Innovation as a Breakdown of Habits and a Reimagining of the Self

Exploring the Experiences of Public Sector Innovators in a Norwegian Municipality

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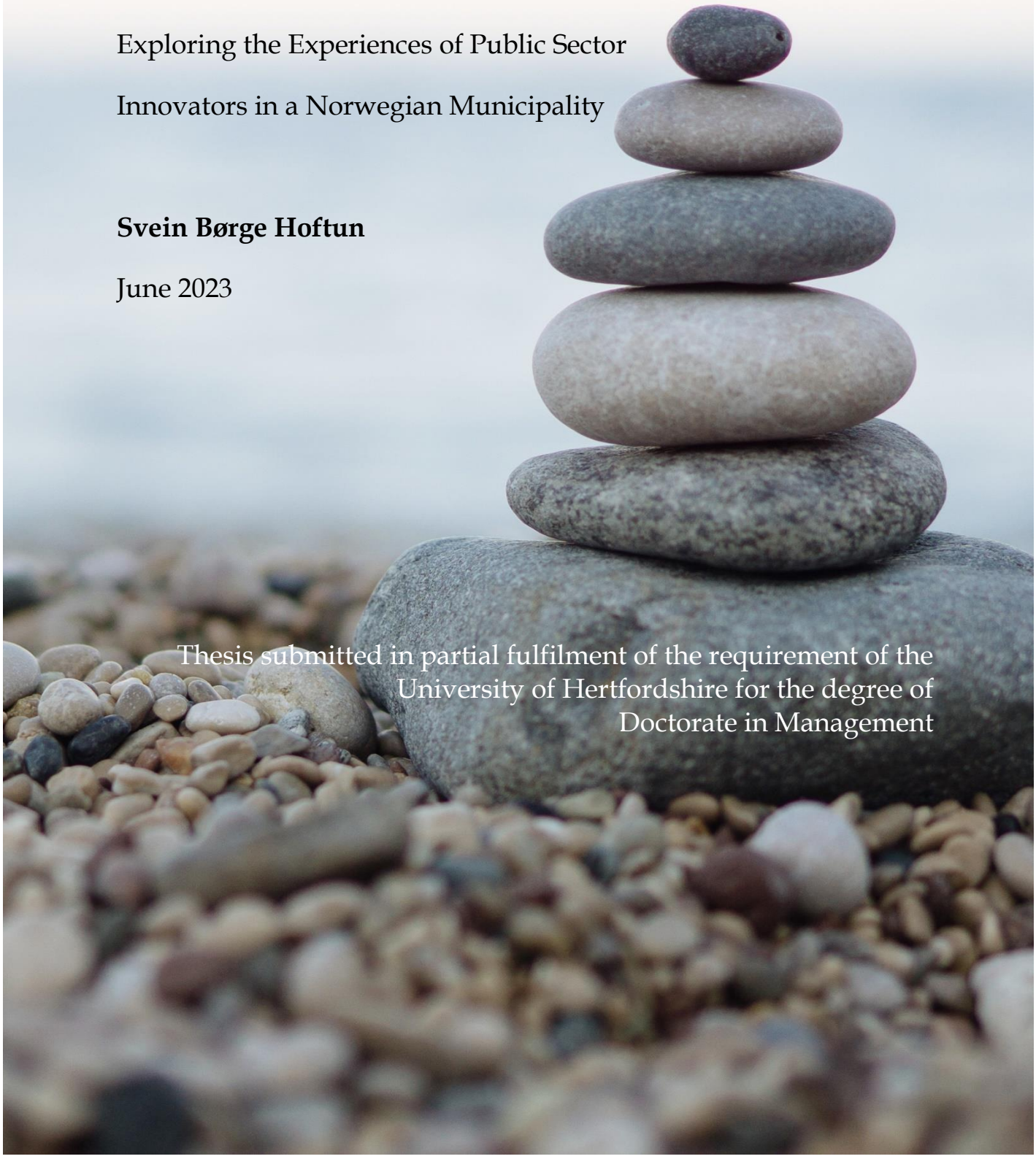

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Abstract

The underlying assumption in the discourse of innovation is often that 'innovation is good'. The public sector is frequently characterised as not being sufficiently geared towards innovation and hence unable to address the grand societal challenges we face, and further, to add to the deficiency rhetoric, that public servants are not up for the job (yet). This thesis explores the interconnections between social processes of self and the paradox of continuity and transformation, in that wherever there is an imperative for innovation and change there is paradoxically also an imperative for (the potential security of) sameness. Through its four projects and synopsis, it explores experiences of public servants taking upon themselves to innovate services and practices within the public sector and the logic of public sector practice. The thesis explores various breakdowns and how innovative solutions get to be seen as threats to identity. It problematises the idealisation of innovation.

The thesis posits that realising the potential of innovation is a multi-faceted process. Innovation of practices necessitates a breakdown of (embodied) habits. Furthermore, it requires reflexive processes that are grounded in narratives, ultimately a reimagining of the selves.

These narrative-based reflections could help navigate the complexities of innovation in public service, which are essential in understanding the disruptions that innovative solutions can cause. The thesis argues that hermeneutic dialogues could support negotiating the interpretations of the experiences and interactions in the public sector. Alongside this, dynamic power-related negotiations also come into play. This could be called negotiating the judgements of taste – of judging the good, the bad and the ugly – and by that exploring the paradox of continuity and transformation, which might facilitate the adoption of innovation.

Key words: Innovation, practice, breakdown, narrative, power, judgement, taste,

Key writers: H. Arendt, N. Elias, H.G. Gadamer, I. Kant, C. Mowles, D. Nicolini, P. Ricoeur, J. Scott, L. Svendsen, R. Stacey, T. Sørhaug, C. Taylor, M. Weber, L. Wittgenstein

Content

Introduction

Context: Being an innovator in the public sector

The public sector in Norway, like most other places, is under pressure. It is often stated by managers, politicians, and the press that we are not sufficiently geared towards innovation and hence unable to address the grand societal challenges we face, and further, to add to the deficiency rhetoric, that we, the public servants, are not up for the job (yet). There is an underlying assumption in the discourse of innovation that 'innovation is good'. But is it necessarily good? This is a question that has grown on me during the work on this practice-based research from a position as the Head of HR and Innovation in a Norwegian municipality (a rather strange title that I reflect further on in the thesis).

Some of the roots of our current imperative to innovate in the public sector are to be found in the situation we share with most northern/western countries. In short, the ways services are provided to our inhabitants are not sustainable[1]. In my municipal workplace, which I generically and anonymously call The District, (a 1500 person-strong outfit providing services for children and for young, disabled, and elderly adults) one example pressing on us is that we are already having difficulties recruiting enough nurses (and unlocking finances) to undertake vital work for the elderly. Additionally, the growing rate of older people in Norway will make this increasingly hard. There simply are not enough taxpayers to fund it, and not enough people to train to do the work.

This is combined with a political system that sees politicians re-elected (or not) every fourth year. The decisions they must make in the situation we face are not going to be popular and probably will not attract voters, so inevitably they refrain from deep engagement in those discussions. Neither public servants like myself, nor politicians

[1] I state this as a fact. My argument for it follows in the paragraph. The non-sustainability is widely accepted as a fact in the public sector, though not everyone would agree. As I see it from my practice the statement holds – and it is a driving force for all the talk of innovation.

and policy makers really know what to do about this crisis. So, we all find ourselves obliged to try and change things for the better and/or at lower cost, which often do not turn out as planned.

This thesis takes the experiences of innovators in the public sector seriously – and I explore some of the emotional breakdowns and setbacks I have encountered together with my colleagues in trying to innovate. The research commences by focusing on the individuals, who engage in change and transformation, and it aligns with the pragmatists' perspective, asserting that the self is inherently social. Ultimately then, it is all about democracy – at a time when democracies are on the verge of collapse in country after country.

According to John Dewey (2018), democracy is a school of self-reflection. It is not just a way of deciding, and a form of government, it is a way of going on living together – "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (ibid. p.93)". Democracy is a negotiation of what is a good life for me, what works for me, and what can work for the many, "so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (ibid.)".

When someone says to us: "Innovate (or die)!"[2] they are also taking a power position, stating we are not good enough – which becomes a threat to our identities. It takes a breakdown of habits to change (Dewey, 1910/33; 1922). I argue that wherever there is a call for innovation and change there is paradoxically also a call for (the potential security) of sameness. What I am further arguing in this thesis is that innovation (of public sector) is dependent on a negotiation and reflexive processes of our embodied habits of how we go on together – as the habitual selves we are. In the end this is a reimagining of the self, for the innovator as well as for the citizens of democracies.

[2] Peter Drucker (1999) is often said to have coined this term, but is not disputed whether he is the origin. https://hbr.org/2014/12/innovation-on-the-fly. It is a commonly heard slogan even in the public sector – one could of course wonder what the death of it would be like.

This thesis suggests some explanations as to why innovating is so hard, pointing at reflexive, narrative-based, and breakdown-oriented processes to negotiate innovation. It does not introduce step-by-step models for the creation of innovative solutions that would solve every problem. It can be read by people who have taken upon themselves to facilitate the transformation of practice of others (or their own), within organisational development, innovation, or management.

The Imperative of Innovation – some introductory thoughts

As stated above, this narrative-based research delves into breakdowns I experienced with my colleague while facilitating innovation at The District, seriously considering the experiences of public servant innovators. Early in the writing and reflection process, a discussion with my peers arose about the theme of innovation. In Project 1, change and innovation may seem synonymous, a perspective met with criticism from my peers. Therefore, I aim to provide some context on innovation and my perspective on it in this thesis, to help prepare the reader. It is further explored in the section *The imperative of innovation revisited* (p. 172).

Firstly, my focus on innovation centres around service innovation, rather than technical gadget invention. Lars Fuglsang (2010), a Danish professor of innovation in services and experiences, highlights that innovation encompasses two main activities: 1) introducing something new, and 2) ensuring its effective functionality in a given context (ibid., p. 67). He emphasises that innovation is usually seen as intentional, differing from changes that occur unconsciously or indirectly (ibid., p. 68). Thus, change and innovation are closely related, with intentionality and utility defining innovation. *This thesis challenges much of the thinking around the intentionality and usefulness of innovation – questioning for whom these intentions and utilities serve.*

Secondly, most discussions on innovation exhibit a Pro-Innovation Bias (Pfotenhauer et al, 2019) and an Imperative of Innovation (Jordan, 2014; Thøgersen & Waldorff, 2022). Innovation is often viewed as a cure-all for public sector challenges and fundamentally as ‘doing good’ – a pathway to beneficial change. *My thesis critically*

examines this perspective and illustrates how the definition of 'good' is subject to negotiations among involved parties.

Thirdly, ethical considerations of innovation and the role of innovators in implementing innovative solutions are linked to the Pro-Innovation Bias. I argue that innovation is not universally 'good'. *This thesis suggests that addressing ethical issues involves (breakdown-oriented) reflexive hermeneutical discussions/negotiations about what is considered good, understanding our prejudgements, and their manifestation in the present, in light of an emergent future. It questions, 'Good for whom?'*

Fourthly, the Imperative of Innovation is rooted in modern thinking and tied to Western individualistic thinking. As Godin (2012) observes, prior to the mid-19th century, innovation was often associated with negative connotations like heresy or deception. This thesis further explores the origins of the Imperative of Innovation and its connection to Western concepts of self and identity, as well as perceptions of time. *It argues for a fundamental link between innovation and the processes of the social self, highlighting the paradox of continuity and transformation. This exploration opens new perspectives in innovation studies.*

I will now outline the research approach.

Outline of the research approach

In conducting research on my own practice within an organisation, it is essential to first establish how the term "organisation" is conceptualised in this thesis and within the thought collective (Fleck, 1935) of the Doctor of Management Programme (DMan) at the University of Hertfordshire. Doug Griffin and Ralph Stacey's[3] (2005) book, '*A Complexity Perspective on Researching Organizations: Taking Experience Seriously'*, introduces the methods applied in the programme.

The perspective is referred to as 'complex responsive processes of relating' which draws insights from complexity science, group analytic theory, pragmatism, sociology,

[3] Doug Griffin and Ralph Stacey being two of the founders of the program, and Stacey the first director.

philosophy, and anthropology. Rather than considering organisations as static systems or entities, they are viewed as ongoing patterns of relating between individuals.

This perspective aligns with the central theme of social selves in this thesis. Drawing from the American pragmatist George Herbert Mead (1934), individual consciousness and mind are formed through communicative interactions with others. As humans we have the ability in our gesturing to others to evoke in our own bodies a response that is similar to the response in the others (and in anticipation of it). In our acting we take the attitude as well as the tendency to act of the other (Griffin & Stacey, 2005) and this is how we know what we are doing. "It immediately follows that consciousness (knowing, mind) is a social process in which meaning emerges in the social act of gesture-response, where the gesture can never be separated from the response. Meaning does not lie in the gesture, the word, alone, but in the gesture taken together with the response to it as one social act (Griffin & Stacey, 2005, p. 4)"

Our tendency to take the attitude and tendency to act of the other is core to how we came to function as teams, departments… and organisations in the first place. Within the framework of complex responsive processes of relating, the spatial metaphor of a system is replaced by a temporal metaphor of interaction. Interactions between people form a patterning process that is neither created by a system nor creates a system. An organisation is then understood as a paradoxical process of both continuity and potential transformation, in which individuals contribute to the patterning process based on their experiences. Griffin & Stacey (2005) states:

> If patterns of human interaction produce nothing but further patterns of human interaction, in the creation of which we are all participating, then there is no detached way of understanding organizations from the position of the objective observer. Instead, organizations have to be understood in terms of one's own personal experience of participating with others in the co-creation of the patterns of interactions that are the organization (ibid. p 1)

The only way to understand an organisation will then be through the local interactions, "in which global tendencies to act are taken up (ibid, p. 9)". *My research stance could then be described as one of detached involvement.*

Within the framework of "complex responsive processes of relating," knowledge is not solely located within individuals but rather emerges through continuous meaning-making in interpersonal interactions. Organisations are seen as processes of human relating, where everything organisational happens in the cooperative-consensual and conflictual-competitive interactions between people (ibid. p. 3). The understanding of organisations (and research of our practices) then must be based on the interpretations of the experiences of the social process of local interaction.

Therefore, my research process and methods align with these basic assumptions. Reflexive narratives play a crucial role in creating meaning and exploring experiences within interactions, which is a major theme in this thesis (see Project 2 on p. 35 as well as argument 1 on p. 191). These narratives can be considered as "raw material" (ibid.) for research, subject to an iterative social and reflexive process within the research community, involving learning sets, community meetings, and exploration of key themes together.

The research approach can broadly be described as narrative inquiry (Mowles, 2017), reflexive ethnography (Davis, 1998), or autoethnography (Adams, 2015; Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), as it relies on the interpretation of experiences within the social process of local interaction. The methodological considerations are discussed towards the end of my research (p 209) before the conclusions, as they serve as yet another reflexive turn on both the research process, methods, and the findings. The research methodology emerges alongside the development of thinking and both aspects are interconnected.

The reader has already been introduced to me - the 'I' who is writing this text. My background is also in literature and literary studies, where one of the key analytical approaches is to question the trustworthiness of the 'I' narrator. This text, however, is not a piece of literary fiction but an autoethnographic account, presenting research from my own practice. The individuals featured in this narrative are real people, which brings to the fore the need for the reader to critically question my writing and its associated ethical considerations. In these projects, you will find instances where I am the manager of others and times when I am being managed by others, indicating an undercurrent of power dynamics (as discussed in Project 4). This raises questions

about what I choose to present in my narrative and what I choose to omit. What counter-stories might exist to the ones I have narrated?

While I advocate for a critical reading of (the I of) this text, I would like to offer several points of reassurance regarding the development of this text and the processes employed to address potential questions and concerns. *Firstly*, apart from myself, the other individuals and the organisation in which the events took place are anonymised. All names are pseudonyms. However, this alone is not sufficient, as my name is on the cover, and it would be relatively easy to identify my workplace and colleagues through online searches. Therefore, *secondly*, the thesis is under maximum embargo. The reason for this is that over time, as more people leave the organisation, identifying who might be involved in the narrative will become increasingly difficult, should anyone attempt to do so. Still, it will ultimately be accessible to the public. In light of this, *thirdly*, according to the ethics protocol, all main characters received a participant information sheet (Appendix 3 on p. 261) and signed a consent form (Appendix 4 on p. 263) with the option to withdraw.

However, this is still not sufficient as there are questions around how I handle the data and my interpretations of it. Consequently, *fourthly*, I have engaged in conversations with my colleagues about the contents of the narratives. I have discussed my interpretations of the events with them, which I will elaborate on in the section *The emergence of ethics* (p. 225). Some of the reflections in this thesis are joint reflections with my colleagues. *Fifthly*, and importantly, this research is a social endeavour. It has developed through a reflexive process with peers and supervisors who critically read and question my narratives. This process helps me explore what occurred in my narrative and aids me in understanding what might have transpired for others and for us collectively. As my supervisors have advised, I always strive to represent others in my text in a manner that they would recognise themselves (and their feedback – as I will return to and problematise in my ethics section – have confirmed this). The goal is not to analyse others but to deeply explore my own practice through reflecting on our shared situations, ultimately to gain a deeper understanding and to be able to generalise these insights for broader application.

