could be combined with my extensive traveling. The parameters for decision-making also included the nice-looking prospectus and the affordable price.

My initial perception of the MBA as a highly prestigious, academically challenging, and 'for-the-very-few' degree slowly changed into an experience of a very interesting and intellectually stimulating process which gave me lots of fun and learning and which I came to suggest as something that 'everyone can do if you put the resources into it (like a marathon run)'. Over the programme's three years, I became more and more aware that possibly the most important experience for me was that I still had the capacity to learn and that I enjoyed it.

Oh, yes, by the way, I also learned something about management, strategy, knowledge management, and especially creativity, innovation, and change. In the heavy module on financial strategy, I just scraped through, which was not the same as learning the subject. I was defeated by the maybe 100 pages on how to analyse every single line and figure in the annual accounts of a multinational company; I did not intend to become an auditor or a business analyst.

The MBA course focused on the application of concepts. In many ways, the 'one-week MBA course' books found in any airport bookshop, as for instance (Silbiger, 1993) give a good overview of what I came to understand as a presentation of a series of models for how to exercise management. The assignments would be about applying these models to any problem rather than inventing your own solution. I had no real problem with this as I was very much aware that none of the models would be the 'truth' anyway. I think that the models often gave me an insight or a handle on something which could otherwise be rather blurred and difficult to get to grips with. However, I did question some of the concepts. Even if I enjoyed reading about knowledge management, I did wonder if there were any use in our company for publishing its intellectual capital accounts three years in a row.

I believe I often favoured models where I could feel complex or not so easy to grasp processes, where I could sense the features, imagine something but not clearly describe it in absolute terms. Nonaka and his co-writers' suggestion on how tacit knowledge could be analysed and decoded into explicit knowledge was not convincing to me. How could anyone describe how to ride a bicycle (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2002). I preferred Cook and Brown's 'generative dance of knowledge' (2002) which gave a more elusive illustration of a complex and non-deterministic 'dance' between the two understandings of knowledge.

I also enjoyed the discussions on emerging strategies, and I reflected a lot on the description of how managers often choose strategies and make decisions on a very flimsy background; it mirrored my own experience when sent to London a few years earlier. In many ways, this was an eye-opener, and I often wanted to do the London assignment all over again.

KEEP LEARNING

I scanned the website to find new Open University programmes and signed up for a couple of courses in psychology. The initial courses were on behaviour and experience within complex everyday contexts. Miell, Phoenix, and Thomas (2002) gave me an interesting overview and I moved on to cognitive psychology (Eysenck & Keane, 2003), which did not grip me. Somehow, it was too mechanical, too scientific, as I was rather looking to be engaged in processes with other people such as I recalled from our intensive group dynamics on the advanced leader-training courses. I went on a week's residential in Bath on research methods and enjoyed it. We undertook a mini research project and ended up sitting in the sun in the front of Bath Cathedral sipping coffee while doing a qualitative naturalistic observation of people's behaviour around the abbey, identifying a number of interesting themes. I found it interesting to do this kind of exploratory research—even if it was on a very small scale.

I had decided to do a doctoral research programme. My big problem was that most business schools had this idea that to be accepted you should know what you wanted to research and write a research proposal. I hadn't really come across a subject which I would be keen to dig into, and in my mind, I questioned if this was necessary. Recalling, say, the LFA experience, I was not convinced that any firm initial objectives would continue to be the most important. Once again, as a true *fisherman*, I was interested in the potentially exciting exploratory process and was sure my subject would emerge.

A friend of mine suggested complexity theory to me. I cannot remember what I read or saw, but I was immediately hooked—with my entire body, with all my senses. I knew right away that this was what I wanted to pursue. It would possibly be extremely difficult and utterly useless, but to me it was fascinating and I started reading. I eventually signed up for a DBA programme and planned to work with complexity theories.

1.9 INTRODUCTION TO COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESSES OF RELATING

LEARNING ABOUT COMPLEXITY THEORY

I believe that my first reading was Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw's book *Complexity and Management. Fad or Radical Challenge to System Theory?* (2000), which I found impenetrable, and as it referred to some key readings on the subject, I soon looked around for easier overviews of what this was all about.

I was taken by the description from the natural sciences of highly complex, non-linear processes without obvious causality, such as flocking of birds, the river's splashing over the rocks, and the predictably unpredictable weather. I tried to understand the non-reversible 'dissipative structures' in thermodynamics (Nicolis & Prigogine, 1989) and the illustrative metaphor of the 'butterfly effect', where small changes in initial conditions may result in proportionally very different outcomes. I read how Chris Langton (Mason, 2008) saw the 'Edge of Chaos' as a dynamic field creating tension, destruction, or novelty. Later, I understood, the theories were adopted by social scientists, economists, and eventually also by researchers within management. I found them intriguing but struggled with how to place them in an ontological and epistemological context. Alhadeff-Jones suggests three levels of understanding the role of complexity: 1) as an ontological dimension of the object of the study which suggests reduction to specific characteristics used to understand, observe, and calculate with certainty; 2) a 'softer' position as a powerful metaphor to understand or describe socio-cultural phenomena; or 3) a more coherent interpretation as a characteristic attributed by the observer to the phenomenon (2008, p. 119). I 'wanted' it to be the third but couldn't quite see how people and organisations could be described in such a framework, so I would for some time be sitting on the fence on this, trying to take in all of it.

As mentioned, I was initially concerned about the usability of all this. Many writers are looking for and suggest applications of complexity theory (tools) to management and leadership (Olson & Eoyang, 2001; Phillips & Shaw, 1998; Plsek & Wilson, 2001; Snowden & Boone, 2007), whereas others (Morrison, 2008; Stacey & Griffin, 2005), argue that complexity theory is not prescriptive, but descriptive. Also:

A mere use of the theories to advance what organizations 'should' look like and what leaders 'should' do or to market faddish solutions to old problems would fail to take full advantage of the theories' power. Their potential lies in forcing us to see things differently and in understanding the nature and gestalt of the system; but that will take time (Arndt & Bigelow, 2000, p. 38).

I accepted this, but could not escape having the feeling: 'OK, and then what?'

RECOGNISING THE COMPLEX PROCESSES IN FACILITATION.

My objectives for doing a doctorate were many, but one reason was that I wanted to have a 'third career'. I was keen on working with facilitation of processes, and amongst others, I read Patricia Shaw's doctoral thesis (1998) as well as her book on changing conversations in organisations (2002).

Shaw describes how training and facilitation sessions traditionally involve structured agendas, objectives for the outcome, set rules for communication, or structured inputs and summaries by the facilitators. She argues that the need for reaching tangible outcomes is a result of traditional thinking in corporate life and is embedded in the faulty understanding that we can design the future. Her stance is that of a much more evolving, searching, and participative process into an unknown future.

At a workshop on research methods, we were asked to do a five-minute presentation of our research topic to the plenary group. I thought about this—how could I make a presentation of my topic—the theory of complex responsive processes—when I still found it difficult to explain even to myself? Moreover, how could I get such a complex subject across in such a short time? I decided on a slightly unusual approach: I stood up, drew a line from A to B on the flip chart and described these five minutes as an example of complex processes where there would be a lot of interaction between different players in the room. I suggested that (like in a company strategy) I might have an objective (B) for the five minutes, but I could not be sure where we would end. I suggested that they would not all hear, see, or understand the same; I named an individual in the room who would possibly still be reflecting on the presentation he had delivered five minutes earlier, and I pointed at another person who would right now be mentally preparing for his turn just after me. Some would be observing my presentation techniques, and some would be concerned that they did not understand where on earth I was heading. I stated that my formal objective of getting some particular knowledge about my subject into their heads did not have any real meaning—in the thinking of complex responsive processes, ‘knowledge would be continuously reproduced and transformed in relational interaction between us’ (Stacey, 2001, p. 98).

Patricia Shaw emphasises how in a learning process one can sense something important but may struggle to verbalise it and how this process will create new meaning in itself. Just after the five-minute presentation, I made the following crude notes in my learning log.

After the session I have gone through the presentation 100 times in my head, again and again repeated the things that I should have said and done. Mentioning Carl (*in my presentation*) is an example of relating, also an example of moving one level of stable instability to another level. I could then also have acknowledged that I used Carl as an example and that this would cause tension—this impacts the relating. By acknowledging this I would actually defuse that tension to another level, again changed the relating. Not sure to where, but it creates something novel....

Patricia Shaw’s theories are illustrated by this—I understand her theories better. Getting my eureka on the Sunday after the session is an example of moving to a new level of understanding. In learning

terms I realise that reflecting is not enough—the actual action triggered new levels of understanding.

I have blamed myself that I did not say all these things during the session, I should have planned better, thought it through. However, I can also see that I am learning in the emerging moment, I could afterwards see lots that might have been difficult to see beforehand. This tells me about my learning process, but it also illustrates the whole idea of Patricia's emerging knowledge, moving from one step to the next. This last understanding was another eureka that I went through Monday evening (personal notes, 2006).

As described in the above, my immediate learning was that I cannot predict or plan the outcome or the learning. In my later reflection on my notes, I realise how I was still thinking in stepwise learning and only slowly realised the aspects of Shaw's writing. She points to the importance of an on-going process and an understanding of the tension as a sense-making element, how we cannot always verbalise what we feel and this is creating sense in itself.

TRYING A NEW APPROACH IN FACILITATION

I kept thinking about Shaw's approach to facilitation of processes. At the same time, I was rather concerned about where this would lead, how could it be 'implemented', who on earth would 'buy' this approach? I could feel that the process would make sense (I had a long time ago buried the '10 actions for Monday morning' approach), but I still found it difficult to articulate what my client would get out of it, found it difficult to legitimise it. However, I somehow made Shaw's writing my alibi for a much more open approach to facilitating and tried to adapt and use it in my work.

I conducted a workshop in Vietnam for 30-40 people. Plenary communication was conducted through arduous consecutive interpretation, and I launched some key questions for discussions to flow freely in (Vietnamese) group sessions. My questions were brief—but apparently too simple, it turned out, as the feedback was rather tame. I now ventured into challenging some of the conclusions and asked more questions, recalled the theatre director Keith Johnston's *Impro* (1989), which gives an entertaining and insightful description of approaches in improvisational theatre. I physically kept some 'actors' on stage, walked around the room and asked the interpreter to follow me. I picked up some key themes made by some presenters, giving them more time than others, kept offering them ideas and challenges, to which some responded positively. I asked questions in directions that were very different from those planned, simply because I felt it was interesting. The atmosphere lit up, and there was a lot of positive feedback.

After the workshop, I felt somehow liberated. Part of it had been a bit boring, but I concluded that this was a natural part of the complex processes. I could not foresee everything that was going to happen. I reacted when I felt that the process was not moving, although I have in my later years trained myself to accept the silence, the stuck patterns, where undercurrent themes and power plays are also on-going. I was questioned—by an international consultant—why there were no outcomes in terms of ‘actions tomorrow’. I explained that I had felt how it was the right thing to let the discussions flow freely, and there was no need to pretend that the workshop could *decide* anything, we could only keep developing ideas and attitudes in people’s minds.

THE PROMISE OF COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESSES OF RELATING

Upon reflection, I would today not say that the workshop ‘could not decide anything’. In the understanding of *complex responsive processes of relating* introduced by Stacey and his co-researchers, a decision will possibly be understood as a never-ending process where meaning emerges in the interaction between agents and all the agents will therefore be decision-makers in their own right (Stacey et al., 2000). In a way, I was testing myself through activities like the above, experimenting, exploring how in my work and actions I could start thinking in terms of complex responsive processes.

This way of speaking also informed my understanding of my management skills. The complex responsive processes way of thinking focuses on the relating and emphasises the responsive and participative nature of human processes and evolution over time. There is an understanding of the organisation as an emergent property and self-organising of many individual human beings interacting together in a responsive manner, not as a rigid ‘system’ overseen and managed by individuals (Streatfield, 2002). An important message, says Streatfield, is to understand the internal, ever unfolding processes of human relating where we continuously develop and negotiate power, context, goals, and means to achieve them. Streatfield refers to his experience as manager in organisations dealing with paradoxes and being ‘in control’:

I would certainly not label what my colleagues and I were doing as ‘muddling’ or as an inferior kind of ‘garbage can’ decision making.....This is the paradoxical dynamics of being ‘in control’ and ‘not in control’ at the same time. The apparently messy processes of communicative interaction I have been describing are not some second best but, rather, the only way we know of living with paradox.....From the complex responsive process way of thinking, management skills and competencies lie in how effectively managers participate in those processes... (Ibid, p. 128).

For me this was a powerful statement. In a way, it was disappointing to me that we cannot find the perfect way of managing. In other ways, it was quite liberating as I started recalling many of my previous management and leadership experiences, starting with how I 'muddled through' as a 16-year-old patrol leader, how I had felt rather stressed and inadequate as a director in London, how I have acted as project manager, and how I see my skills as a course leader and trainer.

I had questioned the counting of intellectual capital, resisted the call for codifying project managers' experience, I was no good at 'storing' lessons learnt, I had struggled to convince my colleagues that even if our strategies were usually sitting on a shelf 'what really counted was the process of making them'. I had struggled with my messy, intuitive decision-making, could not always justify it. I usually felt that working together and informing each other in a semi-structured manner made sense to me, but I wondered if it was just a convenient cop out or pure laziness. However, I now started seeing a paradigm or a way of thinking which could better explain what was going on around me and within me, and this was what I wanted to research.

1.10 TO RESEARCH WILL BE TO EXPLORE

I decided to move my doctorate research to the Doctor of Management Programme at Hertfordshire University Business School where I felt that I could find a more conducive environment for my interest in complexity theory and in complex responsive processes. Further, I was keen to enter an exploratory mode of research, which I believed would be supported in this programme. I believe that my interest in exploring has been a thread in my life, and I now intend to take this exploration into how I experience my daily work and interaction with other people.

2 PROJECT 2 — THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Project 2, I reflect on the nature of leadership in the face of uncertainty and ‘stuckness’ which I often experience in my profession as a consultant and project manager.

I will present two narratives from current work as an international consultant and relate these to modes of thought such as classic writings on leadership and organisations and more recent complexity theories. I present transformational and processual thinking to understand what happens in human interactions and as an alternative discourse for understanding my reactions and decision-making.

2.2 NARRATIVE—THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A LITTLE PUMP IN PORT CITY

It was late May in the Mediterranean, and the heat was soaring in a little dusty and dozy street in a residential area of Port City. People walked or drove quietly through on their way home from work, and children played in the late afternoon sun. If they listened carefully, they might hear the low humming sound from a dirty, covered concrete well adjacent to the street. If someone chose to investigate and lifted the heavy concrete slab, he or she would see three feet down in the dark a little pump working steadily to lift the collected grey, smelly wastewater from the residential area into a bigger main sewer leading towards the newly built wastewater treatment plant outside the city.

Sometime later in the evening, the humming sound was interrupted as the pump started coughing and spluttering; it switched off and on several times, but eventually it slowed down and came to a complete standstill. The black wastewater rose slowly inside the well as the automatic switch could not re-activate the pump and very quietly, the smelly, grey substance started seeping out under the concrete slab, into the night, into the nearby grove and into the alley.

This little and very modest pumping station No 12 was just one component in a major infrastructure project being constructed over a three-year-period and generously donated by the International Financing Institution (IFI) to the residents of the city and to the people of the region. The IFI had several projects in the area, keen to make an impact in the country. Unofficial observers would say it was part of the long-term effort to stabilise the region, which had long been divided by minds, politics, and fences.

Such a project was guided by the FIDIC General Conditions of Contract, FIDIC being the international organisation of consulting engineers, which provides a comprehensive set of contract formats and implementation guides which will facilitate a smooth implementation in accordance with budgets, work plans, and time schedules. The construction works were carried out by a local/international contractor and were supervised by 'the Engineer', our international consulting engineering company. We were hired by the 'Employer', the IFI, and acted on behalf of the local IFI delegation; also the mayor of the city would follow on the sideline and would receive the gift at the end of the project—just in time for his re-election campaign the year after. The roles, responsibilities, and rules of engagement were simple and clear.

However, the problems with pump No. 12 were not the only issues we faced. The project was close to being finished much earlier but when the contractor opened the valves to let in the sewage our (first) resident engineer soon realised that there was a problem. Major defects in the pipes allowed very saline groundwater to flush in through the cracks, into the sewers, and further straight into the brand new wastewater treatment plant, which was part and parcel of this grand donation from the IFI to Port City. Within months, this resulted in visible and increasing corrosion of the steel components of the plant. Upon the failed tests, our engineer and the IFI delegation impressed on the contractor that he was responsible (*General Conditions, clause 3.1*) for the extremely poor workmanship. He in turn moved extremely slowly through the repairs and blamed all the defects on the engineer, the IFI, the city, his pipe supplier, the political situation, and the financial crisis. A planned milestone had turned into a permanent conflict and a major crisis. After two years, none of the problems had been solved.

So, this early morning in May, the city administration was alerted by the residents about the smelly sewage flowing into the street. The administration phoned our resident engineer, Bob, and within the hour he issued an instruction by email and formal letter to the contractor to remedy the problem (*General Conditions, clause 12.7*) because of the risk to public health (*Special Conditions, clause 3.1*), which meant that the contractor should take immediate action and not await any discussion on technicalities, responsibility, or payment; copy to the IFI task manager. However, the contractor's site manager was not in his office (next door) and the young guy behind the desk refused to receive the instruction. Bob and his team started calling around and eventually got a response; the contractor refused to do anything until he knew the payment; copy to the IFI task manager. The engineers now sent another mail and letter (all actions must be documented) stating in very clear terms his anger about the contractor's unwillingness to cooperate, spelled out *Special Conditions*

3.1—immediate action on the basis of risk to the public health. The contractor now requested a technical instruction from the engineer as he claimed to neither have the money, the needed expertise, nor the equipment. Bob immediately sent a very icy email stating that he did not care if the contractor wanted to use a truck, a shovel, create a by-pass, find another pump or mobilise a thousand Chinese labourers—he should just get the job done! Now!! The contractor immediately sent a formal email to the IFI delegation complaining about the engineer being unfair, rude, and racist.

The IFI task manager, Jorgen, was away for the week at meetings in faraway IFI headquarters. He should have stayed out of this and left it to the engineer to play it by the book, but he now started writing soothing emails to the contractor, being worried about a potential start of an email-war. He was also worried about the wastewater in the street, but he was (most likely) particularly concerned about the local government and the residents' reaction towards the IFI. The IFI delegation had more than its share of very difficult projects in this volatile region and did not need any further problems.

One week earlier the following had happened:

I was the company's home office project director, and the IFI delegation called me while I was in Denmark, walking my English pointer at the seaside on a late, sunny Friday afternoon. I felt rather downhearted when I recognised the country code on the display and had a feeling that my weekend would now be ruined. On the line were my three client contacts in the delegation, they all spoke into a shared table microphone, each with a different Mediterranean accent, all of them trying to get their say, and I could understand only half of it. However, the overall message was one of dissatisfaction. This morning, our new resident engineer, Bob, had introduced himself to the delegation at a lengthy meeting. The three clients now informed me that they did not appreciate Bob at all and did not feel that he was the right man for the job. He had at this very first meeting in rather direct terms told them how they should act more professionally, stay out of his hair, and support him instead of being too lenient with the contractor (well, this was my interpretation). He had apparently told them that alternatively they could just hire a monkey to follow their instructions and then he could leave. They did not understand this reaction at all and did not find it amusing. The task manager explained how they were concerned about him already sending tough letters to the contractor and potentially escalating a conflict. At this point in the phone conversation, I felt rather stressed, very much in doubt about what to do, and I now knew for sure that my weekend was ruined.

I had sent Bob to the city because he was a professional contract manager, knowledgeable and efficient, a no-nonsense man but reputedly also one who looked for solutions. He had replaced our previous (second) resident engineer, Johnny, which the IFI delegation liked a lot, although he considered them unprofessional and resigned. Unfortunately, he did so the day after we got the contract renewed (based on his continued involvement), meaning that the delegation was not impressed at all and for which they now held our company to account, which in real terms meant me as project director.

I was immediately aware that it might have been a good idea for me to be there to introduce Bob. Well, I had felt so for the last week, but I had had too much traveling in the spring and had decided not to go. My explanation to myself had been that it is normal practice for a team leader to introduce himself to the client, but somehow, I was also aware that I had not been enthusiastic about going; I did not feel overly competent about this contract management project, I did not have a perfect solution, maybe I just wanted the difficulties to go away.

I now reflected on how we came to choose Bob for the job. As project director, it was my job, together with my colleagues, to identify a candidate who was good, available, and acceptable to the client. I would have preferred Martin, my own colleague over 20 years, but he was tied up in southern Africa until the end of July and could not be released, so my section leader quickly suggested our free-lancer, Bob, instead. Yes, he said, 'we know that he got into conflict and resigned on our big Asian project, but he is available and surely up for a challenge, for sorting out a difficult project.' I could see the logic and rational arguments, but my intuition worked against this solution; I was concerned if he could also 'sort out' the client. I dithered for a couple of days, but I was also aware that I have a procrastinating habit of looking for the 'perfect' solution, and I knew that we must balance our needs on different projects—and I needed someone *now*. Eventually, I emailed Bob and we easily agreed on the terms and conditions. The day after his departure, our director asked me, 'Oh, why did you pick him, he always gets into conflicts?' I knew that 'you' was plural, but I was now getting even more weary about this; it enforced my feeling that I had chosen this solution half-heartedly, even though I had had to use practical judgement. I did sense a power play, being lightly criticised by my director.

In the phone conversation with the IFI delegation I now found myself becoming more assertive. I had a good personal relationship with these people and I impressed on them that they should give Bob a chance as he was very professional and their best hope of getting through this messy project. I kept wondering what I should say to Bob about this situation. However, to keep him on board and to

convince the client was my clear objective and strategy when I booked a ticket to travel south a few days later. The lifetime of this plan would turn out to be one weekend.

Still at home Monday morning, I received a letter from the contractor stating that they had found out that Bob was not professionally registered in the country and therefore not allowed to work on the project; copy to everyone. This was totally irrelevant under an IFI contract, but I immediately realised the ramifications. Sure enough, three hours later, I got Bob's resignation by email. He had issues from 10 years earlier with authorities in the region. We were not in the same country, but the links were more than close—he wanted out, within the week. I changed my flight to travel the next day and this was why I arrived in Port City just in time to take part in the drama around pump No. 12.

At this pump site, something started happening. After an array of emails between all parties over six hours, the contractor appeared with some equipment and started pumping the sewage away while the city staff, our local engineers, the contractor, and angry residents gathered around the little pump and discussed the malady. The contractor knew his pump inside out and he also knew the nature of the problem very well. The pump could not cope with the heavy load of solid tissues in the wastewater allegedly coming from the many overseas students living in the neighbourhood and who (we were told) traditionally use these tissues for personal hygiene and then threw them into the toilet, an unusual habit not accounted for in the design for small pumps made by the IFI's European design consultants some years earlier.

I was acutely aware that the project was in a critical phase. The pumps were overflowing, the construction works was a shamble, the contractor was incompetent and playing tricks, the IFI delegation was nervous (which is never a good strategy), and in five days I would have no resident engineer. I felt that I must make some executive decisions; people around me expected me to take action, I was supposed to find ways ahead. I was painfully aware that I had very little experience with contract management, even less with sewerage projects, and none with sewage pumps. Over the next couple of days, I got drawn into all sorts of discussions on contract issues, the price of pumps, technical details, and design responsibilities, and I certainly felt out of my depth.

However, I had on the five-hour flight given myself a crash course on the standard contract conditions and kept discussing eagerly with Bob over the next four days (he was a walking encyclopaedia on contract management). I started having a feeling that I could communicate about central contract issues, and I listened carefully to my three to four engineers, who tended to have differing views of what we should do and, in particular, what we should have done. They issued

instructions and formal letters, discussed with the IFI task manager, argued with the contractor, called pump suppliers, handed over to each other. I just hoped they knew what they were doing. I tried not just to let go but asked questions, discussed their ideas, respected their knowledge but also tried to establish a wider picture of the situation. During the week, I kept thinking about who I could find for the role as resident engineer, I even interviewed one guy on the spot, but on day four I resigned to the fact that the quick fix was not there. I would have to think it all over again and I would tell the client so. I was sort of relaxed about it, maybe because it was soon the weekend and I could have a breather, but somehow, I was becoming less stressed. I was back to square one, but this was also sort of a new start. I had a growing feeling that I would have to use my common sense and my good relations with the client to take this to the next step. I was also somehow aware that the gravity of the situation would enable me to be more assertive at home when discussing how we apply resources. At the end of the week, most of us prepared to leave, some were leaving the project for good; one asked me, 'so, who will take over on Monday?', and I answered him, 'I don't know but I will find out.' This was actually how I felt. He seemed to accept this.

Later the same night, Bob and I shared an old Mercedes taxi to the airport, and when we approached a permanent police control it was pitch dark, and my companion had become very quiet indeed, sitting behind curtained windows, very much aware that he wanted to get out of the country. The driver presented our passports to the control and we stayed in the car, standard procedure; however, the official in the boot took her time, hesitated, looked at the car, wanted us out in the light, looked at our faces, checked the passports again. Eventually, she said 'OK' and gave us a big smile, we got into the car and Bob slumped into his seat with a big sigh of relief; he had been scared, but we were now heading for the airport. I couldn't help laughing (neither could he), and I told him that this project must certainly qualify as an input to a textbook on chaos and complexity.

Later the same night, the little pump No. 12 started coughing again.

2.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF ACTING INTO AN UNKNOWN FUTURE

My initial question has been how I as a manager do something when I do not know what to do, when managing into the unknown. To reflect on this I will, in the following, initially touch upon the nature of goal and objectives in my work, then draw on classic writers' understanding of management and leadership. I reflect on my role as manager cum participant, and I try to understand how I experience the messiness and uncertainty. I will, in this context, draw upon complexity theories and ideas developed by researchers for how these theories may inform what happens in organisational life.

2.4 TELEOLOGY — SEEKING THE PURPOSE OF OUR ACTIONS

The narrative illustrates how an engineering project is essentially planned in detail with a clear physical goal and objective in mind, however, also how this objective can be difficult to reach within the time frame and under changing circumstances. The story illustrates how other targets, such as staff replacement or smooth cooperation with other agents, are not always achieved according to plan and expectations. This makes me question at which level we in detail can plan, foresee and reach certain objectives.

Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (2000) investigate different strands of thinking about causality and the purpose of human action. They suggest that classic organisational theory (systems theory) is essentially based on a Kantian philosophy where human action is dualistic and based on two different strands of teleology, the first being the *rationalist teleology*, where a human can choose a future goal by reasoning; the second is the *formative teleology* suggesting that the future is a mature form of something which is implied at the start of the movement, that is, the movement and the final state are known in advance (Stacey, 2001, p. 27). Stacey also suggests that these frameworks assume that thought comes before action and signifies processing of information in accordance with mental models. This leads to another assumption, namely a split between the social and the self where the individual is the primary and where new knowledge is created in the individual mind (Ibid, p. 29). The implications of this dualistic framework would be that as a project director I take actions based on advance thought, that the decisions are very much mine, and that I can somehow plan and foresee the result—I would expect the outcome to be in line with my plans.

Even if this is how I (and others) initially try to act, it does not always resonate with the developments on the project, where there are constant renegotiations of meaning (client's needs, political needs, mayor's needs, my needs), and where many local interactions take place. I fully accept that the physical goal of a built sewerage system is clear, but the understanding of its value, its benefit, or its reputation may be less so. Further, I believe that the goals for the IFI's position in the area, the political advantage for the mayor, and the cooperation between the agents can hardly be decided in advance.

Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw question the premise that humans in detail can plan the future state of things—determine the future. Obviously, one can work towards a given objective, but the future is also constructed by planned and unplanned actions of multiple other agents and the ongoing

multiple relations between them. Stacey and colleagues suggest a so-called *transformative teleology*, an understanding that the future is under constant reconstruction. Stacey says

Movement is toward a future that is under perpetual construction by the movement itself. There is no mature or final state, only perpetual iteration of identity and difference, continuity and transformation, the known and the unknown, at the same time. The future is unknowable but yet recognizable, the known-unknown (Stacey, 2001, p. 60).

Key assumptions are here that 1) thought does not come before mind as the future and the understanding of this are constantly renegotiated and 2) the individual and the social cannot be split, as they are both forming and being formed by the ongoing interaction which has the potential either to create novelty and movement or hold the existing patterns of interaction through conversational themes.

As project director participating in this complex process, I will initially try to establish and 'design' a future and with all my actions I try to make an impact and try to foresee which impact. On the surface, this is thought before action (Larsen, 2013) and an attempt to locate responsibility in myself as an individual. However, I also realise that my designing and decision-making comprise an ongoing process in constant renegotiation with colleagues, client, and other actors, and that the future is a moving target under constant change and continuous reconstruction. I am aware that my understanding, the meaning, of my actions is changing as I act, that is, even when I try to think before acting, The telephone conversation I had on a sunny May afternoon with my client is, I believe, an illustration of an evolving sense of meaning where I continuously change my perspective. The American pragmatist George H. Mead suggests that simply by making a gesture or sending a message one cannot know or determine the precise outcome or understanding of this message. Meaning is not discovered—it emerges in conversation, and in the processes of relating we respond to each other in spontaneous ways, which are often recognisable (Larsen, 2013).

Having initially presented these teleological dimensions, I will in the following reflect on my narrative and my engagement in leadership from different theoretical perspectives.

2.5 CLASSIC UNDERSTANDING OF LEADING

Approaches to leading and strategic thinking are reviewed by Whittington (1993) where he broadly categorises strategic thinking into *Classic* (stressing rationality and analysis), *Processual* (pragmatic approach, adjusting to reality), *Systemic* (contingent on social systems), and *Evolutionary* (stressing

unpredictable environments). Geoff Jones suggests that the first three of these can broadly be classified as *strategic choice* approaches as they all imply that managers can make choices, which influence outcomes (Jones, 1998, p. 414). A more classic description of *strategic choice* has been promoted by John Child (1972), who also suggests that strategy and directions can be developed and implemented by powerful individuals who will act objectively and with the best overview of the needs of the organisation.

Child stresses the importance of the organisation's environment. He says that

Strategic Choice analysis therefore allows for the objective presence of environments while, at the same time, it recognizes that organizations and environments are mutually pervasive....

Organizations and environment therefore permeate one another both cognitively and relationally— that is, both in the minds of actors and in the process of conducting relationships between the two (Child, 1997, p. 58).

The impact of the complex environment is typically analysed (in advance) through different tools such as PEST (Political, Environmental, Social, Technological), SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), or Porter's Five Forces (Grant, 1999). In the Port City project a Logical Framework Analysis (LFA), as described in my Project 1, was mandatory and included listing of risks and assumptions related to the successful implementation of the project. The employer and the engineer would (in his tender) outline how to mitigate risks.

The strategic choice management processes include reactive and proactive measures including corrective, cybernetic actions if needed.

The ongoing dynamic process being postulated is thus:

Information -> evaluation -> learning -> choice -> action -> outcome -> feedback of information

Though, since it is continuous, no particular stage can be taken as the starting point. (Child, 1997, p. 70)

By this, I understand a sequential approach, where thought comes before action, and where feedback informs action in a structured manner. The planned and detailed design will thus determine the outcome of the sewerage project and is neatly illustrated in the LFA format, where the list of risks and mitigating measures is supposed to ensure a (cybernetic) correction. This I relate to the notion of rationalist and formative teleology, a framework where the future is decided by the powerful.

The implication of strategic choice theory is in my understanding that the overall project can be managed effectively based on the choice of the IFI task management through the FIDIC contract management systems. However, the narrative illustrates that the strategy may not have taken account of political wrangles, the contractor potentially going bust, individuals' dislike of each other, or other less tangible implications. Alternatively, the strategic choice's simple, linear understanding of causes and effects may not take account of the more complex, interweaving, and constant developing relationships observed in the project.

Following this theory, I will, as project director, set the directions for the team of resident engineers, choose the best candidate, and ensure that he has the knowledge and resources to do the job; my decisions will be determined by objectivity, and I act by motivating others. However, what the strategic choice theory may not illuminate are my deliberations, my interactions with my manager or director in head office, my own intent to be home over the weekend, and my uneasiness with the nature of contract management. Further, the theory does not offer me, I think, a deeper understanding of what leads me from uneasiness to assertiveness and saying: "I will find out".

Systems theories are fundamental to the organisations in which I work, to the projects I manage, and to the relationship between the agents involved. The understanding is that decisions and actions at one part (or level) of the organisation or the project will have a direct cause-effect implication for other parts. The better the manager can identify and fine-tune the system and the interaction, the better the organisation will perform.

Peter Senge is a prominent writer within systems theory and through his book *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge, 1990) he promotes the *learning organisation theory*. He describes in detail his view on the leader's role and responsibilities and his learning disciplines can also be considered a theory on leadership. Senge differentiates himself from the strategic choice theorists by acknowledging the complex dynamics of an organisation's systems and by advocating a dynamic learning process.

Senge's five disciplines for successful management are (Ibid, pp. 6-8) *systems thinking*, the ability to see and understand how many different elements interact and have an influence on outcome, that is, not a simple cause-and-effect linearity; *personal mastery*, an ability to clarify one's personal vision, focusing energies on things that matter most; *mental models*, understanding our internal pictures of the world and being able to scrutinise them; *building shared vision*, the skills of developing of unearthing shared pictures of the future in order to ensure commitment—not just compliance; *team learning*, the ability to create dialogue and understand negative patterns of interaction in a team.

My take on Senge's perspective of the Port City project is that he would want to understand in detail the complexities of the project. He differentiates between *details complexity*, which I understand as all the technical and complicated matters that can be listed through hard and dedicated work; and '*dynamic complexity*, situations where cause and effect are subtle, and where the effects over time of interventions are not obvious'. Following Senge (ibid, p. 72), I recognise project parameters such as (international) political tensions, quality of work, availability of staff, and satisfaction of the IFI as dynamic problems. I presume that Senge would agree that my own personal circumstances, difference in cultures, the mayor's ambitions for the elections, and so forth are also parts of such dynamic complexity.

I acknowledge that Senge appreciates the dynamic complexity leading to unforeseen consequences, but then he moves on to promote *leverage*. He says that

The real leverage in most management situations lies in understanding dynamic complexity, not detail complexity (ibid, p. 72).

He suggests that the trick is to see interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect relationships and to see processes of change instead of snapshots.

To me, the word *leverage* is interesting. Senge suggests that the skilled manager must analyse and identify the key processes where he can get leverage. He sees *circles of causality* and *systems archetypes* in the organisation, which I as manager must be able to identify through mastering the five disciplines. By identifying the leverage points in advance of action and thereby exert influence on the behaviour of the system, I can move the process forward in the desired direction. He even, in the first heading of the book (ibid, p 3), includes a quote:

Give me a lever long enough....and singlehandedly I can move the world.

I note how Senge suggests an *advance* identification of a leverage point, how he through analysis and planning expects to maximise his influence. This, I believe, is an example of rationalist and formative teleology, which splits the thought from action and subject/object. Also, the determined efforts to establish a shared vision of the future and thus striving to develop something already formed is to me an example of rational teleology (*establish*) as well as formative teleology (*vision*).

I agree that all the actions we take in the course of the project somehow represent attempts to use a lever to try to move the world. To identify a tough resident engineer, to travel to Port City, to write stern letters to the contractor are all examples of us trying to move the process, but this was without

success and Senge may suggest that we had not analysed the situation in sufficient detail. What I do question, though, is the understanding that one can identify the perfect lever and determine the future with a high degree of certainty as this seems to imply that 1) one can predict the future, and 2) one can understand in detail the interactive dynamic relations. Senge gives several case studies where he describes negative developments in companies' performance caused by wrong decisions. He identifies alternative (potentially more successful) decisions and actions and thus illustrates the impact of a genuine systems understanding. The flaw, as I see it, is that he then must anticipate that everything else is equal and that all other dynamic parameters would not change. This contrasts with how I experience the dynamics of my work, where I am involved in daily patterns of communicative interaction, where my actions are constantly influenced by the present, by the past, and by my expectations for the future. In summary, yes, I will constantly try to manage from where I am now, but I am not so sure that I will know what will happen, and I cannot be sure that different decisions in the past would have led to identifiable and desired outcomes.

2.6 THE PARADOX OF BEING 'AT THE SAME TIME'.

Strategic choice theories consider the powerful few who can be objective, at times detached from implementation, being able to observe and influence the process. The systems theory represented by Senge focuses on a skilled manager who is enabled to develop his team, that is, also in a position detached from the process. As a manager and project director, I do try to influence the process by finding the 'right' resident engineer, I do try to take a step back and get an overview while my engineers are working around me in the office, and I do try to detach myself somewhat to be able to build my mental models—be able to understand what is going on. I also try to develop my team by setting the agenda, by informing them, by working together, and by asking their advice. Griffin (2002, p. 13) describes how this illustrates an 'either... or' perception of my role, one where I can stand aside, observe, and understand what is going on around me. However, I am not 'either...or', because I am deeply involved in the process. The activities are influenced by my actions, and the actions continuously influence me.

The Kantian dualistic thinking mentioned above contains a *paradox* of being part of a formative process with goals and rules already set and at the same time being able to make rational choices. Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw state (2000) that Kant and classic organisational thinkers try to eliminate this paradox by suggesting that a manager can be 'both....and', meaning that I am both a manager observing the process and a participant in the process. An illustration would be that as a project

director I am in the middle of a rapid stream, following the flow, but at the same time constantly trying to take my bearings, avoid the rocks, and adjust to retain the balance (Griffin, 2002, p. 13).

However, in my experience of this process I also note how I was emotionally involved and an integrated part of ongoing patterns of interaction. My narrative illustrates my private dialogue, my uncertainty, and a constant process of being in a dialogue with others, observing their needs, feeling my own needs and how these are constantly evolving in the course of the process. In this, I rather feel that I am part of the flow where I have no clear bearings (because they are also moving), and I am caught up in the generation of forward movement. This is what Griffin calls 'at the same time' (ibid) which describes well, I believe, the paradox in which I find myself and will have not only to accept but also appreciate.

The German sociologist Norbert Elias (1987) suggests a distinction between being *involved* and being *detached*, thus a distinction between a more emotional and a more aware participation. The emphasis may shift between the two, but Elias says that one can never be purely in one or the other mode and he thus suggests a paradox of being both involved and detached at the same time. Elias refers to the *double-bind* as he states that high feeling of danger lessens the chance of a realistic practice in relation to it, that is, lessens the chance of bringing it under control. This resonates with my experience (and many others', I believe), and I can recognise how my ability to be more detached was more profound at the end of the week, when I felt more sure of what I could and what I could not do.

This combined description of my work resonates with how I experience my leadership; it illustrates well, I believe, the feeling of being part of a flow (involved), needing to surface, and (detached) take stock of the project, to get an overview. Put another way, my 'overview' is constantly evolving and part of a continuous interactive process and dialogue with others. I also understand this metaphor in the way that one may not want to fight against the stream, rather accept and embrace the paradox—to be part of the flow and move the best way possible. In the description of my working with the engineers around the pump problem, I note how 'I just hope they know what they are doing', not out of despair but because I found it the best—and only—way to move forward. In my Project 1, I refer to Streatfield's understanding of an organisation as an emergent and self-organising property of many individual human beings interacting together in a responsive manner (Streatfield, 2002). I recall one of my key insights mentioned in Project 1, Streatfield's comment:

I would certainly not label what my colleagues and I were doing as ‘muddling’ or as an inferior kind of ‘garbage can’ decision making....This is the paradoxical dynamics of being ‘in control’ and ‘not in control’ at the same time. The apparent messy processes of communicative interaction I have been describing are not some second best but, rather, the only way we know of living with paradox (ibid, p. 128).