This autoethnographic research is based on my own practice in my own organisation, and I am deeply emotionally invested in the events that have transpired, which is another call for a critical reading. I further discuss these questions in my section on *Research method* (p. 209). As a manager conducting research within my organisation, my approach is different from that of an ethnographer studying other cultures. My data are not in the form of field notes or taped conversations. In meetings, I am primarily participating as a manager or colleague, not as a researcher. I may jot down notes in my notebook as a meeting progresses, and occasionally, I refer to agendas and reports from meetings as sources of data (which are equally accessible to me and to the others). I also at some points include e-mails I have received and sent. But largely, and as subjective as it may seem, my recollections of events are my primary data source. These recollections begin to form the basis of my inquiry as I exit meetings and/or engage in discussions with colleagues and peers about what transpired, referred to as retrospective autoethnography (Edwards, 2021). Earlier versions of the projects, which are often written closer to the actual events with less reflection, also serve as data sources.

One important focus in this research is on emotional breakdowns in the field of innovation, both my colleagues and I were significantly impacted – in many ways both shaken and stirred as my projects will reveal[4].

Further introductory guidance for readers of this thesis

This thesis serves as a documentation of my work as an innovator over the past three and a half years, completed as part of a professional doctorate programme. It comprises four projects presented as a portfolio, which have undergone multiple revisions based on feedback from my peers and supervisors.

The projects have not been retrospectively tidied up but are presented as completed, showcasing the evolving nature of thinking and practice. The interconnections between the projects and the development of both my practice and thinking are explored in the

[4] To which could be added, humans are animals too.

synopsis, which also considers the implications for other practitioners in management and innovation.

Project 1 My Journey through Shipwreck and Rescue: Preparing for Research serves as preparation for research, delving into the influences on my thinking through practices I have been involved in, relevant readings, and my writing experiences, including the publication of three novels. It helped me better understand the underlying assumptions and patterns of my thinking, highlighting my long-standing preoccupation with transformation. This project aided in formulating the initial research question: "What happens to our social selves when we try to innovate?"

Projects 2, 3, and 4 are autoethnographic narrative accounts that further explore the experiences of my practice and colleagues in The District. These projects reveal various emotional breakdowns encountered while attempting to facilitate innovation:

- *Project 2: Sameness and Otherness: Breakdown of narration in the field of innovation* illustrates the challenges faced in implementing a new working model in the care sector, drawing inspiration from a 'trust-based' management model from Denmark.
- *Project 3: Rejecting or engaging with innovation in the context of the (habitual) practices of public servants* delves into the questioning of my practices as the Head of HR, where I was accused of immorality and unethical behaviour by a colleague, leading to an exploration of the practice of public servants and how it bureaucratically connects to the universal (for instance in insisting on the similar treatment of similar cases), which sometimes makes it hard to see the exception of the (potential innovative) particular.
- *Project 4: Innovation and the Role of the Fool. Exploring the Interconnection between Power, Judgement and Taste* showcases my struggle to assert my position within the organisation after the arrival of a new boss, shedding light on the power dynamics surrounding the work of innovators and finally how we come to judge the good, the bad, the funny (and the ugly) and some negotiations of our social taste in the exploration of an bad taste joke.

The *Synopsis – more than a summary* brings together insights from all the projects, reflecting on innovation, social selves, and the evolution of my thinking throughout the research. It includes a summary of the projects, further considerations on innovation, and the arguments explored by the end of the research.

During the writing of the synopsis, I realised that certain aspects of innovation thinking were missing in the projects. To make statements on contributions to knowledge, a mini literature review was included in the *Critical evaluation of the research in light of the overarching themes* to better understand the dynamics of my practice. This review follows the project summaries and offers a further reflexive exploration of the theme of innovation, as well as social selves and paradoxes. It was only in the creation of the synopsis that I could see how the themes interconnected and how I was getting better at the interweaving of insights from different authors in the process of an emergent review of literature when exploring my practice to better understand what was going on for us. This then leads to claiming *My Arguments*

The research process is characterised as emergent, as experiences and narratives unfolded during the course of the work. Themes emerged as I engaged in my practice, and the challenges encountered led me to discover theories that supported my understanding of the situations. The use of literature in the thesis is therefore also emergent, reflecting the unpredictability of our explorations influenced by both my work experiences and the broader research community, particularly my learning set. The *Research method* section is therefore placed at the end as a reflexive turn. I have outlined the approach (and the ethics of it) in the beginning, reflected on method throughout the research in the community of researchers. By reflexively writing the method section it offers new insights to the research. In the *Conclusions and contributions* section I conclude by pointing to what I argue is my contributions to knowledge and practice.

An illustration of how the reflexive process works can be seen in the way part of my thesis title emerged. This ‘a-ha!’ moment happened upon revisiting the literature on social selves in the synopsis and retrospectively examining my personal experience in ‘coming out’ as gay (Project 1) through the lens of Michel Foucault’s perspectives (1978; 1985) on sexuality being shaped by discourses of science, medicine, and law -

perspectives I had not extensively explored while initially writing the project. Integrating these insights with Peter Marris' (1986) commentary on the inherent pain of change and transformation, as presented in *'Loss and Change,'* was insightful. Revisiting this material shortly before submitting my introduction and synopsis, and therefore late in the final stages of the thesis, allowed me to make a vital connection: innovation is also about a reimagining of the self, as difficult as it may be. This realisation influenced both my thesis title and the thrust of my arguments. Later, I recognised a further connection to the methods of abductive research (Alvesson & Sköldberg; 2018; Martela, 2015; Mowles, 2015) and the concept of theorisation as a 'disciplined imagination' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011) (see pg. 221). In essence, the process of writing my thesis became a disciplined reimagining of myself as a practice researcher.

Why innovation is so hard – and a fallibilistic conclusion

My thesis can be summarised in a short question: *Why is innovating so hard*? The shortest answer would be: *Because as innovators we come up against people.* The 'we' in this answer then is including ourselves, as innovators we also come up against ourselves – and my research is questioning the taxonomising of a 'we' the innovators, and a 'they' the innovated. We are in it together.

In my argument section (p 191) I provide three answers to the question connected to my argument – the themes are interconnected, but I have signalled where the main exploration originated by pointing out in which project I started reflecting on them.

Why innovating is so hard?

1. *Because innovation can threaten (and/or enhance) our (narrative) identities* (mainly Project 1 & 2).
2. *Because the habitus of (public sector) practitioners is often directed to the (bureaucratic) universal – doing the best for the most – which sometimes makes it hard to see the exception of the (potential innovative) particular* (mainly Project 3).

3. *'Because as innovators we are questioning/negotiating what people/we judge as right, good and true – the embodied taste*[5] *– and their/our (narrative) sense of who we are for which we are willing to put up a fight and/or silently ignore'* (mainly Project 4).

These are some answers as to why innovating is so hard. My thesis introduces no step-by-step-models for finding innovative solutions that would work for all. I argue that the potential of innovation can be supported by the breakdowns of habits. Further reflexive, narrative-based processes would be a way of negotiating the paradox of continuity and transformation. In the end innovation can be seen as a reimagining of the self. This could be called hermeneutic dialogues, and the thesis further argues that these power-related negotiations are reliant on our judgements of taste: Judging and negotiating the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Leaning on the pragmatists in doing what can be called a pragmatist inquiry, knowledge is not presented as 'eternal' truths. It starts and ends in the experience. What is presented are Deweyan *warranted assertions* (Dewey, 1938). To me this means a suggested solution on what is good enough for now and to go on exploring together, conducting a fallibilistic inquiry with ethical ends in view (Martela, 2015) on the innovation of the public sector. Knowing that the solutions of tomorrow can be totally different ones.

This is how the questions above relates to my arguments (see argument section, p. 191):

[5] Which is also exposing and including the innovators own embodied sense of taste in the negotiation, which is the reason for using 'we'.

Why doing innovation (in public sector) is so hard?	My arguments
1. *Innovation can threaten (and/or enhance) our narrative identities*	1. *Social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is socially co-created*
2. *The habitus of (public sector) practitioners is often directed to the (bureaucratic) universal – the best for the most – which sometimes makes it hard to see the exception of the (potential innovative) particular*	2. *The potential of innovation can emerge through the breakdown of habits and be supported by (re-imaginary), iterative, reflexive, narrative-based processes/negotiations*
3. *Innovators are questioning/negotiating what people/we judge as right, good and true – the embodied taste – and their/our (narrative) sense of who we are for which we are willing to put up a fight and/or silently ignore.* *In the questioning innovators expose their own embodied sense of taste which is also a part of the negotiation.*	3. *Innovation is in effect a reimagining of the self involving hermeneutic dialogues and dynamic, power-related negotiations of the embodied judgements of taste*

Table 1 Arguments connected to why doing innovation is so hard

Project 1 My Journey through Shipwreck and Rescue: Preparing for Research

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> *"Only when the individual stops taking himself as the starting point of his thought (....), only then will his feeling gradually fade that he is something isolated and self-contained "inside" while the others are something separated from him by an abyss (...) (Norbert Elias, 1991, p. 56).*

In medias res – the shipwrecked I

In 1990, at 23, I found myself lying on the floor in my room. I lay curled up, afraid of falling off. Life seemed utterly meaningless, and I struggled to stay sane. At this moment, I was facing an existential impasse, feeling as if my entire life had gone astray. I had hit rock bottom; something had to change, but I did not believe in change—there seemed to be no such thing for the shipwrecked I, hopelessly lying there.

My feeling of meaninglessness found theoretical support in my studies at that time. I was studying German language and philosophy at the University of Bergen, delving into the works of philosophers like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. A quote that particularly struck a chord with me is from the Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zappfe. It's included in the foreword of the third edition (1988) of his 1941 doctoral dissertation, *'On the Tragic'*, penned as he lay on his deathbed: "The view from the last ward can briefly be summarised in this sentence: The human race comes from nothing and goes to nothing. Beyond this there is nothing" (Zappfe, 1988, p. 4, my translation). This quote aptly captured my sentiments as I lay there, curled up.

Additionally, there was the aspect of personal narration. I wrote page after page of what I called 'Notes of the Soul', transcribing the meaninglessness of life into (rather terrible) poems and short stories. My dream was to become a writer, as I was vaguely aware that no matter how bad I felt, it could always be turned into words and narrated. But, lying there on the floor in this utter meaninglessness, hoping for a change I did not believe could ever happen, even the narration was of no help—it had gone too far into the nothingness of being.

I choose to begin my narrative at this point, as it represents both a crisis and the breakdown of the existentialist and highly individualistic (and lonely) version of me. At the same time, it is the start of something else, a more relational variant of myself.

In this project, I will explore a self in process, particularly how my views on change, both as an individual and together with others in organisations, have altered alongside this relational awakening. The 'shipwrecked' version of myself doubted that real change was possible, yet yearned for it and also underwent changes, whereas the rescued and relational version sees the self as a process with the possibility of both continuity and change.

One of my main points will be the close connection between views of self and processes of change. In this project, I aim to show how this connection has been important to me and how it has shaped my thinking. I explore past events and thoughts with the aim of becoming aware of my prejudices and assumptions to make my subjectivity more transparent as a researcher. This will be a central part of my method for the following projects, where I will explore the interdependence of selves and change within the area of innovation in the public sector. This is not a strictly professional biography, as my thinking about self has developed through childhood, youth, reading and writing, as well as through my work as a manager and consultant—and lastly, through my training as a gestalt therapist. Before I metaphorically rise from that floor to commence the rest of my journey, let's look back and explore the influences from my earlier years.

The young artist - the dissolved dream of music

I am the youngest of four siblings. My eldest brother is fifteen years older than me, and there is an eight-year gap between my middle brother and me. I was born in 1966, at a time when my mother was 43 years old. Soon after my birth, my siblings, one by one, left our home village to pursue their studies. Growing up, I often felt like an only child.

My father was a busy self-employed baker, and my mother sometimes assisted him in the bakery while also managing our household. The years following my birth were challenging for my mother, in some ways leaving me in a self-reliant position. This early 'independence' fostered in me an egotistical outlook, as described by Clarkson & Mackewn (1993), characterised by a mix of grandiosity and worthlessness.

My grandmother, a devout Christian living next door, contrasted with my parents' more relaxed approach to religion. They did, however, send me to Sunday school. As I grappled with my emerging sexuality, I remember being overwhelmed with shame each time I masturbated, haunted by a belief in Hell despite my doubts about God's existence. This period was also marked by unrequited love for several girls who seemed beyond my reach. Somehow, I found myself unable to align my own sexuality with any of the girls I had affectionate feelings for, and never experienced any sexual attraction towards them.

In school, I was a diligent student, possibly even seen as nerdy. I earned the trust of my peers and teachers, leading to roles like a member of the pupils' council and trustee on various boards. Simultaneously, I played the role of the class clown, employing humour as a shield to conceal the underlying sadness I felt. This concept of a 'true inside' was also a theme in many novels I read at the time, influencing my thinking. This Western dichotomy in my perception of self – the contrast between my 'authentic inner being' and the social facade I presented – was profoundly critiqued by Norbert Elias in *'The Society of Individuals'* (1991), a critique I will delve into and expand upon further in this thesis.

My interest in psychoanalytic theory took root early. For a significant school project, I analysed '*The Road to the World's End'* by the Norwegian writer Sigurd Hoel (1958), a novel deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich's therapy (Tvinnerheim, 1975). This exploration of the subconscious in Hoel's work was a precursor to the themes I would later explore in my first novel, published in 1996.

After graduation, I pursued my dream of becoming a musician. I played in one of Norway's finest school brass bands. In preparation for a contest, we were joined by a renowned guest conductor, Dennis Blackdyke. He was an Englishman living near Bergen in a Folk High School – a unique Norwegian/Danish establishment that eschews grades and exams in favour of practical learning. This particular school, located in a region celebrated for its superior brass bands, specialised in brass band music, with Dennis conducting one of them. During his visit to my hometown, he invited me to join the school as a solo cornetist in his band. I embraced this opportunity to prepare for the music conservatory admission test. I had already been

travelling monthly to study with a professional trumpeter and had devoted countless hours to practice.

Several months into my tenure as solo cornetist, Dennis asked me to move to second cornetist to bolster the back row. Although nothing was explicitly stated, I perceived it as a demotion, a blow that hit me hard. I found Dennis charismatic and exceptionally skilled, a true artist with a penchant for childlike tantrums. Amongst the students, we often made fun of his eccentricities. To some, he was merely a peculiar school character, but to me, he was a central figure – my teacher and the conductor who had the power to demote me. This incident marked the first of several similar experiences in my life, where a cherished position was removed from me. It was upon reflecting on this episode that I identified the underlying emotion as shame. From a psychological perspective, such a setback could be particularly daunting for someone with an egotistical or narcissistic trait. Adopting a more sociological or pragmatic viewpoint (Stacey & Mowles, 2016), it could be argued that I internalised the 'generalised other's' perception of myself (Mead, [1934]2015), feeling shamed by an imagined chorus of critical voices: "Serves him right, he wasn't that good, he just thought he was someone special."

Was I good enough? When I compared myself to the stars of the band, I must have realised I was not (yet) as good as them. Did this start a cycle of self-doubt? Regardless, I eventually lost my dream of becoming a musician. I imagine that the demotion and the consequent doubts contributed to this, but I remember afterwards rationalising that I found the music business somewhat limited – which could, of course, have been a (narcissistic) defence to shield myself from the worthlessness of being downgraded. The most important lesson I learnt from striving to become a musician is that it takes exactly that – hard work. You have to rehearse extensively, repeat things tirelessly for years, with the goal of improving every little detail under the guidance of an instructor. There is always room for improvement. This ethos might be seen as a reflection of a rather Protestant work ethic (Weber, 1973). It also bears an existential risk, as there is the possibility of not being good enough in the end. This links to the sense of life's meaning, and when a dream is lost, so too can be the meaning. The dream and the meaning then lie in the achievement, making it highly competitive.

During my year at the Folk High School, I discovered something else. There was this boy at the school who I found nice, interesting, and humorous. I made a point of being wherever he was. Then it suddenly hit me: "You are in love with him – that is what this is." Once I acknowledged this to myself, I reflected on past attractions to boys and realised that I had been both physically and mentally drawn to them, without fully understanding my feelings. My affection for girls had been idealistic and asexual, but with boys, it was a different story altogether. How had I not seen it? Admitting my feelings was one thing; as we shall see, accepting my gay identity was another challenge. I was now three years removed from the 'shipwrecked I' on the floor.

Unsure of what to do after leaving the school, as my musical aspirations had faded, I was offered a one-year position as a junior journalist at my hometown's local newspaper. I had worked there on summer jobs for some years. Returning home with my newfound understanding of my gay identity (I identified as bisexual back then), I confided in my best friends about my realisation. It was daunting, but they were supportive.

In summary, as a young man, my thinking was highly individualistic, and my concept of self was divided between a 'true' inner self and a 'false' external, social self. I have described my diligent efforts to fulfil my artistic dreams and identified a Protestant work ethic in my endeavours. Simultaneously, there is an existential risk associated with pursuing dreams, as they might remain unachieved, leading to feelings of inadequacy and a loss of meaning. I continually strove for excellence and success, and we have seen how the cornetist experienced a social fall along the way. We shall now explore the crisis of this individualistic (and gay) self.

Nihilism is at the door – reevaluating all(?) values

The winter of 1990 rolled in, and at 23, studying philosophy and humanities, I increasingly felt as if I were living the wrong life. In Bergen, there was just one venue for gay people, Studio 52, tucked away on a deserted street. I often took long night-

time walks, passing by the place but never summoning the courage to open the door. What was I afraid of? This was thirty years ago, and although the Norwegian Parliament had legalised homosexuality in 1972, there were no positive gay role models as there are today. Legalisation, on its own, did little to change societal perceptions of gay people[6]. I recall a boy from my childhood street who grew increasingly feminine and was mercilessly mocked, with cruel jokes about him bleeding from his nose once a month. Tragically, he took his own life. So, as I stood outside that door, I suppose I feared what entering might mean for my 'identity'; it represented a threat in a way. Instead, I returned to my room, consumed with desire, pouring my energy into writing poems and short stories, feeling utterly miserable. It was during that winter that I found myself on the floor in despair.

It is important to note the language I used in the previous passage. Referring to a 'threat to my identity' indicates that my thinking at the time was deeply entrenched in the dominant Western discourse of humans as autonomous (rational) individuals, a concept tracing back to Immanuel Kant (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Again, this highlights my perception of an internal versus external self. Linked to this is the belief that personality and identity, my 'true' self, are stable and fixed entities within me, a viewpoint critiqued by Elias (1991). Earlier, I mentioned my disbelief in change during this period, which ties into this notion of a stable and unchanging self. I recall, in high school, reading works by Norwegian Nobel laureate Sigrid Undset, including her famous last sentence from *'Tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table'* (1915): "Although customs and practices change considerably as times pass, and people's beliefs change, and they think differently about many things. But human hearts do not change one bit with the passing of time." This encapsulates my view on change at that time: The 'outside' me might engage in different actions and change behaviours, but my heart – my 'inner, true, passionate self' – remains unaltered. I will revisit this as the shipwrecked I on the floor confronts the crisis and breakdown of this individualistic thinking.

Another point worth noting is that I had internalised others' prejudices towards the gay community. By adopting the attitude of 'the generalised other' (Mead, [1934]2015), I

[6] Yet probably was important in sparking a movement in perception

was shaming myself for my perceived perversity. I would rise from the floor, but within the same paradigm of individuality, only to discover later that it was, in fact, the beginning of something else: a more relational understanding of the world. This became clear while studying Gestalt therapy and later viewing things through the lens of complex responsive processes, where the individual mind and social relating are parts of the same (bodily) action and responses (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). In this framework, change (or continuity) also becomes possible, as there is no such thing as an inner, stable, true self; it is all in the context of relating.

Reflecting on my diary from this dark period, I see that I was not suicidal, for I had too many aspirations. An entry from that time reads: 'You cannot make an end to this dirty life because there is this Something that I am searching for, and yet do not know if I will ever find it, and it makes me hold on in this stream of shit. You cannot make an end to it without really having tried life. Can you? Or? And Otherwise? Nothing!' Humour also permeates these writings. Through it, I could view myself from a different angle, making jokes and comments about the suffering 'I'. Rereading these notes years later, the self-irony sometimes makes me burst out laughing. I believe humour is a vital resource for survival[7].

From these notebooks, I can also see my deep engagement with the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, more so than I recall. His project was a revaluation of all values, but he warned of the danger that utter meaninglessness (Sinnlosigkeit) could result from a failed revaluation (Montinari, 1983). I found a note about his philosophical novel *Also sprach Zarathustra*: 'Nietzsche failed, though; he did not manage the edifying and constructive part of his own philosophy. Can anybody else make it? Tunc bene navigavi, cum naufragium feci. I then had a good voyage, although I was shipwrecked.' This echoed my feelings on that floor. The 'I' was shipwrecked, but I found some solace in Deleuze's (1985) words about the creative human being in his book on Nietzsche: "To create means to ease and relieve life; to invent new opportunities for life. The creator is a legislator – the creator is a dancer." (p.22); or Nietzsche's (1969) own words: "Yes, I recognise Zarathustra. His eyes are clear, and no disgust lurks about his mouth. Does he not go along like a dancer?" (ibid,

[7] See also project 4 (p 115) and its discussions of humour as a part of the power games

p. 40). To create (and achieve?) was my main project, as it was the only thing that made sense to me in my longing for a different life.

When I got up from the floor, I realised I needed to do something different, perhaps even relocate. While contemplating this, I received a phone call from the editor of my hometown newspaper, offering me a year's work due to a vacancy. Knowing my life needed a change, I accepted.

In my room, with everything packed for my return journey, I decided to visit Berlin before starting work. I diligently prepared, filling my notebook with the names of gay cafes and bars. A couple of days into the trip, after visiting numerous cafes without significant encounters, I found myself in a café/bar, writing observations in my notebook. I described a man who had entered and was reading 'Der Spiegel' at the bar. I found him appealing and wrote in real-time: "So I ask you, my lovely. The time is twelve-thirty, and you sit here reading, alone. What are you interested in? People come and go around you, and you just sit there. (…) He decided to put his magazine aside. What now? Did he look at me? What now?"

The next entry is post our conversation and the day after. I had approached him, asking if I could join him for a drink. He said, "Of course", and we struck up a conversation. I found Peter attractive, both personally and physically. And importantly, I noted we planned to meet again. The last entry of the book reads: "I am happy. For the first time in a long time, my diagnosis is happiness. Or maybe in love? And I have (hah – maybe in love? I am madly in love!) an appointment in two hours".

Reflecting on my notes from the following year, I recognise I faced challenges in accepting my gay identity. I had not informed my family and often lied about my whereabouts. However, I was generally in a better place. Revisiting these notebooks after years, I was struck by how I in a sense wrote myself into coming out. In a note from 1996, I describe becoming gay as my "Umwertung aller Werte" (Re-evaluation of all Values), echoing Nietzsche. It was an existentialist undertaking, akin to what Simone Beauvoir said: "Self-consciousness is not knowledge but a story one tells about oneself (in Sartre, 1972, p. 15)". That is what I was doing in the '*Notes of the Soul'*: writing myself, a process I believed probably saved me. From this vantage

point, one could argue I am doing the same by writing this narrative. In retrospect, stepping into a more relational life was a significant change, something I will revisit later. I was no longer lonely and shipwrecked; reaching out to others became my salvation. The toughest existential struggles were behind me.

I eventually opened up to my family about my sexuality. Initially, it was difficult for my parents, but with time, they adjusted wonderfully. One night, while riding the bus back from the city to my room in Oslo, where I had relocated, I confided in a friend that I was tired of trying to find Mr Right in bars. The following day, she invited me to a small gathering at her place, which is where I met Morten for the first time. He invited me for a walk the next day, but as I was visiting my parents, I could not make it. Due to my somewhat abrupt manner on the phone, I thought that was the end of it. However, on the 1st of April 1993, while at the bar/café of the LGBT organisation with my theatre group, awaiting the parliamentary decision on legalising same-sex relationships, I met Morten again. The law passed that night, and it marked the beginning of a relationship that has lasted for the past 27 years.

Throughout the process of writing this project, my peers have repeatedly asked me: What is the meaning of your queerness, how has it shaped your thoughts, and why should your encounters in bars be of interest? Honestly, I do not have a definitive answer. Asking ‘what are the explicit intellectual links of your straightness’ might seem peculiar; a heterosexual person probably would not dedicate many words to writing about their straightness. The embodied habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) of a heterosexual society is less often articulated; it is a “subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action” (p. 86), or as Charles Taylor (1995) interprets Bourdieu, “values made flesh”. We are defined – and define ourselves – using demeaning terms like queers, faggots, gays, poofs. The term ‘straight’ exists simply as a contrast; a heterosexual individual would not typically identify as such – there is no need, as it is an ingrained norm. My habitus was identical until I embraced and internalised my experiences as a gay man, though initially with a strong sense of living a wrong life. There was significant shame associated with this, such as the fear of devastating my parents by coming out. To explore and understand my identity, I had to venture into bars. Even today, I find it somewhat embarrassing (shameful?) to hold hands in public, revealing my gay identity

– while I have embraced my queerness, traces of heterosexual normativity linger. So, what does queerness mean intellectually to a queer person? I cannot say definitively, but it certainly holds significance, just as straightness does to heterosexuals[8].

In 1992, I began studying Norwegian language and literature at the University of Oslo. This equipped me with knowledge of Literary Theory and, through engaging with the works of great writers in groups and lectures, I acquired some essential tools that had previously eluded me. I wrote a novel based on my childhood, heavily inspired by psychoanalytic theory and set against a backdrop of subconscious landscapes. At the time, I was delving into the works of Freud and others who applied psychoanalysis to literature. Early in 1993, I sent my manuscript to a publisher. The consultant was positive but felt it was not yet complete. By December, I had revised it, and the consultant recommended publication. In February 1994, the editor confirmed this via phone call. However, a letter in late May brought disheartening news: the editor, having consulted a senior writer in Norway, now believed the manuscript lacked intensity, depth, and coherence. This was a severe blow, especially after celebrating with friends about my impending authorship. This experience mirrored my time as the Solo Cornetist – reaching a pinnacle only to have it snatched away, leaving me engulfed in shame. Initially, I could not bring myself to work on the novel, but unlike my experience as a cornetist, I eventually resumed the project as it held too much significance in my life, and my sense of purpose was intertwined with its success. In 1996, after submitting two more iterations, the novel was finally accepted and published in the fall, receiving positive reviews.

Reflecting on those years, I recognise their immense importance in my life. I grappled with accepting my gay identity, faced a life that seemed inherently meaningless with nihilism lurking, leading to a breakdown. Yet, I overcame internalised prejudices against my homosexuality, came out, rose from despair, and realised my dream of becoming a writer. Still, my approach to life was highly individualistic, and my efforts were ultimately rewarded, reinforcing this mindset. My coming out marked a significant relational turn – a rescue for the shipwrecked I that, like Narcissus, had

[8] This is further explored in the synopsis sections, Project 1 – The Young Man's Re-imagined Self (p. 156) as well as in the Social selves revisited (p. 178)

previously shunned relationships. While my values underwent some reevaluation, my conception of self as a 'true', unchanging entity remained intact.

Change by objectives - the strategic management years

In the autumn of 1993, alongside my studies and writing endeavours, I began working at a youth club in The Municipality. Within six months, I was appointed as the club leader and its staff, a role initially intended to be temporary, but which later became permanent. By the time my book was published, this job had evolved into my full-time occupation. Influenced by my partner's work in leadership development, and after several years of leading the youth club, I developed an interest in leadership. This led me to enrol in the part-time Master of Management programme at BI Norwegian Business School.

In my first year, I studied under Professor Paul Moxnes, an expert in organisational psychology, focusing on what he terms 'deep roles' in organisations, heavily influenced by Carl Gustav Jung's theories. Moxnes' interest lies in the unconscious processes within groups and organisations. The learning approach was experiential: he placed us in specific scenarios, allowed us time to reflect in groups, and then lectured on the themes we had just encountered. Interestingly, we were also part of his research, as evidenced in his publications, for example, Moxnes (2007). This learning experience resonated with my studies in psychoanalytical theories of literature. My second novel was heavily influenced by Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian-French semiotician, psychoanalyst, philosopher, and feminist, and especially her book '*Black Sun'* (1989). The novel portrays the depressive/melancholic position that Kristeva discusses and which I had personally experienced. This novel was published shortly after completing the programme.

My research focused on change and organisational culture, drawing from systemic and cognitivist/humanistic literature, particularly Edgar Schein's work. Schein (1992) identifies three levels of culture: 1) artefacts and behaviour, 2) espoused values, and 3) basic assumptions. He emphasises that values and norms form the core of a culture. Agyris & Schön (1996) differentiate between espoused values - those we claim to live

by - and the actual values that unconsciously underpin our actions. Schein defines basic assumptions as learned responses or solutions to how a group can survive in its external environment and resolve internal integration problems – essentially, how to interact. His theory, among others, builds on Bion (1961) and the Tavistock tradition, which Moxness also draws upon. Change, according to this tradition, is feasible as the different levels mutually influence each other, but effecting change is challenging. The real hero of the story, in this context, would be the leader/consultant/change agent who, from an external perspective, could bring to light some of the unconscious content and facilitate genuine change – a concept that has spawned a multi-million-dollar consulting industry and numerous how-to books. In my role, I embraced the position of this hero.

After completing my master's degree in human resource management in 2006, I applied for and secured a job as an internal consultant within organisational and leadership development at the Agency for Competence and Development in the City of Oslo. I was following in my partner's footsteps, who had successfully transitioned from a similar role into the consulting business. By then, he had published a book on relational leadership and development (Skivik, 2004), in which I had been deeply involved, offering readings and critiques. His work, influenced by Donald Schön and Chris Agyris (Schön, 1983; Agyris & Schön, 1978), posits that while new leaders need to consciously consider their actions, experienced leaders develop an intuitive understanding of what to do, which he terms 'knowledge in action'. When actions do not yield the desired results, it prompts a 'competent' leader to reflect on their actions. Our programmes were designed to assist leaders in this reflection and to introduce a third level – research on action. This involves theorising about oneself as a leader, planning development based on these reflections, and gaining situational awareness of what is 'effective' leadership.

Tom Andersen's (1994) book *'Reflecting Teams, Reflecting Processes and Conversations of Conversations'*, inspired by constructivism and collaborative, language systemic therapy, also greatly influenced our work approach. Tom had previously facilitated a reflective group of consultants at my workplace, and his legacy continued to shape our methods. This tradition aligns with the one described and critiqued earlier.

In this section, I have explored how my understanding of self and change has been shaped by significant influences in Western organisational thought. My partner had commenced a four-year Gestalt therapy training programme, and a close colleague at work, with whom I co-facilitated two leadership programmes, had completed the same training. Observing the impact it had on her approach to work, less goal-oriented and more process-focused, I embarked on the four-year training in 2007. This marked a significant turning point in my life, leading to a more relational understanding of the self and altering my views on change.

The paradoxical theory of change – to become more of who you are

Gestalt therapy reacquainted me with existentialism, a significant theoretical component within its eclectic practice (Clarkson, 1999; Clarkson & Mackewn, 1993; Perls, 1969; Polster & Polster, 1973; Skottun, 2002; Zinker, 1978). It is fitting to start with my personal experience of 'Angst' (Kierkegaard, 1969) lying on the floor, embodying the "fundamental malaise or dread which people experience when they face the fact that they will die, that there is no ultimate meaning to human life and that they, alone, have responsibility for choosing who they are and the meaning they give their lives from moment to moment (Clarkson & Mackewn, 1993, p. 80)". Simultaneously this is the beginning and the potential of the 'I'. Fritz Perls (1957), one of Gestalt therapy's founders, posited that anxiety is the impetus for moving forward. He emphasised adult responsibility for how we live our lives and the meaning we attribute to them, offering a liberating alternative to the perceived determinism of Freudian psychoanalysis. Although individualistic in nature, this marked the start of my shift towards a more relational understanding of 'being me.'

Gestalt therapy is non-deterministic; it advocates that it is never too late to ascribe new meaning to past experiences. Throughout my darker years, I never shed a tear; yet, in a therapy session, I found myself weeping, confronted with both the meaninglessness and meaningfulness of my time on the floor of my student flat. Those challenging pre-coming-out years shaped who I am today. While I would never wish to relive that period, in hindsight, I was able to reinterpret and find new meaning in it.

Gestalt views the self as a process. With Martin Buber (1970), the 'I' emerges in relation to the 'You' (Not-I) through contact and interaction. In his 1957 lecture, Perls quotes Buber and adds:

> So what is the 'self'? Now the 'self' cannot be understood other than through the field (…). So, the 'self' is to be found in the contrast with otherness. There is a boundary between the self and the other and this boundary is the essence of psychology (ibid.).

Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (1951) assert that the self is not a static structure but a constantly changing process, presenting a critique of Freud and psychoanalysis. They utilise terms like id and ego, akin to Freud, but instead of the 'super-ego', they refer to 'personality'. The self/personality, in their view, is not an essence but a function – not something one is, but something one does or becomes, making the self inherently relational. This conceptualisation of the self has an understated connection to American Pragmatism, particularly William I. Thomas, as Paul Goodman studied at the University of Chicago (Kitzler 2007, Skottun, 2008). However, it still seems caught in the dichotomy of the 'inside' I and the 'outside' Other(ness), portraying the autonomous individual and focusing on the boundary between I and the other. Kitzler (2007) notes that Goodman maintained a Kantian view of the self as the 'Ghost in the Machine' while also embracing the pragmatists' idea of a processual self. Nonetheless, this challenged my earlier notion of self as a 'true' and 'static' inner entity and altered my perspective on change.