I accept that whilst I may constantly be grasping for control, the beauty lies in working with not being in control, understanding this paradox, and making the most of it.

In summary, I have in this section reflected on the transformative nature of the project and of my role as a leader, how I feel that I am part of a process and paradoxically also maintain an ability as a sometimes-detached manager. I have also emphasised the dynamics and emergence in management and leadership.

This may be somewhat at odds with a classic way of understanding the managers’ role where thought precedes action and where the manager maintains an overview and aim at a well-known goal. I will in the following try to investigate further how other theoretical frameworks may help to illustrate the transformational processes (unpredictability) and paradoxes (apparently contradictory propositions) that I experience in my role as a manager.

2.7 CAN COMPLEXITY THEORIES HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE UNPREDICTABILITY AND PARADOXES?

I will touch upon how complexity theorists have tried to understand the messiness, the unpredictability, the unknown future, the nature of the flow, and even tried to suggest useful management tools and techniques.

Complexity theories are concerned with environments, organisations, or systems that are complex in the sense that very large numbers of constituent elements or agents are connected to and interacting with each other in many different ways (Mason, 2008).

It all started with *chaos*. In the 1950s, the American meteorologist Edward Lorenz and fellow scientists tried to model weather patterns and find ways of predicting the weather with an increasing degree of certainty. By pure coincidence, he discovered what came to be called the *butterfly effect* where small changes in initial conditions may result in proportionally very different outcomes (Gleick, 1987/1998). The general understanding within (Newtonian) science at the time was that small errors,

fluctuations, or 'noise' could be ignored, but Lorenz focused on 'sensitive dependence on initial conditions' and proved otherwise. His findings came to be the basis of chaos theory.

Gleick suggests that 'in science as in life, it is well known that a chain of events can have a point of crisis that could magnify small changes' (Ibid, p. 23). As an early illustration of how this may be of interest to others outside a limited community of natural scientists, Gleick mentions that it has a place in folklore:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;

For want of a shoe, the horse was lost;

For want of a horse, the rider was lost;

For want of a rider, the battle was lost;

For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost (Ibid, p. 23).

Gleick sees analogies in human sciences and organisational life. If using such analogy in the Port City project he may point at how the sensitive dependence on initial conditions comes to mind when, for example, the unexpected bathroom habits of international students somehow played a role in the strained relationship between the contractor and our team. Also, one may wonder if we could have managed the approval of my resident engineer better if I had travelled to the project a week earlier.

The *mathematical chaos* described by Gleick does not mean pure confusion or randomness. Mathematicians describe chaos as non-linear processes, that is, it is determined by non-linear equations, which cannot be solved. A chaotic process will typically follow a certain path, an *attractor*, until it reaches a *bifurcation point*, at which the process may change abruptly and, in some cases, oscillate between two and later several very different paths. This pattern will repeat itself, and the process will move into an apparently random series of oscillations. However, a closer study will reveal that even though the oscillations never follow the same paths they are certainly showing a repetitive pattern. Furthermore, the oscillations are moving within certain boundaries and the chaotic processes are paradoxically stable and unstable, predictable and unpredictable at the same time.

Again, following Gleick's suggestion of analogies, it could be suggested that the project implementation clearly displays elements of unpredictability, a basic feature of chaos and complexity. I did not foresee the resignation of my first resident engineer at a critical time, and the

IFI could not predict that their contractor would be short of funds and display unwillingness to proceed. Likewise, it is worth mentioning that these patterns are highly recognisable, we have seen them before on other projects; we just do not know if or when they will occur again.

Ilya Prigogine defines *dissipative structures* in thermodynamics (1997, p. 66). He suggests that far beyond the bifurcation point, a set of new phenomena arises such as oscillating chemical reactions or non-equilibrium spatial structures, induced by catalytic steps, such as the production of compound Y from compound X *together* with the production of X from Y. He talks about order emerging from disorder in far from equilibrium conditions and he accepts, rather than eliminates, the paradox as he talks about the *order and disorder at the same time*.

The bifurcation points mentioned above are the critical points at which processes may change into one or more different paths. They break the symmetry and are 'the manifestation of an intrinsic differentiation between parts of the system itself and the system and its environment. Once a dissipative structure is formed, the homogeneity of time...or space...,or both, is broken' (Ibid, p. 69), which means that the process cannot move backwards.

Prigogine, therefore, states that dissipative structures require an *arrow of time* (Ibid, p. 73). He suggests that science had traditionally been based on Newtonian thinking, which is time independent in the sense that any calculation of a physical process can be reversed, and his interest is rather in the irreversible processes. If I take my dog for a walk, he will initially jump from the doorstep onto the ground. Knowing the height and his mass, I can determine the velocity and force with which he touches the pavement, and I can also do the reverse calculation. However, my dog will rather spend his energy and time on digesting his breakfast before going out to meet friends, foes, or prey; he will process his bodily energy and through his senses absorb a multitude of different impressions. He will thus go through complex, irreversible processes, which will leave him in a new mental and physical state after a certain period. Newton would not have an equation for this, but my understanding is that Prigogine would find it important.

Prigogine states that: 'Once we have dissipative structures, we can speak of self-organization' and that '....bifurcations can be considered the source of diversification and innovation'. He referred to the history of science and also suggested that '...human creativity and innovation can be understood as the amplifications of laws of nature already present in physics and chemistry (Ibid, p. 70-71).

He suggests that management and development of organisations will be dependent on self-organisation (Ibid, p. 71), and he thus indicates an analogue between natural sciences and human

organisation. Many writers inspired by Prigogine have drawn attention to the phenomena of emergence, order, and disorder and the transformational nature of human life and organisational life as, for example, Griffin (2002). Also Mowles draws parallels with arguments in the natural sciences and refers to Prigogine pointing to natural processes far from equilibrium, such as evolution, radioactive decay, or the weather, and he suggests a similar understanding in organisational life (2011, pp. 216-217).

Prigogine's description of dissipative structures and irreversibility strikes a chord with me. The understanding that input, actions, processes, and communicated decisions all integrate to form a new situation, a new level of energy, is important. In a way mundane and obvious, to me it is educating to acknowledge the arrow of time, how I must accept that most of these processes cannot be reversed and also that no, I cannot always know what will be the outcome of my next step, what will happen then, and in particular, what I will do thereafter. As project director, I had to make decisions into an unknown future. Further, it also reminds me that even if my engineers discussed what we 'should have done' at an earlier stage, I should not feel too guilty about it. One needs to accept that knowledge is emerging and that the tensions we go through are in themselves sense-making (Shaw, 2002).

Prigogine's bifurcation points are significant to my experience of the project where I see analogies, events where order and disorder happened at the same time far from a steady state, far from equilibrium. When I, at the end of the busy and very confused week, answered my colleagues with 'I don't know, but I will find out', I had a feeling of acceptance, that I was doing my best and that no one could really ask for more. I felt quite calm and confident that on this basis I would now use my common sense, my practical judgement, to tackle the problem, face the client, and discuss a proper way forward. In a way, I believe that I had come to what some writers would call a proper pitchfork bifurcation, where there was no obvious straight line ahead, no small change of direction, but where I as project director would be on an entirely new route. The focus was very much on the process here and now rather than on a constant attempt to anticipate the future and on what I 'should' be doing.

MacIntosh and MacLean (1999, p. 38) suggest the 'use' of bifurcation points to move the organisation in a certain direction deliberately. They move on to develop a response to a bifurcation (a crisis) in terms of a managed process where they suggest how an organisation should implement a measured response by going through a series of well-planned steps (Ibid). This is most likely what most organisations go through many times during their development. However, the assertion is, in my opinion, questionable, as it suggests that one can predict an outcome and implies that the

process can be managed by an outside and independent observer to reach specific, chosen goals. Thus, it reflects a formative and rational teleology.

Their paper introduces the concept of deep structures in social systems, which will prevail during a transformation change and it argues that by understanding the dynamics and the deep structures, organisations can gain some influence over the self-organising processes, which in the natural sciences are regarded unpredictable. I can relate this to Senge's understanding of dynamic complexity and again, I see elements of formative teleology.

A number of scientists looked to computer modelling to investigate complex processes. *Complex adaptive systems* (CAS) consist of a large number of interacting entities, agents that operate according to sets of rules guiding their interactions with other agents (Mowles, 2011, p. 60). The agents are computer programmes themselves and can as such adapt and change their rules in response to other agents. The agents are, therefore, self-organising, and over time new and radically different structures will occur. The American scientist John H. Holland focused (1998) on the minute detail of his models and the rules of the individual agents and saw modelling as a tool for better understanding of emergence.

Likewise, CAS theory has become widely promoted as a model to understand and even 'apply' to complex organisational issues. Writers such as Plsek and Wilson (2001) see clear analogies between CAS and organisational life or even suggest means to benefit from the complexity, facilitate emergence and self-organisation, and move, overcome, or eradicate (unwanted) attractors and thus obtain desired results.

Olson and Eyoang (2001) concern themselves with how managers through an understanding of complex adaptive systems can facilitate organisational change. They suggest how one can establish visions, goals, and structures in (organisational) complex adaptive systems and they discuss the roles of change agents.

Curlee and Gordon have written *Complexity and Project Management* (2011), which gives an introduction to complexity theory and explanation of the need to understand the complex processes in project management. The writers suggest how to plan for complexity and which leadership style to apply, and they suggest ways of continuously reviewing the work processes with due respect to complexity and unpredictability.

My understanding is, however, that these scholars do not describe in detail how they make analogies from what is essentially a computer model to human life. Secondly, the concepts are all founded on the understanding of an outside observer—like in CAS—who can manipulate the interactions without own involvement, and thirdly, the implication is that the goals can be determined in advance. Again, I agree that we all strive towards certain goals, but I cannot, I believe, by pulling a lever or by changing the resident engineer, know for sure if it will work out the way I hope.

It therefore begs the question, to what extent one can actually use or ‘apply’ chaos, dissipative structure, or complex adaptive systems through metaphors or analogies to understand human interactions.

Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (2000) make the point that one must be very careful in transferring complexity theories from the natural sciences to social sciences such as management theories. They suggest that one must argue rigorously for making a transfer from the source domain to the target domain, and they make a clear distinction between the use of metaphors and the use of analogy. In particular, they describe that it is not meaningful just to look at the attributes of the source domain (as in a metaphor); rather, one must meticulously analyse whether the relationships can be transferred, that is, for instance, whether the relationships in complex adaptive systems are similar to those of the targeted domain of human interactions in the organisation (Ibid, pp. 200-201). They say that

the approach is to make a translation in terms of human sociology and psychology with the purpose of seeing whether this procedure illuminates the experience of life in organizations. The theories and models of the complexity sciences are then used as an analogy for human activity. They also motivate particular ways of examining organizational phenomena (ibid, p. 202).

Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw have thus developed their theory of *complex responsive processes of relating* by drawing on analogies from complex adaptive systems and combining these with insights from psychology and sociology. This will be further described below.

In summary, I have, based on my first narrative, argued that my work and my project reflect a transformative teleology with a future under perpetual construction and I have described my role as being in a flow, being manager and participant at the same time. I have reflected on how classic approaches to management may not adequately reflect this understanding of leadership, and I have touched upon how complexity sciences to some extent may provide insight into some aspects of organisational life.

I am increasingly interested in my experience of an private dialogue, development from uneasiness to assertiveness, passage of time, and key moments of openings, seeing new ways forward. I will investigate this through the following narrative describing the situation a month later in Port City.

2.8 NARRATIVE—CHAIRING A COMPLEX MEETING INTO UNCERTAINTY

It was now June and the IFI delegation had promised the contractor a top-level meeting where the three parties—the delegation, the engineer, and the contractor—could sit together and discuss the key issues in a cordial atmosphere, lay the cards on the table, and find ways forward. We had not been keen on this meeting, considered it a waste of time, and had again suggested that the employer, the IFI, should not get too involved as we, the engineer, operated on behalf of the employer and needed to work out the way forward in accordance with the contract. Further, I had postponed the meeting as my key staff with all the knowledge, the two resident engineers, had left the project over this last month, meaning that I had no one left on our side to engage in a meaningful way. The contractor wrote formal letters, expressing in rather verbose language his sincere disappointment and concern that such an important meeting promised by IFI had not yet taken place. In our book, he should rather go back to the site and get some work done in accordance with the contract. I was concerned about our position but also felt that the contractor exploited the IFI delegation's friendliness and tried to drive a wedge between the delegation and ourselves. Again, I mobilised my assertiveness, discussed with my team and eventually we set a date for a meeting in June in the IFI's meeting room. I was supposed to chair the meeting (as we had insisted that the engineer must have the initiative), and I met the day before with the task manager and his superiors, the programme manager, and her colleague. We discussed the strategy and the three agreed to keep a somewhat low profile at the meeting.

We knew that there was one major sticking point: The contractor would insist that he had been promised that we would agree on accepting the works and, in particular, that it could be backdated to about one year ago. We, the engineers, disagreed firmly as we found that even if he suggested there might be some contractual grounds for this, we insisted that the works were nowhere near finished because they were full of defects and it would be totally unreasonable to hand over such a system to the city.

Before the meeting the contractor had sent a letter to IFI stating that if he did not get the approvals, he would stop all maintenance on the pumps and stop pumping. The unsaid implication was that the

sewage would then spill into the streets after which the city authorities would have to take emergency action and by doing this de facto take over the works.

The IFI programme manager promised to back me up during the meeting even if we knew that this would be a tough one. She smiled wryly to me and said that ‘your success criteria are that they stay in the room’. I certainly felt the pressure, I was aware that she did not need a fiasco and I returned her smile and said that I would do my best and then we would see.

We all met at 9 a.m.; the conference table was laid out with seats for the IFI delegation and our team on one side, eight in total. The programme manager smiled at me and pointed to a chair in the middle—‘You are the chairman’. On the other side, the contractor would be seated. I was rather apprehensive, felt the strain, aware that this was definitely not my expertise. I was a novice within contract management (although I had embarked on a very steep learning curve), I did not have the technical knowledge, and I certainly did not have the history of this project. On the other hand, I believed that I was reasonably skilled at chairing meetings, and I was glad that I had three engineers with me who had had varying roles in the project.

The contractor’s team entered the room. The directors and the site manager took their seats and the usual small talk about orange groves, the upcoming election, and the health of some family members was soon dealt with. It was common practice here and I suppose we did it to start communicating, to identify a way of speaking together. I left this to the others, did not participate, but listened, was rather focused on how to open the meeting, tried to gauge the atmosphere. Most of the attendees had met on numerous occasions whereas one Danish colleague and I were newcomers.

I opened the meeting and handed over to the programme manager as the host. She invited the meeting to work in a constructive manner and to find ways forward to solve our disagreements. However, she emphasised, the engineers were acting on behalf of the employer and our instructions must be followed in accordance with the contract. The managing director of the contractor immediately raised his hand and declared that his team would, of course, follow the instructions of the engineer, but they would not obey anyone who made racist or rude comments (I recalled the ‘Chinese labourers’) and he wanted this to be noted in the minutes. I knew it would be coming, and just said, ‘Yes, it will be minuted’.

Then we were on to the agenda and I knew enough about the history to recognise the usual patterns of discussion. The contractor’s younger director was quite aggressive and my local engineers chipped in now and then, but this was the normal rhetoric and I felt that so far we were doing OK. We slowly

approached the critical subjects. The contractor had, as expected, asked that the issue of taking over the works was on the agenda and I now raised the subject, mentioning that he had sent the letter to the IFI threatening to switch off the pumps and that I was very concerned because I considered this a very serious move.

I did not believe that this was his true intention, but I was also aware that he was quite desperate; there were rumours that he was in an extremely difficult financial situation and that he did not pay his staff. I now sensed that the room was very quiet and I had no idea where this discussion was going to take us. I was somewhat apprehensive and concerned, but felt that at least our team including the IFI representatives was working together.

The MD confirmed that yes, if they do not get the approval they would switch off the pumps the following morning at 8 a.m. as these 'were no longer the contractor's responsibility'. He ventured no further, although everyone knew what the implications were, so I leaned forward and looked directly at him: 'But this will surely mean that the streets of the city will be overflowing with wastewater?'

The MD looked directly at me and shrugged his shoulders, 'Well, yes,' he said, 'but this is not our responsibility'.

The room went very quiet and the tension was tangible. My engineers did not move at all, and I said nothing, did not try to steer the discussion.

This was deliberate. I was aware that I did not want to rush in with a solution to sweeten him, be helpful, give in. Neither did I intend to confront him and potentially escalate the conflict. I trusted that he had no interest in seriously falling out with the City or the IFI and I also wanted to ensure that the 'responsibility' for such a threat stayed with him; it must not become a shared property. For me, this was also a way of showing respect, I wanted him to know that I took him seriously—as a mature professional. There was no way, of course, to know which way this would go, but I felt that I must trust my practical judgement.

Eventually, the client, the programme manager, made a statement and impressed on the contractor that this was totally unacceptable and that even the threat was ridiculous. After all, the contractor was the only one with the expertise and resources to keep the pumps operating, and he was responsible towards the community and the people in the city. The MD now responded that he was certainly seeking cooperation if only the engineer would allow this. Slowly the discussion picked up

again. I had a sense that we might have come across a hurdle, but this meant that we were approaching the next one.

The MD now looked at the programme manager and stated that now he would formally like to ask the IFI if they would not as promised approve the taking over of the finalised works. The programme manager asked me to respond, and I said that certainly, we would approve the works as soon as all the defects have been repaired. The contractor now claimed that all defects had been remedied over the last month and that the works could be inspected at any time. 'Great', we said, 'let's do that' (knowing well that no defects had been repaired). The MD now asked, 'And which date will you put on the approvals?'

I now braced myself; I felt that I was on thin ice; I would give him the answer which the client and we knew that he would potentially consider a subject of arbitration. I looked directly at him and said that we would use the date of the actual inspection and approval. He said, 'So, you will not backdate the documents as we have previously been promised by the IFI?' I tried to look friendly and empathic and said 'No, I am sorry MD, we cannot do that—it would not be the correct thing to do'.

The MD now turned to the programme manager and asked if she agreed with my decision. She confirmed. I felt grateful but also apprehensive. I felt that now I had certainly committed myself, there was no way back.

The MD sat back in his chair and mustering all his dignity said, 'Well, in this case we must inform you that we will immediately leave this meeting'.

The room went quiet.

I looked at him, said nothing, and hoped that no one else would say anything either; in particular, I hoped that the IFI team would not try to intervene and they did not disappoint me. Seconds passed, it felt like an eternity, and I slowly started feeling more confident. The MD did not get up; there must be some room for moving forward. After what felt like a very long pause, I suggested, 'MD, I think this would be very unfortunate, this meeting has been scheduled to find ways forward and the IFI is interested in doing so.'

The MD shrugged his shoulders and asked, 'So, what is your suggestion?' I was not at all sure what to suggest, but I thought I saw an opening, so I said to him, 'I am not sure what to suggest, but I am trying to understand why it is important to you to get the approvals backdated.' After a few more comments back and forth, I impressed on him that I was really trying to understand his needs. I asked

him if the key issue was the cost of maintenance, which the contractor had borne over the last couple of years on behalf of the city, rightly or wrongly. He confirmed this. The IFI team also stepped in slowly and a communication developed regarding whether or how he could somehow be compensated for at least some of this. The discussion took new turns and we eventually came to a conclusion, not on any amounts, but on how at least to take the issue forward.

After the meeting the programme manager complimented my chairing of the meeting. I said 'thanks' but I was somewhat concerned about what would happen next.

2.9 SIGNIFICANT SYMBOLS AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME

I am intrigued by the way the dialogue developed between the different parties at the meeting, where I from the outset had no idea what would happen and still found that there was a certain flow and coherence in the way we communicated. The narrative illustrates, I believe, how my own understanding of what is going on between the actors is constantly being developed and reconstructed, how I am influenced by others' gestures and how they react to my gestures in return.

George H. Mead (1934/1967) developed an understanding of how we in our communication create the specific situations and create our understanding of who we are. Mead describes how meaning is established not simply in one individual's head but in the response from others and thus in the dialogue between humans. He suggests how one makes a *significant symbol* (Ibid, pp. 71-72) when one can in oneself sense similar feelings which this gesture invokes in others. Meaning is not discovered; it emerges in conversation, and in the processes of relating we respond to each other in spontaneous ways, which are often recognisable (Larsen, 2013).

My statement at a key point, where I said to the MD that I did not know what to suggest, was genuine. I did not have a card up my sleeve, but I tried to convince him that I was open and tried to make progress together with him. I sensed that he did not initially trust me, but through a couple of exchanges new understanding developed and we moved on. I can relate this to the notion of a significant symbol as I felt that he was moving and taking in my openness. I would not know in advance, of course, how he would react to my gesture.

Larsen suggests that Mead's thinking has significant consequences, namely that—in line with thinking from natural sciences—we cannot have the full overview of the result of our actions as events may take new, unexpected twists and turns. This means that we must see ourselves as active

participants, accept how complexity and unpredictability mean that we cannot know in advance the full result of our actions but also that we should maintain that they do make a difference.

In this interaction, I participated in an ongoing process in a way that recognised that solutions to problems emerged from within the interaction itself— and that no one individual was in control; the outcome emerged as a consequence of the interweaving of what we all did—or did not do. This is different from other ways of thinking where the leader determines in advance what the outcome must be and pulls levers to achieve this—hence Senge’s learning organisation. Leadership is in this example not located in me as an individual but between the actors, and it emerges as the power figurations change and the discussion moves on.

I have described my initial uneasiness before the meeting and my growing confidence as it developed. I could relate this to the importance, the progress, the decisions made, and so forth. However, I also describe how others’ expectations, the continuous dialogue, and the team work had an impact on my assertiveness—I describe a dialogue within myself.

Mead described the continuous ‘me’ and ‘I’ dialogue, where ‘me’ is the individual’s picture of how others perceive him/her. This ‘me’ influences the decisions I make and actions I take as project director and the way I conduct the meeting. The ‘I’ represents the spontaneous part of the individual—also reflected in some of my reactions to the other part’s tough statements—and Mead suggests that our thinking is simply an ongoing inner and external dialogue between the two. The ‘me’ and the ‘I’ cannot be split; they are closely interlinked and, as Mead says, the ‘I’ is constantly ‘catching up’ with the ‘me’.

The “I” reacts to the self, which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the “me” and we react to it as an “I”.

The “I” of this moment is present in the “me” of the next moment...

...It is because of the “I” that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 174).

In combination with our gestures, this means that we are in constant interaction with ourselves and others, our actions impact on others as well as on us, and it does not make sense to talk about the individual’s free will. Our actions are interlinked with those of others in a web of interrelated actions and gestures. I was aware that in my role as chair of the meeting I was continuously making gestures, orally or bodily, without knowing the exact outcome. I could plan and suggest in advance but would

have to rely on my practical judgement and experience to react to the reactions of the other participants.

In particular, I was very much aware of the irreversibility when we committed ourselves with the key statements about the certificates, made by myself and by the programme manager.

I reflect on the two incidents where the contractor made tough statements and where we through a negotiated dialogue came over a 'hurdle' and onwards to another level. But what is it that creates a step forward, what is it that releases the tension (or the opposite) and brings in new meaning?

Larsen suggests (2013, pp. 36-37) that Mead's thinking makes it obvious to focus on the present, where we act and react. Mead understands the present as a point in time which is influenced by our understanding of the past as well as our vision of the future, although he also emphasises the continuous change of the past and the future as new meaning and understanding continuously develop.

Barbara Simpson describes the effect of *temporality*. She mentions how Mead describes *temporal passage*, which is a series of *events* 'that thrust themselves into the otherwise undifferentiated flow of time, providing a mechanism for ordering and making sense of experience' (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 277). Mead sees an event as a turning point where something new arises. The temporal passage is then a series of events where the past and the future are reconstructed and thus give new meaning to the present.

These past and futures are constructed as separate temporalities belonging to different frames of reference that coincide in the present experience of a given actor. The simultaneous occurrence of multiple temporalities affords the actor a multifaceted perspective that offers the actor a repertoire of alternative choices for reconstructive action in the present moment (Ibid, p. 278).

My understanding of Simpson's words is that when I, during the meeting, sense a feeling of relief, change, clarification, assertiveness, it can be ascribed to the coinciding of several temporalities. My sense of a changing pattern (event) in the communication may coincide with other experiences, patterns that I (or others) have and can recognise, or it may be a question of the needs of several parties meeting at a specific time. I see this as similar to the notion of order and disorder at the same time, the passage of something new, yet recognisable. This is clearly an understanding of a transformative teleology, an understanding that the future is under perpetual construction.

2.10 THE PROMISE OF COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESSES OF RELATING

Mead's pragmatic understanding of the social self and the development of meaning describes an evolving, unforeseeable, and thus dynamic process which gives insight into organisational life and into my role as a manager. However, it does not account for the multiple relations between the numerous actors, which result in totally unpredictable and dynamic patterns of interaction. It may not adequately describe the many interrelations in the meeting room, the emergence of an understanding between many, or of the power plays.

As described above, Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw suggest how complexity thinking can provide insight into human interaction in their theory of *complex responsive processes of relating* (2000). They suggest that processes in an organisation and between humans are not directed by an outside authority (as in complex adaptive systems) but are signified by many and constant interactions between all involved and with the outside environment. Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw suggest a transformative teleology indicating that an organisation is constantly changing, moving, and developing as a result of the many interactions between the participants. They make analogies from the relationships in complex adaptive systems to the insights of Mead on human interaction, and they support this with the work of Elias who takes an interest in how society changes and develops. He focuses on power relations as he suggests that power plays at some level are always present in interactions between people (1939/2000). He describes how this leads to mutual dependency, inclusion and exclusion, forming of ideologies, and definition of groups as well as enemies. This can clearly be linked to the dynamics around the table in the meeting room.

Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw summarise what they call their principal insight (from the complexity theories) to their theories of complex responsive processes. In this summary, they—amongst other key points—include that it is possible for abstract relationships to display different kinds of dynamics in different conditions:

..Our interest is in understanding these dynamics in human terms as patterns of repetitive interaction in which people get “stuck” and as patterns of spontaneous, creative partnerships in which the possibility of transformation arises (2000, p. 192).

I find this triangulation—Mead, Elias, complexity—intriguing and will in my next project look further into how this may help to explain some of the patterns I experience in my role as manager.

2.11 IN SUMMARY

I have initially described how I understand transformational processes as a reasonable description of how I experience the purpose of my doing and of our roles in acting together. I have related this to the nature of project work and of management in a complex project—to all organisational activities.

I have described how classic understanding of management such as strategic choice, systems thinking, and Senge's learning organisation give a good description and framework for how we in our organisation try to manage ourselves and our projects but also how I believe that they do not necessarily take account of unpredictability, emergence, and paradoxes in daily organisational life.

In my work, I constantly try to take stock, manage, keep an overview, and act as a participant and detached observer at the same time, whilst I in reality rather experience being part of the flow, being part of an evolving process, part of something I cannot truly get a handle on. Thus, I need to embrace the paradox rather than try to collapse it. To understand the flow and the paradox, I have touched upon complexity theories to illustrate unpredictability, irreversibility, and passage of time.

I have, based on my second narrative, discussed how Mead's understanding of the social self supports my understanding of my private dialogues, my exchanges with others, and the understanding that leading is developing in interaction with others. The notion of temporality and coincidence of frames of reference support my assertion that I experience moments of 'catalytic steps' forward, moments of 'bifurcations' points, where new meaning emerges.

In my following projects, I intend to look further into these intriguing and elusive processes where I appear to know what to do even if I don't know what to do.

3 PROJECT 3 — UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROCESS AND TIME

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard spent his life wondering about the meaning of life and trying to understand his role in his turbulent and ever developing interactions with other human beings, with God and the church, with other philosophers, and with powerful individuals.

Philosophy is quite right in saying that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other clause—that it must be lived forward. The more one thinks through this clause, the more one concludes that life in temporality never becomes properly understandable, simply because never at any time does one get perfect repose to take a stance—backward (Kierkegaard, 1843/2000, p. 12).

Kierkegaard points to not only the difficulty in understanding life but also the need to keep living, keep doing, keep going; he cannot rest to reflect because life does not stop while he is sorting it out. I believe that he illustrates a very fundamental aspect of human life, the aspect of living in a constant process and thus the inability to fully grasp and analyse daily events or brief moments in time.

In this Project 3, I discuss aspects of process thinking to make sense of events as I experienced them in my professional work as project manager on an international development project. Initially, I present a detailed narrative from an organisational change, which on the surface seemed very straightforward, but where I still experienced uncertainty about how to move on. I found myself being stuck with flickering recollections of the past and apprehensive anticipation of the future, then taking critical steps forward without knowing the outcome. I am curious to understand better which processes made me hesitate or act, which interactions hindered or facilitated development, and what decided the moving forward.

Initially, I investigate how *process thinking* may help to understand my actions and those of other actors. I address how I experience the development of the project and stakeholders' engagement as an integrated flow rather than distinct events. I discuss how prominent writers understand process and how this illuminates my experience. Secondly, I investigate how I experience that *time*, a key aspect of process, has a profound influence on my own actions, how recollection of pasts and expectations of the future were prominent in my perception of what was happening around me. I interpret the concept of time as discussed by various scholars and I investigate how, in the daily

processes of interaction between humans, coinciding *frames of reference* create novelty and new ways of thinking.

3.2 NARRATIVE—TAKING OVER LEADERSHIP IN A RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Our company had won a major rural development project in Central Asia in support of the local ministry and funded by our clients, two international financing institutions (IFIs). This was exciting as we did not have much experience in the region, so it was not in any strategy, but sometimes you go where your client goes. I took over home office responsibility three months after the launch of the project. It was not my preference as I had little knowledge of rural development, but someone had to take it on.

As team leader we had identified Jack, a free-lancer with an impressive CV. He had previously worked in the region for our company and he spoke Russian. He suited the bill perfectly, although he was not everyone's cup of tea and had a reputation for getting into conflicts. However, in a competitive bidding there is always a trade-off—the best CV wins the job. Also, as the previous assignment had worked out OK, we had proposed him for this one as well.

Initially, I maintained a somewhat hands-off approach to this project as with a strong team leader in place it should surely be running on its own. However, very soon Jack managed to alienate himself from the client, from the local beneficiary, from other partners, and from our national as well as international members of the project team. Over the next month, I had extensive communication with Jack in which he expressed how difficult and frustrating he found the project, the working environment, and all the stakeholders, including the client. He made no attempt to hide that he could run into trouble and that the implementation of this project would be an uphill battle. I found it very difficult to assess the reality on the ground. I was sure that it was an extremely difficult project, that he had his hands full, and that the (political) working environment was somewhat 'unusual'. On the other hand, this was why we had hired an experienced and well-paid professional consultant with a long track record and experience from the region. He was there to make things work, to find a way through—not to complain about all the problems. I had never met Jack, but the way he always wrote very long narrative-type emails and spoke at length on the phone, using rather verbose language, made me particularly weary.

One morning, I received a long-distance call from Mikkel, an old trusted colleague and one of our key technical experts on the project, the only one with experience from the country. Mikkel spoke calmly but passionately: 'Leif, we really have a problem here and head office needs to do something about

it'. He talked about the project, the team, the lack of progress, and our company's reputation. A high-level delegation from the client—the IFI—had arrived in the city on a monitoring mission, the members were now in the project office, and things did not look good at all. They seriously questioned Jack's behaviour and the project performance. The discussions had been heated and Mikkel had found it necessary to stand up and tell the client that 'as a long-term employee of the company I can promise you that we will definitely see this project through'.

I suddenly felt very tired and engaged at the same time. I realised that it was time to take the problems seriously. I felt grateful towards Mikkel but also guilty about him being rather alone in the mess and with the task to defend our position. I promised Mikkel I would take action and went to discuss the matter with my department head, Jakob. We discussed briefly the usual actions such as finding a replacement (which would take time), asking Mikkel to take over, or fight Jack's corner towards the client. I had, however, already concluded that either Jakob or I would have to take over immediately. I dreaded the idea of being on this difficult project—not at all in line with my other plans of working from a home office for a while. Jakob gave me a wry smile and said, 'Well, I can't really leave the department'. I recall that during our brief conversation my dread of taking over slowly became mixed with a feeling of having an opportunity to take up a challenge.

We initiated a meeting with the IFI project managers in London two weeks later and they welcomed the initiative. It was clear that if we had not done so, they would have called us. We listened to the clients' numerous complaints about Jack's behaviour, his initial draft reports, the interaction with the locals, the lack of project progress, and numerous other issues. We were aware that our company's professionalism was being questioned, a matter of serious concern to us. Jakob and I had worked together for many years on international development projects. Although we were part of a large company, our closely-knit team and our portfolio of activities were important to us. We therefore informed the clients that Jack would be replaced and that I would travel the week after to take over the project until a suitable replacement could be found. They were clearly surprised but also seemed pleased with what they presumably saw as our decisive action, stating that 'this is an offer we can't refuse'. The day after, Jakob sent Jack an email terminating his contract.

On a very early July morning, I arrived in Central Asia, jetlagged and rather tired from the overnight flight. I was somewhat apprehensive and curious about what to expect upon arrival, entering a new country and a new culture. I moved surprisingly swiftly through the immigration procedures and outside the arrival hall our project driver, a friendly young man in casual summer clothes, introduced himself and the project car, an old well-used German import. He took me on a 45-minute drive to the

city via a semi-tarmacked country road beautifully lined with tall poplar trees. A low morning sun illuminated the snow-capped mountain range appearing to be rising straight out of the plains just behind the city, and I thought that I could easily come to like this place. The driver took me to a rented flat in an ugly, old, grey, concrete apartment block. In my eyes, it looked more suited for demolition than for accommodation. He walked me up the raw, uneven concrete stairs, handed me the keys to an apartment and suggested that I get a few hours' rest after which he would pick me up later in the morning. I checked out the dark old Soviet-style (I guessed) flat and adjusted my initial positive impression of the city before snatching some sleep. As agreed, I was picked up just before lunch. As we stopped at a traffic light, another car came up next to us, the driver rolled down the window and greeted me with a friendly 'Hi, welcome to the city, I am Jack'.

We arrived at the project office which was in a basement flat and a bit of a dungeon—'The budget, you know'. I felt somewhat despondent, reflecting on how our competitive kind of business never really allowed for a higher standard of facilities or logistics. Jack introduced me to the 10-12 people working on the project—many more were still to be hired. I knew only Mikkel, and the remaining staff greeted me friendly but did not offer any opinions or comments about the situation. I would not expect them to at this stage.

Jack sat down at his usual team leader desk and I grabbed the empty one next to his. The facilities were quite basic, the team leader's desk being no different from the rest, but from the physical arrangement of tables and chairs it was obvious which one was occupied by the team leader. I did not suggest that we swap. In a way, this would be in line with a peaceful handing over, and I felt there was no reason to stress or demonstrate that Jack had been sacked.

Jack was about five years my senior, had a certain presence with big wild beard and scruffy clothes, not unusual for a team leader in the 'bush'—although we were still in the city. He started talking energetically (nervously?) and loudly about the ongoing activities, ways of mobilising the villages, the critical budget issues on the engineering design, the lack of money in the implementation budget, and so on. He appeared to be very sure about his ideas about how to run the project and I could understand how people around him might get weary of his style as he just talked over me, not listening at all.

I stopped him, suggesting that he gave me an overview of the practicalities, the office facilities, our stakeholders, and the project files. I also asked for a briefing about the project plan and the status of the inception report, which had been rejected by the client and was now an urgent issue.

I sensed that Jack was sad that he had been sacked, but in the previous weeks he had been expecting it might come to this and I was relieved that he did not express any anger or animosity towards me. He asked, 'So how long do you want me to stay?' In his contract, Jack had two months' notice, which meant that he would work at least part of this time.

I had previously been involved in laying off people and going through redundancy processes and I had found it extremely difficult, always wondering what I, or we, could have done differently to avoid such situations. I had also found it difficult to go through the time after such a decision had been taken.

I told Jack I wasn't sure, but as this was all new to me, I thought it would be very useful to work together for a period, say two to three weeks, to ensure that we had a good hand-over so he could provide me with a reasonable understanding of the nature of the project. I would need to come to grips with the management, finances, and administration immediately and it would be useful if he could keep other things moving, in particular the field work. We would see how it worked out and then we could review later. I did have mixed feelings about the arrangement, as in one way I quickly tired of talking and working with Jack, but I needed his expertise. I was aware that I had a lot to learn in a very short time.

I asked the office manager, Katrina, to call a staff meeting. I told the staff about the changes (Jack had already informed them about his dismissal) and how Jack and I would work together over the next few weeks. They were friendly and again they did not make any suggestions or statements and I wondered if any of them were concerned about their future role. Some of them were probably not up to the challenges we faced, but the selection or replacement of team members could be a little tricky, as the general director in the ministry had agreed with the IFIs that he should approve our local staff. In my opinion this was an unprecedented way of curtailing the project's manoeuvrability.

I later had a talk with Mikkel, looking to him for guidance. I believe, however, that there was not really anything new to be said—the project simply had to be reinvigorated before the client would come on another monitoring mission a few months later. I sensed that Mikkel was ready to go home for a period and I realised that I felt quite alone.

Katrina drove me back to my flat in Jack's car. He had bought an old banger in town and used it for private and project purposes. The project would then pay him rental each month instead of renting another—and presumably more expensive—project car. This was part of his contract, but I was always wary about any arrangements where personal and project finances mix. Katrina was very

talkative in a nervous sort of way, and I guessed she had concerns about her own position as she had been working closely with Jack.

Next morning, I went to the ministry with the local IFI representative to be introduced to the general director in charge of our project, who spoke to me for half an hour in a very aggressive manner. He complained about the project, Jack's performance, our company's performance, and he told me very directly that he would prefer us out and another company in (our competitor in the bidding process—I now wondered what they had promised him). I had been warned beforehand and knew what to expect, so I felt a moment of sympathy towards Jack, acknowledging that he had had an uphill struggle working with this guy. At the same time, I felt annoyed with Jack that he had not made my life any easier by alienating himself from the ministry.

Jack and I went through the project files, reports, communications, and so forth, and I realised that important letters and formal agreements were stored only on the hard drive of Jack's old private laptop, not on a central project computer. I now questioned Jack's use of his private laptop and I noted that it had been agreed that he would rent his private pc to the project (as this was far the most efficient for him, he explained). I felt annoyed, wondered who had convinced someone back home that it was not feasible to buy PCs on such a big project, and in my mind I now started holding some of these arrangements against him. At the same time, I knew very well that project budgets were always cut in a competitive tender.

We went through the key activities on the project. Jack had travelled around in the region and promoted a new concept for financing the water supply schemes. However, the central level, the ministry, would not allow this and we had now been informed by the IFIs that it was our responsibility to sort out the mess. Jack talked at length, kept explaining about the concept, how it had been used in other places. Frankly, I did not have a clue whether such a programme would work or not; the message from the client was that we had to 'dismantle it'. I tried to listen to Jack, aware of my own ignorance, but I also got restless. I sensed that I could not engage myself while at the same time feeling somewhat guilty that I did not listen when I had no idea myself which route to pursue.

We went through the accounts. Jack turned out the pockets of his tank trousers and his shoulder bag, displaying a staggering amount of U.S. dollars and local currency on his desk; these were the project finances and our cash balance. I stared in disbelief, feeling that somehow something was not under control. Jack explained that we did not use our bank account as we would have to *pay* interest

to deposit money, so when funds were transferred from head office every month he would immediately take out the monies and keep it in his personal bag. And no, we did not have a safe. I was not impressed at all and I told him so.

Salaries would be paid three days later, but for some reason Katrina's salary had already been paid a couple of days ago—just before I arrived. It can happen that staff ask for an advance, but I thought that somehow this did not look pretty. I challenged Jack on this and asked why on earth he had paid this advance—in particular, after he had been given notice and only the day before my arrival. The answer was not clear, he was visibly uncomfortable—well, he just thought that it would be OK, and she would be paid anyway, wouldn't she? I was not happy with this non-answer and requested that the money be paid back. She would get her salary three days later.

I wondered why I demanded this. I was concerned that I was now over-reacting and taking my anger out on Katrina. I had no intention of not paying her, was not sure yet whether she should be staying, so why did I ask for this? I did not wait for my own answer, I just asked Jack to get the money, I wanted to reconcile the books and I did not want any more flexible/practical/local (messy) arrangements. I believe that I did not want to be taken advantage of. Katrina came to me with a stressed look on her face, explained that she also thought it had been wrong, but Jack had insisted that she get the payment then.

The rest of the day, I was very uncomfortable. I realised that I was not happy working with Jack; he kept telling me about the project, and names, events, programmes, plans, problems were all presented to me in a somewhat unstructured manner, whichever way I asked the questions, and I remember that I stopped taking notes.

I needed to find out how long he should stay and this should not be for very long. But again, I was concerned that I did not yet have enough knowledge about the project, the team, the key issues, and main problems. Nor did I have the solutions to the problems. Alone that evening, I reflected on this uncertainty and recalled strongly the same feeling from other projects or events where I had hesitated because I had felt uncomfortable and could not see the way forward. I decided that the next day I would speak to him about making this handing-over period much shorter than initially agreed. I felt that I did not really want him in the office anymore.

Next morning, I tried to look at the reports, but I wasn't focused as my mind was elsewhere. Sitting at my desk, I started preparing myself for the confrontation, but I was unsure how to handle it, did not quite know how to say it and when to say it. Eventually, Jack sat down and I now told him that I had

been thinking about this and that I found it very difficult working alongside him. I had therefore concluded that he should leave now, not later as we had previously discussed.

‘Oh’, he said, ‘so you want me to leave now, already after today?’

I confirmed, ‘Yes, you should leave now’.

‘What do you mean by now? Do you mean *right* now?’

‘Yes, I’d like you to pack your bag and leave now’.

I explained again how I felt it difficult to work alongside him and that from now on I wanted to handle this on my own. Jack sat quietly for a moment. He was obviously hurt, but did not look angry. He asked if he could say goodbye to the staff and I said that yes, of course he could do that. We exchanged a few more words about the practicalities and how to keep in contact, after which he got up, packed his bag, said his farewells and was gone within 10 minutes. I called the team into the room and gave them a short briefing. Again, they did not offer any comments, but I did not worry too much as I now considered it to be my responsibility to facilitate an improved working relationship in the team.

I am not sure if I had planned it this way, but it happened very naturally. A few years earlier, I had been involved in walking someone out of the door although it did not feel right at the time, but I now sensed that my previous experience helped me to make the move and say the words. This time I felt it was the right thing to do; I was suddenly sure that Jack should not stay any longer.

I felt a sense of relief, drained but somehow content. I knew that I would now have an uphill job of getting this project going, but I felt that a major blockage had been moved out of my path. I had thought I would feel an element of guilt, but I did not. I had expected to feel that I had opened a new conflict, but I did not. I then realised that I felt positive about my action—a very strange feeling under the circumstances. I also realised how my concern for everyone, including Jack, had given way to my anger and to what I saw as a need to protect my company, my colleagues, myself, and the project.

For some days, I pondered over the sense of feeling content about my action, but I could not justify it or find the right words for it, I even felt a little ashamed; however, I could certainly recognise it from my past. I recalled how I had felt similarly in other circumstances in projects and in training courses. I recalled a very difficult one-week training course where I, as course leader, had been very consensus-seeking and conflict-avoiding, and where my three friends and co-trainers expressed their concern.

Or rather, when I eventually took some leadership and expressed myself clearly, they applauded it and said that ‘now we recognise you’. Not because they wanted direction, but because they could never be sure about my opinion or intentions. I recalled other events where colleagues had expressed their appreciation of my assertive role after a period of uncertainty or discontent where they had felt that I had been vague. I now reflected on how this might be a sense of taking leadership as I predicted it would be expected from me and as I would expect from myself. It was also a sense of being more authentic—even if the somewhat submissive role had also been part of me.

Two days later, I asked Katrina to leave the project. I carefully explained to her why. Fair or unfair, she was part of a history and I felt that she would not be able to work with our clients. She was sad, so was I, but somehow it was not so difficult for me this time.

3.3 THINKING IN PROCESSES

INITIAL UNDERSTANDING OF PROCESS

In the above narrative, one may, on the surface, see a simple intervention carried out by me as project manager, planned in advance in terms of content and time, without much uncertainty and where the only outstanding issue would be the date for Jack’s departure. What I see illuminated, however, is a more complex series of interactions of several actors and where the time perspective (past experiences, hopes for the future) has an influence as well. I am curious to understand the processes leading me as project manager to take action and dismiss Jack when I was not at all sure how to handle the situation.

Stacey refers that ‘process’ is defined as something going on, being reconstructed, a series of change or a course of action (2011). In my narrative, I see this played out in many different ways:

Firstly, I refer to the interactions between Jack and myself; but also colleagues, staff, and clients have an impact on the processes involved in the management change. My relationships with my manager Jakob and with a trusted colleague, Mikkel, were important to me and I was aware of the apprehension of the staff who did not know what would happen next.

Secondly, I briefly refer to the history of our team and a process of our company establishing this project in a new country, which again followed a history of developing our portfolio of activities over 20 years. Hernes describes how such a process may be placed in time and at a certain location, but it can be traced backwards or followed forwards in time, and it is impossible to tell where it starts or

ends (2014, pp. 282-283). Importantly, my own history also plays a role in the way I handle the situation.

Thirdly, I note how in the narrative I refer to the physical conditions and my own mood and recall how, on different assignments in the past, I have had varying experiences of the physical conditions and how this has influenced my sense of well-being.

In the following, I try to make sense of my experience through process perspectives as promoted by some key writers. These do not necessarily concur with each other. I further endeavour to describe my own understanding and position.

HERACLITUS' FLOW AND LUCRETIUS' ATOMISM

The old Greeks lay a foundation for the process of thinking of later and contemporary scholars. The philosopher Parmenides posited the permanent and unchangeable nature of the world, a view, which has had major influence on classic organisational thinking. Heraclitus opposed the Parmenidian perspective and is commonly seen as the founder of process thinking (Hernes, 2008; Stacey et al., 2000). Heraclitus suggested that continuous experience and process is what forms one's life and one's way of understanding the world, and he is usually credited with the metaphor that one cannot step into the same river twice, thus illustrating that the water is always new, the experience will always be different. Heraclitus illuminates my experience of venturing into a new country, sensing apprehension and excitement and the feeling that I was taking on a challenging task where I would need to take things as they came and where reversal was not possible.

I am curious about the idea of flow and why the novelty and change occur. The Roman philosopher and poet Lucretius sided with Heraclitus on the principle of movement but disagreed in his understanding of a world made up of flow and transition of substances (Hernes, 2008, p. 26). He was engaged in Epicurus' dilemma: The world is made of the void and of atoms that move with the same speed on parallel paths, but how will they collide—how will novelty occur? Epicurus' solution was the *clinamen*, the occurrence at uncertain time and places of small deviations in the atoms' courses (Prigogine, 1997). Lucretius suggested that streams of atoms would start forming new configurations and this emergence would attract other atoms to develop the final structures (humans, mountains, rivers). He thus introduced the notion of emergence and his ideas would much later be taken up by other philosophers, such as Alfred North Whitehead.

WHITEHEAD'S PHILOSOPHY OF BECOMING

The English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead is often referenced in discussions on process thinking (Chia & Holt, 2009; Hernes, 2008; Mead, 1932/2002; Stacey, 2011). He was inspired by the new theories of relativity and drew inspiration from Lucretius' atomism, suggesting that formation emerges spontaneously and attracts particles into its process (Whitehead, 1978).

Whitehead, in his philosophy of *becoming*, substituted atoms with *entities*—also termed *actual occasions*—which 'are the final real things of which the world is made up' (p. 18). An *actual occasion* is like a knife-edge of no real duration in time, an analytical construct describing actual experience. Whitehead assumed that the actual occasions are the building blocks of processes aiming to become 'one', after which they can be 'felt' by other subsequent occasions. This attraction forms the processes, and the *prehension* between the occasions is said to have a vector character and to involve emotion and purpose (p. 19). The togetherness forms *events* (or *nexus*), thus bringing together Whitehead's understanding of novelty and lived experience:

The ultimate facts of immediate actual experience are actual entities, prehensions and nexus. All else is, for our experience, derivative abstraction (ibid, p. 20).

In other words, discrete occasions of apparently no real significance are pulled together into what we experience as events. Whitehead suggests that an event exercises agency for a new event and that a higher intensity of 'feeling' gives stronger agency in forming of events, making it more probable that connections will take place. Events form 'data' for future events (Hernes, 2008) and in consequence, they embody the potentiality of other past events and therefore embrace the actual past and the potential future (p. 42). Once certain patterns are set in motion (according to Whitehead), they tend to enroll other events, take in data from the predecessors and add novel feelings of their own. I suggest that this understanding may somewhat be aligned with Mead's understanding of the present being informed by the past as described below, but an important difference is that Whitehead did not at all include the dynamics of human interaction and he did not discuss whether or how entities (human experience) change in the process.

My understanding of Whiteheadean thinking is that our project in Central Asia would be an event influenced by previous events and it would, in turn, influence future or parallel activities. Where classic theory may see each project in its own right and suggest that the required actions should be taken on a rational basis without reference to history, I understand Whitehead's position to be that

the history I have from other projects would inevitably play a role in my handling and my understanding of what was going on. The budget had been prepared without my involvement, I had just landed in this location and I had worked for many years in the same department towards which I felt a strong affiliation and responsibility. Jack's situation would be that he had worked with us before, he worked as a free-lancer, he needed to look after himself and he had useful experience from the ground. Also, the client's expectations and the general director's attitude served to set the scene. These events would have what Whitehead called *potentiality* and act into how we both (and others) played our roles in the process of handing over.

I believe that Whitehead takes an interesting perspective in seeing the connections between entities and events over time; how a project and its implementation is part of a wider and never ending process which also includes other projects, different stakeholders' ambitions, a political development, Jack's experience, my own personal history, and so on. I do find, however, that by referring to agency in everything—a direct continuation of Lucretius' atomism—he does not convincingly describe emergence and novelty. Further, I find it questionable that he does not include the human contribution to the events and their interaction. I believe that the narrative describes how Jack and I continuously changed our way of thinking during the process.

In the narrative, I refer to the importance (to me) of artefacts, physical objects such as the sunlit mountains or the grey, dilapidated, multi-storey houses; the old project car; the laptop, the office furniture, and the pile of money. I am aware that I include them in the story as means of illustrating my experience, but clearly these objects mean something to me and my appreciation of the situation. Physical objects, according to Whitehead, are not important as such but form part of a process and are shaped by the process (Hernes, 2008). The project managers' desks in the office were not just pieces of four-legged furniture made of wood. Bought cheaply, they signified a low project budget (and thus some constraints), they were the backdrop of cash being stacked up to my dissatisfaction, and they played a role in the power relations between Jack and myself. They would later become part of the narrative of the subsequent team leader's untidy office on what would become a long-lasting project. Also, recent scholars within process philosophy suggest that objects, artefacts, and materials perform some role in establishing and maintaining social relationships (Carlisle, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2013, p. 7).

I can relate to Whitehead's description of how objects come to play a role, and I can certainly recall how, under other circumstances, I have felt that the physical environment, horrible weather, or other practicalities have given me an initial perception of a 'good' or a 'difficult' project. I do,

however, have some reservations about the way Whitehead and Hernes appear to give agency to physical objects, nature, and events and how Whitehead sees everything as process. His dominant notion of time and process is coined 'passage of nature', alluding to his preoccupation with nature as the key element of his theories rather than intersubjectivity, the processes of relating between individuals. By omitting the continuous patterns of relations between individuals, I find that his way of understanding process does not adequately explain what happened in our project, where I was in a constant dialogue with Jack, Mikkel, and other actors and where this unplanned and evolving dialogue had a significant impact on our ways of acting. Stacey (2011) also critiques the Whiteheadian understanding of process as a kind of movement over time in which entities are *becoming*:

I think that there is a further implication, given a universe of interdependent entities, and this is that the movement of process always involves some kind of interaction between entities. So at its most basic, I take process to be the ongoing, interactive movement (the *how*) of entities over time through which these entities become, individually and collectively, the coherent pattern of activity (the *what*) that they are. Process is interactive movement, the *interaction* of entities, and what these entities are continually producing or creating is the coherent *pattern* of the entities themselves both individual and collective (Stacey, 2011, p. 321, emphasis in original).

Whitehead's interactionism implies encounters between irreducible entities—process or novelty may develop, but the entities stay the same. This understanding of process has typically led to the 'atomistic' perception of organisations, management activities, or project management. An atomistic understanding implies that a project is the sum of its parts and that single items (e.g. staff, work plans, resources) can be replaced with a predicted outcome and without major disruptions.

In contrast, as Stacey's suggests, the theory of complex responsive processes described below points to the recreation of the entities themselves in their interaction.

THE THEORY OF COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESSES OF RELATING

Entities are embodied human persons, and process is understood as responsive act of mutual recognition (Stacey, 2011, p. 321). This position forms an alternative way of understanding the process around the project office. I am conscious of a continuous dialogue between Jack and myself, initially through emails and phone calls and later in the office through meetings, informal chats or briefings, and eventually more intense discussions. I am also conscious how my dialogue with Mikkel continuously formed my perception of the situation and of my own role, and I suggest that our

interactions and my arrival created new meaning for both of us. At our last discussion, he did not offer any new perspectives but felt like taking a break from the project and this, in turn, made me feel that I was on my own. The staff in the office did not readily engage themselves in a dialogue, but this gesture was also a form of communication, and it contributed to a re-creation of meaning and perception of my role. Their gesture implied a recognition of me being the new, unknown manager, and I would similarly recognise their position and potential concern about the future (or relief that something was being done?). In the very present background was the continuous and critical communication from the local general director and the IFI.

In the narrative, I describe how these interactions form a developing pattern and decision-making process, but even if some paths are tentatively planned in advance, I observe that we would not know the outcome, and I note how my way of thinking would be continuously developing. I was prepared for a tense meeting with the general director, but I did not expect how this would trigger a spur of sympathy towards Jack. I had also expected an arduous period of working together with Jack but had not foreseen how his mere presence could make me feel paralysed or stuck.

Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (2000) offer a view of processes where complexity thinking can provide insight into human interaction. In their theory of complex responsive processes of relating, they suggest that processes in an organisation and between humans are not directed by an outside authority but are signified by many and constant interactions between all involved and with the outside environment.

They draw analogies from the relationships in complex adaptive systems, described for instance by Holland (1998), where key features are inherent uncertainty, the paradox of predictable unpredictability, agents' self-organisation, and the so-called 'butterfly effect' (described in my Project 2) where small differences in initial conditions may potentially have significant consequences. Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw combine this with insights of the American psychologist and pragmatist George H. Mead into human interrelations (1934/1967) and the work of German sociologist Norbert Elias, who took an interest in how society changed and developed, and who suggested how power plays at some level are always present in interactions between people (1991/2001).

In a complex responsive processes perspective, organisations are therefore not boxes, lines of command, and feedback mechanisms where the powerful few can determine and implement the future. The perspective is instead that organisations are widespread patterns of interactions

between people, with narratives and themes evolving in the myriad of interactions between humans—both those in the organisation and people outside (Stacey & Griffin, 2005).

The evolving communication and generalisations, which can be described as propositional and narrative themes, can be described as the following thematic patterning of interaction (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 7).

- *Complexity.* Healthy and creative human relating is complex and uncertain, no matter what the situation is.
- *Evolving.* The existence of social objects (general tendencies for a number of people to act in similar ways in similar situations) and values mean that humans will make choices on how to particularize them, which leads to differences and conflicts. As human interaction is non-linear, small differences may be amplified into new and different understandings. In this way, social objects and values keep evolving.
- *Self-organising and emergent.* Humans interact with each other by their local principles, and coherence emerges without a plan or blueprint. In the numerous local interactions between people, social objects and values emerge and will eventually be particularised in the local interactions.

In the context of my project, I see how taking over the leadership of the rural development project is actually a myriad of interactions between Jack and myself, Jakob, Mikkel, Katrina, clients, the general director, staff, and others. These widespread interactions are verbal utterances or body language, emails and phone calls, reports, and so forth. I can see how themes of dissatisfaction from several sides emerge, and how narratives of a very verbose team leader or an office manager caught in the middle are developing.

I acknowledge how the uncertainty is explicitly illustrated in my narrative, not just as my uncertainty but rather as the unexpectedness of Jack's and my reactions, a dialogue where I cannot know what Jack's response will be to my gestures and vice versa. Similarly, I cannot know in advance how the interactions with another stakeholder, the general director, will play out and how it influences my mixed emotions after the meeting.

The complexity described by Stacey and Griffin alludes to the phenomenon that small deviations in our communication can lead to unexpected and quite different responses and actions (the 'butterfly effect'). 'The future is under perpetual construction in the interaction between people, and it is the

interaction between differences that amplifies these differences into novelty' (Stacey, 2011, p. 323). Our differences in attitude to cash management amplified our difference in understanding of whether it was possible to work together. I suggest that I came from head office and other projects with a history of 'cash management', a social object, which signifies a generalisation, the 'way we do things here', which had evolved through numerous local interactions with colleagues in my company, and which I particularised in the actual situation. I now acknowledge that had I worked over a period in the bush with Jack or others facing difficult logistics my values and the social object of 'cash management' might have been different.

I observe how developments in the project hand-over caused new situations, escalation of conflict, possibly my own renewed assessment of the situation, but, in particular, renewed interactions and exchange of gestures between Jack and myself. As Stacey says, I may construct 'wholes' felt as unity of experience, but these are in reality myriads of micro interactions between others and myself (Ibid, p. 321).

I describe the profound experience of feeling relieved after Jack left the office, and I notice how I relate my earlier experiences of similar situations. In the complex responsive processes view, mental activity is not considered to be inside a person but rather a process of interaction between humans. This suggests that my sensation was a continuously evolving process of relating to Jack, to the clients, the staff around me, and probably my colleagues back home. I can accept this position as I also refer to earlier experiences where friends commented on my behaviour and I realise that in our mutual interaction I was constantly trying to accommodate, finding consensus and gauging what was the right thing to say until I—through our interaction—found a way to be more assertive.

A SUMMARY OF PROCESS PERSPECTIVES

I have initially described an atomistic understanding of processes, primarily promoted by Whitehead, which suggests that novelty and change are created through the coming together of events with potentiality, thus creating further events and eventually order. An atomistic understanding also implies that a project can be seen as a sum of its parts, where individual entities can be replaced or changed. Although I find that this perspective illuminates some of my experiences, I do suggest that it does not take proper account of human dynamics and I further question that, in my understanding, it gives agency to objects in nature.

I then argue how my experience of the interaction between actors in the project can be described by the theory of complex responsive processes, a perspective which understands process and

organisation as a myriad of interactions between humans in a continuous and developing pattern and where small differences may lead to significant developments.

In my professional practice as project manager, I am highly aware of the role of these myriads of interactions between actors and tend to pay attention to them when seemingly unimportant messages have the potential to escalate conflicts. Increasingly, I engage myself in paying attention to and bringing up the patterns of communication in the working teams and with clients.

3.4 TIME—THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRESENT, ITS PAST(S) AND ITS FUTURE(S)

I have in the narrative alluded to past experiences, and I will now discuss how *time* was important and how it can be understood from the perspectives of different writers. Stacey states that the understanding of time is important as the narrative patterns of interactions are recreated over time (Stacey, 2011, p. 322).

I am curious to investigate how time impacted the way we interacted in the project office and how I take a step forward in an uncertain situation. I note how I refer to my evolving experiences over a few months, how I refer to past experiences of uncertainty, and in particular how I am intrigued by the strong sensation of relief after having dismissed Jack, a paradoxical sensation of novelty and having experienced this sensation before.

THE ARROW OF TIME

In Project 2, I described how I was taken by Prigogine's *arrow of time* and his pointing to how nature is developing in an irreversible way (1997, pp. 2-7). Prigogine pointed to the physics of non-equilibrium processes, dissipative structures, where *irreversible* processes would occur, and stated that

We have now learned that it is precisely through irreversible processes associated with the arrow of time that nature achieves its most delicate and complex structures. Life is possible only in a nonequilibrium universe (1997, pp. 26-27).

These reflections have led me to acknowledge the irreversibility of the processes in which I am involved as a project manager. In the project office, I might unconsciously have been looking for the 'ideal' way of taking over management, which could be described in advance and where the processes could be traced backwards. The reality was that of an emerging process where my

perception of the situation and my personal feelings were continuously changing, a process where there was simply no way of going back. The moment I asked Jack to leave, it could not be unsaid and it had implications. Stacey refers to the unpredictability in complexity theory:

It is because of the potential for small differences to escalate that we cannot retrace our steps. In other words, it is because time has the structure of the living present that we also experience the arrow of time (2011, p. 320).

I reflect how, in my management roles, I have often hesitated in order to seek consensus, ensure that I made the 'right' decision, in order to feel that everyone was on board, confirm that no one was upset, and so forth. I now wonder if this can be related to an understanding arising from rational teleology (as described in my Project 2), namely a wish to be able to backtrack, to be able to undo what has been done and/or predict outcome in advance. I believe that discussing and analysing the arrow of time has made me increasingly cognisant of the fact that my next steps cannot be undone.

Prigogine refers to how problems of time and determinism have been at the core of Western thought since the days of the old Greek philosophers. He refers to how thinkers and philosophers since the 19th century have increasingly engaged themselves with the issue of time. I will now take up his lead and discuss how prominent thinkers have offered perspectives on temporality, which aids my understanding of the experience in our project office.

BERGSON'S NOTION OF DURÉE

French mathematician and philosopher Henri Bergson forcefully promoted the notion of *durée*, duration. Where the English word duration implies a past with a start and ending, Bergson's *durée* signified what he called *real time*—time as experienced rather than measured. A minute trying to catch a train is experienced very differently from a minute waiting for the final whistle in a football cup tie or a minute watching one's child being born. None of these minutes are experientially comparable; they have a clear qualitative difference (Linstead, 2014, p. 222). Bergson was thus focusing on the qualitative feature of *real time* in contrast to the quantified and *spatialised time* (or *spacetime*) of a clock or a diary (Bergson, 1913/2005). He stresses that his real time is not something mysterious: '... it is the clearest thing in the world: *real duration* is what we have always called *time*, but time perceived as indivisible' (1946/2007, pp. 124, italics in original).

I suggest that my perception of an arrival in a foreign city—the very early morning fatigue, the apprehension of the newness, and the appreciation of the scenery—can be illuminated by this notion

of real time, and it certainly resonates with my recollection of a strong qualitative experience of taking it all in, and with my sense of the advent of something new.

For Bergson, the problem of time is not that of 'being', stability, and permanence, but of 'becoming', change and the future as the unfolding of novelty. Past, present, and future as memory, experience, and anticipation form duration where the real and the virtual meet. Duration is not measurable like spatialised time and 'cannot be predicted—it is full of exciting or terrifying potential' (Linstead, 2014, p. 223). Bergson points to the importance of *intensity*, the level of feeling that we experience in the duration. He advocates the *force of time*, the *élan vital*, that affects this intensity—quality, feeling, or sensation, and he reminds us to consider lived experience instead of abstract ideas. Guerlac explains Bergson's point that

We cannot know time cognitively. We can only know it through the way different qualities feel to us at different times (Guerlac, 2006, p. 80).

In short, Bergson posits that novelty occurs in moments of *real time*.

Bergson's notion of *durée* certainly strikes a chord with me. In my narrative, I can appreciate how at certain moments I experienced the flow of time with intensity and feelings and without much sense of spacetime or clock time. Most important for me is how Bergson posits that being in duration is where we experience *freedom* and we cannot explain this through concepts. If we start explaining freedom, we eradicate it because it was only there in the moment of immediate experience where time flows in only one direction, says Bergson (Guerlac, 2006, p. 85). We must listen to our experience because we do act freely when we act passionately and decisively, and we learn to know freedom when we acknowledge these moments (Ibid, p. 104).

When reading Bergson's explanation, I certainly recall the feeling of freedom I experienced after having asked Jack to leave. In my narrative, I describe how I was quite content and how I was puzzled about this feeling. Reading Bergson now makes me use another term—that of feeling freedom after having felt somewhat paralysed by the mere presence of Jack. I do not allude to the freedom of being in charge, but to a freedom of being authentic and using my resources, acting, as Bergson says, 'passionately and decisively'. I can trace back this feeling of freedom to other situations with friends, colleagues, or trainees where, as described in the narrative, I experience how I move from being somewhat submissive into being more assertive. Situations where other actors have expressed their appreciation that I 'eventually acted as Leif'.

Bergson suggests that to act freely is not to choose between two (or more) options as such a choice never really happens because the alternatives are never really given in advance (Guerlac, 2006, p. 83).

...in reality there are not two tendencies, or even two directions, but a self which lives and develops by means of its very hesitations, until the free action drops from it like an over-ripe fruit (Bergson, 1913/2005, p. 176).

Bergson would not have heard of complexity theory and he does not really give an explanation why the over-ripe fruit suddenly drops, but his rejection of two contrary paths and his reference to hesitations certainly describes the decision-making process I experienced. He locates the hesitations in the individual but then goes on to suggest that we have two selves:

Hence there are finally two different selves, one of which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation....But the moments at which we thus grasp ourselves are rare and this is just why we are rarely free....Hence our life unfolds in space rather than in time: we live for the external world rather than for ourselves: we speak rather than think; we 'are acted' rather than act ourselves. To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration (1913/2005, pp. 231-232).

When Bergson uses the expression that we should 'act' rather than 'being acted', I note how he thereby clearly acknowledges the influence of other humans on our actions and decision-making. I can relate the 'being acted' to my uncertainties and concerns about making a decision, and I can also directly relate to my Projects 1 and 2 where I describe similar lack of confidence and hesitations.

I do not suggest, however, that I can solely 'be acted by others'. I would rather suggest that this can be linked to Mead's 'I-Me' dialectic as discussed in my Project 2. Mead describes the constant interplay between my spontaneous actions and utterances, expressed through the 'I', and the conditioning effect of the 'Me', my understanding of the *generalised other's* perception of me. In short, if I relate to Bergson's 'being acted by others', I may qualify this by saying that in such situations I tend to pay very high attention to what I believe others' think of my actions.

The statement 'To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration' describes very clearly how I felt when I had asked Jack to leave. I note, however, that Bergson tends to observe a Cartesian dualistic split between internal experience and that of the outside, a position on which he disagreed with Mead. He also suggests a very individualistic perspective of process in contrast with that of Mead who focused on the social aspects of human dynamics. I will below

describe how Mead posits that the described feelings, actions, or decision-making are part of relational processes and not located in the individual.

MEAD'S PHILOSOPHY OF TIME

The narrative describes how the handling of a single event was linked to my past as well as my concern about how to move on over the next three months. Mead understands the present as a point in time, which is influenced by our understanding of the past as well as our vision of the future. He also emphasises the continuous change of the past and the future as new meaning and understanding continuously develops (Mead, 1932/2002). He sided with Whitehead and Bergson in the view that a 'knife-edge' understanding of points in time does not address human experience of temporal continuity:

...no such knife-edge present exists. Even in the so-called specious present there is passage, in which there is succession, and both past and future are there, and the present is only that section in which, from the standpoint of action, both are involved (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 194).

Mead developed his idea of the *temporal passage* as a series of events 'that thrust themselves into the otherwise undifferentiated flow of time, providing a mechanism for making sense of experience' (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 277). Mead sees an event as a turning point where something new arises and the temporal passage is then a series of events where the past and the future are reconstructed and thus giving new meaning to the present.

I suggest that my narrative by its nature describes a series of temporal passages, but also that key moments were significant for making sense of the events. I describe how, over a period of some months, I tired of Jack's emails or verbose way of talking and tired of his general handling of the project, but I also indicate how I was in doubt, which for me implies that these problems were not sufficient to change my way of managing. I tried to ignore or excuse Jack's annoying communication—after all, he had the experience, and he was in the hot spot. Apparently, turning points such as Mikkel's phone call or Jack's handling of cash created a new sense of my previous uneasiness and of Jack's communication. In Mead's terminology, we were involved in mutual exchanges of gestures and responses, which created new meaning in the continuous flow of interactions. I also describe earlier experiences of laying off staff and these pasts would clearly inform my perception of the present.

After asking Jack to leave, I had a feeling of being content and I could recognise the feeling from earlier situations of moving from uneasiness to assertiveness. I now wonder if these earlier—past—

experiences informed my present, even unconsciously. Similarly, I note in my narrative how I was cognisant of the need to move the project on—into the future—as soon as possible and within deadlines. This may also have informed my perception of the present.

Mead does not suggest that the past and the future exist in the present but that they ‘condition’ the present and the future.

...we are particularly interested in presenting the past which in the situation before us conditioned the appearance of the emergent, and especially in so presenting it that we can lead up to new appearances of this object. We orient ourselves not with reference to the past which was a present within which the emergent appeared, but in such a reinstatement of the past as conditioning the future that we may control its reappearance (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 46).

I understand Mead to say that we invigorate the past to serve us in the present. Also:

The question arises whether the past arising in memory and in the projection of this still further backwards, refers to events which existed as such continuous presents passing into each other, or to that conditioning phase of the passing present which enables us to determine conduct with reference to the future which is also arising in the present. It is this latter thesis, which I am maintaining.

The implication of my position is that the past is such a construction that the reference that is found in it is not to events having a reality independent of the present which is the seat of reality, but rather to such an interpretation of the present in its conditioning passage as will enable intelligent conduct to proceed. It is of course evident that the materials out of which that past is constructed lies in the present (ibid, p. 57).

In other words: Our recollection and interpretation of the past is constructed to be useful for our understanding of the present and to find a way to move on into the future; and we use our present knowledge and our wish for the future to construct that past.

I thus suggest that in the project office, in the moment of increasing irritation, and in the interaction between Jack and myself, the past was reconstructed as I now became more assertive and decided that, yes, he actually had been annoying and I was right to be irritated. I wonder if the past, the problems on the project, and Jack’s past behaviour were continuously being reconstructed to allow me to make my move, to enable what Mead calls ‘intelligent conduct to proceed’. I also wonder if my wish to move on (into the future) also helped to reconstruct the past, my perception of Jack’s performance.

Through my writing, I have become increasingly interested in understanding how past experience and the time element can be said to influence my way of acting in the present. I suspect that most people would say 'of course it influences your actions', but I have the feeling that such a statement may be based on the concept of a fixed past. I suggest that a deepened understanding of the living present (with a constantly re-edited past and future) may play a role in my perception of myself and thus my way of leading in interaction with others.

Mead's suggestion that the interpretation of the past is conditioned to allow one to proceed could imply that I primarily 'apply' past moments of uncertainty and lack of confidence to inform the present; in other words, I habitually adopt a concern that I am not sufficiently qualified or not sure what to do and how to proceed. However, this also suggests that when I eventually do find the confidence and take 'decisive action' (in Bergson's words) or 'intelligent conduct to proceed' (in Mead's words), I will again reconstruct a different past, another frame of reference (a successful one?) where I recall assertiveness or confidence. I believe this is an important insight for the understanding of the role of a manager, especially in situations where he or she experiences uncertainty and unpredictability.

A SUMMARY OF THE TIME PERSPECTIVE

The arrow of time provides me with an increasing appreciation of the irreversibility of process and the consequences of one's actions. I experience significant passages of time which can be illustrated, I believe, through Bergson's qualitative understanding of time, *durée*. I appreciate his suggestion that this duration has force, but I am also observant that it is a very individualistic perception of my experience.

I believe that in my professional practice I am slowly moving to an increased acceptance of novelty and trust that the future can be handled even if it cannot be predicted. In practice, this means that even if I do reflect on the past I am more focused on the next steps. I do not deny responsibility for past actions, but I also accept that they were taken at the time to the best of my ability through interactions with others.

I can identify past experiences which inform my present conduct, and I suggest that the perspective of living present allows me an improved understanding of the interplay between past, present, and future. This also implies that we continuously redefine the past, not only to understand better, but to suit our need for making a sensible way into the future.

For my professional practice as a consulting engineer, this means that I am less concerned about finding an ultimate ‘truth’ about the past. A project manager needs to exercise practical judgement, and I believe this is strengthened through an increased understanding of the living present perceived by different actors. Our project managers in the field in Central Asia or similar locations will often be exposed to unfamiliar, uncertain, or unpredictable situations and we rely on the manager’s ability to act on their own and judge sensibly based on their experience.

3.5 MEAD’S SOCIALITY OF THE PRESENT

Mead wished to develop an understanding of how novelty occurs and took a keen interest in the work of Whitehead and Bergson (who were both mathematicians) to see if he could develop a more holistic philosophy by incorporating thinking from the natural sciences. However, he still found that the intersubjective—the social—element was not adequately covered by the deterministic space-time proposed by Whitehead or Bergson’s ‘inner flow of consciousness’. To explain the separate, temporal experiences and sociality in nature, Mead turned (inspired by Whitehead) to Einstein’s relativity theory and developed a concept which is somewhat questioned by Murphy (in his introduction to Mead’s *Philosophy of the Present*) who finds it speculative and daring (Mead, 1932/2002, pp. 24-27) and by Cook who (quoting Murphy) uses the words ‘highly dubious’ (1993, p. 159). My understanding is that Mead was trying to find explanations for what he experienced as non-explicable moments of novelty where something suddenly makes sense, or where one experiences new insight and an understanding of other perspectives:

Moreover, by emphasizing the significance of “taking the role of the other” in the formulation of the doctrine of relativity, Mead illustrates an important respect in which the social character of human thought allows nature as an organization of perspectives to appear in reflective human experience (G. A. Cook, 1993, p. 159).

This ability of ‘taking the role of the other’ thus offered a suggestion of where novelty occurs, as Mead was interested in the emergence of order-disrupting novelty in human practice. This emergence of novelty is also observed in the interaction of agents in complex adaptive systems where analogies serve Stacey and his colleagues in the description of complex responsive processes (2000).

Mead suggested that simultaneous but separate temporal experiences or *frameworks* would condition novelty and emergence, offering the actor a repertoire of choices in a given moment (B.

Simpson, 2014, p. 278). This creative turning point was what Mead called *sociality of the present* (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 86). Mead suggested two, apparently different, understandings of sociality:

First, I turn to the temporal *past-to-future movement* which I suggest occurred when, in the project office, I moved from one frame of reference, being accommodating and uneasy, to another frame, taking on a role of leadership and, in particular, having a sense of satisfaction and assertiveness.

Mead says,

The social character of the universe we find in the situation in which the novel event is in both the old order and the new which its advent heralds. Sociality is the capacity of being several things at once (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 75).

I reflect on the suggestion that I harbour pasts of uncertainty as well as assertiveness and how these are activated in forming my present. Simpson says that ‘sociality is a defining quality of presents, as every event simultaneously juxtaposes more than one temporality’ (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 278), which may be a way of understanding how a strongly experienced passage signified the presence of two or more very clear frames of reference, surfacing at the same time. I can also recall the feeling (frame of reference) of initially working with a hands-off approach from home in what Mead would call the ‘otherwise undifferentiated flow of time’, until the pressure from the project as well as from my management was too high, and I started envisaging myself taking on the assignment in earnest to make the project move forward (another frame of reference?). Also, I note how I felt it easier to lay off the office manager, Katrina, possibly because my frame of reference has shifted, it had been re-informed by the past—the experience of asking Jack to leave.

Interestingly, this first description of sociality, the temporal *past-to-future movement*, does not involve other actors as Mead stays with the suggestion that an individual can harbour different *temporal* frames of reference. However, even if I initially locate much of my experience in the individual (myself), I am profoundly aware that I continuously worked and reacted in response to the gestures of other people, my colleagues, my boss Jakob, Mikkel, Jack, the clients, and the office staff. What they said and did not say was important to me—and vice versa—and had a direct impact on how I interpreted the meaning of things—how *we* created meaning of events.

Therefore, I turn to Mead’s *second* understanding of sociality related to his work on intersubjectivity, where he asserts that the self is socially constituted and that the social precedes the individual. Simpson says that Mead’s suggestion is that:

...for any event to be social, it must exist simultaneously in at least two different frames of reference—for instance, the different frames of gesturer and the respondents in a conversation. (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 281)

Taking this perspective, I recall the moment I communicated with Mikkel who was on the ground in the project office, that is, with a very different frame of reference. I knew Mikkel well and his gestures, the voice, his calm but engaged explanation, and the strong words he used made me sense his position. I responded by taking him seriously and, in our continued exchange of gestures and responses, I suggest that I was able to perceive it just as he was able to perceive my situation, having worked together before. I suggest this is what Simpson and Mead refer to in the quote above.

Similarly, in my initial conversation with Jakob, I apparently harboured two different frames of reference, that of wanting to stay home and that of needing to go, an element of making virtue of necessity. This created novelty, the wish to go and make an impact.

Simpson brings together Mead's apparently two different ways of understanding novelty, the *temporal* and *social* perspectives. They are linked by his understanding that *selves* who are conversing are themselves dynamic reconstructive processes with a continuous movement of gesture and response through an private dialogue (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 278). I take this to mean that my perception of novelty through a *temporal* movement such as, for instance, arriving and taking on a new role in new country—a changed temporal frame of reference—is also *intersubjective*, as it is continuously being reconstructed through my own private dialogue and the continued exchange of gestures and response I have with others. I believe that I observe this understanding of sociality in the previous project as described below.

In my Project 2, I included a narrative of a meeting with a contractor where I described a dialogue where no one could foresee the outcome and where I felt a high degree of uncertainty. I suggested that the coincidence of frames of reference supported my assertion that I experienced moments of 'catalytic steps' forward, moments of 'bifurcation points', where new meaning emerged. I primarily ascribed this to the coinciding of several temporalities, that is, the past-to-future *temporal* understanding of sociality.

I now extend this understanding of sociality to suggest that in the meeting room with the contractor the frames of reference of the MD, myself, and others were converging. I suggest that through the exchange of gestures, the MD and I at a certain time came to a point where he was aware that we were aware of his position and vice versa. I suggest that at a certain point we had the same sense of

what was possible and what the other part needed. I refer to the situation where we through dialogue established that I was interested in understanding his needs and he (I believe) accepted this position to be genuine. Mead suggests that sociality relies on one's ability to take the role of the other and this may have cognitive connotations. However, my understanding is that he refers to the situation of having the same perception or at least the capacity to perceive the other's perception, a coincidence of frames of reference. As described above, I also suggest that reaching such a point is not only caused by a dialogue between the parties but also our internal changes. This understanding of sociality describes well, I believe, situations where one experiences novelty, a move forward, that something 'clicks'. It should also be emphasised that such a novelty and move forward could also be escalation of a conflict as illustrated in the discussions between Jack and myself. This escalation into conflict is not necessarily a comfortable experience, which underlines that novelty does not occur only in an atmosphere of harmony and appreciation.

3.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I have in this project discussed how I consider process thinking a way of describing an organisational change. I have argued that such a change is an interplay of many different actors based on different experiences and different circumstances.

I initially describe an atomistic understanding of process, primarily promoted by Whitehead, which suggests that novelty and change are created through the coming together of events with potentiality, thus creating further events and eventually order. This atomistic understanding of process suggests that a project is a sum of many parts, which can be identified individually and, if necessary, changed or amended. I find that this perspective illuminates some of my experiences; however, I do suggest that it does not take proper account of human dynamics, and I further question how it (in my understanding) gives agency to objects in nature.