Awareness was a key focus at the Norwegian Gestalt Institute. As Yontef (1993) describes, "Awareness is a form of experiencing. It is the process of being in vigilant contact with the most important events in the individual/environmental field with full sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive, and energetic support (ibid. p. 179)". This emphasis on being aware of what is happening within me in relation to others and exploring it together was central to the life changes I experienced. It offered an escape from the 'inside-trap.' As a client initially driven by egotism, my breakthrough came from exploring vibrant contact with others. This allowed me to experience tears again, tears of joy, sadness, and emotional connection. The key for me was embodiment – through training, I realised that my cognition sometimes disconnects me from my emotions. Being aware of my bodily sensations helped me connect with my emotions

and, consequently, with others. The reports and writings from these years of training reflect many traces of this realisation. Polster & Polster (1973) illustrate that contact is implicitly incompatible with remaining unchanged, as through the act of contacting, change occurs in the here and now, influenced by the meaning we assign and the choices we make.

In one of the training sessions, I created a drawing that led me to understand the lonely little boy it depicted. I was standing alone between houses in my yard, with an absent mother, probably due to a headache, and a preoccupied father. In my exam that year, I cited Wheeler (1998): "By uncritically maintaining the introject, 'Nobody will pay any attention to me', he is compelled to reply, 'so I have to do it for myself' (p. 83)".

I also realised that I could experience the opposite – that by reaching out, I could come into contact with others. My view on change now aligns with Beisser's (1970) Paradoxical Theory of Change: Change occurs when I become what I am, not when I try to be what I am not. This understanding directly informs my later research on innovation in the public sector. The crux lies in the effort to change or innovate. I am exploring two versions of a question: what happens when we *try to* innovate versus what happens when we change. This delves into the dilemma of planned, desired change versus organic, emergent change. Who desires this change, and why? I will elaborate on this later.

Interestingly, Gestalt therapy seems to idealise 'change', viewing constancy as a resistance to contact. This perspective stems from the therapeutic tradition, as people typically seek therapy desiring some form of 'change' or 'healing'. However, not acknowledging the paradox of coexisting continuity and potential transformation could be problematic, especially in organisational settings. Gestalt therapy suggests that the self is a process, yet it also posits that change involves becoming who you are (implying a non-processual self), leading to a potential contradiction in the concept of self. This indicates that Gestalt literature has not completely shed the Kantian notion of self, akin to a 'ghost in the machine' (Kitzler, 2007). In my leadership development work, I encourage leaders to be the best version of themselves, with the caveat that this is contingent on whether others will allow them to be.

The process of meaning-making in Gestalt therapy is intrinsically linked to the concept of wholeness. As Gestalt represents a meaningful whole, holism becomes a critical aspect. Perls (1969) critiques science for being overly reductionist, analytical, and causal, rather than embracing a holistic approach: "The essence of the whole can never be captured by an analysis of the parts (Clarkson & Mackewn, 1993, p. 37)". However, from the perspective of complex responsive processes, the notion of wholeness is somewhat problematic. It seems to presuppose the existence of something prior to the processual selves that co-create the 'reality' they perceive.

To summarise my Gestalt training and education, it revisited existentialism, enabling me to sense a deeper, more relational meaning in my life. Gestalt therapy facilitated my transition from viewing the self as a static entity to understanding it as an emergent process in contact, where change is an inevitable part of this process. Despite its focus on the processual self, Gestalt therapy remains somewhat entangled in an inside/outside dualism and retains individualistic tendencies. I discovered that being fully aware of my inner state, with comprehensive sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive, and energetic engagement, and being in contact with others, was transformative. While I critiqued Gestalt for its holistic approach and idealisation of change, I also recognised its valuable assertion that the self is a dynamic process. I will now explore how complex responsive processes offer an alternative perspective, which I have integrated with Gestalt theory.

The rescued I at work – what happens when you try to innovate?

Two years after completing my four-year training as a Gestalt therapist, primarily focusing on leadership development, I embarked on a Master of Science in Organisational Development – A Gestalt Perspective (Leading and Facilitating Transformative Change in a Volatile World) at the Metanoia Institute, in partnership with Middlesex University. The programme, led by Jenny Mackewn, featured guest lecturers like Patricia Shaw and Eliat Aram, both associated with the Complexity and Management Centre at the University of Hertfordshire and the doctoral programme within which this thesis is situated. The Metanoia programme merged complexity theories with Gestalt perspectives.

The significant shift in my practice post-Gestalt was that consultancy, previously more of a performance reflecting my earlier egotistic/narcissistic stance, became relational and deeply meaningful to me and, hopefully, to the participants in the leadership programmes. My action research on the master's programme posed the question: *How can I support and challenge myself and my participants/clients towards a more emotional and embodied way of knowing?*

Ralph Stacey's work (2003) was particularly influential. Echoing the sociologist Norbert Elias and the pragmatist George Herbert Mead, Stacey argues that individual mind and social relating are interconnected aspects of bodily actions. He states, "Individual mind is the actions of a body directed toward itself, while social processes are the actions of bodies directed toward each other in paradoxical processes of continuity and potential transformation at the same time (Stacey, 2003, p.17)". I found it liberating to shift from the perspective of a 'static', 'inner' self to viewing the self as a process. However, I also observed that Gestalt therapy, despite this, still originates from a standpoint of individuality and an inside/outside dualism.

This project has highlighted my near obsession with the theme of change. In my roles as a leader and consultant in the City of Oslo, I had effectively been a change agent, involved in youth work, leadership, organisational development, and leadership development. The concept that social processes embody paradoxical processes of continuity and potential transformation, and that it all hinges on relating, resonated with my experiences in organisations. For years, we had been influenced by 'managerialism' and the corporate governance model of New Public Management. My experience with this goal and result-oriented approach was that people would perform their tasks and engage in dialogue sometimes according to organisational goals, sometimes resisting, either openly or subtly. The change agent, often linked with leadership, was deemed the hero. Despite my toolbox being filled with organisational development tools, I recognised that many of the processes I facilitated might not instigate change, as numerous underlying dynamics within the organisations remained unaddressed.

Working as a Gestalt therapist within an organisation entails adopting the perspective of organisations as systems composed of individuals, with a focus on those individuals

(Nevis, 1987). However, the concept of organisations as complex responsive processes presents a contrasting viewpoint. In this framework, human interactions neither create nor are driven by any systematic structure; there is no overarching entity patterning our actions. Instead, the global and local mutually shape each other, with interactions consisting of interdependent actions and responses. Meaning-making is situated in the moment, and the future is continuously forged through the process of interaction (Johannesen, 2011).

My master's thesis was an action research project conducted within an organisational development initiative focused on elderly care in a district of the City of Oslo (Hoftun, 2015). The project aimed to develop practices empowering individuals to manage their own lives, involving extensive participation from employers, employees, and users, and utilising a bottom-up approach to sharing and reflecting on practices. In this project, I integrated Gestalt principles with insights from complex responsive process theory, exploring themes of change, innovation, and the role of resistance as a catalyst for change, along with the power dynamics inherent in such processes. I posited that innovation requires both challenges and a supportive community.

Upon completing the master's degree in 2015, I was appointed as the Head of HR and Innovation in The District (referenced in project 2). The deciding factor in securing this role was the research I had conducted. My current work builds upon the foundations laid in my master's thesis, addressing similar challenges around innovation in empowering practices for the residents of our district. My initial research question focuses on what happens to us when we try to innovate. I will now summarise my journey, weaving in the remaining influences in this final consolidation of ideas.

The journey as it was – a gathering of some threads

This marks the current endpoint of my journey as the shipwrecked and subsequently rescued self; a transition from an isolated, individualistic, and cognitively-driven existence, devoid of meaning, to a relational, embodied state where meaning is discovered (or not) in our shared, co-created world. I have evolved from viewing the

self as a ‘static’ and almost immutable internal entity, to understanding it as a process that is relational, social, and harbours the paradoxical potential for both continuity and transformation.

I have depicted the egotistic/narcissistic tendencies of my youth, where meaning was heavily tied to performance, excellence, and success. Coming out as gay was a pivotal part of my relational turn, rescuing the existentialistic and shipwrecked I. Deterministic, psychoanalytical thinking and existentialism significantly influenced my earlier years, likely absorbed through extensive novel reading.

In organisational theory, as influenced by Western business schools, the self is often conceptualised as a ‘static’, internal entity. This thinking is evident in notions of organisational culture, where underlying values and basic assumptions are seen as barriers to change, though not insurmountable ones when addressed by the ‘change agents’.

My education in Gestalt therapy guided me to perceive the self as a dynamic, evolving process deeply entwined with the notion of change. This approach, emphasising heightened awareness encompassing sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive, and energetic dimensions, and fostering genuine contact with others, was transformative. It provided me with a more embodied understanding, a pathway out of isolation. However, I’ve also recognised certain paradoxes in Gestalt philosophy, particularly its strong emphasis on holism and systemic perspectives.

Then came the perspective of organisations as complex responsive processes, moving beyond the ‘inside’/’outside’ dualism. In this view, there is no overarching entity dictating our interactions, which are seen as a series of interdependent actions and responses, with meaning created in the moment and the future continually shaped by these interactions (Johannesen, 2011).

This journey sets the stage for using my subjectivity as a research tool in exploring change and innovation in the public sector. Change has been a pervasive theme throughout my life, and I argue that issues like change and innovation are deeply entwined with ontological considerations of self, identity, and organisations. My

experiences of threat, fear, and deep meaninglessness in the face of change and innovation are not unique to me. Thus, my research question is: *What happens to us when we try to innovate?* While I have not yet differentiated change from innovation, seeing them currently as two facets of the same concept, my next project will delve deeper into this.

However, the journey was not just fraught with challenges. As I have illustrated, change can also usher in a profound and life-affirming sense of meaning. Tunc bene navigavi, cum naufragium feci – I then had a good voyage, although I was shipwrecked.

Project 2: Sameness and Otherness: Breakdown of narration in the field of innovation

Completed May 2021

Boredom is a root of all evil. Strange that boredom, so still and static, should have such power to set things in motion. The effect that boredom exercises is altogether magical, except that it is not one of attraction but of repulsion. (Kierkegaard, 1992, loc. 3548)

Introduction:

Confined in Sameness

In 2015, I joined The District, an organisation of 1500 employees providing services for children, young people, disabled individuals, and the elderly. The staff, conscious of The District's reputation, had coined a tagline that was widely used at the time. Some even referred to it as a 'vision statement': "On Top of Oslo". Geographically, this was accurate as it is located north of the city on a rising hill. However, it also symbolised the standing in the 'league table' of service providers, having consistently scored above the national average on recognised quality-of-care indicators.

My boss, Jens, was the CEO of the organisation. He had been my manager from 1997 to 2004, and we have maintained a close relationship ever since. Initially, I applied to become The District's Head of Human Resources but was surprised to find my job specification extended upon receiving my contract. Jens shared his belief that innovation is as much about people as technology, and my MSc thesis on that theme prompted him to change the title. Thus, I became the Head of Department for both HR and Innovation, a dual role I had never encountered before, which I found both exciting and unique.

However, this title brought with it significant expectations that would prove to be a burden. Over recent decades, calls for innovation have become commonplace across the public sector. Western countries grapple with ageing populations, falling tax revenues, and rising costs, making current levels of public service provision unsustainable. In The District, we have long been dealing with the implications of

these changes. Managing expenditure on elderly care remains a perennial challenge: how do we provide necessary services within our budget constraints?

The First Commandment in the Laws of the Municipalities is unequivocal: Thou shalt not overspend.

The situation is straightforward yet problematic. Politicians promise services to their electorates without allocating sufficient funds for their delivery. This creates a tense atmosphere, constantly demanding innovation. What new methods can we adopt? How can we enhance efficiency? Can new technology help us achieve our goals?

At The District, the mere mention of 'innovation' was often met with resistance from middle managers and employees. For instance, in 2015, as I began my role, some teams were piloting innovative age- and dementia-friendly approaches, attracting nationwide attention. However, when I encouraged other departments to adopt similar methods, they would retort, "Yes, but we already do this!" or present arguments against the feasibility of these solutions in their contexts. This is known in the literature as the 'Not Invented Here syndrome', referenced in 647 scholarly papers according to Anton & Piller (2015).

As Head of Innovation, I frequently felt unproductive and disengaged. It was deeply frustrating to be made responsible for otherness and find that the actual requirement was for sameness, probably the innovator's ultimate taboo.

Sometimes, I wished Jens had not altered my title or added the extra responsibilities. Initially, my project focused almost narcissistically on my feelings of boredom when reflecting on my work. However, through its seven iterations, I have expanded my perspective to include my colleagues' experiences, shifting my focus from personal to social aspects of emotional turmoil and breakdowns in innovation.

This project examines my experiences and those of two colleagues at The District, documenting the emotional journey of three innovators navigating the demands of innovation within a contemporary organisation. We will explore our experiences of boredom, frustration, anger, and eventual descent into narcissism and a breakdown of meaning. Through narrative and reflection, I aim to investigate:

- *How continuity and transformation, are socially and situationally co-created.*
- *How breakdowns, such as in boredom or narration, can unlock understanding of this co-creation.*

Narrative

The introduction of the 'Model of Trust'

A year after starting at The District, I co-facilitated a process of change and restructuring that impacted half of the organisation. This shift paralleled an ideological and political transition as our city moved away from 18 years of Thatcherite conservatism under The Conservative Party and their New Public Management (NPM) model. NPM had integrated private sector concepts and solutions into the public sector (Eide, Gulslett, Nilsen & Eide, 2018; Ellingsen, 2013).

At The District, we applied the 'Model of Order and Execution', a local variant of NPM. Initially a political 'hot potato', it redefined professionals who traditionally made autonomous decisions about healthcare provision as 'doers' who executed the directives/orders from the Office of Order. Despite initial resistance from employees, it had become The District's established methodology.

The incoming red/green coalition, comprising the Socialist, Labour, and Environmental Parties, introduced the 'Model of Trust'. This new agenda aimed to focus on the needs and experiences of citizens, granting more responsibility and autonomy to professionals, while simplifying mechanisms for control and reporting.

Danish researcher Tina Øllgaard Bentzen (2019) explores in her article, *'The birdcage is open, but will the bird fly? How interactional and institutional trust interplay in public organisations'*, how trust is a reciprocal social phenomenon. She defines it as "the willingness to accept the risk of making oneself vulnerable to another person or party. The decision to trust also depends on contextual risks that may affect the trustee's ability to live up to the trust offered to him or her (ibid p. 187)". Trust in leaders and institutions is crucial for employees to utilise the autonomy offered and the

risk of 'flying out of the birdcage'. Bentzen's metaphor implies freedom beyond the cage and potential gains from taking flight, despite the inherent fear. However, the cage represents familiarity, safety, and community – a paradox I will revisit throughout this project.

I facilitated the process where Department managers collaborated with unions to develop our interpretation of the Model of Trust. A key challenge was resolving disputes about our organisational structure. Should we form new, smaller, interdisciplinary teams, or stick with our established departmental groupings? The deadlock was reflected in a report presenting these two alternatives.

Ultimately, since my boss Jens favoured the interdisciplinary approach, the model of smaller, self-determined interdisciplinary teams, named 'Mastery Teams', was unanimously agreed upon with union support.

The discussions around the introduction and implementation of the 'Model of Trust' were protracted, and I often felt impatient and bored, grappling with a sense of meaninglessness.

Otherness arrives at my department

While I was facilitating the creation of the Mastery Teams at The District, Jens introduced me to Tore, whom he had met at a conference. Tore had delivered a keynote speech on how the innovative use of technology had aided him in caring for a family member with dementia. Jens, intrigued by Tore's approach, suggested hiring him. However, I did not have the budget for it. If Jens wanted Tore on board, he would need to find the funding. Regardless, Jens arranged a meeting with Tore.

My first impression of Tore was that he was exceptionally talkative and somewhat unconventional. I was concerned that his outspokenness might not fit well within the organisation. In my interactions with Tore, I assumed the role of the established insider, reflecting the dynamic described by Elias and Scotson (1994) in *'The Established and the Outsiders',* which examines how newcomers are often judged by

established members and how this affects the newcomers' (as well as insiders') self-perception.

As the person responsible for innovations related to the transition to the 'Model of Trust', I had previously felt like an 'outsider', and the frustration and boredom I experienced were partly due to the internalisation of others' disapproval. Now, as an 'insider', my hesitation regarding Tore stemmed from a resistance to change and scepticism towards new ideas. I had started to embody the 'sameness' typical of a long-term District employee.

Yet, I also saw potential in Tore's unique way of thinking, which might aid our innovation efforts. Jens remained interested in Tore and had the funds for his appointment. The decision was effectively made for me.

Tore's initial task was to help establish a new home for dementia patients, intended as a model for welfare technology. However, the managers responsible for the project had not thoroughly considered infrastructure and equipment needs. With an imminent grand opening, Tore energetically pushed for early deliveries and (contributed ideas for the building's décor and facilities.