I argue how my experience of novelty and decision-making in the project can be illustrated by the theory of complex responsive processes, a perspective which understands process and organisation as a myriad of interactions between humans in a continuous and developing pattern and where small differences may lead to significant developments. I recognise how this perspective of complexity is in direct continuation of my conclusions in Project 2 and one that I will pursue further in my next project.

Today, in my professional practice as project manager, I am increasingly aware of the role of myriad interactions between actors and tend to pay attention to them when seemingly unimportant

messages have the potential to escalate conflicts. Increasingly, I engage myself in paying attention to and bringing up the patterns of communication in the working teams and with clients.

I believe that the notion of the arrow of time provides me with an increasing appreciation of the nature of process. I have described how from an unconscious wish for reversibility I move towards an appreciation of an ongoing change and irreversibility. I believe that in my professional practice I am slowly moving to an increased acceptance of novelty and trust that the future can be handled. In practice, this means that even if I do reflect on the past I am more focused on the next steps. I do not deny responsibility for past actions, but I also accept that they were taken at the time to the best of my ability through interactions with others.

I experience significant passages of time which for me have been illuminated through Bergson's qualitative understanding of *durée*. I appreciate his suggestion that this duration has force and creates novelty, but I am also aware that it is a very individualistic perspective, which is not in line with my experience of constant interaction with other humans. I acknowledge how Mead points to how the continuous interaction with others must impact such experiences.

I describe how I can identify past experiences which I believe inform my present conduct, and I suggest that Stacey and colleague's understanding of the living present allows me an improved understanding of the interplay between past, present, and future. For my professional practice, this means that I am less concerned about finding an ultimate 'truth' about the past. As project manager, I need to exercise practical judgement, and I believe this is strengthened through an increased understanding of the living present perceived by different actors.

I describe how novelty is created through sociality, meaning coinciding frames of reference, which include both temporal changes and that of different actors' gestures and responses. I argue that novelty, for instance, occurs when, for an individual, a frame of reference related to past experience coincides with the frame of reference for future needs. I also describe how moments of clarity in humans' interaction can be described as coinciding frames of reference, the ability to perceive each other's position, resulting in a move forward, a move, which may be seen as positive or may be a step into conflict.

The insight that sociality (in Mead's terms) is a prerequisite for the occurrence of novelty has implications for my professional practice as a consulting engineer and project manager. Firstly, I suggest that an understanding of sociality may facilitate a project manager's interaction within a team of people. Secondly, sociality implies a much more social understanding of leadership

compared to a traditional way of seeing a 'heroic' leader acting with all the necessary skills and insight. A social understanding suggests that project management takes the form of a continuously evolving and negotiating dialogue, meaning that the project manager will not know in advance what will be the outcome of this process. I see this as an important insight for managers in the field who, to a very high degree, need to act on their own based on their own sound judgement and ethics.

4 PROJECT 4—THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

4.1 INTRODUCTION — MY INQUIRY LEADS TO A SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP

My overall research question is that of asking: How come that when I apparently do not know which course to take, I still find myself doing something? In my Projects 2 and 3, I suggest that novelty and meaning develop in the continuous exchanges with other actors, my colleagues, clients, and many others, and I point to the inherent unpredictability and complexity in my project work. I refer to Mead's understanding of sociality, the ability to be in two different frames of reference at the same time, and I suggest that the capacity of sociality facilitates a manager's interaction within a team of people and that I have come to appreciate the importance of relationships in project work.

During the process of writing, I have often been asked to explain or define how I see myself in the role of a leader, for instance as a strong, paternalistic, facilitative, inclusive, or other type of leader. Whilst writing and discussing my projects, I have become increasingly aware how I have discussed questions of identity as a leader and how this is interlinked with the identity and actions of other actors. I suggest that to understand my own actions—that of doing something when not sure what to do—it is important to better understand aspects of identity and how it is related to leadership.

In the following, I present some narratives from my work as a team leader on projects in Central Asia. I describe the experience I have shared with others, and I subsequently try to make sense of this experience with the support of writers in the field of identity and leadership.

4.2 THE SOCIAL ACT OF RELATING

In this section, I will—based on an initial narrative—discuss my experience of what G. H. Mead calls the *social act*, the detailed interaction between my colleagues and myself, leading to new ways of thinking and relating to each other.

NARRATIVE 1—CONVERSATIONS IN A MINI BUS

One early evening, just after sunset, our 18-seater mini bus moved slowly down a winding road leading through the icy mountains of Central Asia to the capital two hundred kilometres away. I sensed an atmosphere of tiredness but also content and tranquillity as some were resting or sleeping, one was reading, and a couple were talking quietly in the local language, bundled up in lots

of clothes, sipping green tea from their flasks. We were team of 10 international and national consultants and we had just finished our last mission to the central mountain town where we had finalised a study for a highly needed improvement of the old, dilapidated water supply system. I recalled briefly how we had been extremely pleased when we won the assignment six months earlier and how we now hoped that we could continue in this region together.

I noticed how being in the minibus gave me a sense of being in a team as we benefitted from the chance to relate to each other and chat away during the long drive. I sat for a long time next to our local social consultant, Anastasia, and talked about how we had come a long way together, how she had helped me during my first difficult visits to the country and how we had done quite a few trips together over many years. She smiled, grabbed my hand in the dark and said that soon she would invite us all for her 60th birthday in her home village. We then discussed how we could keep developing our work, finding more projects, maybe by involving some of our former colleagues in the next assignments. Anastasia is one of a team of national consultants that I have worked with over the years on several projects that we have been able and fortunate to contract and implement, and I am highly aware that the dedication and loyalty of our national consultants is a major contributor to our success in this region. They have become my friends, and I feel a strong loyalty towards them. They work only on our projects, which means that these assignments and the income are very important for them and their families. We pay them quite well compared with local standards because we want to keep them close to us and, well, because I think it is the right thing to do. I also feel an obligation to keep developing new projects for them and to make sure they have work to do, and at the same time I am very aware that their good work and success has an impact on my role in the company and on my identity as team leader.

I moved back in the bus to sit next to Richard, our very senior international engineer. I chatted with him about the meetings that we had had with the authorities earlier the same day. Richard commented on how the client genuinely appreciated that we made the extra effort, always had an extra and final meeting about the proposed investments, if needed. Richard himself was the one who always made this extra effort and insisted on the meetings, and he knew that I knew. As had happened before, I sensed that by making the comment he was looking for a compliment, which would often stop me from giving just that. I briefly wondered why I usually felt like that. However, I looked at him, felt this was important to me, and told him how much I appreciated his very dedicated way of working. He would always walk the extra mile up the hillside and he always took this extra meeting with the authorities to ensure that they were in full agreement. He immediately commented

on the good team effort. I looked at him and said yes, I agreed, but now I was actually giving him a compliment. He paused, looked at me quietly, nodded and said, 'Thank you'. I sensed a moment of friendship and mutual respect.

I have known Richard for maybe 30 years. He is some years older than I am and used to be a senior director in the company. He was an authority, energetic, humorous, knowledgeable, and always pushed himself very hard—as well as others. One day, he was demoted and went abroad working on my projects, employed in my business unit. This felt odd to me as I used to see him as being senior to me, but we established a good relationship. Two years later, I was also replaced and called Richard to tell him. I remember how he quietly said, 'The advice I got was stay in the ring!' I stayed in the ring, we both took up other positions in the company's international expansion, and sometimes, when we occasionally met, we discussed our feelings about the whole process, whilst we observed how those who got rid of us slowly disappeared, one by one. Years later, I asked Richard to join us on our Central Asian projects. I was glad to have him on the team even if I was apprehensive because I knew from colleagues that he could be quite forceful, could be very critical, and demanded a lot from himself as well as others. I sensed that he enjoyed having the chance to do the technical stuff, and I always reflected on how it was important to me that he appreciated the way I managed the team, even if he might have done it differently. In the bus, in the dark, I sensed that the flow of our exchange of gestures were part of an ongoing process levelling our relationship and its inherent power balance.

Later, in the bus, I talked to Hanne, our international social consultant and my colleague through more than 20 years. We talked at length about the project, the politics of our department back home, our private lives, and exchanged a few comments about what to improve for the next mission. We were now mentally planning the next project. I wondered if Hanne would also like to take on the role of team leader on these projects, but as I sometimes said to her, then I could not come along! I do not have any technical expertise apart from project management, whilst she is a skilled professional in her own field. Somehow, we did not take that discussion in earnest. I wanted to maintain the role as team leader, and I kept thinking about how I acted in that role in relationship with others, how I perceived myself, how others perceived me, and how we interacted.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATIVE

I have included this narrative because I realised the experience meant a lot to me and because it sets a background for other narratives, which I include later in this project. I think I am trying to describe

some emotions and a sense of belonging that I feel to what has become a certain type of assignment in a special place and to a number of people who have become important to me over the years. For me, this story points to a sense of temporality, that is, the history of my work as team leader in close cooperation with others, and as discussed in my Project 3, I see our professional work in processual terms rather than as atomistic, discrete events. This is not one single, discrete job; it is an element in a series of assignments that are developing over time and which has much more importance to us in the team than just having something to do. Further, it points for me to how I constantly reflect on my role and identity as team leader in a continuously developing relationship with others. There is no big drama in the bus, yet I find that some of the many micro-interactions are significant for the process of leadership and for my understanding of identity. I will describe this in the following, initially by discussing what the American psychologist and pragmatist George Herbert Mead calls the *social act*.

MEAD'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL ACT

I try to understand what is going on in the interactions I have with my colleagues and how it impacts the way I see leadership and my own role in leading. I note how the exchanges with Richard have stayed with me, maybe because they were important to me, maybe because I was aware of and reflecting on them as they took place. What was it that made me want to compliment him, why would it be important to me, how did it influence our relationship, and why did I call it 'levelling our relationship?'

To help me analyse and understand better, I turn to Mead and his understanding of the *social act*. Based on a Hegelian understanding of relationships, Mead does not locate meaning and development of thought in the individual but in the continuous and complex flow of gestures and responses, which are inseparable phases of the social act and which do not have a specific beginning or a specific end.

I was conscious of my long-term relationship with Richard as I approached him with a compliment. I realised, when I started talking to him, that even approaching the subject created an emotional response in me, which would possibly be similar to those in him, those of my appreciation as well as what I anticipated would be his appreciation. This is what Mead calls a 'significant symbol' (1934/1967, p. 45) as a mediator of conversational meaning-making (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 282). When I felt that Richard somehow deflected the compliment this was another turn in the meaning-making. I sensed that he appreciated the compliment yet felt slightly embarrassed having 'asked' for it (this was my perception of course). This called out new emotions in my body, those of appreciating

his modesty and wanting to emphasise my point. This exchange of gestures, (including facial expressions and body language) was not just a sequence of gestures and responses, of course, rather a more complex flow of interactions where every interaction was a response in what Stacey and co-writers call the living present, a present formed by our understanding of the past and our anticipation of the future.

I will take another turn on this understanding of complexity in the gestures and responses. My utterances were not just based on one initial impulse in the form of a bodily sensation as I registered that my emotions developed as I spoke. I noted how my words to Richard in turn made me slightly more emotional as I spoke (many people will recognise this effect when they make a personal speech), and I was aware how my spoken words became an impulse to my emotions, which then again would mean something for my choice of words and way of speaking. The American pragmatist John Dewey (a friend and colleague of Mead) described the phenomena in an article about the *reflex arc concept*, in psychology a classic understanding of a linear relationship between stimuli and response (Colman, 2001). Dewey rejects what he calls 'our preconceived and preformulated ideas of rigid distinctions between sensations, thoughts and acts' and argues that 'sensory stimulus, central connections, and motor responses shall not be viewed as separate and complete entities in themselves, but as division of labor, functioning factors, within the single concrete whole, now designating the reflex arc' (1896/1982, p. 263). Dewey illustrates his point with a description of how a child reaches for the flame of a candle. The view of the flame is a stimulus to the emotions and to the eye, which stimulates the hand and the arm, but in turn the hand getting nearer to the candle stimulates the eye to focus on the approach of the fingers and the sensation of danger (or disobedience?) also becomes as stimulus to the body and the hand.

Dewey thus points to a complex process of mutual stimulus and response, and returning to Mead and to the interaction with Richard, I argue that our social process was continuously being developed, not just as a linear sequence of gestures and responses but also in our continuous making sense of the process and our internal dialogues. As I started speaking to Richard, I became increasingly conscious that expressing my appreciation was not one of me being a consultant admiring the experienced manager. There was another form of recognition as I expressed my appreciation in the role of team leader, thus also acknowledging myself and in a way indicating to him that I did that. This was, of course, not something that I thought out and planned, but I sensed it when it happened and I could articulate it afterwards in my reflections. I also reflected on how I did not readily accept his deflecting of a compliment, and by saying 'I am actually giving you a

compliment' I somehow indicated that I 'called his bluff' and indicated that I could 'see through him'. I have no idea whether he perceived the situation in the same way, of course, but I am pointing to how I felt that these micro interactions played a role in the continuous development of our relationship. The exchange of gestures made me feel slightly more confident as team leader and, I believe, renewed our relationship and way of communicating.

4.3 THE FORMING OF IDENTITY THROUGH RECOGNITION AND A SHARED HISTORY

Before I go further into a discussion of identity in relation to others, I will present a second, contrasting narrative, which at the time left me somewhat frustrated, puzzled, and questioning my role and identity as team leader.

NARRATIVE 2—AN UNEXPECTED REQUEST

We were on our first mission to Laketown on a new assignment and I was again the team leader for the team of 10 national and international consultants. I stood in the small courtyard outside the premises of the local water company discussing with Richard while our six to eight colleagues were busy in the field or at meetings gathering data on finances, social conditions, or environmental issues. We gazed towards a clear blue sky and the snow-capped mountains a few miles uphill from the town and discussed future water resources in light of the projected climate changes. Richard was pondering over the water company's wish to draw additional water from rivers in the mountains, and he was very concerned about proposing such a significant investment as we did not have any historical data for the volume or regularity of the stream flows. We could initially do with an assessment of the magnitude of some of the catchment areas—which we did not have. Data are scarce in this region—or at least difficult to get access to.

Suddenly, Richard turned to me and said that, now, here was a job for me to do: He needed a rough estimate of the size of the catchment area and why did I not spend some hours doing an assessment based on Google Earth satellite images, and he could then compare with other well-described areas in the hills. This would give him a basis for making some calculations and taking the discussion further. He then suggested that I could do this in the evening—OK?

It did not sound at all like an idea; I clearly heard it as an instruction.

I was somewhat taken aback. I did not expect such a request and answered something like: Well, yes, I could have a look at that, would look into it. We then chatted about other issues and carried on

with the work. On these missions, Richard and the other consultants keep themselves very busy in the field, whereas I, as team leader, try to maintain a hands-off approach, so Richard probably knew that I would soon be dropping down to the guest house to do some desk work. Often, on this kind of project, the team leader will also take on another role, such as economist or engineer, usually resulting in an excessively high workload. I take on the team leader role only to be able to look after the team, the budget, edit the reports, plan, and maintain client contact.

I immediately realised that I had negative feelings about the exchange, and a series of emotions seemed to appear at the same time, such as embarrassment, irritation, and inadequacy. I felt that I had been given an order, wondered if Richard had implied that I was not busy compared with the rest of the team. Then, I immediately wondered why I had just accepted and felt subdued, wondered if I'd failed to fulfil my role as team leader. Did I feel belittled? I also wondered why I did not react differently and then thought about what an alternative answer could have been? Was he right to be dissatisfied (if he was), was I right to be annoyed? I was also aware that Richard has 40 years' experience of being a manager and naturally takes the lead—especially if no one else appears to do it. I reflected on why my first reaction was that of feeling inadequate before being annoyed and why Richard could have such an impact on me.

Later in the afternoon Richard asked me if I had had a chance to look at the catchment area and I answered that no, I had had other stuff to do and I would ask our environmental specialist to do it as he was the Google Earth wizard. 'OK, fine,' said Richard, and we did not discuss it further. Again, I wondered why I did not just suggest this in the first place. I was also aware that I did not take the opportunity to discuss our earlier exchange with him.

In my Project 3, I was intrigued by the statement by Henri Bergson about acting rather than 'being acted'. Obviously, in this situation, I felt being acted—in Bergson's terminology—instead of acting myself. As part of my research enquiry, I have now moved to a different understanding of such a micro-interaction; namely that it was not Richard who was 'acting' me but that the 'acting' developed in the continuous flow of gestures and responses which go a long way back. Referring also to Dewey's understanding of impulse of response, I realise how also my (social) expectation of his expectation was influencing the emerging action.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATIVE

I have discussed this incident with a few colleagues and friends who take on the role of being team leader and find that many have similar inner conversations about their own inadequacies or anxiety

around the power configurations in their teams. Seemingly trivial micro interactions influence our way of gesturing and responding, the social act. I therefore believe that such an experience of being 'buffeted around' is generalisable in my professional practice. The narrative makes me reflect on two main themes in relation to identity.

First, I note how I apparently feel concerned if Richard does not recognise me in my role as team leader and the work I am undertaking. I am also cognisant that his actions call out certain reactions in me that I recognise very well but about which I still feel puzzled. I have always been very resistant to taking 'orders', being told what to do, and I note how it depends very much on who asks me. I reflect on how I would most likely happily have taken up the little job if I had been asked in a different way or by someone else, with whom I have a different relationship. I am originally a hydrologist, have looked at many catchment areas and would normally consider it good fun to try to find and use such a feature in Google Earth. I also suggest that my hands-off approach might prompt Richard (or others) to act in a certain manner.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor posits that our sense of identity requires recognition by others (1991, p. 45). He emphasises how the genesis of the human mind is not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, and, referring to identity, he suggests that 'We define this always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us' (Ibid, p. 33). By our 'significant others' Taylor refers to parents and presumably other close relatives, but I would suggest that it also signifies that it is important to me what others, whom I value, think about me and whether they recognise me.

The German philosopher Axel Honneth also suggests that human subjects owe their identity to the experience of intersubjective recognition (1995, 2014). He builds his work on Mead and the German philosopher Hegel (and the British relations psychologist Winnicott) and develops the idea that when humans struggle to gain recognition from their interaction partners, they are at the same time developing themselves morally, socially, and ethically (Zurn, 2015). I acknowledge how these aspects are at play in the mini bus in my interactions with Richard, Anastasia, and Hanne, as well as in my discussion with Richard below the foothills. I have, however, in the interest of space constraints in this project, chosen not to take this discussion and analysis of recognition any further, but what is important for the following discussion is to acknowledge that this aspect is part of my personal development in interaction with others and therefore also forming my identity.

Similarly, working together on projects with Richard, Hanne, Anastasia, and other colleagues over a lengthy period has had an impact on my identity and, I believe, on theirs. Below, I will develop my inquiry into a better understanding of the time perspective and what I call narratives of my identity as well as those of others.

My *second* reflection on the narrative is how I apparently tried not to stay in a subdued mode but somehow resisted this tendency and maintained a dialogue with myself about what had happened (again!). I will, later in this project, discuss how I often sense a shift in my self-understanding in interaction with others.

4.4 CONFLICTING SELVES

I have presented two narratives describing contrasting experience of own self-understanding. In this section I will initially present and analyse a third narrative which describes a situation—a process—that made me wonder and reflect quite a lot on how I, in my relations with colleagues, tend to move between different levels of confidence and different levels of focus on either myself, others or the process.

NARRATIVE 3—A MEETING WITH MANY IMPRESSIONS

We were on another mission to Laketown, preparing a workshop for all stakeholders to present our findings. After the event, we would stay for another night and a full working day as it was very important for us to consolidate our work together before travelling to the capital. I had called for a team meeting two hours before the workshop and our three engineers came just in time, straight from another meeting. I had just sat down when Richard—still standing up—opened the meeting quite loudly and suggested that we should immediately talk about logistics. The three engineers would not have any further meetings on the following day and it made more sense for them if we all drove back to the capital on the same evening straight after the workshop. They could then work in our local company office all of the following day. Also, he said, Alexei (our local engineer) would be happier going back the same day (for family reasons, I presumed, as this was always an issue).

I was taken aback and felt rather irritated. We had several points to discuss, in particular the workshop with 50 participants starting in two hours, and I felt that Richard immediately hogged the agenda and the chairing of the meeting. We would often in our meetings just talk openly about what we wanted to do in an unstructured manner, but we were 12 of us together, and we had very short time to conclude, so some leadership was needed, I felt. Somehow, this opening was very forceful

and set the agenda and I felt it was difficult for anyone to speak up against it. I was aware of the classic power balance between international and national consultants, who were not eloquent in English, Richard's mother tongue. I sometimes wondered if Richard was aware of his strong presence. I knew that once back in the capital, the team would easily be scattered, so I was not keen on going back today. I vaguely noted how Richard had played the 'Alexei's-family card'. Somehow there also seemed to be an underlying message that the engineers did not appreciate the need for input from others and vice versa. I sensed from Hanne's expression and body language that she was not impressed at all. I knew she would always opt to stay together on location.

I noticed my own feelings and thought process. I was initially very uncomfortable with Richard 'taking over *my* role' as the team leader, but quite quickly this changed into being uncomfortable with what I felt was messing up the plans. I was concerned about my ability to bring this to a sensible conclusion in a very short time and I also sensed that I did not want to conclude with a decision that would make some unhappy. I was also painfully aware that I was now (again) trying to locate all these responsibilities in myself, aware that decisions are made in the mutual interaction, even if I would be the one who had to conclude.

I stepped into the discussion, leaned forward at the table, spoke louder and began chairing the discussion. Richard was eager but appeared to be fine about this. I wanted others to join in and take some responsibility as well, felt that it was important to see what would emerge. I asked for opinions, no one really spoke against the early departure and soon we concluded to travel the same evening, acknowledging the engineers' need for a dedicated working session. I started concluding half-heartedly that we could travel the same afternoon, well in advance of nightfall. Then, suddenly, Anastasia spoke up. She had kept quiet until then, but now told us that she had planned to stay here for the weekend as it was her home region. Another local consultant, Choiton, spoke up (in Russian), she also wanted to stay here. I felt that the dynamics changed. Hanne stepped in, as she wanted to keep working with Anastasia, wondered how much time was needed. Could they exchange by mail? I sensed she was not happy, which confirmed my experience that she would normally opt for keeping the team together. As usual, I was in doubt; somehow, I hated to just change the original plan. I realised how I unconsciously had hoped for consensus about what to do but I was also aware that in the group of 12 people some would possibly want me to decide.

I noticed how I slowly became more preoccupied with what I felt was reasonable and fair towards most consultants and their work, in particular, towards Anastasia. Would it be justified to suggest that her presence was not that important for the meeting next day? There were good reasons why

we had planned the extra day and a rushed departure would for certain disrupt the work of the sociologists.

I sensed that the group was now in favour of staying, and I eventually concluded that we should stick to the original plan and we would benefit from working together in the big room we had occupied in the hotel. I sensed how I (deliberately?) used the words ‘I honestly feel that it will be better for the team work’. To my surprise both Richard and Alexei immediately accepted. In his rudimentary English Alexei smiled and said, ‘No problem’.

Just after the meeting, I reflected on this. I noticed how Richard had been very powerful about his wishes but then readily agreed to the general preference and my conclusion. On the flight home, I asked Hanne how she had experienced Richard’s intervention. She replied that she had been annoyed that Richard and the other engineers had been so focused on their internal needs, as the project was just as much about working together across disciplines. I mentioned my sentiments about how Richard had initially hogged the chairing of the meeting. She paused and said, well, now that I mentioned it, this was noticeable, but she hadn’t really paid attention to it. She was annoyed with the idea of changing the plan, not with Richard’s style. I then reflected on how Richard’s ‘hogging’ of the meeting was very much *my* perception, possibly developed through my own sense of identity and of my personal narratives.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATIVE

The narratives made me reflect on two main issues in relation to identity.

First, how I reacted to Richard’s and others’ gestures with an initial sense of my own inadequacy and wonder why this happened. I sensed a moment of looking like a weak team leader, of not knowing what to do; even though I am not aware that I did anything ‘wrong’ when we sat down for the meeting. I also sensed a feeling of not being in control. Interestingly, I am usually quite comfortable with not being ‘in control’, as I trust the team’s ability to come together and move forward and, I suggest, my own ability to participate in this process. In Central Asia, many things are going on in different languages; plans are changed without my knowledge, and we often joke about the feeling of ‘being in charge but not in control’. I am, therefore, curious as to why this need initially arises in the situations described in relationship with others.

Second, I note how my sense of self changed during the team meeting. My initial reaction was one of inadequacy, irritation, dented self-esteem, or alike, that is, a high focus on myself. Gradually, my

focus changed to being more engaged in what I thought was sensible and reasonable for the work and for the team members in terms of practicalities and the work ahead, even if I still felt uncomfortable with the discussion, did not hear too many voices, some views sounded half-heartedly—I did not feel a consensus. Then, when Anastasia spoke up, I immediately felt a strong concern about her needs and how we, the international consultants, behaved towards the local consultants. I was, for a moment, pretty much engaged in the ‘other’; however, I slowly realised that my genuine concern for the well-being of Anastasia and Choiton was certainly mixed with my own sense of not wanting to hurt people, not wanting Anastasia to be upset with me. Apparently, I had again mixed my focus with my sense of discomfort.

When we eventually decided and I concluded on the way forward, I sensed that there was acceptance because of a sense of fairness, a decent treatment of others, and simply a need to conclude. I am also aware how I invested some of my own feelings in my concluding arguments and wonder if this was part of a mutual negotiation of identity?

So, which kind of identity do I display as a leader? One who is easily subdued, one who wants to be in control—or the opposite? One who relates to the team members in a paternalistic way or who is concerned about upsetting people? One who is skilled at facilitating a meeting to a sensible conclusion or one who is afraid of making decisions? I suspect all aspects are at play. Also, how is this sense of identity developed and perpetually negotiated in the relating with my colleagues?

Therefore, in the following section, I will try to develop an understanding of *identity*. After a brief introduction, I will discuss Mead’s understanding of the self in the sense of identity and I will afterwards inquire into my experience of continuously moving between ‘different’ selves in relation to my colleagues.

4.5 UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY AS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE SELF.

I understand identity as an interpretation and reflection, not as a given identification or one single understanding. In his seminal work *Being and Time* the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1953/2010) introduces the notion of ‘Dasein’, which may be interpreted as ‘being’ in the sense that a human can reflect on and relate to his or her being and ask about its own nature (Ibid, pp. 7-9). This is the basis for many interpretations of selfhood, self or identity, and the ability to reflect on one’s own experiences.

The Danish psychologist Svend Brinkmann has engaged himself in the discussion of identity in the postmodern consumer society (Brinkmann, 2008). He describes (referring to Erikson (1968)) how identity has been a rather open and elastic understanding of a process where an individual develops an individual *self* and at the same time develops a sense of belonging to a group (Ibid, p. 18). Brinkmann also sees identity as an individual's reflexive self-interpretation of his or her personal *biography* (Ibid, p. 22). My reflections on my narratives have therefore led me to focus on two aspects, self and temporality, when in the following I discuss how identity is interpreted by different writers and how it makes sense for me.

I will initially introduce Mead's understanding of identity—or the self—as I find his theory of intersubjectivity further facilitates my understanding of the narratives.

MEAD'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL SELF

Self and self-consciousness

Mead was instrumental in developing the understanding that the self and identity are developed through intersubjective recognition (Honneth, 1995, p. 71). In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934/1967, p. 140) Mead suggests (in line with Kierkegaard) that one's self has the characteristic that *it is an object to itself* and this self is essentially a social structure and arises in social experience. It describes the process of being aware of oneself and should, as Brinkmann says, be understood as a reflexive relationship (2008, p. 25).

Self-consciousness is then

...an awakening in ourselves of the group of attitudes which we are arousing in others.... refers to the ability to call out in ourselves a set of definite responses which belongs to the others of the group (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 163).

Mead thus stresses the importance (and inevitability) of relating to oneself through others' perspectives and reactions (the 'generalised other'), from which follows that communication with others becomes central to one's self-consciousness and identity.

Self-consciousness, on the other hand, is definitely organized about the social individual, and that, as we have seen, is not simply because one is in a social group and affected by others and affects them, but because...his own experience as a self is one which he takes over from his action upon others.

...

It is the social process of influencing others in a social act and then taking the attitude of others aroused by the stimulus, and then reacting in turn to his response, which constitutes a self (Ibid, p. 171).

It can in between be a little difficult to understand Mead's distinction between self and self-consciousness, but in the following I understand self to be the *process* of taking oneself as an object and the self-consciousness as the actual *awareness* of that self.

The *attitude of others* is central to Mead's philosophy and an integrated element of developing the *generalised other*, which describes part of one's continuously developing reaction based on one's perception of how others perceive him or her.

I now reflect on my self-consciousness in the minibus, the sense of satisfaction, of being in tune with team members, of playing a constructive role in relations with my colleagues, and of maintaining a role of team leader. I immediately note that what I think of as *my* self-consciousness is very much an experience formed by the social interaction.

I was conscious of my long-term relationship with Richard when I gave him a compliment. I described how I felt that I expressed my appreciation, thus also acknowledging myself (as team leader) and showing him that I did so. I thus note how—again referring to Dewey's perception of impulse and gesture—the act of giving the compliment simultaneously aroused a new perception of both the gesture and the anticipated response. In Mead's terms, we created meaning in the exchange of gestures influencing the other in a social act, taking the attitude of the other aroused by the stimulus and then reacting in turn to the response, an ability which constitutes the self. I note how my sense of self in relation to Richard is being developed through these interactions, and the same, I believe, is happening to Richard when he expresses a keen interest in being involved in our projects.

I find it valuable to discuss what Mead calls the 'I'/'me' dialectic, an intrinsic part of the self, where the 'me' represents the perceived group of attitudes of others in the community, whereas:

The "I" is the response of the individual to the attitude of the community as this appears in his own experience. His response to this attitude in turn changes it. As we have pointed out, this is a change which is not present in his own experience until after it has taken place (Ibid, p. 196).

In the exchange of gestures, both Richard and I respond with 'I', which is immediately caught up by the 'me'. I notice how possibly the safe ground in a minibus with an air of mutual satisfaction apparently facilitated that I complimented Richard (through the 'I') and how I in the same instant

sensed that I was doing it and sensed another perception of myself—‘me’. This sense of self, I think, was an awareness of me acknowledging myself as well as being acknowledged. This perception would not have been the same if I had spoken to the bus driver or to the door! By this, I point to how I understand the dialectic and thus the self to be socially created through and through which is a radically different way of understanding recognition compared to being something one can give or withhold from others.

In the later and contrasting incident, looking up the mountainside outside the water company, I was conscious of discomfort and a lowered self-esteem when I felt that Richard handed me a task, and even later I had yet a third experience at the meeting when my sense of self moved swiftly from being belittled to that of needing to ‘sort out’ the situation and eventually to look after what I thought was morally right. Apparently, a sense of self is not that constant?

Mead says:

We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances...There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience (Ibid, p. 142).

So, according to Mead, the significance of this is the changing social process. My sense of self depends on the circumstances and obviously on the people with whom I am involved. Mead further discusses a two-stage development of the self from childhood to adulthood with an increasing appreciation of one’s wider environment, and I can wonder if the sense of being subdued or focused on one’s own needs displays reminiscence of the early stages of self-development. Mead describes how the generalised other is not only what one perceives that others think one should do, but has become an integrated part of one’s perception of oneself:

when taking the attitude of the other becomes an essential part in his behavior—then the individual appears in his own experience as a self; and until this happens he does not appear as a self (Ibid, p. 195).

For me, this points to what I call my tendency to denigrate myself and accept a certain perception of myself—in the narrative I wonder why I ‘did it again’. Mead points to habits, for instance by saying that ‘There are whole bundles of such habits which do not enter into a conscious self, but which help to make up what is termed the unconscious self’ (Ibid, p. 163).

I find it interesting to investigate my apparent resistance to feeling subdued. As Mead says, we have an ability to surprise even ourselves. Below the hills, in my conversation with Richard, I apparently resisted internally and tried to fight the habit. I realised that I was not irritated with Richard, I was irritated with myself and irritated with a history of reacting in similar manners. I reflected on why I did not immediately say, 'Yes, that's a good idea' or alternatively, 'No, but I'll ask someone to do it'. I was annoyed that I took up the fight only in an internal dialogue.

Mead distinguishes between the case where the perceived attitude of the other becomes part of the self and the situation where the individual reacts against the attitude of others. He states that the individual has rights but also duties and can react to the community. The attitude of the other is as this appears 'in his own experience as a self', meaning that it does not necessarily truly represent others' attitude. What I also take from this is that we constantly, in our gestures and responses, in our interaction with others, are being formed while we at the same time form others. Mead refers to an active resistance:

If one puts up his side of the case, asserts himself over against others and insists that they take a different attitude toward himself, then there is something important occurring that is not previously present in experience (Ibid, p. 196).

Mead here talks about how one reacts towards other actors, but he also concerns himself with the internal dialogue of individuals, and I suggest that articulating to myself (and later writing about it) is a way of maintaining this dialogue. In Laketown, the first move towards 'others' was to articulate that the environmental consultant was the right person to do the job, and I have later noticed—possibly through my work, reflections, and writings—that my reaction in similar situations has changed to a less dismissive and passive resistance. This process, I believe, is changing the sense of self and my identity as a team leader.

Mead's understanding of the social and the asocial selves

Mead describes how conflicts may arise between what he calls the social and the asocial (impersonal and the personal) aspects of the individual self. Both are, of course, socially derived, but whereas the social self will be supporting the ethics of a given society, the asocial self represents a feeling of superiority and will cause disruptions in the society (1934/1967, p. 321). I do not believe that an active resistance necessarily means that one feels superior, but I suggest that Mead points to the ever-ongoing disruptions and changes creating novelty. In some cases, just the basic sense we often have of 'what about me?' may cause a little disruption and novelty.

Mead discusses role play between actors and suggests that ‘it is through taking this role of the other that he is able to come back to himself and so direct his own process of communication’ (Ibid, p. 254). Callero (2016, p. 346) points to how Mead (1938/1972) suggests that not only does action define a role, but the act of classifying or naming a role itself directs action. It is the behavioural response towards the role that establishes its functional identity and gives it its meaning. By this I am suggesting that behaving in a more prosocial² role as a leader can be self-reinforcing. *Acting* prosocially in response to the team’s gestures called out responses that made me forget my preoccupation with a hurt ego or concern about not being ‘in control’.

I am not claiming that I always know which act will be considered prosocial by others, but I do reflect on the fact that *doing* something seems to have an impact on my sense of self-esteem.

As suggested in the introduction to this section, I will also include a discussion of the importance of history in relation to identity and leadership

MEAD’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SELF IN TEMPORALITY

I refer to Mead’s understanding of temporality, elaborated in *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932/2002), in which he describes our present as continuously being informed by our perception of the past and our expectations for the future (and vice versa) (described in my Project 3). Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (2000) use the term living present which I find gives an excellent sense of the depth of our temporal experience of the present. Mead does not suggest that the past and the future exist in the present but that they ‘condition’ the present and the future. Mead also says that our recollection and interpretation of the past is constructed to be useful for our understanding of the present and to find a way to move on into the future, and we use our present knowledge and our wish for the future to construct that past.

I imagine that the brief exchange with Richard below the mountains called out in me a sense of the present informed by the past such as aspects of a history from youth or childhood related to taking instructions or it may be related to earlier concern towards senior managers about fulfilling my professional role. Similarly, I am becoming convinced that in the team meeting I reacted momentarily

² *prosocial behaviour* meaning ‘any behaviour that is positive and calculated to promote the interest of society’ (Colman, 2001)

in a present which was being informed by a past which could be related to others' expectations of me being in control or it could relate to me not wanting to displease team members who had planned their work and private lives around staying in town. Similarly, the present was continuously being informed by my expectations for the future as I recall an instantaneous concern about us not getting ready for the workshop two hours later.

Referring back to Mead's description of the social structure of the self, I find it valuable to stress again how he posits that the selves can exist only in relationship to other selves:

Selves can only exist in definite relationships with other selves. No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 164).

I understand Mead to say that one may experience a self when in solitude, but even this is developed through social interaction, and one's private dialogue will constantly be related to one's generalised other, the perceived attitude of others developed through language and reflection. However, these others must be entering or have entered my experience at some stage. Based on Mead's position, I suggest that my experience of self and my identity in relation to the national staff is being developed through years of close collaboration. I have found it difficult to explain to peers (other researchers) how my perception of being a project manager and team leader can vary and change slightly depending on whether I work from home office in Denmark for a long time focusing on developing our business and our skills or whether I spend many hours in a minibus with local staff, feeling highly responsible towards them and their families, wanting to pay them well and wanting to find more assignments for them. In this way, they 'enter as such into my experience' and take part in forming the self.

I will briefly mention that some contemporary scholars question that the self is only developed socially. The Danish professor of philosophy Dan Zahavi refers to an *experiential* self which precedes the social self, suggesting that we all have some experience which is not related to the social (Zahavi, 2008, 2014). In Project 1, I refer, for instance, to a sense of self during my lonely hill walking and to some extent I find Zahavi's position interesting. In relation to my inquiry into my practice, however, I fully appreciate the overriding experience of intersubjectivity and will focus on this.

SUMMARY OF MY UNDERSTANDING OF MEAD'S PERSPECTIVE ON SELF

Based on Mead, I understand self as a reflexive capacity to take oneself as an object to oneself. It is formed in the social act as it is continuously forming and being formed through the interactions with my colleagues and it develops through stages. I experience different selves according to whom I work with, social circumstances and the passing of time. My perception of the present is constantly being formed by my history, that of my colleagues and our mutual history.

Mead based his theories on Hegel's philosophies of social interaction, and I believe that Hegel can give me yet another level of understanding of how recognition and what he calls 'being oneself in another' plays a role in forming identity. I will briefly describe this in the following.

4.6 HEGEL'S 'BEING ONESELF IN ANOTHER'

Hegel's basic claim is, says Honneth, that for individuals to reach each other, have a dialogue, it is necessary that 'ego and alter ego react to each other by restricting or negating their own respective, egocentric desires: they can then encounter each other without having the purpose of mere consumption' (Honneth, 2014, p. 15) and he quotes Hegel: "recognition"—the reciprocal limitation of one's own, egocentric desires for the benefit of the other' (Ibid, p. 17).

This strikes a chord with me. Recognition is not just praise or a promotion. I clearly sense how being talked to and respected as an equal is what is felt as recognition, thus developing identity. I now recall how communicating with Anastasia in the bus was a moment of sharing narratives and willing each other, thus—in Hegelian terms—voluntarily negating our 'egocentric desires'. Similarly, I used in my narrative the wording that Richard and I were levelling our relationship through our exchange of gestures when I thanked him for his efforts.

This reciprocal negation is what one needs to change reality through the activity of one's consciousness, says Honneth. I suggest this describes the sense of 'encounter each other' and communicating at a level where one can go a step further and, for example, ask new and hitherto unspoken questions.

Honneth takes his explanation a step further:

For Hegel, 'recognition' is not the intentional content of a desire or need, but the (social) means that satisfies a subject's desire to experience its own capacity to modify reality (Ibid, p. 18).

Again, this certainly resonates with my experience—that recognition as such is not a need but is *what allows us to use our capacity*.

I immediately reflect on my narratives in previous projects: In my Project 3, I described how, after having dismissed Jack and started acting more freely, I had a clear *déjà vu*, a recollection of how friends and colleagues in the past have said that ‘now we can recognise you’ in the sense that they acknowledged the way I spoke and acted as leader in relation to them. They might not always agree, but they accepted my judgement and thus the word *recognise* would not only mean ‘having seen before’ but it would also mean recognition in Hegelian terms: The way they related to me and I related to them allowed me to use my capacity and vice versa. Similarly, in my Project 2, I describe a conflictual negotiation with a contractor where I sensed that we started reaching each other when sharing frames of reference in Meadian terms. I suggest that this can be linked to the sense of reciprocal recognition and a double negation of own desires. This did not imply that we gave up our financial or technical claims but that we made an effort to understand the other’s position in the conversation.