At the opening ceremony, I sat with Tore, aware of his substantial contributions. Despite this, he received no acknowledgement during the project manager's speech, effectively rendering him invisible. I felt it was unfair that Tore's efforts went unrecognised and whispered my own thanks to him. This situation seemed to exemplify the Established vs. Outsider dynamic or perhaps another instance of the Not Invented Here syndrome.

Reflecting on this period, especially through Tore's role in setting up a vaccination centre, I recognise his effectiveness and speed in turning concepts into practical solutions. However, his verbosity and critical opinions can be overwhelming, which might explain why some might prefer to sideline him, especially as a newcomer.

After completing the Dementia Home project, Tore's next role was unclear. He worked on software development but nothing as impactful as his first project. Over time, Tore and I have discussed his journey at The District and its implications. These

conversations sometimes followed his emotional breakdowns (rage, frustration, confusion, sadness) resulting from interactions with colleagues. One such instance is detailed in 'The Raging Innovator' to follow.

Tore is undoubtedly an innovator and an outsider, with his private sector background and distinct approach accentuating his otherness and intensifying the Not Invented Here Syndrome. Yet, in the realm of innovation, being different can sometimes be an asset.

The Raging Innovator

About a year after Tore joined The District, Signe became the third member of my innovation team. We had previously engaged her as a consultant, where she had demonstrated her skills in facilitation and handling people. Her role as a service designer was new to the organisation, signalling our focus on innovation and development. She needed to collaborate closely with Tore, so I was pleased that they had scheduled meetings together… and alarmed when one of their early meetings escalated into a heated argument, leading them to request my intervention.

The meeting took place at an outdoor restaurant in the city centre on a beautiful early summer Friday afternoon, over a glass of beer. I arrived to find Tore speaking fervently, almost losing control. He and Signe were at odds over how to engage people in the innovation process and the role of a 'change agent'. Tore advocated for technically literate staff with IT skills, while Signe emphasised the importance of 'soft' skills to navigate upcoming changes.

I attempted to mediate, suggesting The District needed change agents skilled in both process facilitation and technology. However, Tore remained obstinate. Our discussion became protracted, with Tore's inflexibility causing both Signe and me to become rigid and irritated. Although we avoided personal attacks, finding common ground was impossible.

Signe, visibly shaken by Tore's behaviour, left for a family event, later confiding that she felt Tore was bordering on madness. I too was frustrated by his stubbornness,

though not as unprepared as Signe, having experienced similar lengthy debates with Tore in the past.

After her departure, Tore and I stayed on for a couple more drinks. I had the option to leave with Signe, but I chose to stay, sensing a need to understand Tore better. Post-argument, it was as though a storm had passed, leading to a more amicable phase of our relationship. We ended up enjoying the afternoon together, a stark contrast to the earlier tensions. Tore recognised his role in the conflict and apologised for his behaviour, attributing it to frustration and feelings of redundancy.

Signe was actively involved in various projects, often at my assignment or responding to colleagues' requests for facilitation. However, finding suitable projects for Tore was more challenging, likely exacerbating his feelings of confinement and pointlessness.

Reflecting on drafts of this project, my fellow students questioned why I did not simply fire Tore. There are multiple reasons. Firstly, I believe Tore's actions were contextually and socially co-created, and I share responsibility for placing him in that situation. Secondly, Norwegian employment laws, which require that an employee is given a meaningful job with adequate resources, would likely prevent dismissal. Thirdly, I have always believed that under the right circumstances, Tore could demonstrate his value, as evidenced in his first major project and recent significant initiatives. Lastly, despite his challenging demeanour, Tore is good-hearted, sociable, and liked by many colleagues, myself included.

Understanding my complex feelings towards Tore is crucial. I perceive our situation as double-sided, influencing both Tore's actions and self-perception. I believe that his rage and my boredom are connected; flip sides of the same coin in the 'heroic enterprise' of innovation – a complementary, bipolar expression of rage and boredom holding the paradoxical potential of both continuity and transformation. Our shared experience of struggling to deliver innovation leads to his rage and my boredom. As 'change heroes', we find ourselves bound together in this endeavour. Despite occasional irritation, the fact that we get along is fortunate.

I would not be surprised if Tore also experiences boredom at times. While my feelings towards him often include anger, they have not escalated to rage, but my boredom encompasses disgust and irritation.

Bubbles of Change

Five months after Signe joined our team at The District, the two of us facilitated events known as 'Kick-offs' to introduce the nine new, interdisciplinary Mastery Teams formed under our Model of Trust. These teams, comprised of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, decision officers, and predominantly nurses, were assembled in three separate Kick-off events due to service continuity requirements.

The first two Kick-offs, attended by Jens and the Department's middle management, were successful. However, from the onset of the third session, Signe and I sensed potential problems. Misunderstandings seemed to permeate the atmosphere. With Jens and the middle managers absent, I was the sole representative of The District's management. Signe's presentation to the group devolved into a heated discussion over minor details. My heart sank as we approached the final part of the Kick-off.

In the previous events, we had facilitated a 'devil's advocate' group discussion, with the provocation: "We are now in 2020. The 2018 restructuring, which convened the Mastery Teams, is regarded as a total failure. What did I/we/the District do wrong?" The intention was to allow participants to freely express concerns. This 'negative' approach, drawing from gestalt therapeutic interventions, sought to elicit new insights by exaggerating one polarity (Zinker, 1977). My rationale was to acknowledge existing resistance and explore what lay beyond it.

The tone was set by a team member sitting in the middle of the assembly, a dark-haired woman whose black T-shirt read "Hvorfor sitte inne når håpet er ute." (The English translation, "Why sit inside when /Hope is outside/when there is no hope/?" does not really do justice to the Norwegian original.) She stood up, and drawing herself to her full height, said to the plenary in the sing-song dialect of the North of Norway: "I just want to say that we are pissed off! We have not been involved in this

restructuring and we have heard nothing about it – yet now you blame us for its total failure?" We were facing a significant breakdown.

Attempting to defuse the situation, I began with an apology, acknowledging our failure to involve them and clarifying that the blame for any potential failure did not lie with them. Following my intervention, a variety of responses emerged, some echoing the first speaker's anger, others more conciliatory. A senior nurse then provided a calming perspective, saying: "I've worked here for many years. During that time, we have reorganised several times. This new system looks pretty much like the way we were organised back in the eighties. When we arrive for work on Monday, our users will be the same, our colleagues will be the same, and we will still know how to do our jobs. We've landed on our feet before, and I'm sure we will again. Everything will be fine.".

The plenary went quiet after he had spoken. I let his words sink in, then raised my hand and knocked on the table in front of me (knock on wood!) "And NOW it is time for Bubbles!"

This episode underscored the view of organisations as complex responsive processes, where continuity and potential transformation coexist in a state of flux. The gestalt technique of focusing on one polarity highlighted the unpredictable nature of the opposite polarity.

The mood lightened considerably as we enjoyed the cava, having navigated through a breakdown with the possibility of new beginnings.

Signe's subsequent work with the Mastery Teams also encountered resistance, often reducing her to tears, particularly when she felt undermined by managers. These instances could be seen as a series of breakdowns.

My frustrations often manifested as boredom and a sense of meaninglessness, compounded by resistance to our efforts. Despite my belief in our objectives, doubts crept in about the potential for real change and the value of my work.

Echoing Berntzen (2019), *"The birdcage is open, but will the bird fly?",* it might be argued that, as facilitators, we had taken on ourselves the responsibility for making

them fly. I sometimes felt confined, but the cage was one of my own making. But perhaps not solely of my own making. After all, this cage is socially constructed, paradoxically comprising boredom and rage along with sameness and safety. We might remark that *flying is probably a wonderful thing, for those who know how to do it*.

Breakdown following attempts to narrate

In June 2019, Signe resigned during a brief meeting. She explained that a prestigious job offer, too good to refuse, had come her way. She also candidly expressed her frustration with The District. I shared how much I would miss her presence in the team, to which she responded that she had enjoyed working with me and would not have endured the role without my support.

Signe's departure coincided with a positive phase for the Department of HR and Innovation. The work on the Model of Trust was largely complete, and we had launched a new programme addressing social exclusion in The District, involving all management team leaders in design thinking. The project had garnered significant interest and secured a pledge of government support for its extension.

However, following Signe's exit, I often felt bored and disconnected. The winter brought some excitement with the commencement of my doctorate, but then the coronavirus pandemic struck, presenting new challenges.

Lockdown was particularly tough. Even under normal circumstances, the demands of those initial months would have been strenuous. But the 'two-dimensionality' of endless online meetings, with participants reduced to heads on a screen, compounded the difficulty. By summer, when the situation had calmed enough for reflection and writing, I experienced a breakdown.

Attempting to reflect on my work, I was overwhelmed by intense boredom, verging on depression, stemming from the perceived meaninglessness of my efforts. The pandemic amplified these sensations of entrapment and futility.

The three central figures in this narrative –Tore, Signe, and myself – share a commonality: we each embarked on a 'heroic journey' of innovation, under the constant pressure of being change agents. While innovation holds meaning for us, others find meaning in their current work, not in changing it. This mismatch often leads to intense emotions of frustration, anger, boredom, and in Signe's case, tears. These emotional episodes are, as is to be discussed, not just breakdowns but also opportunities for learning and change (Dewey, 1910/1933; Koschmann et al, 1998; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

I have observed that isolation breeds boredom in me, while confinement triggers frustration and rage in Tore (and possibly boredom too?). I perceive rage and boredom as interconnected, sharing a bipolar relationship within the paradoxical potential of both continuity and transformation (Stacey, 2003).

In contrast, Signe's tears and frustrations stemmed from her social connectedness, particularly her immersion in the games played by The District's management and employees (Bourdieu, 1977). Unlike Tore and me, she was not confined in the same manner. Her 'birdcage' remained open, and she chose to fly away.

Why was Signe free to leave? I will delve into this question in the following discussion.

Discussion

In the following sections, I will use my reading of literature to reflect on our experiences. Here are the starting points of my exploration:

Boredom considered as a social phenomenon

1. This project had its inception in a breakdown caused by boredom, which I took as the starting point of this account. Much writing on boredom has individualistic roots. My own experience has been that boredom is connected to a **breakdown of meaning,** which, as we shall see, emphasises the necessity of the social for the individual.

Fundamentals of the imperative towards innovation:

2. If we accept point 1, the starting point of any discussion of boredom is with meaning, the pressing need to experience meaningful work. Failure to experience such meaning can lead to boredom, rage and/or a spectrum of other emotions. I will consider ***the western, modern, and individualistic 'self' and the search for meaning at work***.
3. I will then consider that experience which is shared by Tore, Signe and myself, our status as 'innovators'. This role relates to an ***imperative towards innovation in our western culture***, which again is closely connected to the issue of meaning. I will explore its roots and its connections with modern, individualistic views of the self and how it can feel to take on the responsibility for change.

Further elaborations of (emotional) breakdowns and narration

4. I will argue that the feelings I experienced this summer, and particularly those which marked my earlier encounters with Tore, all reveal a touch of narcissism. This is also apparent in the self-centredness we displayed in various situations

in the narrative. I will consider the ***proneness of the individualistic self to narcissism as well as boredom*** – in many ways a dark side of organisational life.

5. I will show how my breakdown of the summer resulted from my attempts to narrate and reflect. What is a breakdown? ***Could boredom be seen as a breakdown of narration – and what would that imply?*** As I have already stated, breakdowns can hold the potential for change and innovation.
6. There is fun to be had at work too. I feel a need to contrast the negative bullet points above with an exploration of the relational positives of innovation. ***Continuity and transformation are situationally and socially co-created***.

Boredom considered as a social phenomenon

(1) Boredom as breakdown of meaning

While boredom was the primary focus at the start of my writing, it has become less central as I delved deeper into the relational aspects of my breakdown. However, a brief discussion on the subject is still pertinent.

Peter Toohey (2011) in his book *'Boredom: A Lively Story'*, sparked by a friend's inquiry, questions the very existence of boredom, suggesting it as "a term covering emotions such as frustration, surfeit, depression, disgust, indifference, apathy, and that *feeling of being trapped or confined*. When conditions like all of these are blurred together, he [the friend] argued, people end up with a false emotion of boredom (ibid., loc. 113, emphasis added)." Toohey also notes the close relationship between boredom and depression. Boredom is often classified into 'superficial' or 'simple' boredom and 'profound' or 'existential' boredom (Haley, 1984; Spacks, 1995; Svendsen 2005; Toohey, 2011), with the latter often equating to depression.

Central to boredom is the individual's loss of meaning. Australian sociologist Jack Barbalet (1999) points out that "the importance of boredom in this process is that it

does not merely register meaninglessness but is also an imperative toward meaning. In other words, boredom is an emotional safeguard of meaningfulness and a defence against meaninglessness (ibid., p. 633).” According to Barbalet, this double face of boredom, both indexing a loss of meaning and motivating us towards meaning, confirms the necessity of meaning in social processes. Boredom “is a restless and irritable feeling about an absence of interest (Barbalet, 1999, p. 635).” It is easy to connect this account both to my own feelings, and to those of Tore.

Meaning, in this context, is seen as relational and social. George Herbert Mead (1934) argues that meaning creation is based on a triadic relation: the individual’s gesture, the other’s response, and what arises in the interaction between them (Mead 1934; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). The loss of meaning, leading to boredom, despair, or rage, emerges from a particular social context.

Both Tore and I experienced feelings of uselessness, lack of meaning, and boredom, arguably resulting from unmet expectations from others and ourselves, and our anticipation of their expectations. This is indicative of the paradoxical nature of social interactions where individuals shape and are shaped by each other (Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

Toohey (2011) defines ‘simple’ boredom as “an emotion which produces feelings of being constrained or confined by some unavoidable and distastefully predictable circumstance and, as a result, a feeling of being distanced from one’s surroundings and the normal flow of time (ibid., loc 544).” This aptly describes my emotional state during my breakdown and at times at work, especially when I felt isolated, unsuccessful, and confined. Time seemed to move excruciatingly slowly, a phenomenon explored by Ben Anderson (2004) in his article *“Time-stilled space-slowed: how boredom matters”* and reflected in the German term ‘langeweile’ – literally, a long time.

Boredom can be seen as an escape from the relentless positivity demanded by modern organisations (Han, 2015), albeit an unpleasant one with some potential for insight. There is also an interplay between a forward-directed sense of time and the drive for

improvement, contrasting with the time-slowing nature of boredom and the breakdown of innovation – a concept I will revisit.

My boredom is intertwined with a complex range of emotions, including anger, frustration, and disgust. Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips (1993) notes, "Clearly, we should speak not of boredom, but of boredoms, because the notion itself includes a multiplicity of moods and feelings that resist analysis (ibid. p. 82)."

Toohey (2011) suggests that boredom could be a precursor to more severe issues, analogous to gout or angina, and proposes that the best response to boredom is to heed its warning and change one's situation. However, I question this advice. If we consider boredom as a form of breakdown with potential for change, it does not necessarily portend something worse. I will explore this further, but first, I aim to discuss how individuals seek meaning at work and the resulting imperative towards innovation.

Fundamentals of the imperative towards innovation

(2) The individualistic 'self' seeks meaning at work

In my initial project, I endeavoured to narrate the developmental process that led me from an isolated, individualistic perspective to a more relational and embodied one. This narrative was shaped by my experiences in therapy and training as a therapist.

Reflecting on that first project, I recognise my attempts to apply a linear structure to my experiences. I cited sociologist Norbert Elias (1991), who stated, "Only when the individual stops taking himself as the starting point of his thought (...), only then will his feeling gradually fade that he is something isolated and self-contained 'inside' while the others are something separated from him by an abyss (...)(ibid., p. 56)". Although I labelled my experience as a 'relational awakening' and presented it as if I had transformed into another self, subsequent events revealed that this change was not as definitive as I had believed. Self-centredness, deeply ingrained in our Western culture, makes the complete shift from previous thought patterns, as suggested by Elias, challenging. In a sense, I still carry within me my individualistic 'me'.

Yet, I also contend that my experience of boredom is socially co-created. In this context, the work environment contributes to both my boredom and Tore's rage and impatience. This leads to the question: What are our expectations of work?

In his book *'Work'*, Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen (2016) traces the history of work, starting with classical Greek philosophy. The Greeks distinguished between necessary and voluntary activities, deeming necessary work degrading, as it subjected one to another's will and therefore unfreedom. In contrast, an aristocrat engaging voluntarily in an activity, such as crafting a chair, retained his status as a 'free' man. This dichotomy persists in modern language, where we refer to 'free' time as separate from work, and many people view work merely as a means to make a living, reserving self-realisation for their 'free' time.

Hannah Arendt delves into similar themes in *'The Human Condition'* (1958[2018]), identifying three fundamental human activities: 1) *Labour*, which corresponds to the biological processes of the human body, maintaining life and ensuring the survival of the species. 2) *Work*, which relates to the unnaturalness of human existence and focuses on the production of things, bestowing a sense of permanence and durability on mortal life. 3) *Action*, which pertains to the human condition of plurality and the uniqueness of each individual, creating the conditions for remembrance and history.

Arendt highlights the Greek idealisation of the social life of the polis and political life, emphasising their connection with what she terms the 'activity of action' and their relative freedom from the activities of labour and work.

> Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers. However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. (…) Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought (ibid. p9)

We can regard innovation, the process of creating new ideas, actions, and collaborative methods, as dependent on the activity of action and connected to natality. While it may seem that an inventor alone produces an invention, in reality, such creations are not born in isolation. They are essentially social gestures or responses, necessitating social engagement for their adoption and utilisation. Implementing changes in organisational practices, like those we attempted with the 'Model of Trust', is undeniably a matter of social engagement, which I will revisit when discussing the necessity of the social.

Lars Svendsen (2016) observes that during the Middle Ages, Christians viewed work as both a curse and a duty, a legacy of humanity's expulsion from Paradise. However, the Reformation transformed this perception, with work becoming seen as a 'vocation'. Luther posited that devotion to one's profession was the best way to serve God. Calvin viewed the imperative to work as God's Will, making it a believer's duty to choose a profession that maximised income. Despite the Biblical admonition to serve God rather than Mammon, Calvin reinterpreted wealth accumulation as a sign of faithful servitude to God. Svendsen comments on the ironic role of Christianity in the spread of capitalism. Max Weber ([1905]2002) pointed out that the essence of this Protestant ethic was the continuous accumulation of wealth, combined with the strict avoidance of enjoyment. For the true Christian, wealth brought no personal gain other than the irrational satisfaction of fulfilling one's vocation.

Hannah Arendt (1958[2018]) critically addresses the impact of this work ethic, noting how it rapidly transformed modern communities into societies centred on labour, the essential activity for sustaining life.

My personal connection to this Calvinist worldview is significant. My grandfather, a prominent figure in his Christian community, would have identified with these Calvinist ideals. A respected merchant like his father before him, he passed on this pride in work to my father, who continued the family bakery.

Svendsen (2016) argues that the romantic transformation of work is fundamentally about finding meaning – a secular pursuit encouraging individuals to realise their potential to the fullest. However, when work fails to fulfil this desire for meaning, it reverts to being perceived as a curse, as the ancient Greeks believed.

This emphasis on meaningful work has even been enshrined in Norwegian employment laws. In my experience, and that of my colleagues, work has occasionally felt meaningless. Signe left our team, and both Tore, and I have considered seeking work elsewhere in hopes of finding meaning. The inability to move on amplifies the feeling of confinement. The curse of meaningless work leads to boredom, and the sensation of being caged can evoke rage, apathy, sadness, and a range of other emotions. Yet, this cage, a construct of our own making, also offers a sense of safety. The familiar, however unhappy, can seem preferable to the unknown.

Freedom, whether within or outside this cage, is intrinsically linked to the social. I will expand on this idea, with further reference to Hannah Arendt, in the next section.

As Head of Innovation, change is fundamental to my role. Those moments when I perceive a lack of meaning and view work as a curse are intertwined with failures to enact change, affecting both myself and others in the organisation. I believe Tore's rage and possibly his boredom, as well as Signe's frustrations, stem from the same source. This is our collective cage.

For some, confining innovators might be a relief, allowing them to continue their work without disruption. In the following sections, I will delve deeper into the imperative towards change and innovation and our collective addiction to it.

(3) The imperative towards change and innovation

Up to this point, I have used 'change' and 'innovation' almost interchangeably. Furseth & Cuthbertson (2016), leading researchers in this field, define 'innovation' as "the creation of value based on new ideas. Innovation in an economic sense is creating something new and selling it on a market, or in other words: the commercial exploitation of new ideas (ibid., p.3)". Although this definition may not fit perfectly with public sector operations, it remains relevant. Many of our tasks at The District fall under 'services', and service innovations, like the 'Model of Trust', align with Furseth and Cuthbertson's concept of innovation as a novelty in customer experience, business

model, service system, or a combination thereof. They can represent a minor adjustment to an existing service or an entirely new service (ibid., p. 3).

Bason (2010) defines public sector innovation as "the process of creating new ideas and turning them into value for society. It concerns how politicians, public leaders and employees transform their visions of a desired new state of the world into reality (ibid. p. 44)". Change and innovation are "inextricably tied together (Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016, p. 8)".

Why this obsession with change and innovation? I contend that the pursuit of happiness and the good life are key motivators for change. Aristotle (2020) links virtue and happiness (eudaimonia), as exemplified in his *'Nicomachean Ethics'* (ibid.). While Aristotle positions such happiness as the ultimate human goal, there is an argument that the time and energy expended on work detract from achieving eudaimonia (Aristotle, 2020; Svendsen 2016).

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1989), in *'Sources of the Self'*, highlights an imperative towards change, rooted in core beliefs of modern Western culture: the obligation to improve the human condition, alleviate suffering, and enhance welfare. Our fixation on innovation as a form of positive change stems from this cultural directive towards betterment.

It might be argued that western notions of chronological and linear time have their origins in a sense of ongoing, continuous improvement. We link causality, time, and rationality and, having constructed a past, a present and a future, we often strive for a 'better' future. Stacey & Mowles (2016) critique this approach, noting, "In models of planning and goal-setting it is assumed that through a rational understanding of the past, autonomous individuals are able to choose a future and move to that future by taking step-by-step-actions. There is a linear movement from the past to the future in which the present is simply a point separating the future from the past (ibid., p. 163)". This perspective implies a notion of 'created' change, as opposed to incidental change. Hence, there is a link between our linear perception of time and the imperative towards change, improvement, and innovation. This also circles back to the concept of time slowing down – the 'langeweile' – in boredom and my narrative of failed innovation.

In my experience, boredom is linked to recreating a familiar future (sameness) and can thus be seen as a breakdown of innovation and of the forward movement of time.

At The District, my fellow innovators and I embarked on a heroic journey to deliver change and improvement, only to find unhappiness in our inability to achieve those goals. The imperative for continuous improvement brings with it the potential for frustration, anger, and boredom when success is elusive.

I will now delve further into the social aspects of boredom and other forms of breakdown.

Further elaborations of (emotional) breakdowns

(4) (Narcissistic) breakdowns into boredom, rage, and tears of frustration

In my accounts of events at The District, I have illustrated how self-centredness was central to my responses, as well as, arguably, to Tore's. Svendsen (2005) posits that "only a problematic self feels the need for realisation (ibid., p.32)". He argues that boredom presupposes subjectivity; to be bored you need to perceive yourself as an individual "that can enter into various meaning contexts, and this subject demands meaning of the world and himself (ibid.)".

Svendsen further contends that while an animal can be under-stimulated, it cannot truly be bored. However, this point is debatable. Animals may not experience 'existential' boredom, but those in confinement do exhibit signs of boredom (Wemelsfelder, 2005). Toohey (2011), referencing Wemelsfelder, discusses animal boredom, noting that "Sustained confinement produces in animals, initially, a real and observable sense of boredom. This is followed by frustration, agitation, anger, violence and, eventually, depression. The confined animal moves from boredom to a manic response (being agitated and angry) to a depressive one (Toohey, 2011, loc. 1089)". Wemelsfelder, in her *'Animal Boredom: Understanding the Tedium of Confined Lives'*, compares human and animal boredom, arguing for their homology.

This comparison draws a parallel between Tore and me. Rage and boredom were our responses to a perceived sense of confinement. This confinement could stem from factors like limited innovation budgets, unrealistic expectations, the burden of responsibility as innovators, or simply our inability to find alternative employment. As Wemelsfelder puts it, "Caught in a cage of our own making, we may suffer the collective breakdown of meaning and joy (ibid., p.82)".

The psychological link between boredom and anger is also evident in the literature. Dahlen et al. (2004) state that "Boredom (...) predicted one's propensity to experience anger, maladaptive anger expression, aggression, and deficits in anger control (ibid. p 1615)". This supports the connection between my boredom and Tore's rage, suggesting a bipolar relationship between rage and boredom within the paradoxical potential of both continuity and transformation. As I shall now show, this also constitutes a link to narcissism.

Norbert Elias (1991) observes that, since the Renaissance, individuals increasingly perceive themselves as 'subjects', with 'society' and other people as 'objects', external and separate. Patricia Meyer Spacks (1995) in *'Boredom. The Literary History of a State of Mind'*, traces existential boredom to a similar origin, viewing it as a form of 'emptiness' stemming from an individual's perception of isolation from others. She elaborates:

> Fictional (and poetic) evocations of boredom multiply exponentially in the twentieth century, partly for reasons implicit in the common understanding of modernism, which posits an isolated subject existing in a secularized, fragmented world marked by lost or precarious traditions: a paradigmatic situation for boredom. Boredom provides a convenient point of reference for the cultural and psychic condition of those deprived alike of meaningful work and of pleasure in idleness (ibid., p. 219).

Spacks explicitly associates boredom with narcissism in her analysis of George Eliot's *'Daniel Deronda'*. She observes, "Gwendolen's boredom – incapacity, refusal, sign of power, derives from the narcissism that impedes her vision of the world. Her increasing recognition that she needs objects of interest outside herself signals her effort to escape that narcissism and the desperation it implies (ibid., p. 222)."

Similarly, Charles Taylor in *'Sources of the Self'* (1989) notes, "[T]hose who are concerned about what is valuable, what one should love or admire, are worried about the state of their own souls. They are self-absorbed, prone to narcissism (…) (ibid., p.85)."

My personal escape from boredom involves engaging socially and employing humour, as experienced after my breakdown last summer. This underscores the social aspect of boredom; the narcissistic self feels a profound sense of isolation and confinement in boredom, carrying a loss of relationships in solitude, yet simultaneously feeling driven towards social interaction.

This is an opportune moment to revisit Hannah Arendt's assertion in *'The Human Condition'* (1958[2018]) about the significance of the social realm: "Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves (ibid, p. 4)." She points out the Romans' view of 'life' as inherently social, existing among others, while 'death' signals the end of this social existence. For Arendt, freedom is located in the realm of the social, contrasting sharply with the isolation and self-centredness of confinement.

From Arendt's perspective, I argue that the breakdown of meaning into boredom that I experienced is akin to a type of death: a cessation of being-among-men. It is evident that many people have perceived COVID lockdowns and homeworking in a similar light. My initial, isolated reflections on my work were imbued with this sense of lifelessness. Freedom and vitality, then, are found in social engagement.

Exclusion from social interaction, as Tore experienced by being excluded from projects or rendered socially invisible, leads to feelings of confinement, potentially resulting in rage, despair, and depression.

Psychologists like Wink & Donahue (1997) and Zondag (2013) distinguish between overt and covert narcissism. They align with the individualistic/psychological research tradition, which this thesis critiques, but their insights help to explore narcissism's complexity. Wink & Donahue find that both forms of narcissism correlate positively

with the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) and its subscale measuring a need for challenge and excitement (ibid., p 136). However, boredom manifests differently in each subcategory. They report that *overt narcissism* correlates with feelings of restlessness and impatience in response to external behavioural constraints (ibid p. 136), whereas *covert narcissism*, "which is characterized by a sense of inner depletion, correlated with BPS subscales measuring difficulties in keeping oneself interested and entertained (lack of internal stimulation), feelings of meaninglessness, and the perception that time is passing by slowly (ibid.)."

Applying this to my narrative, we might question whether Tore's rage signifies overt narcissism, and whether my own experience reflects the covert type. In this context, did Tore externalise the contextual pressure as rage, while I internalised it as meaninglessness?[9]

Christopher Lasch (1991) in *'The Culture of Narcissism'* links Western individualism with narcissism, associating it with boredom and the metaphor of caged animals (again): "Having internalized the social restraints by means of which they formerly sought to keep possibility within civilized limits, they feel themselves overwhelmed by an annihilating boredom, like animals whose instincts have withered in captivity (Lasch 1991, p. 11)."

We have encountered various forms of breakdown in this narrative. My own can be seen as a catalyst for reflexivity and learning, as identified by scholars like Koschmann et al. (1998) in their studies of Heidegger, Leont'ev, and Dewey. They assert that breakdowns, occurring within directed activities, are prerequisites for learning. Recovery involves inquiry, transforming both the individual and their environment.

John Dewey (1910/1933) posits that a teacher's role is to question and critique, sparking an inquiry process for learning. Brinkman (2012) emphasises the value of

[9] With the possibility that we both experienced both emotions, I was quite irritated during my meetings with my learning group as we discussed my unsuccessful narratives. Tore might have also sensed the futility of his efforts

breakdowns in qualitative research as a foundation for inquiry. Without my own breakdown, this project would not have materialised.

Breakdowns are also seen as the genesis of innovation. Wegener & Aakjær (2016), building on pragmatist theories, calls it breakdown-driven organisational research. They state that breakdowns can foster a more attuned awareness of ongoing innovation and a deeper understanding of the role of places, spaces, objects, and bodies in everyday practices (ibid. p. 79). They continue:

> Breakdowns hold the potential to become productive if we as scientists manage to make use of theory to reflect. Breakdown stories are stories that create new knowledge and new questions in the tension between the researcher's personal experiences and the encounter with the empirical and the theoretical fields (ibid. p. 80).

Finally, I wish to refer to the episode at the Kick-off with the woman in the black T-shirt and the senior nurse. By deviating from her expected role and instead expressing her genuine emotions, the woman triggered a significant breakdown, paving the way for a fresh start. Conversely, the nurse highlighted the aspects of our work unaffected by change, illustrating the paradox of continuity and transformation. His intervention led to a shift towards cava-drinking and celebration, marking a breakthrough following the breakdown.

In this section, I have delved into the narcissistic underpinnings of both boredom and the drive for continuous improvement. The challenges of narcissism stem from the isolation of the self, which craves recognition, relationships, and ultimately love, from those around it. When faced with a lack of success or affection, the narcissist self-compensates and self-affirms, rather than seeking fulfilment through interdependent relationships in the social sphere. This realisation may manifest through a 'covert' breakdown into boredom, sadness, and depression, or an 'overt' breakdown into anger and blame. It is important to note that these responses are not mutually exclusive; they can coexist.

(5) Breakdown in narration

Thus far in my account, I have put the self centre-stage in my considerations of the question of change and innovation as well as of boredom and sameness. Indeed, since the self must be narrated, we might argue that narration should take the stage alongside the self[10] (Durand & Calori, 2006; Ricoeur, 1992; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Taylor, 1989). Svendsen (2005) states:

> Time – as a unity of past, present and future – creates a unity in the self, and time and self are connected by means of a narrative. To have a personal identity is to have some representation of a narrative thread in life, where past and future can provide the present with a meaning. I do not believe that meaning and identity can be properly understood independently of time and narrativity. To have an identity, to be a self, requires that one is capable of telling a story about oneself (….). However, in order to be able to tell such a story, one must also be able to relate to others (Svendsen, 2005, p. 78).

The work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur is central to discussions of narrativity. In his *'Oneself as Another'* (Ricoeur, 1992) he develops the concept of narrative identity. In order to unpack his meaning fully, we must first consider his understanding of the self. Ricoeur is a hermeneutical philosopher who approaches the question of self via consideration of the workings of language.

In his interpretation of the word 'identity', we can identify an embedded kind of sameness – something identical, something that remains the same (over time), and a recognition that the word 'same' (as something) is used in contexts of comparison, and thus that the contrary of 'same' would be 'other'. He also states that self is not just *the same,* and he makes a distinction between self as *sameness* (that which constitutes identity over time), and self as *selfhood* (the contextual experiences of the self).

He then points to a "dialectic complementary to that of selfhood and sameness, namely the dialectic of *self* and *other than self* (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3, emphasis in original)*."* Selfhood is what "reconciles and ties the self to the other (Durand & Calori, 2006)." They are inseparable. "*Oneself as Another* suggests from the outset that the selfhood of

[10] In my Argument 1: Social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is socially co-created (p. 191) I take it one step further and state that the I and the narrative are inseparable. We are our stories.

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 (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3).” Otherness is then not only external “but belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood (ibid., p. 317).”

Ricoeur “asserts that (…) sameness and selfhood may or may not coincide. This interstice between sameness and selfhood constitutes the history of the self, accessible through the narrative identity. Narrative identity reconciles the permanence of identity with its dynamics (Durand & Calori, 2006, p. 101).” It is a mediator “where selfhood frees itself from sameness (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 119).” Ricoeur’s use of the word ‘frees’ takes on additional significance in light of our earlier metaphor of the cage. Sameness can in fact be regarded as a solitary cage (albeit one comprising safety and identity) while freedom is connected to notions of the other – “oneself inasmuch as being other” (1992, p. 3), as Ricoeur’s states in a reiteration of his own title. This echoes Hannah Arendt’s (1958[2018]) notion of freedom being located in the realm of the social.