In one of his major works, *Philosophy of the Right* (interpreted and commented by Axel Honneth (Honneth, 1995, 2000, 2014)), Hegel wrote in detail about the individual’s ‘rights’. Hegel’s book concerns itself with political rights and he engages himself with the concept of the ‘general free will’. He uses friendship as the paradigm for the experience of this sort of freedom:

But we already possess this freedom in the form of feeling, for example in friendship and love. Here, we are not one-sidedly within ourselves, but willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing this limitation as ourselves. In this determinacy, the human being should not feel determined; on the contrary, he attains his self-awareness only by regarding the other as other. Thus, freedom lies neither in indeterminacy nor in determinacy, but is both at once...[T]he will is not tied to something limited; on the contrary, it must proceed further, for the nature of the will is not this one-sidedness and restriction. Freedom is to will something determinate, yet to be with oneself in this determinacy and to return once more to the universal.

Hegel: *Philosophy of Right*, quoted in Honneth (Honneth, 2000, p. 26)

I take this to mean that one becomes fully oneself (free) in recognition of, and in being willingly determined by, the other, meaning that one is neither preoccupied with only oneself nor narrowly-mindedly engulfed in others’ needs. This did not happen in my conversation with Richard at the foothills as we were both rather preoccupied with our own needs, but I suggest we experienced this in the team meeting when we concluded on a way forward, even if not everyone got what they

wanted. I note how at the meeting I described my own moving between being preoccupied with loss of control and dented self-esteem, through being overly concerned about the needs of an other (Anastasia), again back to a personal preoccupation and petty feeling of not wanting to be the ‘bad guy’ and eventually to having a sense of freedom when concluding—being both in what Hegel calls determinacy and indeterminacy. ‘We are intersubjectively formed and our ability to recognise and explore this offers us our greatest possibility of self-determining freedom because we are selves alongside other selves’ (Mowles, 2016).

I reflect on an incident mentioned in my Project 1, where I mention a conversation with a trainee in which I engaged myself emotionally and was aware of it. I suggest that both he and I experienced being determined and indetermined at the same time, and I relate this to the paradox of being detached and involved in a process at the same time as described by German sociologist Norbert Elias (Elias, 1987; Mowles, 2015).

Honneth says (referring to Hegel) that:

He does not think that ...for the individual ‘free will’ to be able to develop and realize itself, is at all fulfilled by the one institution of legal ‘right’ alone; rather, as has already been shown, among the conditions for this self-realization of the individual an essential place is taken by the communicative relations that allow individual subjects to enjoy the experience of ‘being oneself in another’ (Honneth, 2000, p. 27)

Honneth calls ‘being oneself in another’ the paradigmatic experience of friendship in the broadest sense (Ibid, p. 27). I trust this could mean a friendship where both or all are fully engaged and where both or all feel valued, heard and can express their needs and values. I note how the words free will and freedom come to the fore and in Honneth’s later writings his social theory is reoriented around the theme freedom rather than recognition (Honneth, 2014; Zurn, 2015, p. 155). For me, this clearly resonates with the experience I have described through my narratives.

In summary, I believe that Hegel and Honneth’s description of ‘oneself as another’ and the links from recognition, self, and identity to freedom gives me a clearer understanding of the process I experience as liberating and forward-moving when engaging with others.

I would stress, however, that not only ‘reaching each other’ leads to novelty. I am aware how, in my career, conflicts and stuck patterns have also led to significant changes, for good or for worse, and I suggest that in Meadian terms such ways of communicating sound idealised. Mead (and Stacey)

points to the unexpected twists and turns in our dialogues which may enable or constrain the capacity to move forward together.

4.7 OTHER SCHOLARS' PHILOSOPHY OF IDENTITY

I have discussed Mead, Hegel, and Honneth's perspectives on identity and will conclude this section with the perspectives of more recent scholars who, I believe, elucidate various aspects of identity, such as temporality, narrative structure, values and relation to practice.

MODES OF IDENTITY AND THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

I have been asked by peers how I see (identify) myself as a leader and whether I show styles of being paternalistic, a strong leader, or being very facilitative. Similarly, in my narratives above, I refer to my perception of Richard's strong personality and presence as a manager and his earlier roles as a director and I refer to how I preferred to see Hanne as an experienced expert even if I knew she was also a skilled project manager. I wonder if I sometimes find it too easy to label our identities. A contemporary scholar, Ann Cunliffe, who researches in relational leadership, states that the problem with typologies and models is that we often take those as a given and we hire, monitor, and appraise around such givens (Cunliffe, 2014).

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur engaged himself with the question of identity in his book *Oneself as Another* and suggested two different modes of identity, self-sameness ('idem-identity') and self-constancy ('ipse-selfhood'), which together maintain the identity over time (Ricoeur, 1994, pp. 2-3). Self-sameness means a certain typology, a similarity, or identification with others and continuity over time.

Selfhood, however, relates to the becoming in the moment and the dialectic of self and other-than-self. Ricoeur refers to the title of his book and says,

As long as one remains within the circle of sameness-identity, the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original....It is quite different when one pairs together otherness and selfhood....*Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms. (1994, p. 3, emphasis in original)

Ricoeur's position is thus that our narrative identity is a continuous process of interpreting our sameness as well as our selfhood. This means that in our daily lives we interpret what is going on,

what people are doing, and who they are (including ourselves) and try to establish a coherent story about our experience and about what to do. Ricoeur also points to self-doubt and uncertainty as inherent elements of one's identity which ensure that we do not become arrogant and that we keep revisiting our understanding of what is right and wrong (Cunliffe, 2014, p. 132). I see this as a contrast to a more traditional discourse on leadership where knowing, confidence, and assertiveness are hailed as strengths to aim for.

Ricoeur focuses on a richer understanding of time by discussing the histories of human lives (1988). We are all aware of time, what is available to us or frustrating us but also whether a particular time is right for us to do things, whether it is appropriate, and this reaches beyond the immediate towards the general (Franck, 2014, p. 455). Ricoeur finds narratives a 'grounding condition in how we understand ourselves.... Narratives tell how we belong both privately and publicly; it is the way we make sense of things, and what makes things matter' (Franck, 2014, p. 455). I relate this to my own constant recollection of my history with its successes and failures and how I consider it has a role in my daily work.

Ricoeur sees life as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. He proposes that we reinvent our past to a high degree in a manner that makes sense to us and in a way that is useful to us—inspired by fiction as well as our own lives. This, again, is very similar to the description provided by Mead of our reinventing the past and planning a future.

TAYLOR'S PHILOSOPHY OF IDENTITY—A HORIZON OF SIGNIFICANCE

In a similar vein, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor posits that when we want to know '*who* are you?' the answer to the question is not just a name and genealogy but an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. He suggests that it is impossible for us to live without a framework and says, 'Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility. Let us call this a horizon' (Taylor, 1991, p. 37). He also says:

My identity is defined by my commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand (1989, p. 27).

Taylor argues that the knowledge about where 'I stand' is related to important questions such as obligations and morality. These are, in turn, determined through one's own interpretation, and the

importance here is, I think, not to look for identity as something like a 'deep inner' disposition. Taylor further encourages us to focus on the interpretation of the social and history, which enables us as humans to interpret our own lives when we investigate what we call 'identity'. The horizon is continuously developed and negotiated in the interaction with my colleagues who also have their stances and moral horizons. The perception is not mine alone and not one of others but is established in a continuous dialogue. I contrast this with the popular perception that an organisation can (through its management) engineer an organisation's values and request that all members take up and live by these values.

GIDDENS: IDENTITY IS THE CAPACITY TO KEEP A NARRATIVE ONGOING

I briefly mention the contemporary British sociologist Anthony Giddens because he works with self-identity in the post-modern society (as Taylor does). He also emphasises that to be a person one must act with a deep reflexivity and that self-identity is not a trait. 'It is the *self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53, emphasis in original). We have all sorts of means to reflect on causes and consequences of our actions, which can be troubling. In earlier societies, we would have been given a narrative and social role; however, in the post-traditional society we are usually forced to create this ourselves. In line with Ricoeur and Taylor, Giddens emphasises the narrative structure of identity; however, rather than saying that our identities are defined through narratives, he uses the wording *capacity to keep a narrative ongoing*.

A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self (Ibid, p. 54 emphasis in original).

I find this expression compelling as it resonates with my sense of developing a sense of self through actually *doing* something and *reflecting* on how it relates to my values, history, and practice.

This immediately leads me to introduce one last writer on identity, namely Alasdair MacIntyre.

IDENTITY AS AN OUTCOME OF DEVELOPMENT WITHIN MY PRACTICE

MacIntyre is best known for his book *After Virtue* (1981/2013), in which he focuses on social practices and defines two virtues as central to identity: integrity (to be the same person in different contexts) and constancy (to follow the same moral goods over time).

Also, MacIntyre emphasises the narrative structure of our lives and our identity, and he suggests that history is *lived* before it is *told*. Mowles (referring to MacIntyre) describes how it is important to understand professions ‘to be historically and socially evolving practices’ and makes the case that ‘...we need to take into account the past as much as the future’ (Mowles, 2011, p. 25).

Quoting MacIntyre, I understand that my profession as team leader or consultant can be perceived as a living tradition, as ‘an historically extended, socially embodied argument’ (MacIntyre, 1981/2013, p. 257). For me, the importance of MacIntyre’s position is to see how our roles and identities as consultants are not only part of upbringing and personal moral preferences but just as much an outcome of a continuous development within our profession, and vice versa how our profession is defined by history.

SUMMARISING VIEWS ON IDENTITY

In the following table, I sum up how I understand these different writers’ understanding of identity in terms of self and temporality.

	Identity	Temporality
George H. Mead (self)	<p>Taking oneself as an object to oneself.</p> <p>A reflexive relationship developing through intersubjectivity.</p> <p>Experienced in various forms in relation to social context, in various stages, as both social and asocial selves.</p>	<p>The self is constantly being formed through intersubjectivity, the social act, as well as through the perceived experience of the past and an expectation for the future.</p>
Paul Ricoeur	<p>Consists of sameness and selfhood brought together through reflection.</p>	<p>We keep re-inventing the narrative that forms our identity.</p> <p>Time as a qualitative experience informs the narrative.</p>

		Self-constancy is an important part of identity.
Charles Taylor	Defined through a horizon of significance, a moral stand. Only exists in relation to others. Identity is signified by action.	The horizon of values is continuously developed and negotiated in the interaction with others.
Anthony Giddens	The self as reflexively understood in relation to biography. The capacity to keep a particular narrative ongoing.	The individual's biography must continually integrate events, which occur in the external world.
Alasdair MacIntyre	Defined through integrity and constancy. Defined through a quest for certain virtues.	History is lived before it is told. Even before we think or write about it, our stories are given in a narrative form. Individuals are part of social practices and patterns that exist before we do.

I believe these scholars give me new perspectives on my understanding of identity. I acknowledge Taylor's emphasis on moral significance, even if I cannot easily state what my horizon implies. I can see, however, how my history of working in a particular profession (MacIntyre), exclusively with international development work and exclusively with water and environmental sectors, has given me a certain way of thinking. My horizon is clearly influenced by being with national consultants in a many countries and acknowledging their environment.

I am taken by the suggestions by Ricoeur, Giddens, and MacIntyre to see identity as a narrative and the suggestion that identity is a capacity to keep the narrative ongoing (Giddens). This I align with

Honneth's suggestion of sensing freedom and capacity for self-realisation when we experience one as another—in Hegelian terms. I believe that a narrative would always be developing, but I do sense how moments of a sense of released capacity through social interactions has changed my sense of self and thus identity.

In my narrative, I describe several histories. I refer to the year-long development of a project team and the relations between the consultants ('we have come a long way together') which have intertwined histories. I note how Richard's instruction (as I perceived it) apparently called upon past experiences and reactions stemming from my upbringing and work life and I note how this reaction is typically related to being given orders. In the team, we have a history of developing and being successful on several projects, and we have all woven our professional lives together. The consultants around the table in Laketown have a role in forming my identity (within my company) as team leader because our success and teamwork reinforces my self-esteem and my standing among colleagues. Similarly, Hanne, Richard, and I have a role to play in the local consultants' professional development and chance of earning an income. As MacIntyre says, 'Each of us being a main character in his own drama plays subordinate parts in the drama of others, and each drama constrains the others' (1981/2013, p. 248). I would add to MacIntyre's statement that the dramas of these others also enable the drama of the individual: I have described how consultants in Central Asia by their sheer participation in our team enables my professional development. It is also important to note how the day-to-day interactions, as well as minute-to-minute interactions in a meeting, are constantly developing our histories. I am cognisant of how I react to Richard's interventions at meetings, how the presence of other team members clearly influence my reaction, how I reflect on this and how I believe that we are all continuously re-negotiating our relationship.

In line with what I mentioned earlier, some contemporary scholars have debated the narrative approach to personal identity and limits have been identified with the suggestion that a pre-reflective experience of the self precedes story-telling (Tengelyi, 2015, p. 277). In particular, Zahavi (2007, 2011) posits that we possess a pre-reflective self-intimacy, an experiential self. I can somehow follow these arguments; however, as demonstrated through my inquiry into my own narratives and further reflection, I note how I find that the forming of my identity is certainly related to the social and complex processes of interrelating including one's own doing.

4.8 TO SUMMARISE MY OVERALL ARGUMENT SO FAR

I now refer to my initial research question about understanding better what is going on when, after some 'stuckness' and not knowing what to do, I still find myself taking action in the role of team leader. I suggest that I can see an importance for individuals who have the role of leaders:

- Referring to my Project 3, the ability to be in more than one frame of reference at the same time, temporally or in terms of communication, what Mead calls sociality.
- The understanding of how we tend to move between selves such as being lost in oneself or the opposite, being lost in the 'other'; or alternatively how we may experience being somewhere in between, our ability to be selves among other selves.
- The understanding of one's identity as a narrative with a moral horizon and the capacity to keep this narrative ongoing.

4.9 THE SENSE OF FREEDOM

Hegel and Honneth have, for me, opened a discussion of the free will and it reminds me very clearly about the sense of freedom I have alluded to in my narratives in earlier projects. I will briefly mention the German political scientist Hannah Arendt who in her essay *What is Freedom* (2006) (and in other writings) explains how she sees a strong link between action and freedom. She argues that there is a distinct difference between *free will* and *freedom* as one may not have political or physical freedom (free will) but still maintain the ability to stand up for and express one's thoughts based on one's ethical point of view. She describes how the original Greek meaning of the word freedom would refer to taking action and moving something—in line with my sense of feeling freedom when acting, and also in line with my sense of acting when I do not know how to act!

Having analysed Mead's concept of the social act above, I now point to how my perception of acting must be seen in a much more social perspective than what I think Arendt portrays. I therefore find it compelling to understand better how the sense of *feeling free* is so much related to the interplay of selves between my colleagues and myself.

In her major treatise, *The Human Condition*, Arendt states,

...even if there is no truth, man can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty, man can be reliable (1958/1998, p. 279).

I understand Arendt to say that we have a moral obligation to doubt or question but *also to act* even if we are in doubt. For me, Arendt's powerful statement means that it is important not to let oneself be stopped by a concern of looking (in the eyes of others) unskilled or unknowledgeable, which I tend to do. Arendt's statement also means for me that it is important to have the courage to take responsibility even when one is not sure about what is 'right to do'. In my narratives of the team meeting, I note that I did take steps forward based on what I perceived as an authority vested by the others. Similarly, in the narrative of a meeting with the contractor in Project 2, I reflect on how the fact that the expectations or the authority vested in me by others facilitated my taking the next steps. Similarly, in Project 3, when taking over from a non-performing team leader, I hesitated, overwhelmed by my own and others' expectations. This points to how working with others may be crucial for my ability to take next steps in difficult situations. One could also say that the expectations of the other facilitates or forces me to act in complex or uncertain situations. This, in turn, stresses how decision-making and leadership are not located just in the individual.

The space of this project does not allow a further investigation, and I therefore intend to investigate the subject of freedom and action further in my synopsis.

4.10 CONTEMPORARY WRITERS' UNDERSTANDING OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

I have in the above pointed to how I find that development of self, identity, and leadership takes place in the continuous *relating* to my colleagues and others. To take a final turn in my investigation, I wish to draw on more recent writers' perceptions of leadership and, in particular, what Cunliffe calls *relational leadership*. I wish to compare contemporary as well as more classic thinking of leadership with the understanding that I have now developed, seeing leading as a social act, a process formed and being formed by several humans in mutual interaction.

Ann Cunliffe's key message is that management is not only what one does, but is more crucially who one is and how one relates to others (Cunliffe, 2014). She posits that we have a dialectical relationship with our social world and that we shape and are shaped by our experience as we talk and interact with our colleagues. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) draw attention to what they call the mundane yet revealing processes of interaction that leaders see as important when leading in complex situations and suggest that this is an alternative to theories that typically employ models, categories, and frameworks. They focus on micro interactions between leaders and, informed by both Shotter (2010) and Ricoeur (1994), they suggest (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1444) that this could be a matter of:

- creating open dialogue without pre-judgments but with opportunities for understanding who we are;
- accepting responsibility for and recognising difficult moments and using differences to create room for novelty;
- creating scenic moments by being responsive to others, drawing out practical features of the environment and surfacing tensions, allowing diverse voices to express themselves;
- recognising the importance of relational integrity, being accountable towards others, and being able to explain decisions;
- being attuned to sensing and responding by being attentive to the unfolding conversations.

Cunliffe and Eriksen conclude that ‘living conversations are crucial to exploring differences and possibilities for action; and relational leaders are aware of the importance of the flow of present moments in making sense of complexity, resolving problems, shaping strategic direction and practical actions’ (Ibid, p. 1446).

Cunliffe also promotes a philosophical understanding of leadership and reflexivity as an important aspect of managing and leading (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). She suggests that this would encompass themes which examine underlying assumptions and strategies employed in organisations, encouraging members of the teams to question assumptions and actions, acting in more responsive ways, and engaging in dialogue that is critical and open.

I note how Cunliffe and her co-authors’ understanding of relational leadership contrasts the social understanding of leadership that I have described above. Further, it does not, I think, acknowledge the narrative structure of the individuals’ experience and thus the potential amplifications of differences. The authors apparently locate leadership in individuals who can *create* the needed dialogues. This reminds me of rationalist teleology (where one can chose a future goal) or a formative teleology (where the goal will unfold) and where the powerful leader can ensure these processes by, for instance, *creating* or *understanding*. It also points to a highly idealised way of leading where conflicts are apparently avoided or dealt with based on no pre-judgement. I will argue that we will always have prejudice which may not be a negative thing in itself (Gadamer, 1975/2004) as we have selves based on our personal narratives.

I note, however, how this understanding of *relational leadership* resonates with my analyses of my own experience—how, over the years, I have tended to act in relation with others. I can recognise how the leader's proposed *actions* (creating dialogue, recognise integrity, being attentive, etc.) are very much in line with what I traditionally try to do as team leader and my narratives clearly illustrate that I come from a position where I unconsciously assumed that leadership was located in myself. However, I am now becoming much more attentive to a changed way of understanding leadership as a process involving the leader as well as other actors in a social act, an ever-ongoing dialogue between individuals which, I believe, is a different perspective from that of Cunliffe.

I also note how she appears to *apply* relational leadership as a method (with an expected outcome?), and I will agree that I also try to do something, which, based on experience, I hope will yield a certain reaction and outcome. However, I am also increasingly aware that I cannot predict any longer-term impact (and often not the short-term either). Because of our lives' history of relating, I cannot predict what my actions will call out in others, whatever my intentions.

In my analyses of narratives above, I often describe my bodily experienced sense of what is going on in the moment, senses that leave me wondering, frustrated, confident, and so on. Cunliffe points to how sense-making is often made with a purely rational cognitive information-processing activity, such as described by Weick (1995), and she advocates a higher emphasis of what she calls *embodied narrative sense-making* (Cunliffe, 2002; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) which is defined more broadly than emotion as it encompasses bodily sensations, felt experiences, and sensory knowing.

What I take from this research is that I should take my lived experience seriously and accept that sense-making is made based on a variety of impressions and one may not necessarily benefit from looking for a more coherent 'full' picture through a cognitive approach. Cunliffe and Coupland point to how, in our sense-making, we draw on past experiences as well as anticipation of the future, and we plot narrative coherence over time. I can relate this to how I see patterns re-appear in my own interpretations and sense-making in the narratives. Further, the authors point to (so does Mead) how coherence 'comes as much from subtle, small, responsive, particular, in the moment, and often contested, narrative performances as from large, conspicuous, sustained actions' (2012, p. 83).

Lone Hersted and Kenneth J. Gergen (2013) refer directly to Cunliffe and Eriksen's description of relational leaders but move on to advocate and give descriptions for *how* to 'go about 'questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing,' and so on?...you must move creatively in the unfolding process—knowing how, doing and making' (Ibid, p. 11). The book works with examples of dialogical process

and gives descriptions of how to say the 'right' things, how to facilitate a process in the 'best' possible way through asking open and involving questions, and so on, clearly in the tradition of systemic position within facilitation and leadership as described, for instance, by Danish process consultants Dahl and Juhl (2009). I observe that these prescriptions resemble very much how I tend to work myself, but again, I note how I have become increasingly aware that such prescriptions may not always be very helpful as they are built on the assumption of a rational or formative teleology (described in my Project 2) where one expects to foresee and plan in advance how a certain intervention will influence the future.

4.11 CONCLUSION—HOW I UNDERSTAND IDENTITY WITHIN LEADERSHIP

I argue that to understand better my own way of acting as a leader, I must obtain a better understanding of my own identity, and, vice versa. I acknowledge that my identity is at the same time expressed by and formed by my way of working and the enactment of my values. I further argue, based on Mead, that one's self and identity are continuously being developed in the interaction with other humans through a never-ending process of intertwined gestures and responses, the *social act*. I have illustrated how mundane and apparently innocent micro-interactions between my colleagues and myself have an impact on my sense of self and my ways of acting in the role of team leader. Similarly, I am sure, these interactions have an impact on my colleagues' performance even if I cannot tell with certainty in which way. I am thus pointing to the constant flux and uncertainty involved in our internal dialogues and the process of leading.

I argue for the usefulness of a narrative approach to understand identity as an explication of the history of one's life and one's practice. This narrative is not constant but is being renegotiated in the daily interaction with other humans. Referring to Giddens, I acknowledge how my constant reflection on leadership and my ways of working is part of a 'capacity to keep a certain narrative ongoing', and my identity as a team leader is intertwined with those of others—we all have a role to play in each other's narratives, says MacIntyre. I argue that my narrative and my identity keep changing over the course of the work life in Central Asia and in the head office in Denmark.

This leads me to point to how I do not see leadership as a certain role, skill, or act located in myself. I rather see leadership as a process taking place between members of our team (and stakeholders outside our team), expressed through our multiple micro-interactions over an extended period. I certainly have a role to play, as I have been given an authority by my company, but the way

leadership is enacted is totally dependent on the attitudes and display of activities, gestures, and responses of my colleagues as well as myself.

Based on my Project 3, I also argue that leadership is related to the ability to be in different frames of reference at the same time, what Mead (and Simpson) calls *sociality*. The ability to engage in the other's position while observing one's own or engaging in temporally different perspectives is crucial to leadership. Again, I argue that this sociality is not just located in an individual, but is highly contingent on 'the other'. The gestures and responses from my colleagues play a role in my ability to engage socially.

I describe how I as a team leader sometimes can feel 'buffeted about' by colleagues, clients, or circumstances, leading to uncertainty, over-engagement in individuals, or maybe a sense of 'stuckness'. I have described how I, (in Hegel or Honneth's words) can feel determinate and indeterminate at the same time and how this reflects on my role as team leader. I do not claim to suggest that I have a tool to avoid this in the future, but I do suggest that paying attention to these processes is important to understand better one's role as team leader.

4.12 IMPLICATIONS FOR MY PRACTICE

Before summarising what I find are implications for my practice, I will include one final narrative followed by a brief reflection.

NARRATIVE 4—A BRIEF DISAGREEMENT

We were in Southern Town and had presented our work at a workshop. Some criticism and questions were raised about the engineers' expensive water-treatment solutions as it was suggested that we should instead look into the problems associated with grazing livestock in the huge mountainous catchment area leading to lots of solid material washed-out into streams. I wondered if our engineers had a good response; they usually would. Richard's immediate reaction was that these statements were not correct; he had looked up there, the slopes were too steep and the livestock and grazing was all below the water intake, it all showed on the Google satellite maps. I was immediately concerned as I knew the catchment area was about 15 km deep and, of course, he had not been all the way up there. How could he reject people's local knowledge so offhandedly?

After the workshop, we hastily got together with the water company director and engineers. Richard immediately started explaining in English and pushed his point, opened his laptop, searched on the

screen to prove that the claims were wrong. I thought that he was behaving ridiculously, so I raised my voice and asked if we could now talk sensibly about this and ask the local water company engineers (who patiently awaited a translation) what they knew about this rather than Richard trying to prove that the statements were wrong. Richard nodded, OK—that was fine, but then he still moved around the table with the laptop to engage the engineers while I talked. I became very annoyed, paused for a second then said sharply, ‘Now, Richard, would you mind? I am just trying to get us all together in this discussion to find out what is the local knowledge about this issue’. Richard nodded and said, ‘Yes, sure, I am listening’, and then looked eagerly down at his screen again, trying to catch the attention of the young engineer. I was quite surprised, immediately raised my eyebrows and said sharply, ‘Well, but...!’ Richard stopped, looked up, closed the screen, and nodded, ‘OK’. I was aware that I was telling him off in front of our team, but the reaction came quite naturally, in the moment.

Later Richard and I had fun looking together at the satellite images on the screen, discussing the mountain slopes; and he appeared to be fine about the earlier exchange. He said, ‘You are right, it was good to talk about it and get the full picture’.

The incident took place after I had drafted this paper several times, and I suggest that the writing, the discussions with peers, the reflection, and the analysis as well as our continuous work all play a role in the way I develop my relationship and ways of working. I reflect on how Richard in the meeting previously described and after the above exchange of words appeared to be fine about my interventions. I must think about how he seems to appreciate when I actively *do* something and react to his way of working.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MY PRACTICE

I reflect on how my studies over the last three years have informed my practice. I do not believe in a simple linear causality but rather a complex interweaving of various circumstances. I have always spent considerable time reflecting on my experience and the many interactions between myself and colleagues, but I suggest that I do it even more and possibly differently today. I believe I notice the following patterns, which I consider relevant for my practice as a consulting engineer and team leader. I emphasise that I do not suggest that my reactions (in the last narrative) were necessarily the better or ‘right’ ones to display, as I could not know the outcome in advance. Rather, I am pointing to the fact that Richard’s reaction to my gesture was as if he appreciated my engagement towards his

enthusiasm—and maybe *that* it was I have learned. Earlier, I may have been wondering if I made the ‘right’ intervention—as if there were such a thing.

I have an increased acceptance that I cannot necessarily know what will be the outcome of my actions and that these are irreversible. Words cannot be unspoken and actions cannot be undone. I suggest that, compared to a few years ago, I have become much more at ease with not knowing, as I trust that colleagues and I will be capable of working out a way forward. I suggest that many team leaders are concerned about their ability to deal with the unknown and tend to resort to tools and techniques to enhance their confidence. I suggest that an increased understanding and acceptance of the unknown and of the processes of interaction between people will be beneficial for our team leaders.

I have noticed that I pay a different (maybe less) attention to the role my identity plays in relation to others. I may unconsciously have been concerned about finding the right role, the perfect way of acting as a leader, but now acknowledge that such does not exist. Apparently, I have slightly different identities or selves under different circumstances and towards different actors, but in reality, this is then my identity, which is intertwined with others’. I suggest that I earlier would have been eager to understand, develop, or identify my own ‘leadership style’ or ‘personality profile’. I suggest that many team leaders in the field in the same way continuously question their way of working and will benefit from an increased understanding of the interplay of selves and of history.

It is an ‘established fact’ in our practice that the key to a good project is a good team leader who relates well to clients and colleagues, and such individuals are always hard to find. My experience is that many team leaders in our profession feel quite lonely in the field and find it difficult to discuss their uncertainty and the sense of being buffeted about by colleagues or clients. Very few of them are as confident as they may want to pretend, and I suggest that lack of confidence can have an impact on performance. I suggest that team leaders could benefit from being much more aware of when they are being pushed about and what these processes entail. I sense that I have benefitted significantly from being able to articulate and discuss the processes of interaction with my colleagues and fellow researchers. I would argue that earlier I have been less inclined to discuss my uncertainty or ‘stuckness’ with colleagues whereas it now appears a more natural thing to do.

As a direct consequence of these considerations we will soon in our department organise a seminar for a number of our team leaders from projects in developing countries, 16 in total. Over two days, we will work with their lived experience of feeling ‘stuck’, dilemmas, conflicts, uncertainties, and so

forth. They have been invited to work through theatre improvisations and with narratives, and the interest has been overwhelming both among the invitees and amongst other colleagues.

5 SYNOPSIS—SUMMARY AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is built on my practical, lived experience from many years of working in a major international consulting engineering company exclusively with water projects in Asia, Africa, and Central Europe where I act as team leader, project manager or project director. In my research, I focus on the daily interactions related to being the leader of a team of individual consultants. I wanted to investigate what it means to lead when I, as a consultant, facilitator or team leader find myself in an unexpected and complex situation, *not knowing what to do—and yet still finding myself doing something*. I have inquired into what is happening when I, as a team leader, ‘act on the hoof,’ improvise, and take the next steps without seeing any obvious way forward, an inquiry, which I find is relevant for my professional practice, a community of international managers and team leaders who quite often work in remote areas without daily support from the head office.

Chapter 1 to 4 included four projects, based on personal narratives, with an increasing depth of analysis and academic rigour. In this chapter, the Synopsis, I deepen my inquiry into the main themes and findings that I have seen emerge during my writing and discuss how these relate to my overall research question; I then present a cross cutting analysis leading to my key arguments. I emphasise that even now, as I write, I still find that I explore and see new aspects of what surfaced in my four projects and, therefore, I also reflect on the movement of my thinking during the research.

Throughout the synopsis, I refer to my projects as P1 to P4 and will, for easy reference, refer to page numbers in this thesis, for instance: (P1, p.16).

5.2 SUMMARY OF MY FOUR PROJECTS—WITH FURTHER REFLECTIONS

In this section, I summarise my four projects, including the narratives that serve as my empirical material (the ‘raw data’), my insights, and the arguments presented as well as the key scholars and theories that have informed my work. For each project, I present further reflections on the narratives and propositional themes that I find have emerged. In particular, I elaborate on the themes that I feel have developed my thinking significantly and which have had an influence on my practice, and I inquire into additional perspectives presented by key scholars.

In the subsequent sections 5.3 to 5.5 I will develop a coherent argument for how I understand acting in the context of my practice.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT 1—AN INTUITIVE EXPLORATION INTO COMPLEXITY

P1 is a reflexive autobiographical description of my personal and professional experience. Through this project, I tried to identify how my thinking had developed over the years and to understand better my initial assumptions and prejudices when I entered my research.

I described an upbringing with an interest in exploration and learning and a search for an identity. Through many years' involvement in the Scout movement, I developed an interest in human dynamics, leader training, and personal development. I described my education as a water resource engineer and a career in international consulting engineering where I experienced that strategies, plans, and agendas were not always followed through as described in classic leadership models such as those taught in my MBA course. During my early engagement in the Scout movement as well as in my professional career, I noted how I struggled to lead and act in the 'right' way with the expected outcomes. I described an interest in group dynamics and how I eventually took an interest in the theory of complex responsive processes of relating, originally developed by Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (2000), a perspective that focuses on unpredictability, changing patterns, and the responsive and participative nature of human interaction over time. I also described an interest in facilitating workshops or learning processes where, inspired by Shaw (1998, 2002), I attempted an emerging and participative approach based on participants' actual, lived experience.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON PROJECT 1—AND MOVEMENT OF MY THINKING

A reflection on how I understood the thinking and assumptions that define my professional practice

I found it quite easy to write aspects of my experience, less easy to describe the thinking underpinning my practice as I did not see this explicated in our daily work life. I later realised what I had omitted: a reflection on the thinking behind a consulting engineering company's daily engagement with missions, visions, strategies, targets, planning, monitoring, feedback, and so forth. This omission now makes me reflect on how we, in our daily lives and practice, take our basic assumptions and ways of working for granted even if we often question many of the detailed interactions and interventions. I started paying attention to my co-researchers' discussions about mainstream management literature and reflected on previous learning.

In my MBA course (as well as earlier), I was introduced to leadership styles and management models which assumed that individuals had certain traits, roles, or skills which could be recognised and influenced by detached managers who would also have identifiable leadership styles (Adizes, 1985;

Belbin, 1981; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Mintzberg, 1983). I also worked with models for strategising (Grant, 1999; Mintzberg, 1983) and change management (Kotter, 2012) which assumed that leaders can somehow look into the future and determine the best ways forward. I later came to acknowledge how these models are based on systems thinking, which is based on natural sciences and assumes that individuals' actions lead to specific outcomes, that is, an understanding of a clear causality, a clear relationship between cause and effect (Stacey et al., 2000, pp. 56-57). In this perspective, the challenge is to understand these linkages in detail and thus optimise one's management style (Child, 1972; Grant, 1999; Senge, 1990).

I noted (P1, p.22) how this understanding contrasted with my own experience of organisational life where I found, for instance, that *preparing* strategies in our department was often more useful than trying to pursue them in detail as the future usually developed in ways that were not assumed in our plans. However, '...the models often gave me an insight or a handle on something which could otherwise be rather blurred and difficult to get to grips with' (P1, p.16). In a handbook on classic, popular management models, the authors state in their introduction that their selected 'models would not stand up to a high degree of scientific scrutiny, many being simply memory aids, useful ways of ordering reality', and advise that managers 'should not be tempted to consider "trendy" models as a serious alternative to sound, creative, consistent management and advice' (Have, Have, Stevens, & Els, 2003, p. x).

Today, I am even more sceptical about describing our organisational life via linear thinking, models, boxes, and typologies, but I acknowledge how they can give us a sense of assurance, that we somehow try to 'make sense of what we are doing' (Stacey, 2012). In our department, we often return to use a SWOT³ model to discuss our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, a model which can be questioned for prescribing a strategic logic of a sequence of actions based on sensitivity analyses (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 78) which do not necessarily match the experienced confusion and unpredicted events that follow. However, I acknowledge that we in our team find opportunities to discuss, for instance, how certain aspects of our department can be considered both a strength and weakness. Where I would previously try to get the model 'right', I now draw attention to the

³ SWOT indicates an organisation's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (Have et al., 2003, p. 185)

ambiguities, appreciate the discussion among the team members, and quietly appreciate that the model will be forgotten the day after while we carry on with our work, hopefully with new insights.

Some of my research colleagues expected my engineering practice to be based on rigid systems with lots of planning, procedures, quality control, feedback mechanisms, and so forth, which initially made me nod and write down various procedures that I must follow in my work. However, I realised that, yes, in my work I am involved in classic planning, strategising, and reporting, but this has not been overly important for my research. I found that I spent much more time communicating with colleagues and clients about unexpected problems, personal issues, conflicts, looking for compromises, replacing team members, securing our work load, celebrating new contracts, being annoyed with bosses, and so on.

In this thesis, I concern myself with the work I and many other team leaders do in the field, in foreign countries, as team leaders for teams of consultants trying to develop and implement useful projects together with our clients and supported by colleagues in the head office. In the team, we prepare a crude work plan, agree on how we quality-assure our work, and find ourselves acting with practical judgement and as we see fit for purpose. My focus has been on how we, as individuals, interact in daily patterning of human life with all our differences, unpredictability, personal wishes, conflicting needs and values, and our varying ways of communicating.

A reflection on how I initially engaged with the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating.

I had done some reading on complexity theories several years before I entered the DMan programme. My interest was not spurred by a search for answers to specific problems, but, as described in P1, I had—through my studies and later—been intrigued by elusive theories and thinking in terms of uncertainty and unpredictability (P1, p.16). Initially, I had acquainted myself with various descriptions of complexity thinking, for instance (Olson & Eoyang, 2001; Phillips & Shaw, 1998; Plsek & Wilson, 2001; Snowden & Boone, 2007), that all suggest how complexity in my daily life as a consultant and a manager can be *managed*, put to use, or *harnessed*, and this had appealed to me. However, I also realised that by suggesting to ‘apply’ or ‘harness’ complexity many complexity writers employ a systemic thinking expressing linear causality where one can determine a future, meaning that they negate the unpredictability aspect in non-linear processes and complexity thinking.

I came to understand that, in contrast, the perspective of complex responsive processes would *not* provide me with tools for management or harnessing complexity (Stacey, 2012). I went through a process of initially ‘coming to terms’ with this and eventually feeling comfortable with it. I found it both a challenge and a relief to accept the suggestion of a former DMan graduate, Philip Streatfield, that managers cannot find ‘perfect’ ways of managing but have to live with paradox in apparently messy processes (2002, p. 128), where we accept that the future is unpredictable and we cannot determine for sure the outcome of our actions. I now acknowledge how the theory of complex processes does not suggest that I cast all my management skills overboard but that I try to pay more attention to what we all do together. I was determined to research further into how this perspective could help to understand what it means to be a team leader in my professional practice where I experience daily changes and unpredictability. I will describe this perspective further in my reflections on P3 below.

A reflection on how I initially understood processes

From the outset in my P1, I referred to an interest in group dynamics or personal development processes, and I hinted to a preference for studying what I called the ‘not-so-easy-to-grasp’ processes in leadership, knowledge management, communication, and so forth (P1, p.16). As a leader trainer in the Scout movement and later, my initial focus on process was related to human dynamics in specific situations such as facilitation, leading, learning, or dealing with a conflict. I would think of process within a certain time and space, expecting a start and an end to the relating and to the activities in question, where I expected a certain outcome from my intervention—clearly a systemic, spatial perspective on process (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 330).

In course of my research I have revised this perception. When I as course leader (P1, p.10) engaged with a participant in an emotional conversation, it was not (as I initially thought) a five-minute ‘intervention’ with a certain outcome. I now see how our gestures and responses developed as we spoke and how they were influenced by our respective histories, power relation, dynamics with and between others in the room, the history of the training course, and so forth. I also described how the exchange between us had an impact on the relationship between my co-trainer and myself and thus on my sense of self (which I will later call identity), something that I reflect on even today. I took up aspects of process thinking in P3 (see below), and in section 5.3, I discuss in more detail how it now influences my way of acting in a project team.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT 2—THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

I investigated the nature of leadership in the face of complexity and uncertainty. I presented a narrative from my current work as an international consultant and project director where the implementation of an infrastructure project in the Mediterranean ‘Port City’ ran into complex difficulties and where we needed to change key staff while at the same time dealing with a difficult contractor and a demanding client. I tried to act by identifying the best engineer for the job; however, many unforeseen events kept changing the circumstances on a daily or even hourly basis as the project was influenced by local and international politics, budget constraints, individuals’ agendas, career aspirations, personal animosities, and so forth. I also felt rather exposed as the discipline of contract management was not my expertise. After an extremely stressful week, I found that I still did not have a solution for Monday morning but also that I had a peculiar sense that I would find out.

In my analysis, I discussed in more detail how classic thinking in management and leadership, as promoted for instance by Child (1972, 1997) or Senge (1990), prescribe the rational, apparently thought-through interventions, tools, and techniques which we, as consulting engineers, will usually apply in an attempt to move a project forward. However, I also described how these do not adequately describe my experience of the many complex relations and unexpected interactions in the project. It appeared as if every action from our side often led to unexpected or unhelpful reactions.