My summer breakdown arose from a struggle to narrate. I had problems relating to and taking on the perspective of others – in irritation, in isolation. Boredom is in my view connected to this; it can be regarded as a failure to narrate or a *submitting to the meaninglessness* because the situation is not one of lacking a story, but rather one of being stuck in sameness and not being able to narrate. The story – that is, you – no longer makes any sense whatsoever. Patricia Meyer Spacks states: “Boredom defies narration. A storyteller whose matter does not engage the reader’s attention has failed (Spacks, 1995, p. 61).” I would add, a bored storyteller, stuck in sameness, is worse than a failure; he fails to engage himself; and what comes out of him is dead and without animation. To add to the paradoxicality of the Bored Head of Innovation, you could add the words of Kierkegaard: “‘Change’ is what all who are bored cry out for (Kierkegaard, 1992, loc. 3647).” Therefore, we can understand boredom as originating in aversion towards the risk of doing something different – and flying out of the cage. It brings all the themes of sameness, boredom, narration, otherness, change and innovation closely together, with narration as a mediator.

My innovation team displays distinct ‘breakdown styles’. Signe managed to maintain both her relationships and narrative, yet she experienced a level of frustration that

ultimately led her to leave The District. Her ability to stay in relationships could have been her key to freedom, echoing Arendt's perspective once more. Tore, on the other hand, succeeded in retaining his narrative but at a significant cost to his working relationships. I also remained, but I endured an isolating and tediously boring process of composing a lifeless narrative.

The common thread among these varied patterns is the social aspect of relating to others' narratives. I propose that narcissistic boredom can be interpreted as a breakdown in the ability to narrate and staying in contact with the narratives of others.

Another perspective on this issue can be gleaned from Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and the interpretation by Stacey & Mowles (2016) of his concept of being immersed in the social game and its relation to narration. Immersion describes the process of being deeply engaged in the local, immediate actions that unconsciously reflect the broader generalisations and idealisations, or the habitus, of our society. To be immersed means to be thoroughly absorbed in an interest or situation, to dedicate oneself completely to it, and to involve others in this immersion (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 432).

From this viewpoint, Tore's rage and my own experience of boredom might be seen as reactions to a lack of immersion, a state we both seemingly yearn for. Conversely, Signe's tears and frustrations could be her reaction to an overwhelming and undesired experience of immersion.

Stacey and Mowles (2016) posited activities of abstraction (thoughts, reflections and meaning making; awareness of gaming) as an 'opposite' to the activities of immersing.

> All forms of thinking about and reflecting upon experience necessarily involve abstracting or drawing away from that experience which becomes an object of perception, not simply the subject of experience. (…) Since humans have always sought to make meaning, they must also always have been paradoxically immersing and abstracting from experience in explorative forms of reflecting on the generalisation and idealisation of experience and articulating them in narrative and philosophy (ibid., p. 433).

Stacey & Mowles highlight the narrative form as a significant abstraction in human history. They argue that narration encompasses more than mere storytelling,

explaining, that a narrative includes a story, but it extends beyond simple storytelling as it involves some form of evaluation (ibid. p. 435).

As previously discussed, boredom could be seen as a failure in this narrative process. This interpretation aligns with the experiences that form the narrative of this text. During the summer, my lack of immersion and subsequent narrative attempts culminated in a breakdown. I found myself mired in sameness, disconnected from selfhood, and consequently unable to engage with otherness – or even with myself, echoing Ricoeur's concept of 'Oneself as Another'.

As I will explore next, the idea of narrative identity is also intricately linked to the theme of innovation.

(6) Narrative Identity – the situational and social co-creation of sameness and otherness

My discussion of narratives so far has primarily focused on the more challenging aspects of innovation and organisational life. However, after submitting my summer's 'dead' narratives to my learning set and returning to work, I experienced a rejuvenating contrast. During the nine working days between my submission and the subsequent Zoom meeting, I attended 29 meetings, mostly in person, enjoying a vibrant period at work. This experience aligns with early organisational studies, which found that interpersonal interactions can alleviate the monotony of (being caged in) repetitive work (Barbalet, 1999).

This reminds me of my time working with Signe and the enjoyment we shared and the many laughs we had. Contrary to the themes I have explored earlier, our collaboration was marked by immersion, engagement, and shared successes. Another aspect of me, distinct from the covert narcissism discussed so far, is closely linked to humour and laughter[11]. When I'm bored or impatient in meetings, I often use humour as a way of

[11] See also my narrative and discussion in Project 4 on my role as the jester/fool and humour as part of the power game.

escaping and at the same time to reconnect with what is going on. Often this is well timed and welcomed, sometimes disastrous as my narrative in project 4 will show.

Our work, involving service design (Dagestad, 2016), required empathy with our clients to understand their needs, with narration playing a crucial role in this process of understanding. Narration is not only fundamental to conveying needs and finding solutions it is also a key to co-create innovation (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Durand & Calori, 2006).

To further elaborate on Signe's emotional response, it is essential to revisit the context of her tears. My earlier analysis suggested that her tears stemmed from her deep immersion in her role, as she shared in our meetings. Signe's emotional outpouring also highlighted the persistent demand for consistency within organisations. Her struggle was against the inherent resistance of her colleagues in The District, reflecting Ricoeur's (1992) intricate dialectic of self and the 'other-than-self.' In this dynamic, we see a tension between two internal forces: the desire for growth and change, and the equally compelling need to maintain stability and sameness. This underscores the complexity of identity as a dialectic of *self* as sameness (identity over time) and selfhood (our evolving experiences in relation to others). *The existence of an imperative for innovation, as discussed in a previous section, inherently gives rise to a paradoxical counterpart: an imperative for sameness.*

Peter Marris (1986) in his book *'Loss and Change'* introduces the concept of loss and grief into this dialectic. He discusses conservatism in innovation, suggesting "If the conservative impulse is so pervasive, why should anyone willingly risk the uncertainties of innovation? (…) Innovation occurs in response to crucial loss (…). Our instinct of survival pulls us the other way, to protect our sense of identity and the setting which has moulded it (ibid., p. 104)."

Conservatism is not something to be fought off, as in a lot of managerial literature on resistance to change: "Reforms, rebellions, new styles in art, new theories in science, exploration and technical invention are as commonplace as the resistance to them: the conservatism of institutions would hardly show, unless they were continually challenged (ibid.)". I could have written a whole piece of the imperative of sameness,

but I will leave it with this – while reiterating that breakdowns can be the starting point from which new learning emerges.

Finally, I assert that the balance between continuity/sameness and transformation/otherness is situationally and socially co-created. Innovation cannot be simply 'delivered' by leaders or change agents. Responding to demands for change can lead to emotional breakdowns, including frustration, rage, and boredom. But fear not: breakdowns might also mark the start of new beginnings and learning.

Six conclusions and a path forward

My narratives ended in six points for further exploration and discussion, which my conclusion will also follow:

Conclusion following boredom considered as a social phenomenon:

1. ***Boredom can be seen as a breakdown of relational/social meaning.*** Through exploration of my own boredom, I showed that this feeling both indexes a loss of meaning and motivates us to seek for meaning. Since meaning is socially constructed, boredom also confirms the necessity of social processes for the individual. A sense of time slowing down is central to such accounts.

Conclusions on the fundamentals of the imperative towards innovation:

2. ***The modern and individualistic 'self' is socialised to seek meaning at work.*** If it fails to find that meaning the way is left open for boredom and feelings of confinement. This is apparent for both the Bored Head of Innovation and the Raging Innovator.

3. ***Western culture's imperative towards change and innovation influences our behaviours and expectations***. I speculated on some connections between this imperative and the search for happiness and for fulfilment of potentials. There is a connection between the western sense of linear time and innovation,

conceived as change for the better in the future. Boredom is a slowing of time and can affect the western individual (perceiving him/herself as autonomous) when change for the better fails to happen. As innovators, we are part of the heroic enterprise of innovation, and when we fail to 'deliver' change (or be seen as failing by those around us); we may experience frustration, rage – and boredom. As we have seen, all three innovators in my narrative experienced some of these responses.

Conclusions on the further elaborations of (emotional) breakdowns and narration

4. My narratives displayed **breakdowns into boredom, rage, and tears of frustration**. The modernistic self is prone to narcissism as well as boredom. I found support for my conviction that Tore's raging and my boredom are connected, as flip sides of the same coin in the 'heroic enterprise' of working as innovators. We exemplified a bipolar connection of rage and boredom in the paradoxical potential of both continuity and transformation. We also revealed the social aspect of boredom: the narcissistic self, which has a strong sense of aloneness and confinement in boredom, carries a loss of relationships in isolation... and yet at the same time it is an imperative towards the necessity of the social. Breakdowns also hold potential for innovation.

5. ***Boredom can be seen as a breakdown of narration.*** Time and self are connected by narration, hence also meaning. Following from Ricoeur, narrative identity reconciles the permanence of identity (sameness) with the dynamics of otherness; it is a mediator through which selfhood frees itself from sameness. Boredom can be seen as a breakdown of the ability to narrate and the ability to relate to the narrations of others, asserting the importance of the social.

6. I have followed Hannah Arendt in asserting that freedom is to be found in the realm of the social. However, the social realm can also be frustrating (and caging). Innovation cannot be 'delivered' to organisations by leaders, change agents or innovators. It is rather a process of shared narration, and thus reliant

on our narrative identities. ***Sameness/continuity or transformation/innovation is situationally and socially co-created through narration***.

I ended my Project 1 with the following statement: "Change has been a pervasive theme throughout my life, and I argue that issues like change and innovation are deeply entwined with ontological considerations of self, identity, and organisations. My experiences of threat, fear, and deep meaninglessness in the face of change and innovation are not unique to me. Thus, my research question is: What happens to us when we try to innovate?"

In the narrative of this project, our attempts at innovation sparked a range of emotional breakdowns among the three innovators leading to ontological considerations of the self. That which had broken down (again), was also the Western autonomous individual and I was yet again a shipwrecked I – this time caged in boredom.

Crafting seven iterations of this account has been an extensive and time-consuming journey, extending beyond the expected schedule of the program. Yet, this prolonged process was essential for transcending my initial state of being caged in a narcissistic breakdown of boredom in order to narrate myself and to relate to the narration of others. I broke out of the cage and ended up flying a little.

Project 3: Rejecting or engaging with innovation in the context of the (habitual) practices of public servants

Completed March 2022

Geschrieben steht: "Im Anfang war das Wort!"
Hier stock ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,
Ich muß es anders übersetzen,
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.
Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der Sinn.
Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,
Daß deine Feder sich nicht übereile!
Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?
Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die Kraft!
Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,
Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.
Mir hilft der Geist! Auf einmal seh ich Rat
Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die Tat![12]

Goethe, 'Faust'

[12] "'Tis writ, "In the beginning was the Word!"

I pause, perplex'd! Who now will help afford?
I cannot the mere Word so highly prize;
I must translate it otherwise,
If by the spirit guided as I read.
"In the beginning was the Sense!" Take heed,

The import of this primal sentence weigh,
Lest thy too hasty pen be led astray!
Is force creative then of Sense the dower?
"In the beginning was the Power!"
Thus should it stand: yet, while the line I trace,

A something warns me, once more to efface.
The spirit aids! from anxious scruples freed,
I write, "In the beginning was the Deed!"

Introduction

The bearer of continuity and transformation

In this third project, once again, I will be discussing my work at The District, a 1500 person-strong outfit providing services for children and for young, disabled, and elderly adults in Oslo, Norway. The District has seen a number of significant changes since I completed Project 2. Jens, my former boss, began a new job at the beginning of this year, and I became the facility's CEO for the six months it took to find a successor. At the time of writing, I am welcoming a new boss into the organisation, explaining to him our various idiosyncrasies, and taking stock of his expectations... which seem to be just as high as those of his predecessor. His arrival has returned me to the dual role of Head of HR and Innovation, which Jens created for me.

To recap: while anyone who has ever worked within an organisation is likely to have experienced conflicting demands of change and continuity, I believe that my dual role at The District is uniquely fraught. As Head of HR, my job is mostly about *keeping things as they are*, but as Head of Innovation, *transformation* is my core task. (Both jobs have on occasion called for me to manifest the opposite qualities as well.) My dual role thus embodies a paradox of continuity and transformation. However, the one cannot be separated from the other – as a true paradox.

In the narrative which commences Project 3 I will explore these contradictions in more detail, taking advantage of the additional illumination, which my time as acting CEO has shed on my experiences. My discussions will include a number of insights drawn from my reading of the work of sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and other scholars who write about practice. I will pay particular attention to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*, those internalised schemes of perception, conception, and action, which inform our practices.

The narrative highlights colliding logics of practice within my own practice(s) and those of others. What happens to us in the process of innovating when we challenge the practices of others, and/or have our own practices challenged?

Through a process of narration and reflection and in the context of public servants' practice, I will explore:

1. How knowledge and insights gained through exploration of individual cases or particular needs risk rejection when they encounter the standardised/generalised rule-following and 'embodied understanding' of our habitual practice.

2. How the habitus of our practices is paradoxically stable and unstable at the same time and how change can thus be enabled by mediation of our various practices.

3. How new insights can emerge through an iterative reflexive process on paradoxes like that of the particular and the general, the local and the global, as well as continuity and transformation.

Narrative

Background: 'Designing' social care

Today, the majority of organisations delivering social care describe themselves as 'user-oriented'. At The District, the aim is set higher: staff should have empathy for service users and be equipped to "put themselves in the citizens' shoes." This approach presupposes a deeper understanding of user needs and staff need to develop the confidence and skill necessary to co-create[13] solutions with users. The former CEO of The District, Jens, took great pride in this approach and continues to share its (and recent) success in lectures across Norway.

Acquiring such deep understanding is most effective through a 'bottom-up' approach. Recognising the need for leaders who can support staff in constantly revisiting and understanding citizens' needs, The District initiated a leadership development program.

In early 2020, an innovation project titled 'The Co-creative District' was designed. Funded by the government through the Innolab[14] support scheme, it aimed to challenge the existing responses to complex, solution-resistant social issues often termed as 'wicked problems' – a concept originating from the work of Rittel and Webber, to which I will return. The project aimed to explore how The District might contribute to social exclusion through its service organisation and delivery methods.

[13] Co-creation can be defined as: "the process through which a broad range of interdependent actors engage in distributed, cross-boundary collaboration in order to define common problems and design and implement new and better solutions (Ansell & Torfing, 2021, p. 6)".

[14] Innolab (pseudonym) will support and stimulate user-oriented innovation in public administration through the use of service design, testing and experimentation. The scheme will first and foremost contribute to better services for users. It will also strengthen the innovation capacity in the public sector, both by supporting specific innovation projects and contributing to skills development and dissemination of experience across the board

The Innolab application, collaboratively written by team members from the management and me, was well received. It enabled the hiring of a team of service designers from an external consultancy to embark on a year-long exploration of whether practices at The District might inadvertently foster social exclusion.

During the timeline covered in Project 2, Signe departed from The District, and her departure significantly influenced that narrative. Her successor, Rita, an experienced service designer from a private consultancy, played a pivotal role in the Innolab project. I became Project Manager, with the rest of The District's management team, headed by Jens, serving as a steering group. There were weekly meetings and numerous workshops. However, the focus of Project 3 will not be on the Innolab project itself.

Rather, it will delve into a 'side project' initiated by Rita, arising from her involvement in the Innolab project and reflecting her 'deviationist' approach as a service designer. The decision to allow this side project to proceed was a critical juncture. It led to a surprising turn of events, which shed new light on the main project, and indeed on my own practice(s) as Head of HR and Innovation.

Anne's 'Wicked Problem'

Rita first encountered Anne during the initial phase of the Innolab project, when they were introduced by the Preventive Youth Services team at The District. Members of the team had expressed concerns about Anne's family situation after working with one of her three children.

On the face of it, Anne's was a classic case of social exclusion. She was a low-income single parent from a minority background. Because she had no permanent job, she was dependent on the support of social services. Her kids were struggling to fit in, and Anne herself was anxious and sleep deprived.

In other respects, however, Anne was atypical. Firstly, she is well-educated – although she speaks only a little Norwegian, she holds a degree in Economics from her home

country. Secondly, and importantly for this narrative, she is a sometime employee of The District. For four years, Anne had been temping as an unqualified care worker for our Services for the Elderly team.

Anne's ultimate objective was predictable. She wanted to find permanent employment, giving her a steady income that would enable her to take care of her kids and maybe one day buy her own flat. According to Rita, Anne had discussed these ambitions with her manager at Elderly Services, who had told her that she had no chance of gaining a permanent contract unless she improved her language skills and achieved recognised qualifications.

For her part, Anne was aware that she would be unable to fund the necessary training without the steady income afforded by a full-time job. It was a classic 'Catch-22' or, in the terminology of this narrative, a 'wicked problem'.

Rita gets too close?

I learned the details of Anne's case indirectly, via Rita's accounts. Rita always spoke warmly of Anne and took a particular interest in the case from the beginning. In fact, the first time Rita told me about Anne, I noticed her speaking quickly in order to cover all the important points.

She had listened sympathetically to Anne's story, in particular the part concerning Anne's efforts to make sure she was available to Elderly Services. Rita relayed her impression that Anne believed that if she worked hard enough, kept a positive mind-set, and stayed flexible, she would eventually be able to secure the steady income she longed for.

Not having met Anne, I adopted a rather detached and matter of fact stance at this stage, maintaining the 'professional distance' of a public servant while remaining open to the results of Rita's explorations. In other words, where Rita saw an individual in need of help, I saw an 'interesting case'.