In a second narrative, I presented how I chaired a difficult meeting with the contractor and the client and how we experienced difficult passages and the threat of escalating conflicts. During the meeting, the contractor threatened to leave the meeting as well as walk away from the works, which would have had significant consequences. I described a sense of how very silent moments of uncertainty passed very slowly and how we then found ways to continue our dialogue. I also described how I was never sure which direction the discussions would take and that I generally did not know in advance how I would act. In my analysis of the narrative, I discussed how American philosopher and social psychologist G. H. Mead (1934/1967) understands meaning-making as an ongoing exchange of verbal gestures and responses where one senses the feeling that these gestures invoke in others, and I elaborated on what Mead calls the ‘I–me’ *dialectic*, my constant private dialogue during the meeting, themes I will return to below.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON PROJECT 2—AND MOVEMENT OF MY THINKING

I reflect on the suggestion that we cannot determine the future

In P2, I came to appreciate an understanding of a *transformative teleology*, meaning that we may have a goal, but in reality, the eventual outcome of our acting cannot be known in advance because the future is unknown; it is under perpetual construction by the movement itself, yet it is often recognisable (Stacey, 2001, p. 60). What we will achieve is constantly being renegotiated by the actors involved in a particular situation. We can, of course, design a ‘particular’ wastewater system and usually it will be constructed as we planned, but we cannot know because we do not know the future. In Port City, the project has not advanced for four years after the narrated incident took place, and it may be terminated some day at a quality level far below what was originally planned. The outcome, what we will arrive at in this ‘particular situation’, will eventually be ‘negotiated by the actors involved’ through political wrangles, personal agendas, and influenced by budget constraints. This may be unexpected but is certainly ‘recognizable’ in the industry.

In the same vein, I have increasingly come to appreciate how I cannot know the outcome of a communication or a team leader’s intervention. In the narrated meeting with the contractor, I referred to how ‘I had no idea where this discussion was going to take us’ (P2, p.44), and I increasingly appreciate how we cannot determine the future. This does not mean that we cannot plan and use our experience to move forward with means and ends that we find useful.

I reflect on how being ‘at the same time’ has had significance for how I understand acting.

I found it illuminating to read Griffin’s discussion of the paradox⁴ of being ‘at the same time’ (2002, p. 13). In the narrative, I described the unmanageable complexity of the infrastructure project and how I tried to get my bearings and observe what was going on. I read and listened intensely to come to grips with the history of the project, tried to understand our engineer’s contractual decisions, and I observed the sometimes heated, frantic, or despondent discussions, phone calls, or email communications between colleagues, client, and the contractor. However, *at the same time*, I was party to these discussions—whether I said anything or not. Whatever I suggested (or did not) could

⁴ Paradox is here understood as ‘the presence together, at the same time, of self-contradictory, mutually constituting, essentially conflicting ideas, neither of which can be eliminated or resolved’ (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 39).

have an impact within the next hours—and I would not know for sure which impact. I also sensed how I felt the burden of responsibility and looked for ways of getting through what I considered were *my* problems. In this way, my actions were an integrated part of the continuously evolving patterns of communication and decisions while these influenced me at the same time (P2, p.35).

Griffin describes how one's role is echoed in the metaphor of evolutionary change as a stream. I was not 'looking at a stream from the bank' as a detached observer; neither was I 'steering a canoe on a stream', facing challenges and resolving dilemmas by retaining the balance. I rather felt that I 'was the stream' (or part of the stream) where I had no clear bearings and where I was caught up in the generation of forward movement. I was observing and involved, in Griffin's words 'at the same time'. Griffin states:

Holding this sense of *at the same time* is to become aware of key paradoxes and it remains uncomfortable. The very essence of such paradoxes is that they do not settle down to a resolution (Ibid, p. 13, emphasis in original).

This insight has been profound for me. I cannot say that my practice has changed dramatically, but I have increasingly sensed how I accept the paradox of observing and being involved at the same time, and I have somehow felt this as a relief from my own expectation that I should ideally be able to take a detached stance and act in a 'rational' manner.

I reflect on Mead's suggestion that meaning is developed in a continuous exchange of gesture and response.

In the second narrative, I described intense exchanges of views between the contractor, the client, and myself, and I discuss how we tried to make sense of this. A traditional understanding of communication explicated in, for instance, the 'sender-receiver model' (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) would imply that we as individuals form a meaning and try to transfer this to other individuals. Mead, however, understands meaning-making as an ongoing flow of what he calls *significant symbols*, that is, gestures where one in one's own body can sense the same responses, which these gestures arouse (or are intended to arouse) in others (1934/1967, pp. 45-47). Meaning does not arise first in each individual to be subsequently expressed, nor is it 'transmitted' to another individual, but rather, it arises in the circular interaction between them (Stacey, 2003, p. 61). I initially found that this can be difficult to grasp (I often sense that I have a meaning), however, Mead elaborates and says that an individual can be 'conscious of the meaning of his own gesture' if he 'takes the attitude of the second individual toward that gesture' (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 47). He here points to how our selves are

socially formed through and through, formed through how we perceive that other perceive us, what he calls the generalised other. In this way we can often feel that we ‘know’ what we are doing (Stacey, 2003, p. 61). In the description of exchanges of gestures and responses with the contractor, I referred to how he threatened to leave the meeting and how we suggested that he stay: ‘The MD shrugged his shoulders and asked, “So, what is your suggestion?” I was not at all sure what to suggest, but I thought I saw an opening, so I said to him, “I am not sure what to suggest, but I am trying to understand why it is important...”’ (P2, p.44). I suggest that in this brief exchange meaning was being created between us and in our private and public dialogues as we sensed how the other felt about the situation and would respond to our gestures. In P4, I looked further into this *social act* (in Meadian terms), and I will take it up again in my discussion in section 5.3.

I reflect on Mead’s suggestion that sociality is a precondition for novelty.

During the meeting with the contractor, I sensed several moments where the discussion took new turns—where we experienced novelty. Mead states that *sociality*, the ability to be several things at the same time, is a precondition for novelty to occur and relates it to temporality, the aspects of time:

The social character of the universe we find in the situation in which the novel event is both in the old order and the new which its advent heralds. Sociality is the capacity of being several things at once. (1932/2002, p. 75)

In my analysis, I referred to contemporary British scholar on Mead, Barbara Simpson, who suggests that

These past and futures are constructed as separate temporalities belonging to different frames of reference that coincide in the present experience of a given actor. The simultaneous occurrence of multiple temporalities affords the actor a multifaceted perspective that offers the actor a repertoire of alternative choices for reconstructive action in the present moment (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 278).

In other words, the capacity to think creatively and experience novelty could be contingent on the capacity to acknowledge simultaneously patterns from the past and sensing the present as well as a way forward.

I have, however, come to appreciate how Mead refers not only to *temporal* sociality. Simpson suggests that Mead also finds novelty in the coincidence of different frames of reference of gesturer and the respondents in a *conversation*, which on the surface may not be a temporal perspective.

Mead does not clearly state this, but Simpson refers to Mead's understanding of the selves as dynamic reconstructed processes, each with their temporality, meaning that our private, silent dialogue, the 'I'-'me' dialectic, is continuously being informed by past experience as well as expectations for the future. Our selves, thus, have temporal qualities which Simpson finds allow for such an interpretation of Mead (B. Simpson, 2014, p. 281). In the above sequence of exchange of positions at the meeting, I therefore suggest that the contractors, my colleagues, and I were somehow able to sense each other's position by sensing not only our own present positions but also what we had all experienced and what we all needed in the coming days—what Simpson calls coinciding frames of reference. Mead also explains sociality through an example of an animal searching for prey while being in its own physical system of distribution of energies and at the same time being in the system of its environment (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 75).

Carroll and Simpson emphasise Mead's wording that sociality lies 'betwixt and between the old system and the new' (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 73) and says that

This 'in limbo' phase of action is the temporal dimension of framing movements that arise when two or more frames are in play. It emphasizes the continuity of movement such as, for instance, in walking, as weight is transferred from one foot (the old frame) to the other (the new frame). In effect, sociality is the process of readjustment or re-construal of meanings that is necessitated by movement from one frame to another.... It is in this transitional phase of readjustment, where emergent objects belong to different frames of meaning simultaneously, that shared meanings are re-recognized, selves and situations are re-constructed, and directions for further action are re-negotiated; in other words, sociality is generative of novelty and change. Being 'betwixt and between' is key to understanding those dynamic movements, such as problem-solving, interpersonal interactions and direction setting, that define the leadership domain (2012, p. 1289).

I thus accept that Mead's sociality—being several things at the same time—can be interpreted both *temporally* (actors engage in both present, past, and future), *physically* (actors being in more than one environment), and in the *intersubjective engagement* (actors sensing other actors' body rhythm). I will pursue this in the next section when developing my arguments and discuss how novelty occurs in the acting.

Through P2, I started to pay attention to how time has a profound importance on my understanding of our actions, and I started developing a more processual understanding of our practice. I chose, therefore, to pursue this in P3.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT 3—UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROCESS AND TIME

I described my arrival at a new destination in Central Asia where I replaced a project manager, Jack, who had been given notice because of inadequate performance. I had planned a brief overlap with him to acquaint myself with the project which was all new ground for me. I experienced uncertainty about the future, hesitation, loneliness, and soon also a strong irritation towards him and his behaviour. I described how experience and uncertainty about the future made me unsure about which action to take and how it influenced my actions in relation to him and towards other colleagues. Eventually, I found myself asking him to leave the office, which for me triggered a sensation of relief and freedom.

In my analysis, I investigated *process thinking* to see if this helped me to understand better my actions and those of others. I discussed how prominent scholars on process thinking (Hernes, 2008, 2014; Whitehead, 1978) describe an atomistic understanding of processes, suggesting that novelty and change are created through the coming together of ‘events’ with ‘potentiality’. I argued that this understanding of process does not properly account for the human dynamics that I experience, and I questioned how it apparently gives agency (an entity with the ability to act) to objects in nature. In the analysis, I argued how the interaction between the actors in the project could be described better by the theory of complex responsive processes, because I experienced how Jack, others, and I were engaged in multiple confusing interactions in continuous and developing patterns of tension, where small differences in perceptions led to significant and unexpected reactions.

I also turned to a discussion of *time aspects*. French philosopher Henri Bergson refers to qualitative time, *durée*, an understanding of the bodily sensation of time passing (for instance, slowly, painfully, or quickly) in contrast to a classical understanding of clock time (1913/2005). Belgian Nobel laureate and physicist, Ilya Prigogine (1997) describes *irreversibility*, the fact that time cannot be reversed and actions cannot be undone, and Mead describes how our sense of the present reflects the past and the future, and I argued, therefore, that *temporality*, the aspects of time, influences how I (and other team leaders) react in the present.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON PROJECT 3—AND MOVEMENT OF MY THINKING

I have come to appreciate a processual understanding of our consultancy projects

Some of my research colleagues initially found it difficult to comprehend why I suggested that process and time were key themes in my narrative as this was not apparent and there were many other aspects such as power relations, exclusion and inclusion, or recognition that appeared more obvious to take up. However, during the writing, I strongly sensed that process aspects played a role for my experience in the project office even though I found it difficult to articulate it. I experienced a continuous private dialogue related to multiple themes that seemed unconnected, outdated, or mundane, and when I wrote the narrative, I focused on the main story, meaning that I initially omitted some of the many ‘antenarratives’, patterns of untold and seemingly unrelated stories that each play a part (Boje, 2001). After I had rewritten and discussed the narrative several times, some of these themes came to life: a previous experience of dismissing staff in an unfair manner, the sensation of a depressive dungeon-like office environment, an insufficient budget, my conflict avoidance, needing a new challenge, the feeling of uncertainty, cynical comments from my colleague Mikkel, expectations for the project, and so forth.

For me, this emphasises how I experienced a processual understanding of the project and management. Stacey takes process to be ‘...the ongoing, interactive movement (the *how*) of entities over time through which these entities become, individually and collectively, the coherent patterns of activity (the *what*) that they are’ (2011, p. 321, emphases in original). By this, I understand that our interactions in the project office were not just means to reach an ‘end-product’ but a continuation of an ongoing and widespread pattern of activities before the incident and activities that continued into the future. In this understanding, ‘taking over the project management role’ can be understood as an ongoing process shaped by the past and shaping the future.

Sandberg, Loacker, and Alvesson (2015) have analysed different process perspectives and describe how a *strong process view* (‘process is all there is’), as for instance proposed by Hernes (2014) or Nayak and Chia (2011), gives *agency* to events and material substances as originally suggested by Whitehead. In a similar vein, contemporary process philosophers Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, and Holt (2014, p. 5) suggest that processes can, for instance, be described through five attributes, namely *temporality*, *wholeness*, *openness*, *force*, and *potentiality*, descriptions which I find quite abstract. Rereading my P1 to P4, I realise that this may describe how we in our company often talk about our projects, portfolio, assignments, organisations or strategies, and my colleagues and I have come to

talk about our work in Central Asia as a series of successful events (projects) which have potential to act as leverage for our further development in the region. We thus easily describe our work through abstractions⁵ and reified symbols, meaning that we tend to present phenomena or gestures as ‘things’. Moreover, as Stacey says, ‘Using symbols in this reified form can cut people off from their lived experience’ (2003, p. 72).

The purpose of my inquiry is, however, to understand in more detail what these abstractions mean in very concrete terms, the details and the patterning of the ways my colleagues and I interact in our daily practice. In our water projects, problems recently emerged, such as continuous disagreements between one of my colleagues and a representative of the client, and I became involved in our sister company’s disagreements with the same client. I therefore engaged in email communications and tense Skype conferences with the client and long talks with my colleague, who felt angry and rather despondent while I at the same time was becoming frustrated with my colleague. I here acknowledge how I suddenly move from thinking of ‘one good project generating the next’ (agency to events) to an increased focus on what happened in the dialogue with the client, how do my colleague and I discuss this problem, what is this client’s agenda (agency to individuals)? I would say that I move from thinking in abstract (strong) process terms to thinking about the ongoing complex processes of micro-interactions between real people—colleagues, clients, managers, and other actors. As Stacey and Griffin say, ‘...in participating in interaction with, in relating to, each other, people are not producing a whole, other than as an imaginative construct, but only further patterns of interaction’ (2005, p. 31).

I have come to appreciate how the perspective of complex responsive processes informs how I understand the interactions in my practice

The analysis in P3 of strong process theories helped me to appreciate how the contrasting perspective of complex responsive processes might be helpful to articulate an understanding of the multiple micro interactions as well as the wider patterns of communication in our project work. Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (2000) offer a view of processes where complexity thinking can provide insight into human interaction and suggest that processes in an organisation and between humans

⁵ Stacey and Mowles understand abstractions as the drawing away from the detail of direct experience to form general categories or stereotypes (2016, p. 222).

are not directed by an outside authority but are signified by many and constant interactions between all involved and with the outside environment. Stacey and Mowles compare *system thinking*, *strong process thinking*, and *complex responsive processes* and present among other points the following overview.

Table 5.1: A comparison of systems thinking, strong process thinking, and complex responsive processes thinking.

	Systemic Process	Strong Process or 'process is all there is'	Complex Responsive Processes
Process	Interaction of parts.	Entanglement and flux.	Responsive acts of mutual recognition by persons.
Practice	Practice is a system of routines, etc.	Practice is prior to and creates human actors to the extent that they are connected within practices.	Practice is the local, social activity of communication, power relating, and evaluative choice.

Adapted from (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, pp. 333-334)

What I draw attention to here is that in the perspective of complex responsive processes, practice, acting, is simply (although complex) the social activity taking place between humans.

The perspective has been developed by combining psychological insights, social theories, and complexity sciences. Mead gives detailed descriptions of the nature of human interaction (1932/2002, 1934/1967) and German sociologist Norbert Elias takes an interest in how human societies develop (1939/2000, 1978, 1991/2001). However, they do not explain how wider, circular and complex patterning of gesturing and responding between larger and larger numbers of individuals can develop into the societies that Elias describe (Stacey, 2003, p. 65). Stacey and colleagues, therefore, turn to the insights one can gain through analogies in complexity theories and, more specifically, in the computer simulations of complex adaptive systems (CAS) which I described in P2 (p. 40). Stacey and colleagues carefully suggest how some *relationships* in human interaction can be seen as analogous to *relationships* in CAS and how this informs our understanding of the complex nature of human life. It is important to stress also the differences, as indicated in the table below, which summarises some of the ways in which complexity in the form of computer simulations

is used as a source domain for responsive process thinking. It also compares with a classic systemic understanding.

Table 5.2: Human analogues of simulations of complex systems

Complex Adaptive Systems (computer simulations)	Systemic analogue in organisations	Complex Responsive Processes analogue in organisations
The programmer (outside the system)	The management (CEO)	None
The whole is a complex adaptive system	The whole is a complex adaptive system	None
Locally interacting algorithms	Interacting individuals	Complex responsive processes of relating between persons interacting locally
What emerges are forms of algorithm and population-wide patterns at the same time	What emerges are the organisational system and the detail of action which can be shaped from an external position	What emerges is population-wide narrative-like patterns as themes in conversations
Novelty emerges at the edge of chaos, i.e., paradox of stability and instability in processes of self-organisation	Edge of chaos as defined as crisis and stress in which self-organisation and emergence can be intentionally unleashed to produce novelty	Novelty emerges as re-patterning of conversational themes in paradoxical processes of predictable and unpredictable human interaction. Emergence of continuity and novelty, creation and destruction through the non-linear interactions where small deviations are amplified.

Radical unpredictability	Unpredictability played down	Radical unpredictability
Attractor	A vision, or similar.	Routines, habits, generalisations and idealisations
Boundaries set by programmer	Boundaries set by management, i.e., simple rules	Emerging constraints of power relations and dynamics based on ideology and evaluative choices

Adapted from (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 325)

The term *complex adaptive systems* (CAS) is here being replaced with *complex responsive processes*. Humans do not *adapt*, but also *respond* bodily to each other, and humans are not part of *systems*, but involved in continuous *processes*. As illustrated in the table, in the complex responsive process thinking, there is no programmer or manager directing the patterning of our ways of interacting, and there is no ‘whole’, no boundaries, as our interactions are continuously patterning and eventually involve those close to us as well as those in the wider society. In P2, I describe the very complex project in Port City. I might experience complex and dynamics micro-interactions inside a meeting room, but these are influenced by (and influence at the same time) the unpredictable patterns of the mayor’s politicising, international tensions, IFI strategies, personal agendas, and so forth.

In section 5.3 below, I will take up how I understand *acting* in the perspective of complex responsive processes.

I reflect on how the time perspective has become significant for me

A research colleague questioned why it was such a big deal for me to replace a project manager (Jack), who had already been given notice; in project management terms, it should be rather straightforward! However, I now suggest that this question from my peer reflects classic systems thinking with a rational teleology (as described in P2) where there are a clear objective and a linear route to reach it, which means a linear notion of time (Stacey, 2003, p. 10) where one step is simply followed by another until we reach the planned goal.

In contrast, a process perspective implies that time in the present has a circular structure. The future is perpetually being created in the *living present* on the basis of the present reconstruction of the past (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Stacey et al., 2000), meaning that the present is influenced by one’s

experience as well as expectations for the future. Paradoxically, the future influences the perception of the past and we cannot think of the present as a dimensionless dot in a linear flow of time (Shaw, 2002, p. 46). In the project office, the present I experienced was continuously interpreted based on my own histories of dismissing staff in an unfair manner, the prospects of working in a depressive, dungeon-like office for the foreseeable future, a concern about the client's upcoming monitoring mission, insufficient budget for the whole project period, and uncertainty about the next reports due four weeks later. At the same time, Jack and others' sense of past and future would also have an impact on how our dialogue developed in a complex manner into a pattern that led to his dismissal, new reflections on my part, and continued development of my relationship with colleagues, for instance, the office manager, Katrina. In the narrative, I wrote:

Two days later, I asked Katrina to leave the project. I carefully explained to her why. Fair or unfair, she was part of a history and I felt that she would not be able to work with our clients. She was sad, so was I, but somehow it was not so difficult for me this time (P3, p. 59).

In a rational, linear perspective this action seems to follow a normal weighing up of pros and cons, considering the past ('a history') and the future ('work with the clients'), but what I now pay attention to is the last sentence: '...somehow it was not so difficult for me this time'. I here suggest (and recall) that the emotions around the difficult process of dismissing Jack also influenced that Katrina was asked to leave. The immediate past influenced that I could say the words—otherwise it might not have happened.

This reminds me of Mead's suggestion that we tend to interpret the past in a manner that allows us 'intelligent conduct to proceed' into the future. I can see how this is an explication of the American pragmatists' position that truth or knowledge is not what best represents a given world, but what works for us when we pursue our collective aims and interests (Burkitt, 2008, p. 32), a subject I will discuss later in section 5.3.

I have been taken by the perspective of the *arrow of time*. The moment I asked Jack to leave the office, it could not be unsaid and it could not be undone. This was an emerging process where my perception of the situation and my personal feelings were continuously changing, a process where there was no way of going back. I reflect on how, in my management roles, I have often hesitated to act, in order to seek consensus, ensure that I made the 'right' decision, confirm that no one was upset, etc. I now wonder if this can be related to an understanding arising from rational teleology, namely a wish to be able to backtrack, to be able to undo what has been done and predict the

outcome in advance. I suggest that I and others have been brought up with the dominant, systemic way of understanding management and organisations where we always have an unconscious expectation that everything can be calculated in advance—and changed if it does not work.

Prigogine states that our way of perceiving the world has been based largely on classical, reversible mechanical physics in which 'Time is simply a bookkeeping parameter without any direction' (Prigogine & Antoniou, 2003, p. 22) which contrasts with his description of how nature develops in an irreversible way (Prigogine, 1997, pp. 2-7) in which there is an arrow of time.

In P2, I discussed how Prigogine describes bifurcation points in non-linear dynamics, critical points at which processes may change into one or more different paths where '...the homogeneity of time...or space...or both, is broken' (1997, p. 69), which means that the process cannot move backwards, a phenomenon that Prigogine also argues has analogies in human societies (2003, p. 20). Says Stacey,

We can only go forward in time and elaborate on what we have said or done. It is also our experience that interaction with each other in one way immediately precludes all alternative ways of interacting and that what happens next will be different from what might have been if we had interacted in one of these alternative ways. This is analogous to the bifurcations of the nonlinear dynamics (2003, p. 67).

The path dependency means that we can never go back from the present viewpoint to a past one. I would like to give an example:

In one DMan community meeting, a very tense and rather personal discussion developed between some of my co-researchers, a tension that had roots back in time. One member, Gordon, expressed anger towards another member of the group and then became silent, clearly upset. The discussion slowly moved on, and then another researcher asked (paraphrasing), 'Gordon, do you think there are ways where you and (the other) will be able to continue a dialogue?' I was immediately struck by this expression and how it acknowledged the arrow of time—what had been said could not be unsaid, and we could not go back to a past viewpoint. It occurred to me that she did not ask them to 'solve the problem', 'become friends again', or 'get over it', which might have implied a suggestion to turn the time backwards and 'undo' what had happened. I reflect on how often in our daily work we tend to use such expressions or how often we try to ignore or cover over conflicts or power dynamics by simply not talking about them (Solsø, 2016). I suggest that pretending that these do not exist may somehow ignore that there is an arrow of time.

Complexity theory may help us to illustrate how differences occur and cannot be backtracked. In the bifurcations of nonlinear processes, the resonance⁶ between particles may create amplifications of their movement. Resonance is an intrinsic property of matter and is what introduces uncertainty and breaks the time symmetry, making the future unknowable (Stacey, 2003, p. 47). By analogy, Stacey refers to the unpredictability in the complex processes of human interaction which may display differences based on values, history, or other:

It is because of the potential for small differences to escalate that we cannot retrace our steps. In other words, it is because time has structure of the living present that we also experience the arrow of time (2011, p. 320).

Stacey here pulls together the insights of Prigogine and Mead, and he moves on to suggest that there is a strong resonance with the arguments of Elias, who suggested that social processes form and are formed by individuals (Stacey, 2003, p. 48).

It is educative for me to acknowledge the arrow of time, how I must accept that the processes of human interaction cannot be reversed and that I cannot always know what will be the outcome of my next step. This insight appears mundane but feels significant to me—and to contemporary scholars (Hernes, 2014; Stacey, 2003; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). An implication for my practice has been that I have increasingly come to accept this condition in my daily work. I do not suggest that *not knowing* what will happen is particularly helpful, but as I focus less on what we *could* have done, I find that I turn my attention to opportunities instead. I note that my initial research question was not necessarily related to being stuck but just as much to the peculiar experience of moving on even when I have no clue what to do.

Today, I will not say that I am surer about what to do, but rather that I accept that one can do only what seems most useful for now. At the time of this writing, I am trying to close an old consultancy assignment where there have been many discussions, misunderstandings, and disagreements between the client and our team. I now go through and register previous agreements and communication, but I notice how I increasingly mentally try to leave aside the old discussions and

⁶ The phenomenon of resonance (identified by Henri Pointcaré, 1854-1912) means that interacting matters with different frequency of their oscillations may amplify each other's movement significantly (Prigogine, 1997, pp. 39-44).

rather than arguing extensively about what has been said and not said, I 'take it from here', from what we have now, and suggest what I see as practical and useful ways forward. From our communication, I sense that this resonates with what the client needs as well. I will, in section 5.3, turn to how the American pragmatists suggest that moving towards certain 'ends-in-view' seem to open new opportunities for useful conduct.

In P3, I was also taken by Bergson's notion of *durée*. In the course of my rereading of the projects, I have found that my narratives display many examples of a qualitative perception of time ('The room went very quiet and the tension was tangible' and 'Seconds passed, it felt like an eternity and I slowly started feeling more confident' (P2, p.45). I note how significant events in my narratives are not described in a factual, step-wise and 'clock-time' manner. I have written about qualitative experience: cold, sunshine, tiredness, confusion, anger, intimidation, uncertainty, satisfaction, or sense of freedom. I now see how I present lived stories in the same way as one might write fiction, which might imply that the qualitative experience matters and that 'story' invites the reader's reconstrual of what might have happened (Bruner, 1990, 1991). What I emphasise here is that the arrow of time in our acting is more than a sequence in space-time (time illustrated in space). Bergson argues that time, say in a decision-making process, cannot be illustrated as a geometrical figure: 'If I glance over a road marked on the map and follow it up to a certain point, there is nothing to prevent my turning back and trying to find out whether it branches off anywhere. But time is not a line along which one can pass again' (1913/2005, p. 181). This resembles Prigogine's insistence on an arrow of time through bifurcations, but Bergson adds the qualitative experience.

In section 5.5, I will consolidate my thinking related to time aspects, including the perspectives of Bergson.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT 4—THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

In P4, I investigated the role of identity through a series of narratives from assignments in Central Asia where I work as team leader for a group of national and international consultants. Initially, I described relaxed communication with colleagues, where I had a strong sense of being attuned⁷ and

⁷ Stacey (2003, p. 69) describes attuning as how we—as humans and through bodily rhythms—mirror, resonate, and echo with each other's temporal-feeling dynamic in ways of which we are not normally conscious.

an appreciation of having a history together and our working together. In a second, contrasting, narrative, I described how I reacted unexpectedly defensively to what I perceived as my engineer's 'instruction', and, thirdly, I referred to a team meeting where I sensed that I moved (swayed) between different sense of selves (in Meadian terms), between being preoccupied with my role to that of being overly engaged in others' needs.

In the analysis, I took up the social act (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 7), the process of meaning-making through the ongoing exchange of gestures and responses. Based on the American pragmatist John Dewey's paper on the *Reflex Arc Concept* (1896/1982), I then elaborated a more detailed understanding of our interactions as a whole where the stimulus and response are not understood as separate, sequential steps but rather as '...divisions of labor, functioning factors, within the single concrete whole, now designated the reflex arc' (Ibid, p. 263). The moment I start responding to a gesture, my perception of that gesture is being formed as I speak, even before I speak, and I am therefore, in Meadian or Deweyian terms, responding *into* the gesture.

I discussed different aspects of identity and how I see myself in the role of team leader. Mead points to a thoroughly social understanding of self and self-consciousness, and I argued, based on Mead, that one's self and identity are continuously being developed in the interaction with other humans through the social act. I illustrated how mundane and apparently innocent micro-interactions have an impact on one's sense of self and ways of acting in, for instance, the role of team leader.

I stated that I see leadership as a relational process but not as a specific role, skill, or act located in one individual as suggested by some contemporary scholars as, for instance, (Cunliffe, 2002, 2009, 2014; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Hersted & Gergen, 2013). Rather, as team leader I feel involved in a process taking place between members of our team expressed through multiple micro-interactions over an extended period.

I researched various scholars' philosophies on identity and came to appreciate the hermeneutic⁸ tradition that suggests identity as self-interpretation and in particular, I discussed temporal, narrative understandings of identity. I argued based on Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor that identity reflects one's values (1989, p. 27) and is related to what British sociologist Anthony Giddens call the capacity to keep a particular narrative ongoing (1991, p. 54), a narrative which is renegotiated in the

⁸ Hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation (Colman, 2001).

daily interaction with other humans. One's identity is related to our practice which can be understood as an historically extended, socially embodied argument, suggests Scottish sociologist Alasdair MacIntyre (1981/2013, p. 257) and identity is constantly being developed in a relationship with colleagues in my professional practice.

I discussed how German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, interpreted by contemporary philosopher Axel Honneth (2000, p. 26), relates the sense of freedom of engaging with others, and I briefly referred to German political scientist Hannah Arendt's suggestion that there is a strong link between action and the sense of freedom (2006).

I acknowledged how other team leaders and I and could feel 'buffeted about' by demands, colleagues, clients, or circumstances, leading to uncertainty, over-engagement in individuals, or maybe a sense of 'stuckness'. I described how I, in Hegel's and Honneth's (Honneth, 2000, p. 26) words, can feel determinate or indeterminate at the same time and how this reflects on my role as team leader. I suggested that paying attention to these processes is important to understand better one's role as team leader.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON PROJECT 4—AND MOVEMENT OF MY THINKING

I reflect on Dewey's description of how we are acting into a situation

After having written P4 and discussed Dewey's paper on the Reflex Arc Concept (1896/1982), I realise how I have started seeing a 'reflex arc' in every action where I am involved. I increasingly pay attention to how even my intention to act seems to stimulate my perception of the object of my action. I may think about taking up a difficult conversation with a client, and I might sometimes try to avoid or postpone it. I now realise that just by thinking about and imagining the discussion I act *into* the process as it makes me appreciate the client and our potential interaction in a different way, and I also note how I sometimes find myself opening a discussion without really planning to do it. I also relate this to the pragmatists' suggestion that acting leads to new and unforeseen opportunities. This insight has been important for me, and I will pursue it in the development of my argument.

I reflect on my preoccupation with self and how I see identity as a narrative structure.

I reflect on why I searched for identity and how it appears to be an elusive concept. In P1, I described how in my youth I tried to 'create a self-understanding' (P1, p.5), and I have, in the projects, referred to individuals' roles or styles, for instance, a 'no-nonsense manager' (P2, p.26) or a 'skilled professional' (P4, p. 83). In P4, I described how I tried to understand the roles, styles, or identity of

myself or others, a search for something which I realised was difficult to define, probably because, as Danish psychologist Svend Brinkmann notes in a book on identity, there is quite a confusion in literature with regard to concepts such as ‘self’, ‘identity’, ‘personality’, ‘I’, etc. (2008, p. 28). I was thus searching for something and at the same time trying to find out *what* I was searching for—and in this additional reflection, I try to find out *why* I was searching. I clearly sensed that it meant something for how I understood myself and others interacting in our roles as team leader, consultant, or other.

In P4, I have expressed identity primarily through a narrative, hermeneutical view—as an interpretation of one’s biography, but I stopped short of linking Mead’s understanding of self (relating to oneself as an object) to the concept of identity. However, by rereading P4, I note that I have used the phrase ‘sense of self’ several times (P4, p.91) or even that I ‘changed my sense of self and thus identity’ (P4, p.107), leaving a definition of identity ambiguous. To clarify this, I turn to Stacey who describes how human bodies are characterised by a symphony or rhythms of energy (neural, heart, digestive, daily, annual, etc.), which constitute a person’s feelings as unique experiences of self, or identity. Stacey says, ‘A bodily sense of self, an identity, is actualized through the way in which others respond to that person’s unique bodily time contours and the way in which such responses are experienced’ (2003, p. 68). To me, this understanding of identity indicates an *unconscious* sense of self—in contrast to self-consciousness, a subtle difference which now makes a lot of sense to me. In P4, I often refer to how I search for an identity and the right way of acting as a leader and how I apparently have different identities or selves under different circumstances and towards different actors. If identity is an unconscious sense of self, it follows that it must appear elusive, and given that the self is continuously contingent of and developing in our interaction with others, it makes sense that one’s identity cannot easily be pinned down and labelled.

I now link Stacey’s description of identity as bodily sensations with the hermeneutic, narrative understanding of identity. Giddens says:

Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography* (1991, p. 53, emphasis in original).

He further writes:

The continuity of self-identity: the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body (Ibid, p. 55, emphasis in original).

I take this to mean an understanding of identity as a narrative, temporal understanding of a sense of self, that is, conscious or unconscious feelings of bodily sensations over an extended period. In continuation of the above, I suggest that this sense of personhood is socially developed in the complex patterning of interaction with other humans.

My aim has not been to find a 'right' definition of identity but to understand why it was important for me as team leader: When rereading P1 to P4 I note how, in relation to decision-making and acting, I have frequently referred to a lack of confidence rather than a lack of information or a lack of options. I point, for instance, to a lack of expertise in contract management (P2, p.26) or to feeling inadequate as a team leader (P4, p.87). Many scholars describe how identity is related to a sense of inclusion or exclusion and reflects a need for belonging (Brinkmann, 2008; Elias & Scotson, 1994; Erikson, 1968; Stacey, 2017; Stacey & Mowles, 2016, pp. 409-411). Similarly, shame, which is a fundamental aspect of human existence, expresses a constant concern about being exposed, feeling naked, in the eyes of others (Erikson, 1968; Stacey & Mowles, 2016, pp. 410-411). I here suggest that my search for identity can be related to a search for self-esteem and concern about being exposed, and I refer to my brief discussion of the need for recognition (P4, p.87). As Giddens says, 'Shame bears directly on self-identity because it is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography' (1991, p. 65). Again, I note that Giddens here does not stress how this identity is socially developed as a sense of personhood in the interaction with others.

Recently, we assigned an experienced team leader for a new project in Central Europe. He and I got on well, but it soon turned out that he might struggle to manage the job because of other obligations and family problems. When we met to initiate the assignment, I experienced him as quite frantic, eager to make plans, define deadlines, and prepare report structures. I experienced it as a strong wish to convince me that he would manage or, rather, as a need *not* to talk about his problems. The same was the case when we occasionally talked on the phone. When we much later discussed how things had *not* worked out (he simply hadn't been able to put the time into the job), I carefully tried to explain to him how I still appreciated him as a human and as a professional in our practice. I could easily—from my own experience—sense some of the feelings he had had over the period. I here draw attention to how I find that for professionals in our practice there is (as I anticipate is the case for most people) a need to belong and be respected by colleagues, and one's identity, one's sense of self, is continuously being developed and is constantly under threat.

Self is a process, and I suggest we experience a continuously developing unconscious sense of self (identity) as well as an awareness of self, self-consciousness. I here point to how identity exists

whether one is conscious of it or not. I have been preoccupied with identity but find that in the acting this preoccupation tends to fade. When attuning to others, as my colleague Anastasia and I attuned to each other, it is necessary that 'Ego and alter ego react to each other by restricting or negating their own respective, egocentric desires: they can then encounter each other without having the purpose of mere consumption' (Honneth, 2014, p. 15). Similarly, when I asked Jack to leave and sensed freedom afterwards (P3, p.58), I was also less occupied with my identity.

I suggest that acting constitutes identity at the same time as it paradoxically reduces my awareness of identity. I turn to Brinkmann who emphasises German philosopher Martin Heidegger's notion of 'Dasein' (Heidegger, 1953/2010) which may be translated as 'there-being' and implies that this is not only about physically *being* but also being *present* in something. This means that 'Dasein primarily exists as involved in a world of importance, relationships, and purpose, and only secondarily in a world of only material things' (Brinkmann, 2008, p. 36). I here suggest that I might now be less preoccupied with how I am portrayed and less focused on which 'roles' there are to act. Rather, I acknowledge that whatever my identity might be, it *is* there as a patterning of self and self-consciousness, forming and being formed all the time in the interaction with others. Following Brinkmann and Heidegger, I find that I am more focused on being *present* in the daily interaction where I and others act to the best of our abilities in accordance with our values. For my practice, I believe this means that I pay more attention to the patterning and organising around me and that my actions are slightly less constrained by concerns about identity.

THE KEY THEME OF MY RESEARCH—ACTING

Through the rereading, summarising of, and reflection on my four projects, I have come to realise how *acting* is the key theme throughout my research. I have become deeply engaged with the complex responsive processes of relating, the social act described by Mead, the temporal aspects of acting, and how self and identity are developed through acting. I realise that although I have conducted a wide and exploratory research, my findings and my interest have continuously returned to the experience of *doing* something, even in situations when I do not know what to do.

I have repeatedly referred to and critiqued what I see as traditional ways of understanding what it means to act as linear, well-planned processes with well-designed outcomes, typically experienced in systems thinking and more orthodox management literature. Initially, therefore, I will address, albeit very briefly, the background for these perceptions of action.

For the Greek philosopher Aristotle, the reference point for all forms of action is deliberate, rational action related to things we can control (2009, pp. 38-41), and in this perspective our deliberations are confined to the means, not the end (Ibid, p. 44), because the end is considered a given (Ibid, p. 220). This philosophy is reflected in later as well as contemporary Western economic and management theories based on rationality.

German sociologist Hans Joas (1996/2005) provides an overview of different attempts to address the topic of action in various academic fields and points to the work of prominent American scholar Talcott Parsons. In his book, *The Structure of Social Action* (1937/1968), Parsons outlines a broad and comprehensive theory which to a certain extent is inspired by economic action theory and the frameworks informed by classical (mechanical) physics (as well as the work of the German sociologist Max Weber). He maintains focus on the elements of the action itself, the ends, the situation, and the norms regulating the action (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 32). Comparing with physics, Parsons says:

Similarly, it is *impossible* even to talk about action in terms that do not involve a means-end relationship. It is not a phenomenon in the empirical sense. It is the indispensable logical framework in which we describe and think about the phenomena of action (Parsons, 1937, emphasis in original, quoted in (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 32)).

This perspective is still prevalent in my daily work as a consulting engineer and I can, for instance, in my practice within international development projects refer to the widespread reliance on the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) to plan, implement, and monitor a project in a structured manner and with clearly determined outcomes (P1, p.13).

Similarly, Joas discusses the work of Max Weber, who pointed to the social aspects of action (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 39). Weber developed a typology of the ways of developing social action:

Instrumentally rational action, based on expected behaviour of others, determining one's rationally developed means and ends.

Value-rational action, based on belief in the value of a certain behaviour for its own sake.

Affectual action, determined by emotions and affects.

Traditional action, determined by ingrained habituation.

Joas describes how many scholars suggest that actions which deviate from the norm of rational action are classified predominantly in terms of this deviation, meaning as deficient modes of rational action (Ibid, p. 40).

Obviously, Aristotle's, Parsons', and Weber's works are extremely comprehensive, complex, and continuously interpreted by many scholars, but what I am pointing to here is the classic perception that action should ideally be as rational as possible, have a linear temporal structure, and that other modes of action are defined in relation to their degree of non-rationality. According to Joas (Ibid, p. 147), all theories of rational action are based on three assumptions, namely that one is capable of purposiveness action, that one has control over one's own body, and that one is autonomous towards other individuals and the environment.

In contrast, I suggest that the actions I describe in my narratives are not always very rational, and even actions which may appear rational will (in Weberian terms) have strong elements of tradition, affect, or value involved. I describe a sense of not having a clear purpose and outcome, of not being in control, and a sense of continuous influence from others. I argue that my inquiry has led to a much more processual and non-linear understanding of acting. I also suggest that in my practice such an insight will be useful for team leaders who experience that they struggle to understand the multiple, changing circumstances and who feel that they are responsible for the outcome of a project which they cannot fully control.

Therefore, I offer an alternative understanding of what acting means. My research question was what it means to lead when other team leaders and I find ourselves in unexpected, complex situations, *not knowing what to do—and yet still finding ourselves doing something*, and I have, in the title of this thesis, formulated a brief answer:

We are ***Acting Into the Living Present***.

In the following, I explain what I mean by this sentence through three sections with similar headings, each dealing with one part of the statement. I will initially argue how I understand *Acting*.

5.3 **ACTING** INTO THE LIVING PRESENT.

I understand acting in processual terms, as something becoming, as a social undertaking and with a temporal structure. I adopt a complex process perspective where I see acting as evolving themes and patterns of gestures and responses between humans rather than as an activity undertaken by an individual.

A PROCESSUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ACTING

I have increasingly come to see my practice from a process perspective, and I argue that a team leader is an integrated part of a process. Process metaphysics is the worldview that sees processes, rather than substances, as the basic form of the universe (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 2), and in P2 I described how I, as project director, chaired a meeting with the contractor. I was apprehensive before the meeting. Afterwards, I appreciated the client's compliment, but I was also concerned about what would happen next. From a *substance* metaphysical perspective, the chairing of the meeting was the process while the role of being a project director was essentially unchanged. From a *process* metaphysical perspective, however, I—as project director—was also part of the process. The role and identity of being a project director were continuously changing through the discussions, and in the evening, I was not the self-same project director I had been in the morning⁹.

Therefore, being a project director or a team leader is not a fixed role; in a process perspective, it constitutes of *doing* things such as chairing a meeting or communicating with the team members in a minibus. Helin and colleagues say (with reference to Nietzsche): '*...how* something becomes determines what it *is* (i.e. that it becomes). It therefore never "is" in a fixed way.' (2014, p. 11, emphases in original), and, in this, I also see how the team leader is not a detached observer or manager, but an integrated part of the process, being part of a stream, as Griffin says (2002, p. 13).

A process perspective invites us to acknowledge, rather than reduce, the complexity of what we experience (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 3). I have argued throughout this thesis that leading a project team is a social undertaking, a patterning of complex processes that reach beyond any meeting, event, organisation, or group of individuals, and that this perspective is temporal (Stacey, 2003, p. 7).

In my statement—*Acting Into the Living Present*—I use the gerund form (the ing-form) *acting* to indicate how I understand my own and others' interaction in a processual and non-linear way. It signifies what I have argued above: what we are *doing* constitutes our identities, acting has a temporal structure without a beginning or an end, and acting involves multiple actors. This contrasts with the words *action* or *to act*, which, I find, may signify a specific intervention by a particular individual(s) in a specific time and context. Many contemporary scholars have adopted a process

⁹ The example is based on (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 5)

vocabulary, and the ‘...growing use of the gerund(ing) indicates the desire to move towards dynamic ways of understanding organizational phenomena,...’ (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010, p. 9). As American scholar Karl Weick says, the ing-form provides a present as well as a history and in process thinking verbs are just as important as nouns (2010, pp. 108-109).

Because of my research, the process perspective has become increasingly important for me in my practice as project manager/team leader. As I increasingly adopt a social understanding of individuals, I also see how acting is not a task undertaken by an individual but is developing in the interaction between us. In the acting, I find colleagues and myself being deeply involved participants where all our gestures, actions, and relations are forming others while we are being formed at the same time, sometimes under paradoxical circumstances.

ACTING UNDERSTOOD AS COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESSES OF RELATING

I find that the theory of complex responsive processes convincingly describes the experience I have of non-linear and rather confusing processes in management. Stacey and his co-researchers (2000) suggest that processes in an organisation and between humans are not directed by any ‘outside authority’ but are basically many and constant interactions between all involved.

The theory of complex responsive processes is a theory of action, says Stacey and: ‘Individual mind is the actions of a body directed toward itself while social is the action of bodies directed toward each other in paradoxical processes of continuity and potential transformation at the same time’ (2003, p. 17). Human *action* is, in this perspective, patterns of interaction which are not thought of as systems but as activities of humans iterated over time (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, pp. 335-336).

Stacey and Mowles emphasise how thinking in this way directs attention to actual lived experience rather than generalisations, systems, or tools:

We argue that a perspective along these lines forms a coherent way of thinking that directs attention to the narrative forms of human experience. The focus is on lived experience in local situations in the present, paying particular attention to the diversity of relationships within which individual and organisational identities emerge. The practical implication of such a move is that we focus attention directly on patterns of human relating and ask what kind of power relations, ideology and communication they reflect (2016, p. 336).

I will illustrate this by the following example from P3 (p.56), where I describe how Jack and I had differences in our understanding of good financial management:

Jack turned out the pockets of his tank trousers and his shoulder bag, displaying a staggering amount of U.S. dollars and local currency on his desk; these were the project finances and our cash balance. I stared in disbelief, feeling that somehow something was not under control. Jack explained that we did not use our bank account as we would have to *pay* interest to deposit money, so when funds were transferred from head office every month he would immediately take out the monies and keep it in his personal bag. And no, we did not have a safe. I was not impressed at all and I told him so.

In this sequence, I note how all the complex aspects mentioned above and in the previous section (p.131) are at play: The *local interaction* as the verbal and non-verbal communication between Jack and myself ('displayed a staggering amount...staring in disbelief...Jack explained...'), played out in the *living present*, that is, a present in which for both of us an experience of pasts (cash management) and concerns about the next days ('...something was not under control') were at play through unconscious *narrative-like patterning* of how we had done ('Jack explained...') or should do, and this in turn shaped both our *identities*, the sense of our selves (practical manager, responsible manager). Our compulsion of values and *constraining* norms ('I was not impressed...') related to cash management constituted our *ideologies* (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 6). The non-linear interactions of our ways of perceiving good cash management led to *amplifications of deviations* ('...stared in disbelief...'), creating *novelty*, eventually leading to Jack's dismissal. We experienced *conflicting constraints* in that the *power* balance between us shifted ('I was not impressed...and I told him so'), allowing an emergent *narrative-like patterning of experience* of the social object of cash management, a narrative of how, for instance, colleagues and I as well as our superiors frown upon this aspect of project management. When I asked Jack to leave immediately, he was excluded from the project, from our list of free-lance consultants, from my personal thoughts, and from further dialogue.

I here draw attention to how all the different aspects of the complex processes are at play at the same time, even if we try to unpick them to enhance our understanding of what is emerging. Also, 'complex processes' is not a phenomenon related to particularly 'complex projects' but is simply what is continuously experienced in our daily lives in our daily micro-interactions.

The implications for my practice are, therefore, that in my daily practice as a team leader I increasingly observe how these complex processes are played out and how I am an integral part of them. I suggest that acting is not something undertaken by me as team leader but is rather a pattern

of interaction between several actors. I do not deny responsibility for my actions, but I am increasingly aware of how these are developing in relation to others.

The theory of complex responsive process is, as mentioned, based on Mead's theories of social interaction as I have taken up in P2 to P4, and in the following section, I will take up how he suggests that novelty occurs in the acting.

MEAD'S THEORY OF THE ACT

Mead posits that the act is the unit of existence (Mead, 1938/1972, p. 65)—a position that I agree with in my earlier suggestion that one's acting constitutes identity. I will, in the following and through incidents from my narratives, describe how the acting surprised me and where I experienced novelty. I emphasise that even if we here unpick the details of individual agents' roles and gestures and responses, these are micro-interactions in much wider complex processes.

Through four narratives in P4, I describe how I worked as team leader for a group of consultants in Central Asia. In the first narrative (p. 83), I describe how I approached my senior engineer, Richard, with a compliment and realised that even approaching the subject created an emotional response in me, which would possibly be similar to that in him. Thus, the gesture was what Mead calls a significant symbol. Mead does not locate meaning and development of thought in the individual but in the continuous and complex flow of gestures and responses, which are inseparable phases of the social act, and which do not have a specific beginning or end. For the act to be social, the involved agents must be able to anticipate the same parts of the act (Mead, 1925, p. 265), meaning that the social act involves the co-operation of people where the different parts of the social act appear in the act of the individuals as a social object, the generalised tendencies for a large number of people to act in similar ways in similar situations (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 374).

Richard and I both understood the nature of a compliment even if it was unexpected, and I suggest that we both sensed the changing patterns of the conversation, being old friends as well as professional colleagues and having roles as team leader and consultant. Complimenting Richard was thus a social object.

For Mead, the understanding of the social act and the social object leads to what he calls sociality, 'the capacity of being several things at once' (1932/2002, p. 75), and he suggests that this is where novelty occurs (see previous section, p. 125). In the narrative, I comment that the exchange of words was possibly an act of 'levelling our relationship', indicating that novelty occurred in sociality when

we were both able to sense each other's position, being 'several things at once'. I note how the word 'levelling' has spatial connotations, and observing a complex responsive process perspective, I would now rather say that Richard and I continuously negotiated our relationship based on power relations (team leader versus experienced manager) and our needs for inclusion (being part of the project team) which in turned formed our identities.

In a second narrative, I experienced that Richard gave me an unexpected instruction, which left me uncomfortable, subdued, and passive (P4, p.86), and I reflect on how this reaction was quite habitual for me. Richard and I (and our colleagues) kept working together over the following year, developing our very good cooperation, and at the same time, I became more deeply engaged in my research and, therefore, often reflected on the incident. In my last narrative, I described a situation where I reproved Richard because he consistently tried to prove a point instead of listening to the concerns of the local residents. I was taken by surprise when he

still moved around the table with the laptop to engage the engineers while I talked. I became very annoyed, paused for a second then said sharply, 'Now, Richard, would you mind?'. Richard nodded and said, 'Yes, sure, I am listening', and then looked eagerly down at his screen again, trying to catch the attention of the young engineer. I was quite surprised, immediately raised my eyebrows and said sharply, 'Well, but!' Richard stopped, looked up, closed the screen, and nodded, 'OK'. I was aware that I was telling him off in front of our team, but the reaction came quite naturally, in the moment.

Later Richard and I had fun looking together at the satellite images on the screen, discussing the mountain slopes; and he appeared to be fine about the earlier exchange. He said, 'You are right, it was good to talk about it and get the full picture' (P4, p.114).

I refer to the experience of body rhythms, creating a sense of feelings, expressed through unconscious communication. Richard communicated his feelings (eagerness) unconsciously by moving around the table, nodding, apparently without paying attention. This, in turn, created feelings in me in terms of surprise and annoyance, which was then expressed by saying: 'Richard, would you mind?' It created meaning, but apparently, it did not change Richard's feelings. Stacey describes *protosymbols* as '...bodily gestures that call forth a bodily response in another to produce meaning for both...' (2003, p. 70), but it is unconscious. When I subsequently 'raised my eyebrows and said sharply...' I was '...aware that I was telling him off', there was a changed reaction in Richard as he looked up and closed his screen, indicating that meaning was created between us through a significant symbol. I suggest that me being *aware* is an indication that I sensed in my body how both he and the team might feel it in their bodies.

Through these surprises, we kept co-creating meaning in the flow of exchanges between the two of us as well as with the colleagues around us. The social act, the few words between us, was the culmination of conversations leading up to the little intermezzo, however, at the same time, when it broke a pattern of unreflected habitual actions (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 129), it became the beginning of a different conversation between us, where both had an experience of a change, I suggest.

I now see two views on novelty.

First, I refer to the complex responsive processes perspective, where ‘amplifications of differences’ between us have the potential to create novelty (or creativity or destruction):

...patterns of interaction emerge as continuity and potential transformation at the same time in the iteration of interaction itself. The future is thus under perpetual construction in the interaction between people, and it is the processes of interaction between differences that amplifies these differences into novelty. The explanation of novelty lies in the properties of the processes of interaction (Stacey, 2011, p. 323).

I suggest that Richard and I experienced differences when we disagreed in the engineers’ office. Differences occur as we have different histories, says Stacey, and they can potentially be amplified, pending on the properties of the interaction, and such amplifications may lead to novelty and creativity, but also to destruction.

Second, I suggest that Mead helps us to propose what these properties of the interactions might be. Richard and I (and possibly others) experienced sociality—the capacity of being several things at once. I here emphasise that sociality does not mean just that Richard and I agreed. It is also reflected in how we experienced our amplified differences: I sensed how Richard was eager and ignored us and he eventually sensed how I was annoyed, so we were both in our own as well as in the others’ frame of reference. Simpson points to how this capacity of being several things at once ‘...admits the possibilities of mutual adjustment towards common collective actions...’ as well as potential self-reflexivity (2014, p. 280). I can here see how Mead’s understanding of sociality supports the explanation of novelty as the amplification of differences described by Stacey.

I now reflect on my choice of research question. I have been trying to understand the processes where we are able to move into uncertainty. This represents novelty, I think, meaning that we have the capacity of ‘being several things at once’, and I increasingly acknowledge that such a ‘capacity’ is not located in the individual but is an evolving pattern in the interaction. A capacity to act towards

Richard in the meeting is not located in me, but in the continuous patterning of gestures and responses between us as well as others.

Mead was a prominent member of the school of pragmatism which developed in the first part of the 20th century. I find that pragmatism offers some useful perspectives on the concept of acting, to which I will now turn.

THE PRAGMATISTS' UNDERSTANDING OF ACTION

In P1, I describe (p.22) that I had 'struggled to convince my colleagues that, even if our strategies were usually sitting on a shelf, 'what really counted was the process of making them', and in P3 I refer to how entering into Central Asia the first time was not a deliberate strategy apart from following a client. I now reflect on how in our daily work I still participate actively in discussing strategies but eventually stop listening when the detailed tasks with deadlines are distributed. My experience is that they are usually not pursued in detail as we eventually move on to undertake the actions that we find are useful to us. I find that the thinking of the pragmatists (described in the following) helps me to acknowledge this way of understanding acting.

Joas engages himself with the creativity and novelty in actions and turns to the tradition of pragmatism where meaning is derived from lived experience in which humans engage with their environments on a continuous basis and where theories are considered instruments in the human endeavour to cope with daily life and to create meaning by applying concepts in an experimental way (Brandt & Elkjaer, 2008, p. 169). Pragmatism was developed in reaction to the Cartesian idea of the individual's right to doubt basically everything apart from one's ability to doubt. The pragmatists' reaction was to doubt the usefulness of Cartesian doubt (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 128) and to state that there are things which are self-evident facts that humans must take for granted. We cannot doubt everything all the time and may reserve doubts for things which stop us taking the next step together:

A person may, it is true, in the course of his studies, find reason to doubt what he began by believing; but in that case he doubts because he has a positive reason to do so, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim (Peirce, 1934, quoted in Joas 1996, p. 128).

In the pragmatists' thinking, all actions and all doubts are anchored in a firm belief in successful habits and self-evident facts, which is periodically shattered by new experiences. The world-view must then be reconstructed through a creative process on the part of the actor, says Joas. 'The

pragmatists therefore maintain that all human action is caught in the tension between unreflected habitual action and acts of creativity' (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 129).

This leads to the position that action is not the pursuit of clear-cut goals or in the application of norms, and creativity is anchored in action. Dewey says:

The pragmatic theory of intelligence means that the function of mind is to project new and more complex ends—to free experience from routine and from caprice. Not the use of thought to accomplish purposes already given either in the mechanism of the body or in that of the existing state of society, but the use of intelligence to liberate and liberalize action, is the pragmatic lesson (Dewey, 1917, p. 63, quoted in Joas 1996/2005, p. 133).

Dewey introduces the concept of 'end in-view' to define the role of goals in the ongoing series of action (1958/2013, p. 161), and he speaks about the reciprocal relationship between an action's means and the end.

In Port City (P2, p.43), I refer to the meeting and a tense interaction with the contractor of the collapsed infrastructure project. I describe the flow of gestures and responses and how we were not sure where these would take us, although we had some sense of where we were heading: 'The MD shrugged his shoulders and asked, "So, what is your suggestion?" I was not at all sure what to suggest, but I thought I saw an opening, so I said to him, "I am not sure what to suggest, but I am trying to understand"' (p.45). I recently told my colleague Richard about this experience to which he responded, 'Oh yes, I know: "Who blinks first"', indicating, I believe, that as an experienced negotiator he knew such games very well. However, I believe that he hereby assumed that the two parties had very clear end goals and played the usual games of skilled negotiators. It strikes me that this was not my experience—I believe both parties were seeking common ground step by step, maintaining 'ends-in-view'.

Certain 'ends in-view' were also established before the meeting:

[My client said] 'your success criteria are that they stay in the room'. I certainly felt the pressure, I was aware that she did not need a fiasco and I returned her smile and said that I would do my best and then we would see (P2, p.43).

Thus, she offered a significant symbol, that is, a gesture where we had similar feelings, a concern about the outcome as well as a sense of what could be a first step. Obviously, the opponent staying in the room would not be an ultimate goal for a meeting, but I suggest that what was partly a

humorous exchange between us was also negotiated ‘ends in-view’ with an expectation that new targets would have to evolve; and these may evolve, even if we cannot see them beforehand. Joas states:

Only when we recognise that certain means are available to us do we discover goals which had not occurred to us before. Thus, means not only specify goals, but they also expand the scope for possible goal-setting. ‘Ends-in-view’ are not, therefore, vaguely conceived future situations, but concrete plans of action which serve to structure present action (1996/2005, p. 154).

In this, the pragmatists’ approach, ‘it is not sufficient to consider human action as being *contingent* on the situation, but it should also be recognized that that the situation is *constitutive* of action’ (Joas, 1996/2005, p. 160, emphases in original). The creativity lies in the process of acting—not in the achieved goal.

As an example, I here recognise what contemporary scholar Heape refers to from an innovation workshop where he describes how one of the participants said “‘I am on to something but I’m not quite sure what.’” Heape states that the important point here is that he and his participants had shifted from wanting ‘...to know it all before making a move, to a position where they were able to rest in the understanding that the something they had glimpsed in their inquiry was enough for them to act on and move forward with’ (2014, p. 189). Thus, it would be ‘good enough for now’, as would be expressed by the pragmatists. It appears that Heape’s students noticed something which arrested or shifted their attention, and I can relate this to Dewey’s description of the reflex arc, how the stimulus and the response in an interaction are continuously developing, a discussion I will pursue in the next section.

In our practice, I do not suggest that we shall forget about our ultimate goal for a project, but I note how we in our team make some crude longer-term plans supported by short-term detailed work, plans, and goals. At the time of writing, our team is implementing a study in Central Asia where the client clearly described the original outcome. However, other ongoing IFI-funded studies will determine if we can continue as originally planned. We now, after the initial reporting, take up this discussion with the client, and it has been important to us as ‘ends in view’ to prepare a reasonable case and overview for the client; then we will see how we can move on or not.

Contemporary scholars Chia and Holt argue that strategy emerges non-deliberately through everyday practical coping (2006, 2009). They do not refer to pragmatism, however, in a similar vein (using the term *dwelling* after Heidegger¹⁰) they suggest:

Explaining strategy in dwelling terms enables us to understand how it is that actions may be consistent and organizationally effective without (and even in spite of) the existence of purposeful strategic plans.

I draw a direct line to my examples in P1, where I describe an interest in the difficult, elusive aspects in uncertainty theories or complex processes, and I suggest that the ability to accept to move forward based on ‘what we know for now’ into something unknown is an important aspect for me as well as for many other team leaders in international projects.

I have previously discussed how Prigogine’s notion of the arrow of time made me aware of irreversibility and a need to move forward. I now add another dimension: Dewey emphasises how action changes the situation and creatively opens new opportunities and new goals—even if these paradoxically are not known or acknowledged from an early stage. This stresses how any deliberations before acting cannot take in all the future avenues even though they have a role in the process.

A SUMMARY OF MY UNDERSTANDING OF ACTING

Classic understanding of action reflects an expectation of a rational means-ends relationship which I have contrasted with my experience of not feeling rational in my interaction with colleagues. I argue that I see acting as a process, a flow, involving multiple actors in a continuous and complex interweaving of relationships. In particular, I see acting as a complex patterning of gestures and responses between humans rather than as an activity undertaken by an individual. I also argue how—from the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating—the occurrence of

¹⁰ Heidegger’s *dwelling* is related to looking directly at what is objectively present rather than observing a longer-term perspective: ‘In this “*dwelling*”... - as refraining from every manipulation and use – the *perception* of what is objectively present takes place’ (1953/2010, p. 62, emphases in original). This is related to his notion of *dasein*, popularly meaning being *present* in something.

differences may potentially amplify into novelty. I note an appreciation of sociality, the ability to maintain several perspectives of oneself and others, and I acknowledge how this is a prerequisite for novelty to occur. My experience is reflected in the pragmatists' understanding of acting based on actual lived experience and a suggestion to keep 'ends-in-view' rather than maintaining a theoretical future goal.

I will now turn to my second aspect of *Acting Into the Living Present*—an understanding of how the acting influences and is being influenced by the situation in a continuous coordination.

5.4 ACTING **INTO** THE LIVING PRESENT.

Acting is a process *into* a situation and our reaction cannot be seen as a linear, causal process. In our communication with other humans, we are acting into a perpetual and iterative process.

DEWEY'S UNDERSTANDING OF ACTING *INTO* A SITUATION

In P4 (p. 85), I described Dewey's critique of the classic understanding of a linear relationship between stimulus, sensation, and response and his suggestion that one's response depends on how the situation is perceived in light of one's previous experience (Vo & Kelemen, 2014). Dewey states:

... the so-called response is not merely to the stimulus; it is, so to speak, *into* it. (Dewey, 1896/1982, p. 264, emphasis in original)

Dewey uses the example of a child reaching for a burning candle and points to how the initial perception of the stimulus is dependent on, for instance, the child's previous experience of something exciting or something dangerous. By raising the arm, focusing on the flame, and reaching out the child may start appreciating the danger and excitement and will also study the flame in more detail. The response is thus changing the perception of the flame—it acts *into* the stimulus—and vice versa. Dewey says that the stimulus, in order to be a stimulus, requires the attention of the organism (Reck, 1964, p. xvii).

I recall, for instance (P1), how I addressed a participant in a leader training course, how his facial reaction made me slightly emotional, and how I was aware of it, which in turn influenced my way of speaking and how this kept developing through our brief exchange of gestures and responses.

I became engaged in a discussion where I was directly addressing a participant. I became passionate and expressed my personal feelings about the issues he touched upon, to which he reacted positively and the discussion took new turns... 'I was very much aware when it happened that I was

emotional, and I saw that it touched him, and I was aware of the impact it had on him and on the group when I continued.’ (P1, p.10)

This reflects a continuous change and emergence in the actors’ perception of the situation, which was different from what was there at the beginning.

Dewey points to how the stimulus of seeing a candle is not the first element in the sequence as the seeing is an act in itself:

...the real beginning is with the *act* of seeing; it is looking, and not the sensation of light. The sensory quale gives the value of the act, just as the movement furnishes its mechanism and control, but both sensation and movement lie inside, not outside the act (1896/1982, pp. 263-264, emphasis in original).

He also gives the example of hearing an unexpected noise:

If one is reading a book, if one is hunting, if one is watching in a dark place on a lonely night, if one is performing a chemical experiment, in each case, the noise has a very different mental value; it is a different experience (1896/1982, p. 266).

We are thus not listening passively to raw input. Listening is an activity and part of what Dewey calls *coordination*, and it is our active acting that determines the character of the stimuli that we experience.

In P2 (p.25), I describe how I was at home walking my dog on a late and sunny Friday afternoon when I heard the noise of my phone ringing: ‘I felt rather downhearted when I recognised the country code on the display and had a feeling that my weekend would now be ruined’. Referring to Dewey’s position, the sound of the phone and the number on the display was not a ‘neutral’ stimulus; the sound and display called out in me a sensation of potential trouble with the client, a sensation which had been built up through previous experience and possibly also the bodily sensation of now wanting to relax with my dog. Also, the following conversation—the social act—and the subsequent events would have an impact on how I next time would perceive the sound and display of this number calling me. I appreciate why Dewey says that the response will act *into* the stimulus—it is changing it in the moment as well as in the longer term, although it may also stay the same, depending on what follows.

Dewey points to how one must interpret an impulse which may lead to doubt, uncertainty, and potential conflicts. This leads to an analysis of the process, of the unusual stimulus, the unusual

response, and the overall act with the purpose to resolve the conflict—in line with what Joas describes: ‘...that all human action is caught in the tension between unreflected habitual action and acts of creativity’ (Joas, 1996, p.129).

Dewey points to the act as the focus of attention:

Neither mere sensation, nor mere movement, can ever be either stimulus or response; only an act can be that (1896/1982, p. 266);

I can relate to Dewey’s suggestion that acting is the key to creating novelty and creativity (In Joas’s words). I now understand acting as a circular, iterative process in line with Mead’s social act consisting of gestures and responses, continuously developing the self and creating sociality, leading to novelty. I also want to emphasise how this iteration is part of a wider pattern of communication in contrast to a classic perception of a linear relationship between cause and effect.

In P1, I describe how I could not really engage when participating in a course on cognitive psychology; I found it ‘...too scientific as I was rather looking to be engaged in processes with other people like I recalled from our intensive group dynamics on the advanced leader training courses’ (P1, p.17). Brinkmann helps me to explain what I now think was a point: Dewey critiques that the psychology of his time (leading to the later cognitive science) was based on partial elements such as stimulus, representation, and response instead of the entire organism’s activities based on an ‘ends-in-view’. Dewey suggests a psychology based on qualitative aspects, and, says Brinkmann: ‘It is not a science of passive billiard balls in interaction but a science of organisms that continuously interpret and reconstruct the world in which they live’ (2006, p. 105).

At the time I wrote this chapter, I planned to call a client, who had indirectly expressed his dissatisfaction with our team’s performance on one of our projects in Asia. I had not looked forward to the discussion as I was not sure what to suggest, but I reflected on how I started appreciating that the (pragmatic) *acting* may result in one seeing new opportunities not previously considered. I wondered how the act of calling the client—and even thinking about it—might redefine my perception of his attitude and our relationship as the perception would not be mine alone; it would be part of a social act. This may sound trivial, but I sense that I am becoming increasingly aware of the power (as well as the risk) of acting *into* the situation and how even the planning of the acting constitutes acting.

Dewey is supported by Mead who says that every perception of the past, as well as the future, adjusts the impulse, the act.

What represents past and what represents future are not distinguishable as contents. The surrogate of the past is the actual adjustment of the impulse to the object as stimulus. The surrogate of the future is the control which the changing field of experience during the act maintains over its execution (1934/1967, pp. 350-351).

Mead here points to the very important aspect of time, which leads me to the third part of the theme in this section, temporality, expressed as the *Living Present*.

5.5 ACTING INTO THE *LIVING PRESENT*.

Acting happens in a living present which involves both its past and its future. The changing, temporal structure of our identities influences the living present where we sense an arrow of time, meaning that our acting is irreversible.

A COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESS PERSPECTIVE ON THE LIVING PRESENT

In P3, I described the temporal aspects of my experience when I had to replace the project manager, Jack, and I discussed what Stacey and colleagues coined the living present (Shaw, 2002; Stacey et al., 2000), meaning that the present is influenced by one's past experience as well as expectations for the future.

I described elements of past experience such as handling project cash, working in sub-optimal office conditions, or my relation to my old trusted colleague, Mikkel, who was unhappy with Jack's performance. My past also included the unpleasant experience of walking someone out of the door. Other strong emotions influenced me, for instance, a lifelong tendency to avoid conflicts, a sense of inadequacy, and an irritation building up over two to three days. Similarly, the present was influenced by the future through my concern about taking over a complex project in a field where I had very limited experience. In this paradoxical way, the future influences the perception of the past and vice versa, and we cannot think of the present as a dimensionless dot in a linear flow of time (Shaw, 2002, p. 46).

The *past* means the more distant experience as well as what has happened moments before the present, meaning that micro-interactions on the day between Jack, Mikkel, other staff, and myself also became elements of the past in a continuous process. In the below snippet, I note, for instance,

how I ‘recalled the same feeling from other projects’, ‘events where I had hesitated...felt uncomfortable...’, and so forth.

I needed to find out how long he should stay and this should not be for very long. But again, I was concerned that I did not yet have enough knowledge about the project, the team, the key issues, and main problems. Nor did I have the solutions to the problems. Alone that evening, I reflected on this uncertainty and recalled strongly the same feeling from other projects or events where I had hesitated because I had felt uncomfortable and could not see the way forward. I decided that the next day I would speak to him about making this handing-over period much shorter than initially agreed. I felt that I did not really want him in the office anymore. (P3, p.57)

Similarly, the *future* also included the immediate handling of working with Jack, his imminent dismissal, and my subsequent meeting with the office staff. I note how I ‘needed to find out’, ‘did not yet have enough knowledge’, ‘next day I would speak to him’, ‘I felt that I did not really want him in the office anymore’.

In my deliberations in the project office and in the narrative, I did not go through the pasts and the future in a structured manner (although I certainly tried). The reiteration of past and future in the living present develops perpetually as a fractal process (Stacey et al., 2000, p. 36), in other words, self-similar at all scales (Shaw, 2002, p. 46). If I further analyse details in the narrative, I might suggest that the wording ‘I felt that I did not really want him in the office anymore’ still implies one or two hesitations: ‘felt...really’, yet another small fractal structure, which illustrates that ‘making up my mind and acting’ is not a simple linear process, but an evolving pattern of communicative interaction, the gestures and responses between humans or own internal dialogues; all temporal processes, where feelings in the sense of bodily rhythms may or may not resonate with those of others.

In the narrative, I described a sense of relief and a sense of overcoming my strong, historical tendency to avoid conflicts and unpleasant decisions. Shaw describes how

‘...conversation of communicative action in the living present is transformational of personal and social realities, of the patterning of identity and difference’ (2002, p. 46).

Shaw here points to the change of *identity*—a theme I will turn to in the following.

IDENTITY SHAPES ACTING AND IS BEING SHAPED AT THE SAME TIME

I posit that our acting is related to an understanding of our identities. The serious step of asking Jack to leave the office strongly influenced my perception of my identity as a manager as I realised that I

made a tough move but also how this move was developed through the unexpected patterning of communication in which we were all involved. Stacey and colleagues say:

In what we will call the Transformational Teleology of Hegel there is self-organization that has the potential for transformation as well as continuity at the same time. In this process identity is being created (2000, p. 36)¹¹.

I have linked Stacey's description of identity as a sense of self with the hermeneutic, narrative understanding of identity, that is, conscious or unconscious feelings of bodily sensations over an extended period: First, identity has a narrative structure which is perpetually renegotiated in the daily interaction with other humans and is related to what Giddens calls 'the capacity to keep a particular narrative ongoing' (1991, p. 54, Italics in original). Also, Taylor says, 'In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going' (1989, p. 47). Second, Identity is related to one's values, as described by Taylor: 'My identity is defined by my commitments and identifications which provide the frame of horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand' (Ibid, p. 27). Third, identity is related to the experience of exclusion and inclusion as well as shame and I describe examples where I questioned my narrated identity.

I understand this identity to be *constitutive* of acting as, for instance, described by Shaw (2002, p. 46). In P4 I have through four narratives described how my sense of self, my identity, changed through the interactions with my colleagues. I reacted to a sense of being a passive individual and through the following reflections, writings, acting and involvement with others I engaged myself actively with this sense of identity. I have also described how acting in certain situations for me created a sense of freedom.

¹¹ In Project 2, I have described how, based on a dualistic Kantian philosophy, the alternative *rationalist teleology* suggests that a human can chose a future goal by reasoning and that a *formative teleology* suggests that the future is a mature form of something which is implied at the start of the movement (Stacey, 2001, p. 27). These frameworks assume that thought comes before action and assumes processing of information in accordance with mental models.

I now find that my research into identity has had the effect that it has become less important to me. I realise that reflection is important, but there is no need to categorise oneself—identity *is* very much a continuous sense of how we find ourselves interacting with colleagues, in our practice, in what we find are the best ways possible while observing our values.

In summary, I find that *acting* is formed by and is at the same time forming one's identity, which is a conscious or unconscious moral self-interpretation with a narrative structure. Also, I argue that it is more important to try to interact in accordance with one's moral horizon than to speculate about how to label oneself.

This implies a forward movement, the arrow of time, which I will turn to in a last section of my discussion of the time perspective.

THE ARROW OF TIME IN ACTING—THE IRREVERSIBILITY, NOVELTY, AND DURÉE.

In the acting there is an *arrow of time* (Prigogine, 1997). In P1, I describe how I, as young scout leader, travelled across the country to participate in an Easter training programme (p.7). I 'left my comfort zone', became 'absorbed and energised', and 'never looked back', phrases that point to aspects of *irreversibility*, *novelty*, and a *qualitative* experience of time. In the following, I will touch on these three aspects.

Irreversibility. In P2, I describe how I chaired a tense meeting with a hostile contractor to discuss progress of the construction works. We took steps forward, offered statements, and I was aware that we had seriously upset the contractor: 'I felt that now I had certainly committed myself, there was no way back' (p. 45). Says Stacey: 'We can only go forward in time and elaborate on what we have said or done...interaction with each other in one way immediately precludes all alternative ways of interacting and that what happens next will be different from what might have been if we had interacted in one of these alternative ways' (2003, p. 67). The path dependency means that we can never go back from the present viewpoint to a past one.

It has been educational for me to acknowledge the arrow of time, how I must accept that the processes of human interaction cannot be reversed and that I cannot always know what will be the outcome of my next step. An implication for my practice has been that I have increasingly come to accept this condition in my daily work. I believe I focus less on what we could have done, and I have become aware of how new opportunities may occur when one takes the next step.

Novelty. Prigogine points to the clear link between time and unpredictability (Prigogine, 2003, p. 54). I discussed novelty in section 5.3 (p. 149) and here re-emphasise how novelty and irreversibility are interlinked. Stacey states: 'It is because of the potential for small differences to escalate that we cannot retrace our steps. In other words, it is because time has the structure of the living present that we also experience the arrow of time' (2011, p. 320).

Durée. I argue that one needs to pay attention to the experienced quality of time, what the French philosopher Henri Bergson called 'durée' (1913/2005). In my narratives, I have presented significant moments of acting, which (in Mead's words) broke the otherwise undifferentiated flow of time and which had significance and led to novel situations. French scholar Suzanne Guerlac quotes Bergson to define duration as what 'prevents everything from being given at once' (2015, p. 31), which means, I believe, that a whole is not just the sum of its parts (and thereby given at once) but an ever-changing and emerging experience. So, what I emphasise here is that the arrow of time in acting is more than a sequence in space-time; it is rather a continuous flow of qualitative experience without distinguishable single elements and without any clear start or end.

5.6 ACTING INTO THE LIVING PRESENT—MY ARGUMENTS IN SUMMARY

In the following, I summarise what I consider are my key arguments developed in this thesis.

I UNDERSTAND ACTING AS A PROCESS

I suggest that classic understanding of action reflects an expectation of a rational means-ends relationship where actions with linear causality are carefully designed and applied by individuals to reach well-defined and planned goals within a certain context and within a certain time. In contrast, I see acting in processual terms, as something becoming, as a patterning of activities with no start and no end as such as it reaches back in history as well as forward into the future. I see acting as a process, a flow, involving multiple actors in a continuous and complex interweaving of relationships.

I see acting in our projects as complex responsive processes of relating in the form of unpredictable, evolving themes and patterns of gestures and responses between colleagues, clients, and others rather than as an activity undertaken by an individual such as me as team leader. I argue that the theory of complex responsive processes helps us to pay attention to the detailed micro-interactions, verbal and non-verbal, between human bodies in in our project work in contrast to how systemic as well as stronger process thinking tend to provide abstract concepts for our work and our way of

acting. I argue that as team leader I do not have an outside position to the acting in our project but am fully involved in the process while this influences me at the same time.

I argue that my experience of my practice may be explained by the pragmatists' understanding of acting based on actual lived experience where the means paradoxically become our ends-in-view and vice versa, meaning that we do not just try to maintain a theoretical, future goal. I argue that in our projects we increasingly observe what is practically possible for us to move forward towards what we find is useful and makes sense.

Novelty occurs because of the non-linear conditions of human interaction. I acknowledge from the perspective of complex responsive processes that novelty and creation (or destruction) may occur when our differences are amplified. I also argue, however, that sociality, the ability to maintain several perspectives of oneself and imagine those of others, is a precondition for novelty to occur.

WE ARE ALWAYS ACTING INTO A SITUATION

I argue that we act *into* a situation as an impulse and our reaction should not be seen in systemic terms as a linear, causal process. An impulse is not a neutral stimulus because it will influence us differently depending on our history, the context, our expectations, and our emotional state. In turn, our reaction to the impulse immediately influences how we perceive it, and we find that in our communication with other humans we are acting into a perpetual and iterative process.

I argue that acting into a situation make us realise new aspects of the context, which may allow us to pursue or continuously reassess our 'ends-in-view', and thus new ways of acting, rather than immediately seeking the ultimate goal.

ACTING IS A TEMPORAL PROCESS

I argue that temporality has a profound influence on my understanding of acting into a context. Acting happens in a living present, meaning that we understand the present through our interpretation of the past as well as our expectation for the future, and we construct this living present as something that works for us when we pursue our collective aims and interests—which in turns means that we co-construct the future as well as the past. I also argue that the living present has a fractal structure as we observe not only distant pasts (or futures) but also what has happened immediately before our acting (or will happen after), a reflection of the understanding that we continuously act *into* the situation as described above.

I find that acting is formed by and is at the same time forming one's identity, which is a conscious or unconscious moral self-interpretation with a narrative structure. Also, I argue that it is more important to try to interact in accordance with one's moral horizon than to speculate about how to label oneself.

I further argue that, as manager and team leader, I experience how there is an arrow on time in the acting in terms of irreversibility. What has been said cannot be unsaid, and what has been done cannot be undone. This apparently emphasises why it is important to reflect on the perspective of 'ends-in-view' and to understand how acting *into* a situation will reveal new opportunities (or the opposite).

Our understanding of time has qualitative aspects. I argue that the qualitative sense of time, the *quale*, the bodily sensation, influences our acting and interactions. I suggest that the arrow of time in acting is more than a sequence in space-time; it is rather a continuous flow of qualitative experience without distinguishable single elements and without any clear start or end.

6 THE RESEARCH METHOD

In the following, I review the nature of my research method. The overall perspective is that of *taking experience seriously* (Stacey & Griffin, 2005) and describing patterns that would be of interest to a wider community and, in particular, to my professional practice. I give a brief description of how the perspective of complex responsive processes informs the method, followed by a description of the actual research process. I then discuss how the method can be seen in the wider discourse of research, and I argue for the validity of my method.

6.1 A COMPLEXITY PERSPECTIVE ON RESEARCHING

The research is carried out at the Doctor of Management Programme where research students work with the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al., 2000) and related process theories and process philosophies which I have described previously in this thesis.

This perspective has a direct impact on my research method, which has been emerging alongside my inquiry. Key tenets of this perspective have an impact on the research method:

- The perspective of complex responsive processes of relating is based on a temporal way of thinking, based on social interaction, and organisations are therefore understood as processes of human relating—not as structures, lines of command, or ‘things’.
- Complex responsive processes of relating are understood as acts of communicating, relations of power, and interplay of people’s choices.
- No one can step outside the organisation—we are all part of the interacting even if we have different roles and levels of formal or informal power.
- The organisation does not have a designed ‘whole’ (or any kind of whole except an imaginary or felt whole). Any designs, patterns, or programmes develop in emerging patterns through the interaction between many individuals.

The implication for my approach to the research is then:

- The research I undertake also consists of complex responsive processes of relating. It takes place in interaction with my colleagues (in my practice), with other researchers, and eventually with others with whom I speak about my research or my daily work.

- The emergence of patterns in local interaction means that my research is undertaken from *within* the organising, from within the patterning, where I participate in the local interaction.
- As patterns emerge in the detailed local interaction, the research must develop as an ongoing observation and reflection on what is happening in the myriad of micro-interactions, and, in particular, on my own experience of interaction with others.
- The research method is a paradox of *detached involvement*: It cannot be solely 'rational', observing from a detached outside viewpoint (as normally suggested in a positivist, scientific method), and it cannot be totally emotional either as this would not qualify as research.
- Reflection on experience is central to the methodology. By experience, I mean the felt bodily interaction between people, which are narratives of relating. These narratives therefore serve as the 'raw data', the empirical material, for the research.
- Equally important is the *reflexivity*, the reflection on how we think and on which assumptions this is based.

6.2 METHOD—TAKING MY OWN EXPERIENCE SERIOUSLY

Based on the perspectives of complex responsive processes and that of pragmatism, I have maintained an exploratory approach where my research method, as well as my research focus, has been developing throughout the research period.

I have written this thesis over a period of four years and it consists of four consecutive projects and a synopsis. The four projects have been kept in their 'raw' form for this final submission (except for minor editing of errors, language, or repetitions) to show and reflect on the development of my thinking and to document the exploratory research process.

In P1, I provide a narrative account of life experience, events, literature, and other influences that have formed my way of thinking, which is shaping my practice. The project allowed me to reflect on how I then made sense of my experience which, in turn, allowed me to reflect on the development of my thinking over the subsequent projects. As mentioned above, I found it quite easy to write aspects of my experience in P1, less easy to describe the thinking underpinning my practice, which makes me

reflect on how, in our daily lives and practice, we take our basic assumptions and ways of working for granted.

As an outcome of P1, I identified my research question based on experience in my daily work life, a way of acting which I could not easily describe and which I was curious to investigate and understand better. The many situations in which I had no idea what to do but still felt that I could move on, take a next step, and act into uncertainty intrigued me. I wondered why this was possible, and this became my research theme.

In the subsequent three projects, I have written narratives from my professional work life and then analysed patterns, themes, and emerging propositions in my writing. This process of writing narratives, analysing them in relation to literature, reflecting on my own as well as in the research community, has the objective of researching by taking my experience seriously. I research by exploring and by making sense of the meaningful themes that I observe, and I investigate the emerging processes of interaction and communication in different aspects of my daily work. I identify some themes and issues, but I highlight the significance of everyday interaction in organisational life, forms and qualities of communication, and the ways I as a practitioner participate in the conversations. Following the four projects, I have written the synopsis, which aims to summarise and synthesise the themes and insights that I have developed in the projects. The aim of my research is, therefore, not to draw specific conclusions to a specific hypothesis but to draw attention to meaningful themes that emerge. This process is highly abductive, meaning that '...an (often surprising) single case is interpreted from hypothetical overarching pattern, which, if it were true, explains the case in question' (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 4). This implies a somewhat iterative process and I believe, for instance, that I had not been reflecting much on the importance of temporality (I hardly knew the word) until in the course of P2 and P3 I started paying attention to time aspects in my writing, thus to Prigogine's *The End of Certainty* (1997) and Mead's *Philosophy of the Present* (1932/2002), which eventually became key sources for my inquiry.

With this abductive research method, I have not carried out a traditional extensive literature review in advance of forming the research question. I have initially studied what the research community considers are the basic key scholars for the programme (such as Stacey, Griffin, Shaw, Elias, Mead) and have afterwards followed leads in the literature or as recommended by other researchers in line with the development of my thinking and my themes. Focus has been on covering both classic and contemporary literature as well as alternative perspectives reflected in complexity theories.

The research is basically a social undertaking. Each project and the synopsis go through four to six iterations as I share my findings with colleagues in my practice and with the community of researchers in the programme. I have been a member of a learning set of three to four research students and a supervisor. We have exchanged our draft and evolving documents to discuss our projects, our choice of literature, and we have challenged each other regarding our lines of thought and interpretations. The interactive process of reflection is then again subject to reflexive activity as the learning set also talks about the process of working together and how to make sense of what is happening in the process.

The learning set meets with the wider community of DMan researchers (and supervisors) at the quarterly three-day residential seminars. During these seminars, the community meets every morning at meetings lasting one and a half hours, where researchers can take up and discuss anything they find relevant and important to themselves, the community, or to their research. The community meetings are influenced by the group analytical tradition (Foulkes, 1964) but with some notable differences as the objective is not to conduct therapy but to allow researchers to experience group dynamics in a safe environment. The discussion may, in turn, allow researchers to relate the themes or emotions raised by our study work or to our organisational experience.

Over the last four years, I have thus experienced many facets of working together in the learning set and in the wider research community. In the learning set, I have experienced support and encouragement as well as critique that felt like criticism. I have enjoyed discussions, have been enlivened, pensive, and wondering but have also sometimes felt deflated or denigrated. I have at times felt very confident about my knowledge and sometimes uncertain and hesitant. I have been able to support others, but also experienced how I missed more senior research colleagues to guide me as too many left too quickly, and I have been annoyed when younger and newly arrived colleagues would soon lecture me about my conclusions and my writing—in particular when they had a point. In the wider group, I have felt confident with the exposure, sometimes challenged but also sometimes emotional about the emerging patterns of conversation. Thus, the experience of working in the research community is very like the experience I write about in the narratives in my four projects. This is exactly why the work and reflection in the research community plays an important role in the overall research and in the development of the researcher's thinking.

I have thus experienced how, through this myriad of impressions and interactions, I have developed a stronger sense of acknowledging (in this particular social context) my own resources and freedom to determine what I think that I think.

6.3 ANALYSING THE RESEARCH METHOD

I have worked with narratives to 'take my experience seriously' and researched with an exploratory approach, which will not have a particular, traditional label attached to it. I suggest such an approach draws on different methods within qualitative inquiry as described in the following.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS AN INSPIRATION

A study of the daily activities in a professional community may be coined *ethnography*, which usually refers to forms of social research that emphasise exploring the nature of social phenomena (rather than testing hypotheses) working primarily with unstructured data; investigating a small number of cases (could be one), and engaging in mainly qualitative analysis of data interpreting meanings of human actions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1995, p. 248). However, distinct in my research is that my experience is the key object of investigation. Thus, my method may instead be inspired by what is now generally named as *autoethnography*, which differs from ethnography by acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher. Kim Etherington (2004) describes autoethnography as a genre of writing and research that blends ethnography and autobiographical writing incorporating elements of one's own life experience. Key features of autoethnography are that we study our personal experience and that the researcher becomes the research subject. Etherington notices how this method has been challenged as being self-indulgent and narcissistic and how the question of ethics is raised when writing about one's experience of working with others (Ibid, p. 141). I recognise how I have wondered about this perspective, and I have found it important to share my writing with my co-researchers to validate whether my findings were of any interest to others and in what way.

Tami Spry describes *performative* autoethnography as a '...a critically reflexive methodology resulting in a narrative of the researcher's engagement with others in particular sociocultural contexts.' (2011, p. 498), and she emphasises how performance autoethnography enables us to '...pose and engage the questions of our global lives' (Ibid, p. 499). This, I believe, significantly points to the researcher's involvement and his/her inability to take a detached, objective stance to the research.

In my own exploratory mode of research, I am subjectively involved in the process described but at the same time, I need to try to take a detached stance. As described above, I understand this as what Stacey and Griffin (2005, p. 9) based on Elias describe as the paradox of detached involvement. I note how, during my research, I have discussed my narratives in my learning set and some of my own emotions and reactions. In these discussions, I recall how I have been discomforted by some of the

feedback and some of the alternative understandings of the events. In one particular situation, I found myself writing explanatory emails to my peers discussing how I reacted to their interpretations. For me, this points to how a description of experience in my practice necessarily involves both a detached stance as well as a personal involvement.

Autoethnography lends me the perspective of researching one's own experience. However, the marked difference from my own inquiry is that where autoethnography concerns the inquiry with oneself only, my research is just as much about other people, even when several of my themes have evolved from my own personal experience. A focus on my inquiry is how individual selves develop in a social context, which reached beyond the aim of the autoethnographic methods.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AS AN INSPIRATION

Ethnomethodological studies examine how individuals use everyday conversation to construct a common-sense view of the world. It looks closely at and explicates work practices, and here the word *explicate* means showing by unfolding something and making it visible in more details (Thorpe & Holt, 2008, p. 91). It is important to draw attention not only to what we see but also which methods we use to see: 'Whereas most management and organizational research simply assumes that we know what we see, ethnomethodology shows that *how* we look at things comprises, in itself, a range of phenomena in its own right and one which can itself be looked at...' (Ibid, p. 92, emphasis in original). Ethnomethodology is related to sense-making of experience, but there is also a suggestion that it looks into the future: '...when we look at the social world, we do not simply make sense of it in retrospect, but *prospectively*, we search its horizon for a sense that will unfold' (Ibid, p. 93). Ethnomethodology is an ongoing process which acknowledges that an inquiry into our present cannot rest but inevitably points into the future (Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010, pp. 280-282).

The method encourages that we, as researchers, immerse ourselves in an unstructured or structured manner in the local context of the participants, usually as a participating observer (Alvesson, 2009), which implies that the researcher uses his/her participation for instrumental purposes. In contrast, I find that my own role is that of an observing participant because I am basically researching my work life as it naturally unfolds. However, I do reflect on how some narratives in my thesis describe events in which I did not pay much attention to my research, whereas later, in P4, I narrated events in which I was participating, observing, and at the same time was aware how what I experienced could potentially qualify as narratives for my research. In this way, I recognise what Alvesson refers to when he suggests that the research material sometimes finds the researcher (2009). Today, at the

time of this writing, I find myself very frequently commenting to a colleague (and co-researcher) that a certain meeting or event 'could certainly qualify as a narrative!' I would not do this at the beginning of my research, which leads me to realise how I increasingly pay attention to the patterns of human relating.

Ethnomethodology lends me its method of inquiring into the daily lived experience of humans. It is, however, normally used to research specific ethnic groups, whereas my inquiry is related to my practice and my personal lived experience.

THE USE OF NARRATIVES AS A METHOD

In P4 and my synopsis, I have argued how narratives play a significant role in the development of self and identity of humans (Giddens, 1991; MacIntyre, 1981/2013; Ricoeur, 1994; Taylor, 1989) and how these are continuously reiterated in interaction with others. When I began this research, I had basically understood the use of narratives as a method but have only slowly realised how the writing, rewriting, discussions, and analyses have been identity-forming for me. Narratives are thus not 'neutral' raw data for an interesting inquiry but are forming and being formed by one's self during the research.

I have identified narratives from my practice which puzzled me, at times referred to as breakdowns (differences between cultural or theoretical expectations and actual experience) and mysteries (the effect of several breakdowns) (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, pp. 63-67). These are typically solved through the abductive method, which is a very pervasive form of reasoning in everyday life (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 46).

The analysis of narratives is now considered a well-established research method (Czarniawska, 2004). The narratives serve as the 'raw material' from which propositional themes emerge (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 9), and the research method is reflexive because I as researcher reflect on these themes, that is, both on my experience of what happens in my professional work *and* on my role and development in this process.

Czarniawska discusses how the reader can approach the text in question from different angles: *Explication* (what does the text say?), *Explanation* (why does the text say what it says?), and *Exploration* (standing in for the author, typically in concluding remarks or reflections on one's own involvement) (2004, pp. 60-75). In the case of my own research, I have approached things slightly differently as I have written the text myself and critics may ask how one can know that my story is

the truth. I may recall things differently after some time has passed, the exact sequence may be forgotten (or I changed it slightly to give a better flow), others have a different perception of what happened in these days, and my own feelings and need to express them play a role. As mentioned above, the narratives have been forming my identity, and inevitably this reflects on how I write them and how I will expose myself.

However, I do not claim that the narratives are the 'truth'. The best I can do is to describe what I think I experienced and then the 'truth' may lie in the themes that emerge in the conversations, the patterns or shadow themes but also in those which do not emerge. In teleological terms this is a transformative process. I note that my understanding of what happened is formed by events—the past, by what I want to happen on the project—the future, but also by what tale I want to present to others—the present. In P2, I wrote a narrative from Port City where I used a literary device of writing about a complex, confusing and evolving series of events through short, staccato sentences, thus trying to help the reader to sense and resonate with my experience. Similarly, when writing about my search for self and identity in P4, I was conscious of my wish to illustrate my experience and at the same time not entirely exposing myself to my readers.

I have mentioned that for P3 I somehow missed the chance of including the many confusing, disconnected fragments of previous *stories* that led to the event, what Boje calls the *antenarratives*.

I give 'antenarrative' a double meaning: as being before and as a bet. First, story is 'ante' to narrative; it is 'antenarrative'. A 'narrative' is something that is narrated, i.e. 'story'. Story is an account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds 'plot' and 'coherence' to the story line...Secondly, ante is a bet, something to do with gambling and speculation (Boje, 2001, pp. 1-2).

In P3, my narrative focused on process and temporality, and I realised how it was difficult to adequately express and illustrate the fragmented temporal experience I and others had had over many years and which I felt was important for the incident.

The narrative approach has also been adapted for my purpose. Narrative methods will normally be applied to studying narratives of others and usually with a structured approach. In my inquiry, I have written and rewritten my narrative several times, and it has obviously evolved in the course of my increasing insight—it has not been a 'fixed' narrative provided to be studied by someone else.

What I am pointing to here is that as a researcher using narratives I need to make choices about what to include in a narrative and how I want to tell my tale. Therefore, I may find that other

individuals may have a different perspective of the narrated event, and I may discuss and hear other voices. However, the purpose is not to get a 'right' or most 'correct' version that all can agree to, but rather to express an experience to the best of my ability and which others may find resonates with their own experience from their own practice and which they may find useful to act on.

6.4 THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY OF MY RESEARCH

With a developing research approach without a recognised name to it the question of legitimacy arises. A classic, positivist way of assessing the quality or legitimacy of my research would include a discussion of *validity*, *reliability*, and *generalisability* (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998, pp. 114-118).

For a non-positivist approach, Remenyi and colleagues suggest that *validity* is concerned with whether the findings and interpretations fit reality, that is, some triangulation or cross-checks with the sources are needed. This is difficult to assess with a strong phenomenological¹² stance in which I describe lived experience. The *reliability* aspect of this approach would typically relate to the quality of documentation and the transparency of the research process. One would also ask if the research findings are *generalisable* and if the study appears to be credible in the sense that the overall study design is suited to the research question. Remenyi and colleagues thus note how the traditional (positivist) yardstick may not be relevant for a non-positivist research and that alternative constructs are needed.

Bent Flyvbjerg introduces an interesting approach to social sciences research in which he avoids emulating the natural sciences and creates a kind of general theory (Flyvbjerg, 2001). He suggests a research paradigm based on Aristotle's *phronesis*, which represents ethics, pragmatism, has reference to praxis and is oriented towards action. Phronesis requires experience and interaction between the general and the concrete (Ibid, p. 57). It thus represents what we might call prudence or practical wisdom.

¹² Phenomenology is a method of enquiry that concentrates on the detailed description of conscious experience while suspending or bracketing all preconceptions, interpretations, and explanations (Colman, 2001).

Flyvbjerg's phronetic research relies on practical judgment as much as on prescribed methodologies in what he calls a '...pragmatically governed interpretation of the studied practices' (Ibid, p. 140). He emphasises that this approach is not about trying to develop a theory or a universal method but states that 'phronetic social science explores historic circumstances and current avenues to find avenues to praxis' (Ibid). He emphasises that this approach to social science also requires that interpretations must be built upon claims of validity, but he does not venture into suggesting how such claims should be grounded.

In line with Stacey and Griffin (2005), Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) posit that there is no longer any reason to justify the existence of qualitative methods and their suggestion is that good empirical research should have the features listed below (Ibid, pp. 304-305).

- Empirical arguments and credibility
- An open attitude to the importance of the interpretive dimension
- Critical reflection regarding context
- Awareness of ambiguity of language
- Theory development

Importantly, Alvesson and Sköldbberg emphasise that the freer view of data handling (than one would normally find in methods) does not mean that no demands are made. The freedom requires the researcher to be familiar with a wide range of literature and viewpoints and to be intellectually flexible, receptive, and creative. In my exploratory research I have familiarised myself with many strands of literature within complexity thinking, leadership, sociology, psychology and organisational theory, some of which I have used extensively, whereas other literature has been left behind because my inquiry took new turns.

Brinkmann concerns himself with how to undertake qualitative inquiry into everyday life. Building on pragmatism and hermeneutics, he advocates for this purpose to leave behind specialised methodologies and have a more generic approach to working with qualitative materials. He refers to Heidegger's perception of *being*, the *Dasein* made up of *affectedness* (things matter to us), *understanding*, and *articulation* (Brinkmann, 2012, pp. 40-43). Brinkmann believes that our *knowing* is conceived as understanding, an interpretative affair taking place against a background of human

activity (Ibid, p. 43). From this, he suggests that everyday analyses are *valid* when they enable us to understand (knowing) and to act. In summary, Brinkmann says:

All in all, I believe that good social and human science research goes beyond formal rules and encompasses more than technical methods. What the pragmatists called inquiry depends on human *judgement*, something that was also emphasised by the hermeneuticists. The proficient craftsman does not focus on the techniques, but on the task and on the material with which he or she works (Ibid, p. 49, emphasis in original).

Traditionally, researchers argue that research is valid only if the researcher can document that a rigorous method has been applied (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2004; Remenyi et al., 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I have been reflecting on why this is the case. Without having consulted the very rich and extensive body of knowledge on the philosophy of research, my understanding is that the purpose of the rigour is basically that one can *convince* peers in the research community that one's findings are credible. In the word *convince* I see a narrative, an agreement among researchers that something is a 'truth'. My conclusion is then that if my findings and interpretations sound credible to others, useful (in the tradition of the pragmatists), resonate with their experience, then my research is credible.

Etherington (2004, p. 148) briefly lists possible criteria of validity for an autobiographic research, involving contribution to understanding of social life, the aesthetics of the work, reflexivity, impact on myself, and sense of 'lived experience'. Likewise, Czarniawska suggests that a narrative approach '...steers away from the idea that a "rigorously" applied procedure would render "testable" results' (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 136). She argues that the questions of validity should be replaced by questions of whether the research is 'interesting', 'relevant', and 'beautiful'.

I work from a first-person perspective with an abductive method and I acknowledge a limitation of my research method as it is inherently difficult to generalise from my paying attention to micro-interactions from a first-person perspective. It starts from the particular and moves to the general, rather than the other way around as is traditionally the case in organisational research. However, this has not prevented me from doing so and I have for the same reasons emphasised the need to continuously discuss with and be challenged by colleagues and fellow researchers.

In my research, I thus claim that the validity comes from the feedback from my learning set and faculty discussions about my work as well as the discussions I have with colleagues in my profession. I suggest that if the experiences and conclusions I draw resonate with those of peers in my

professional practice, and if they find them both interesting and useful to act on, then I consider them valid.

6.5 ETHICS

Issues of ethics mainly relate to the fact that I have written about other people and I am aware of the need to ensure total anonymity or, alternatively, ensure their consent.

The main focus of my research has not been other individuals but the movement of my own thinking and my understanding of how I understand certain acting, development of self and identity, and the complex processes of relating. Therefore, I do not feel it has been necessary to 'expose' others, although individuals do appear in my writing. I have therefore considered carefully how I observe ethics in relation to them.

People at work know that I have undertaken the DMan programme and that I have been writing about my personal experience of my work environment. Because my research is based on my ongoing experience of change, I have not always been able to tell ahead of time how I would be sharing experiences. Therefore, it has not been possible in advance to get informed consent from people I would interact with. Those of my colleagues or co-researchers who have been mentioned have all read what I wrote about them and given their consent. For particular individuals, I have asked them to read what I wrote, listened to their comments and amended accordingly. Other individuals with whom I no longer have any contact cannot be identified. Where I have referred to individuals, it has been without the use of names, titles, dates, and so on to ensure confidentiality. I have further in my narratives changed location, type of work, names of individuals, and sometimes gender. I have not been gathering any personal data as part of my research.

7 CONTRIBUTIONS

7.1 CURRENT KNOWLEDGE IN MY PRACTICE

I have identified leadership literature from scholars such as Cunliffe on relational leadership (see P4), and I note an increasing amount of articles engaging with the perspective of complex responsive process in relation to leadership, for example within health care, leadership or international development (Bolwerk & Ulijn, 2014; Davidson, 2010; Mowles et al., 2008; Rihani, 2005; P. Simpson, 2007, 2012). I have not, however, identified articles which describe the detailed dynamics of leadership in the particular setting of international consultancy projects from the perspective of complex responsive processes.

I have therefore turned to an assessment of the current ways of working and educating within my practice, consulting engineering teams in the field on overseas development projects. The individuals I refer to as team leaders or project managers will typically have an academic education within a specific field whereas rather few will have undertaken extensive management training.

Our company (one of Europe's biggest consultancies) offers participation in project management training programmes, 'mini-MBAs', or other similar programmes. At present, five of my colleagues within our sector follow project management programmes conducted by four of the most prominent course providers in Denmark, and it strikes me that the course curricula with a few deviations all include classic, systemic theories on management and leadership as I have described previously in this thesis. I suggest that none of the curricula I have had the opportunity to review have engaged themselves with the complex processes of human relating that I have described in this thesis or with similar perspectives on relational leadership. Our company also conducts training programmes for *process consultants*, aimed at project managers who want to train in facilitation of meetings and workshops as well as being more proficient in their interaction with clients. This programme is highly based on the books of prominent Danish facilitators (Dahl & Juhl, 2009; Jensen, Laustsen, Sjøberg, & Thomsen, 2011) who suggest working from different 'positions', in particular, the systemic position, to facilitate processes most effectively, meaning in reality creating a process to manage a process.

I have similarly reviewed the annual course and event programme provided by the Danish organisation of project managers and note how a three-day event in 2016 included a total of 18 sessions, which all promise to provide efficiency, control, synergy, agility, team building, and other means of ensuring competent and effective leadership. These activities are—reading from the title of

the programmes—all based on an assumption that strong, individual leaders can foresee the future and therefore act effectively into it. The quarterly magazine of the same organisation offers articles in the same vein, and it sparked some interest when I wrote an article about a complex responsive perspective on project management. The editor at the time asked that I tweak the conclusions to more clearly suggest how complexity could be minimised; I suggested that he had missed my point. Together with a Danish co-researcher I have offered the planners of these training events to conduct two sessions on complexity aspects in project management.

7.2 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

A RICH AND DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE UNFOLDING OF ACTING IN A CONSULTANCY TEAM IN WATER PROJECTS.

This thesis provides a rich and detailed description of the unfolding of acting in a team of consultants in international water projects, a team which works independently and far from its home office in what is often a remote and unfamiliar destination.

In the traditional management or project management discourse, acting as a team leader in international development projects is considered a discrete event within an identified period, a rational, well-planned activity based on linear causalities and with a well-defined outcome. The description of the acting will normally be held at a macro-level, where the acting on a project is considered an event and where little attention is paid to the micro-interactions involved in the human interaction. I have critiqued this classic discourse, and I contend that such a critique is unusual in the context of international consultancy projects.

This thesis offers a rich, detailed, and coherent description of how acting in an international consultancy assignment can be understood in processual terms, as the ongoing narrative-like patterning of bodily interactions between humans which perpetually unfolds in their daily work while being enabled or constrained by experience, identity, values, and power relations. This is a perspective that has been developed as the complex responsive processes of relating by Stacey, Griffin, and Shaw (Stacey et al., 2000). Others have researched the implications for leadership, but I contend that I am among the first who have related this to the context of consultancy projects within international development, and, in particular, to water supply (engineering) projects.

The thesis demonstrates how leadership is not located in individuals but is a patterning of the interactions between the consultants and other humans. The team leader and the individual

consultants' acting will always be into an unknown future, and because of the unpredictability of human nature, one can never predict the outcome. The thesis provides a detailed account of how the process of acting and its context are mutually shaping each other in a continuous spiralling sense of a whole, and how this leads to new opportunities for acting. In particular, the pragmatists' suggestion to maintain 'ends-in-view' invites a typical consultancy project to adopt new ways of interacting with stakeholders, a perspective which, I believe, is not included in the dominant discourse.

The thesis provides a detailed argument for how acting in such a project must be seen in a temporal perspective, in a living present where our perception of the past influences our acting as much as the future, and where the expected future, in turn, informs the past. The thesis emphasises how acting is influenced by one's identity and how this, in turn, is shaped by the acting, and it draws attention to how the acting is irreversible and how this irreversibility has qualitative aspects. I argue that such an explication of a coherent and processual description of acting is a new perspective in the management discourse. I also argue that such a description of acting in this setting of international water projects has not previously been provided.

The thesis offers a comprehensive elaboration of an understanding of self and identity as processes of dialectical engagement in contrast to the sectors' emphasis on roles and personality traits. I have given a detailed and rich description of how I, in a project context, see individual consultants continuously negotiate identities through social acts. I have described in detail how bodily resonances and symbolic interactions lead to novelty, creativity, or sometimes to destruction of relationships. I contend that such an explication of interaction in a project team is new.

I argue that the method of exploratory research drawing on narratives from my practice is unusual in my sector and I have, therefore, drafted an article for the Danish professional magazine for engineers based on my thesis.

In terms of 'contribution to knowledge' within my profession, I think that this thesis can be taken up as an original invitation to think differently about two themes, namely seeing acting in a project as a much more processual and encompassing understanding where action is not located in an individual and understanding identity as a social process, a sense of self, which ultimately is about how to conduct one's practice through acting and while observing one's horizon of significance.

NOVELTY REQUIRES SOCIALITY AS WELL AS AMPLIFICATIONS OF DIFFERENCES

The theory of complex responsive processes of relating stipulates that novelty, (as well as creation or destruction) happens as a result of the non-linear interactions where amplifications of differences may arise, depending on the properties of these differences. This means that the ability to harbour these differences at the same time may create new insights.

I have also demonstrated Mead's understanding that sociality, being different things at once, creates novelty. I have supported the argument with a detailed description of how such novelty occurs when actors in a water project experience amplified differences but are then able to harbour sociality, that is, understanding each other's frame of references.

The thesis therefore identifies Mead's sociality, being different things at the same time, as a new aspect of the theory of complex responsive processes and has, thus, contributed to the theory by recognising its significance in the process of understanding how novelty occurs.

7.3 CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE—AND CHANGES IN MY THINKING

CHANGES IN MY OWN PRACTICE

I have described how I have a background in an engineering practice and an MBA programme which acquainted me with models and prescriptions for leadership based on classic systemic thinking based on scientific management which, again, is based on classic natural sciences. I have also described how I increasingly questioned these models and took an interest in complexity theories for some years before entering the DMan programme and, in addition, I have developed an interest in process thinking in relation to human dynamics after years of leader training activities in the Scout movement. I have also given an account of how my daily work with the management of international water projects is about dealing with the unpredictable dynamics of human interaction rather than linear planning and strategising.

Therefore, entering my research programme did not provide me with an unsettling sense that I suddenly had to change all my beliefs or my practice as a manager or team leader. I have, though, experienced how new reflections, insights, and challenges from others have made me see aspects of my work in a different light. Also, concepts which were new to me—such as the arrow of time or the reflex arc—have enabled me to put into words aspects of my practice which I previously struggled to articulate—or even recognise.

When trying to identify my contribution to practice, I am looking for three levels of contribution. First, I wonder how my own personal way of working has changed. Second, I wonder how my direct colleagues may experience that I change my ways of working. Third, I reflect on how the wider community of practice—other team leaders—may benefit from my findings.

I cannot say that I have changed my personal way of working dramatically. I find that I do the same job and relate to colleagues in very much the same way as I had before I entered the programme and I find it difficult to explain to my colleagues what they can expect from me after the research programme, even though I know that something has definitely changed.

Richard Williams, an earlier graduate of the Doctor of Management Programme, has accounted for a similar experience of not being able to articulate particular changes in his practice while he still finds that his research has led him to cope better with his job (Williams, 2005). He draws on Elias's (1987) engagement with American poet Edgar Allan Poe's short story *A Descent into the Maelström* (Poe, 2012) which tells the tale of a fisherman who is close to being sucked into a maelstrom in the coastal waters of Lofoten, Norway. Initially, the fisherman is overwhelmed by the scale and intensity of the situation and sees only the raging sea; however, he also finds himself becoming strangely interested and speculating while he starts noticing increasing points of detail such as fragments of vessels, barrels, and timber. He later reflects:

...what I observed was, in fact, the natural consequences of the forms of the floating fragment...and how it happened that a cylinder, swimming in a vortex, offered more resistance to its suction, and was drawn in with greater difficulty than an equally bulky body, of any form whatever (Ibid, p. 407).

The fisherman does not know the hydrodynamics of cylindrical objects and is given the physical explanation only later. In the moment, however, he saves himself by holding on to a cylindrical cask and therefore lives to tell the tale. Williams suggests that Elias was drawn to this example because in much of his work he (Elias) '...attempts to understand antecedent conditions of what he describes as "not knowing" in order to explicate the processual changes necessary for "knowing" to come about' (Williams, 2005, p. 65). In other words, he attempts to grasp something elusive which cannot immediately be articulated but which eventually makes sense in a more coherent way.

Drawing on Elias, Williams then suggests that he, in his research and his work, experiences a *reflexive process of emergent self-awareness* in which the interdependence of all relationships is at the same time fully recognised (Ibid, p. 68) and moves on to say that a contribution of his research is that he is able to carry on in his job in what could have been an intolerable situation. Williams states:

In a sense, nothing much has changed other than my feelings regarding my position in relation to what is happening around me: I can explain this differently and in ways that make sense as I observe them every day (Ibid, p. 69).

I have not (unlike Williams) felt that my work was intolerable, but I have had an increasing workload over the last four years with increasing stress levels, anxieties, ups and downs, but, like Williams (Ibid, p. 70), I suggest that the emotivity of these feelings and my sense of being taken over by them has changed as I, in line with Williams, experience a 'reflexive process of emergent self-awareness'. The research process has drawn me into an increased reflexivity by which I mean that I reflect on how I think and why I think the way I do. I often have explained to my research colleagues how I walked my dog at the seaside while reflecting and loudly articulating to myself (and him) what I think that I think and how I feel about how I feel.

I will therefore reiterate some insights and subtle differences in my thinking, which I believe make a difference to my practice.

I always suggested that the most important thing about strategies was to make them, even if they stayed on the shelf afterwards. I now have a better vocabulary to articulate my views, and I find, for instance, that when my colleagues in the head office want to establish new quality assurance procedures for our tenders (as often before), I will at some stage suggest how just communicating on a continuous basis may be helpful as well and I can explain why I think so. I am aware how we do make plans and procedures to assure ourselves that we do take some action, and I do not suggest that we shall work without doing that. I do, however, maintain a position towards my colleagues that we try to particularise our procedures for the individual project and keep talking about how we do what and who does what.

I find that I recognise discourses different from my own much more clearly than before. I find, in for instance in meetings, that I observe and recognise different ways of thinking and wonder how I can address what I consider important and where I disagree. I find in between that I get impatient and wonder which will be the best way to suggest alternative discourses. This also means that I now try to observe that I don't do so just for the sake of the argument or because I find that I have 'exciting insights' as this might not always be helpful.

When we receive the scope of work from the client for our projects in Central Asia, I increasingly pay attention to what the thinking behind the scope has been as there are often doubts, mistakes, or omissions. Rather than seeing the scope as a definite 'truth', we realise how it has been developed in

dynamic discussions between the client's many stakeholders where power relations and personal agendas play a role. I have increasingly found it useful to discuss the political or practical realities behind the written scope of work and will engage in open discussions with the client and our team.

I find that the perspective of complex responsive processes has given me a changed perspective on 'who' is acting. I find, to a lesser extent than before, that I locate acting and leadership in myself only but acknowledge that it develops as an interaction between colleagues and myself. I do not deny responsibility as team leader, but I find that I increasingly see myself participating in leadership with the best of my abilities and observing my values while others also play their roles, which may or may not lead to useful ways forward. I cannot say if others would notice a major difference, but I do believe that my closest colleagues in our team increasingly realise that I am less preoccupied with *me* doing the 'right' thing.

When acting, I find that I increasingly accept the uncomfortable paradox of being deeply involved in a complex project situation while trying to get an understanding and observe it at the same time, and while it is continuously evolving. I have somehow felt this insight as a relief from my own expectation that I should ideally be able to take a detached stance and act in a 'rational' manner. My colleagues may notice that I am slightly more relaxed about not being able to maintain a 'perfect' overview and that I accept that we 'move on', also when in doubt.

I find that I acknowledge the potential for when novelty occurs as I increasingly pay attention to how my colleagues and I exchange views, identify differences, and seem to find ways of moving on together, even when differences seem to be strongly amplified. Where I previously wondered, I now think that I can see how sociality emerges—how colleagues have an ability to try to appreciate others' frames of reference, sometimes unconsciously, I think.

I have come to acknowledge how the ability to move forward based on 'what we know for now' into something unknown is an important aspect for me and other team leaders in international projects who are faced with a high degree of uncertainty and changing circumstances. Where I would previously feel overly and personally responsible for reaching the ultimate (written) goals, I now increasingly appreciate the need to maintain our means as 'ends-in-view' and involve all stakeholders, including the client, in a dialogue about what will be a useful way forward. I have described in an example how we (at the time of writing this synopsis) provide a client with an interim view of how to take stock of the situation and discuss the way forward. I also increasingly appreciate how action changes a situation and creatively opens new opportunities and new goals—even if these

paradoxically are not known or acknowledged from an early stage. I increasingly accept how all my deliberations before acting cannot take in all the future avenues, even though they have a role in the process.

In the same vein, I have come to appreciate how acting is the unit of existence. I have always been aware that sometimes one needs to *do* something, but I have started appreciating that just engaging with difficult issues has a profound effect as the issues seem to change their character! I realise how we act *into* a context, and that the act of *doing* something immediately changes my perception of a challenge or a threat. I cannot say for sure, but I believe that colleagues will experience that I am less hesitant to actually do something or to make decisions.

I pay less attention to how I or others perceive my identity as team leader and as an individual. I have come to appreciate how identity is a sense of self based on one's narrative and the way one lives by one's values, and that one's identity is created as a social process in the daily work in a continuous interaction with others, with their narratives and values. I have come to appreciate how identity is thus a process and is constitutive of action. My identity as team leader is not a label—it is about my conduct in the interplay with my colleagues with whom I want to belong. I have described how I therefore engaged with a team leader, whom I sensed had struggled with his role in the same way as I had often done myself.

I find that an understanding of temporality and the living present makes me appreciate how history is part of every action we take, how an apparently well-thought-through action in a project is influenced by evolving, flickering recollections of the past as well as hopes for the future. In particular, I note how my appreciation of the arrow of time has influenced my concern about acting into an unknown future. I find it easier to accept that I cannot foresee all the next steps and that I cannot expect to be able to backtrack. I also increasingly appreciate how steps into the unknown may open possibilities that I did not see before and realise that the new opportunities do not occur randomly out of the blue but are usually related to my current context. An implication for my practice has been that I have increasingly come to accept this condition in my daily work. I do not suggest that *not* knowing what will happen is particularly helpful, but as I focus less on what we could have done, I find that I turn my attention to opportunities instead. I have, for instance, described how I approach a client to close an old project in a different way from what I might have done before, by looking ahead, trusting that we share interests in doing so.

RELEVANCE FOR OTHER TEAM LEADERS

I have worked for 29 years in the same consulting company with water projects in an international development context. I have worked for many team leaders, employed many, sacked some, competed with some, trained in-house and overseas and I have learned from many of them. It is common knowledge in the trade that a good team leader is the key to a good project and most team leaders do not expect a comprehensive instruction book or daily support from home. They will work with their team under unusual conditions and use their practical judgement as they see fit. Sometimes it goes smoothly, at other times, they struggle. In any case, I suggest that they experience the same complex responsive processes that I have described and researched; at least, this is what I have experienced through our many hours of communication at home or on a project.

I therefore suggest that my own experience narrated through the four projects can be recognised by most of the team leaders on assignments abroad, whether it be in Myanmar, Uganda, Tajikistan, or Bosnia. I have discussed my experience with the consultants on my own team, Hanna and Richard, as well as with team leaders on other projects. At a team leader seminar in our department, we worked with taking experience seriously through small theatre plays and narratives where team leaders shared stories from their projects. As an example, one participant verbalised his experience of feeling inadequate in meetings with the client; through our discussions, we acknowledged how this resonated with the experience of some other participants.

My assertion is that other consultants and team leaders in similar projects may find it useful to discuss these complex issues, read about others' experience or participate in seminars. I suggest that my thesis can contribute to such discussions. We have in our department arranged that more team leader seminars are to be conducted and my intention is that the complex processes of human dynamics when acting into the unknown can be taken up in various forms through discussions, working with narratives, or plays.

WRITING ARTICLES

I have drafted an article about complexity in the work of a team leader, which I intend to submit to the Danish magazine for engineers, *Ingeniøren*, in one of the forthcoming volumes, which has a theme on project management. I will further write an article for an international journal based on this thesis.

8 GLOSSARY

Word	Definition / Description (as used in this thesis)
Arrow of time	The understanding that time has a direction and cannot be turned backwards.
Bifurcation point	The point in nonequilibrium where a chemical reaction becomes unstable and where new phenomena arise (Prigogine, 1997, p. 66).
IFI	International Financing Institution (bilateral or multilateral donor agency).
LFA	Logical Framework Approach (planning method used by international development agencies).
Living present	Experience of presentness where experience of the past gives meaning to the future, which in turn changes the meaning of the past in a continuous, fractal process (Shaw, 2002, p. 46).
Mind	The private role-plays and silent conversations with oneself and society (Stacey, 2012, p. 25).
Paradox	The presence together, at the same time, of self-contradictory, mutually constituting, essentially conflicting ideas, neither of which can be eliminated or resolved (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 39).
Self	<p>A social process of influencing others in a social act and then taking the attitude of the others aroused by the stimulus, and then reacting in turn to this response (Mead, 1934/1967, p. 171).</p> <p>An ongoing temporal process of 'I' responding to 'me' (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 346).</p> <p>The self is a relation that relates to itself (Kierkegaard, quoted in (Brinkmann, 2016, p. 83)).</p> <p>Popularly: taking oneself as an object to oneself.</p>

Word	Definition / Description (as used in this thesis)
Self-consciousness	Awareness of self
Significant symbol	A gesture towards another individual which calls out in oneself the same feelings as it does in the other (Mead, 1934/1967, pp. 71-72)
Social Act	<p>A social act may be defined as one in which the occasion or stimulus which sets free an impulse is found in the character or conduct of a living form that belongs to the proper environment of the living form whose impulse it is. (Mead, 1925, pp. 263-264).</p> <p>An act as one involving the co-operation of many people in which the different parts of the social act undertaken by different individuals appear in the act of each individual as a social object (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 373).</p>
Social object	General tendencies, common to large numbers of people, to act in similar ways in similar situations (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 374).
Sociality	The capacity of being several things at once (Mead, 1932/2002, p. 75).
Transformative teleology	<p>The understanding that the future is under perpetual construction by the movement towards it (Stacey et al., 2000, p. 37).</p> <p>(In contrast to a rationalist teleology, where the future (goal) is chosen and the formative teleology, where the future is a mature form of something implied at the start of the movement).</p>

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