I believed I had good reason to maintain my distance. I recognised the desperate situation in which Anne found herself, but as a manager, I understood the impossibility of hiring an unqualified worker on a steady contract.

It also seemed to me that Rita's preoccupation with Anne's case was becoming inappropriate. Certainly, she spent a large proportion of our meetings discussing it. At one of these sessions, she told me about an out-of-hours call to her flat after Anne had received a letter from the Office for Social Services that she could not understand. She then confided that she had taken several such calls, and that she was in fact trying to facilitate Anne's search for work, helping her to plan the process of gaining an apprenticeship.

I had the unsettling feeling that Rita would soon be 'pushing' for Anne to receive special treatment, but she assured me that she continued to regard Anne as a service design 'case'.

Rita, the deviationist service designer

Rita's practice as a service designer bears closer examination. As her manager, I am acutely aware that she is not a person who looks for easy, time-saving solutions, but rather a deep thinker who is prepared to spend time getting to the 'root' of a problem. It is a quality which I admire (in theory), but which (in practice) can make me impatient and even irritated as well.

An eavesdropper watching one of our regular meetings might take us for a quarrelsome old couple. We do not always pay proper attention to each other, and in place of open, exploratory dialogue, we have hard-fought arguments where each of us tries to convince the other of a checklist of points. Despite its rather fraught appearance, I find that this mode of communication 'sort of' works for us, probably as a result of our persistence – because most of the times we see our discussions through to the end, we manage to arrive at a more complete awareness of each other's perspectives. A point we have returned to several times in our conversations about our conversations.

Rita's thoroughness is deeply engrained. Service designers are encouraged to develop understanding of their users' needs and emotions. The trainee designer is expected to cultivate their understanding by means of methods from ethnography and other social sciences. This practice encourages study of the particular (individual) thematic patterns of behaviour in order to articulate the general (much as I am doing in this project).

In Anne's case, this approach raised an ethical dilemma. I felt from the outset that Rita's intervention risked raising false hopes in Anne. Worse, if she was let down in the particular context of the project, might it not be considered as a *misuse* of Anne in the search for insights to apply elsewhere in the practices of the District?

These concerns were highlighted when Rita took it upon herself to contact Social Services to discuss the options available to Anne. Rita forwarded me the response of the senior officer assigned to the case:

> We assess each case individually. The service user must talk directly to their case officer, who will then provide her with whatever information she needs. It is important to keep us informed about any changes so that the case officer can provide fully up-to-date advice. I think it is also important that no discussion of the case takes place outside the direct contact between the service user and the case officer.

The officer in question added a graceful addendum:

> But if you need to discuss general issues on a more strategic level then we can talk about it ☺[15]

The e-mail that Rita forwarded gave me the impression that her contact with Social Services had produced the same kind of misgiving in them as it did in me. As public servants, we like to regard ourselves as being consistent in our approach, treating similar cases similarly.

Rita's intervention had violated this basic tenet, highlighting contradictions between her 'person-centred' approach and the standardised approaches more typical of the

[15] The officer is not part of the research. The inclusion of this email is done with her permission in a phone call 22.02.24

sector. I experienced it as an implied criticism of my practice, and therefore bristled at it. For the same reason, I believe that it triggered resistance among the team at Social Services.

Doing my best to leave aside issues of personal irritation, I returned to my earlier deliberations: was Rita's personal connection with her case becoming too strong? Had she exceeded the bounds of the professional 'empathy with the user' required of public servants (a group of which she is, in the end, a member)?

Reading an earlier version of this narrative, one of my fellow students commented on the peculiar ethical perspective of the service designer. As we saw earlier, it is an approach that uses insights drawn from direct engagement with individuals to construct generalised professional practices. It can in fact be regarded as instrumentalising empathy. We might ask: can it ever be OK being empathically involved in an individual's particular case and then withdraw without solving it, even if doing so enables us to arrive at a general solution?

Rita's decision to stay with Anne and her unsolved (insoluble?) 'Wicked problem' might be regarded as a way out of this moral impasse.

Svein, the Head of Immoral and Unethical Conduct

My ongoing deliberations were beginning to affect my relationship with Rita. I noticed that, when she called me, I would sometimes hesitate to pick up the phone. I knew she would want to discuss the case, and that her calls could be extremely time-consuming.

A fellow student on the DMan program pointed out that this behaviour was typical of a person in power confronting a complex decision. That was a fair point... but I would add that it was also that of a CEO avoiding a 'deviationist designer' who wanted to sound off about her pet case.

One afternoon in February, my phone indicated an incoming call from Rita. I knew that she was frustrated with aspects of her work, in particular the situation with Anne. I

was also aware of being short of time. I chose to ignore the call, telling myself that I would call her back later. When I got home, I found an e-mail from Rita:

> I am unsure of how to behave in relation to Anne's situation. She is in an unsustainable multifaceted dilemma:
>
> - Her bad experiences as a citizen and poor quality of life
>
> - She is about hit rock bottom and collapse
>
> - She is 'a case' from which we can learn.
>
> - She has been hopeless for a long time but refuses to give up. How can we give her hope?
>
> • Her employment at The District
>
> - Her status as a call temp
>
> - The laws and regulations around being a temporary employee, four years, etc.
>
> - Her limited opportunities for achieving a steady income
>
> She called me today because she was desperate and says she does not know whom she can talk to. She is so upset that she has been awake all night. I made it clear to her that I can convey her story with her needs and pain points, and that if I am to do so, I must take it as a design case.
>
> That being said, I find something unethical and immoral in the way she is being treated by her employer.
>
> It may well be that this is a common and known practice, but there is a lack of communication here that counts against The District as a workplace.

Rita's message disquieted and angered me. She had called The District – and me – 'unethical and immoral'. Her obvious upset amplified the unsettling feeling that Anne's case had taken her 'over the line'. Was she pushing for special treatment for her favourite client? What about all the other Annes out there?

I called her back immediately. "I do not like to be called immoral and unethical, and I do not like you calling our colleagues that, either."

Those angry words were spoken by 'CEO-Svein'. The direct tone of my response to Rita's message rose from my strong feelings of identification with The District. The intensity of those feelings, reflecting a strongly personalised connection with the organisation, has been one of the more surprising lessons I learned from my six months as Acting CEO.

> Rita replied: "But I did not call you immoral and unethical. I am saying that Anne has been put into a situation that is immoral and unethical."
>
> I said: "I took it personally." (CEO-Svein again.)

Rita and I reconstructed our subsequent exchange as part of our preparations for a joint presentation on the project. Here it is in full.

> Rita: "I think she is being used by The District."
>
> Me: "But Anne is not a regular employee."
>
> Rita: "But she has worked as a call temp for four years."
>
> Me: "She is not qualified. We have many persons like Anne. We cannot provide jobs for all the unqualified people."
>
> Rita: "But she is always there for them, whenever they need her."
>
> Me: "In the public sector, we have to treat similar cases equally. It is the law."
>
> Rita: "But she has been here for a long time. Does that not give her some rights?"
>
> (...SHORT SILENCE...)
>
> Me: "How long has she been working for us?"
>
> Rita: "Four years."
>
> Me: "Yes, that is a long time. Do you know if Anne's a member of the Union?"

Rita: "No, I do not think so."

Me: "Well, that would be a good thing for her. They know her rights and are there to ensure that they are upheld."

Rita: "I will talk to her about that".

Me: "And you could talk with D., the HR officer, to learn more about this. She is the one who knows this part of the law best."

I have rendered the reconstructed dialogue above in full because it marks a turning point, the moment when I recognised that there might be more to the case than I had first thought. Being called immoral and unethical in many ways constituted a breakdown; a breakdown that enabled different actions and maybe even innovation. I will be discussing this later.

Shortly after this conversation with Rita, I called D. to inform her of the situation and to prepare her for a call from Rita, making it clear that the case would need to be treated according to applicable laws and regulations – and that it should involve no special treatment. (Once again, my tendency as a public servant of highlighting standardised procedures comes through.)

The short-term outcome was a 'happy ending': Anne became a member of the Union, which forwarded its demand for her to be instated on a permanent part-time contract to The District's HR department. The department acknowledged this demand as lawful for a 70% part time job and in fact, D. learned of a recent change in the legislation granting increased rights to temporary workers.

But I was left with some serious concerns. Why had it been necessary for me to become the Head of Immoral and Unethical Conduct to realise how severely the case collided with the logics of our practices?

The making of a side project

To conclude my narrative and lay the groundwork for my discussion, I return to a pivotal summer meeting preceding the events of the last section. This exchange was significant as Rita and I decided to pursue the side project with Anne. Before writing this account, I confirmed Rita's perspective on these events in a recent call.

Immediately before the meeting in question, the steering group of the Innolab project had agreed on a 'change document' as a part of the step-by-step process en route to the desired 'workable solution'. The chosen target group of the project was now narrowed into families with children who have disabilities, a group that typically engages in long-term relationships with our services. The project's objective was to investigate how the District might be inadvertently contributing to the social exclusion of these families and more inclusive practices.

Rita, however, was discontent with both the process and the resulting decision. She had hoped the Innolab project would focus on preventive strategies to aid people like Anne. Conversely, the external consultants, constrained by project timelines and budgets, seemed frustrated by her in-depth questions and perceived deviations from the project objectives.

As the project leader, responsible for delivering within time and budget constraints, I found myself siding with the management team and the consultants, and by that opposing Rita. She challenged this direction with critical questions: had we concluded too quickly, and had economic factors unduly influenced our agenda (as these families often depend on expensive services)?

Our summer meeting revolved around these issues. Eventually, we agreed that Rita would continue exploring Anne's case as a side project, using tools she believed might stabilise Anne's life.

Reflecting on this meeting, Rita felt her concerns were initially disregarded. Despite this, she found the meeting productive. She humorously embraced the label

‘deviationist designer’ I had given her and appreciated the constructive nature of our discussions.

For me, this meeting was also crucial. Going against Rita at that time was challenging, but revisiting these matters with her was enlightening. It was a continuation of my journey from Project 2, where I learned to embrace criticism and explore it further.

Postscript

It appears that not everything in the garden is rosy. When I called Rita as part of my preparations for writing this account, I asked her for an update on Anne’s situation. It turned out to be less than perfect.

Anne now has a steady income for her part-time work, but she is on a low base rate, receives only 70% of the pay she would get for a full-time job, and is blocked by her manager from taking overtime to prevent her gaining the rights of a full-time worker. Her cashflow is barely improved, and she feels she is being punished for having gone to the Union. Worse, she cannot gain access to the apprenticeship program because the work she has been assigned does not allow tutoring by senior colleagues.

So, it seems that the last word in the case is yet to be spoken. Meanwhile, it is time to discuss my findings and the sense I make out of them.

Discussion

First reflections upon 'solving' the case

While Rita and I succeeded in delivering important benefits to Anne and her family, it could be argued that our 'solution' was actually a bodge that enabled The District to continue with Business as Usual – an impression confirmed by the postscript to the last section. This insight emerged through the interplay with the other players in ways no one expected.

Even before Rita relayed Anne's account of her circumstances, it is clear that our actions as managers or HR-staff might make life harder for The District's temporary workers. District team managers and HR would now know that they should limit their hires of particular temps to prevent them from gaining rights to permanent positions. In helping Anne, I thus might even have reinforced this practice and contributed to keeping other Annes trapped in the social exclusion of having too little income, no permanent positions etc. Anne's feeling of being punished for having gone to the Union serves as an example.

Rita's 'side project' was convened under the Innolab project and therefore shared its stated purpose, which was to interrogate the ways that our practices in The District contributed to keeping our users in social exclusion. The main project, which focussed on children with multiple needs, forms no part of this narrative. Nevertheless, I can usefully mention the comments made by a few colleagues to an early version of the Innolab findings on social exclusion: "Sure, *but* we knew this already." Rita and I both attended the presentation at which those comments were made, and we shared the same response looking back on it: "Well, if we knew it already, why did we not change our practice?"

This narrative raises essential ethical questions about the nature of rule-following within organisational contexts. Discussing what went on in the narrative (i.e. the rule-following of my practice and the deviation from the rule-following), I will consider, among others, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (whose 'practice theory' is explicitly concerned with the seemingly insignificant repetitions of everyday life), Ludwig Wittgenstein (who famously re-framed philosophical dilemmas as 'language games') and Hannah Arendt (for whom rule following was part of the 'banality of evil').

Before proceeding to a discussion of the practices at The District, I will examine in more detail the concept of the 'wicked problem' and the methods used to go about 'tackling' them.

The wicked problem – a lesson half-learned

A Google search reports some 66 million instances of the phrase 'wicked problem'. Since the term has entered popular usage, we can expect it to be misapplied. I have been guilty of using it as a loose catch-all meaning, roughly, 'social problems that are hard to solve'... and so have many others.

The term 'wicked problem' was coined in the mid-sixties by Horst Rittel, a professor of design[16]. It made its best-known appearance in the seminal paper *'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning'* which he co-wrote with the urban designer Melvin M. Webber and published in the journal *'Policy Sciences'* in 1973.

The paper distinguishes social and planning problems from those encountered in the natural sciences. Rittel characterises the former as 'wicked' and the latter as 'tame' or 'benign'. Tame problems, like the ones dealt with by scientists and engineers, are definable and separable and have solutions that are findable and testable. Wicked problems are quite different, and as a result tend to be resistant to the methodologies of the scientists and engineers.

[16] Ulm School of Design Germany, University of California at Berkeley, University of Stuttgart

Rittel lectured extensively on the precise nature of that difference (Buchanan, 1992). He characterised social problems as being "ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing" (Churchman, 1967, p. B141).

In *'Dilemmas'* (Rittel & Webber, 1973) and its predecessor *'On the Planning Crisis'* (1972), Rittel criticised linear, step-by-step models of design derived from the natural sciences, which adopted what he called the 'first generation systems' approach: (1) understand the problem, (2) gather information, (3) analyse the information, (4) generate solutions, (5) assess the solutions and pick one, (6) implement it, (7) test it, (8) modify it.

Rittel coined this 'first generation systems' concept, (later writers tend to call them first order systems thinking (Stacey & Mowles, 2016)). Rittel rejected these approaches, believing them inappropriate for dealing with wicked problems. However, such models still have a remarkable persistence in design thinking (see, for example, the work of design guru Bela H. Bánáthy (1992) (see also next section). A further critique of Rittel & Webber's thinking is to be found in Appendix 1 on page 255.

Rittel & Webber critique the rational 'scientific' thinking behind systems thinking of first order. However, they end up in a contradictory place with tautologies and contradictions. Stacey & Mowles (2016) have a summary of different ways of dealing with contradictions, which according to traditional Aristotelian logic are a sign of faulty thinking and hence should be eliminated. The dichotomy is the either-or (binary) version; the dilemma is the choice between two unattractive alternatives; the dualism is the 'both-and' where you try to separate both elements in separate places instead of choosing between them. Finally, you have the paradox. In the literature on systemic views on organisations, the paradox is "a state in which two apparently conflicting elements appear to be operating at the same time (Stacey & Mowles 2016, p. 39)". In this take the paradox is not so different from the dualism – which is apparent in Rittel & Webber's distinguishing properties above. They start off by critiquing the step-by-step and the internal logic of this thinking – but by sticking to the 'inherent logic of a problem' and the 'either-or' or 'both-and' solutions of problems and attempts to

eliminate the contradictions in the hunt for solutions, the thinking is flawed (see p. 255).

Further, Rittel advocated instead the adoption of what he termed second generation systems, hereinafter second order systems thinking, argumentative processes in which problem and solution "emerge[...] gradually among the participants, as a product of incessant judgement, subjected to critical argument" (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 162). However, as we have seen their second order thinking is somewhat stuck in systems thinking of whatever order.

The way I use the paradox in this project would constitute an alternative to this line of thinking I have been critiquing above. In Stacey & Mowles' (2016) thinking a paradox is "a state in which two diametrically opposing forces/ideas are simultaneously present, and which are co-constituting, the one suggests and defines the other, either of which can ever be resolved or eliminated" (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p 39). It is apparent in the paradox of continuity and transformation which flows through my projects, and it is apparent in the section on standardisation and the paradox of the particular and the general that follows later. The way to work with these paradoxes in the light of complex responsive processes is to look at the paradox as "the coexistence of one thing and its opposite, where the contradiction is preserved but brought together in a higher state (*aufgehoben,* in Hegelian terms) (Mowles, 2021, p 117).

This thinking helps staying with the paradox, exploring it – there might emerge something that looks like solutions (for now), and/or there might not[17].

Design, stuck in first order systems thinking?

Many designers experience their own processes as 'messy'. Typically, a designer will make concerted efforts to follow a linear, step-by-step working model, but find it inadequate for dealing with her wicked problem. Asserting "it is a non-linear process," the designer retains the first order model as a frame or 'guideline' but adds to it

[17] See also a further discussion on paradoxes in the section *A last reflexive turn on paradoxes – and some points for future research* (p. 183)

'iterations' or 'feedback loops' in an attempt to model the more complex process in which she is now engaged. Fig. 1 shows an example of this type of 'retrofitting' (and also, incidentally, models the processes we went through in the main project with the consultants).

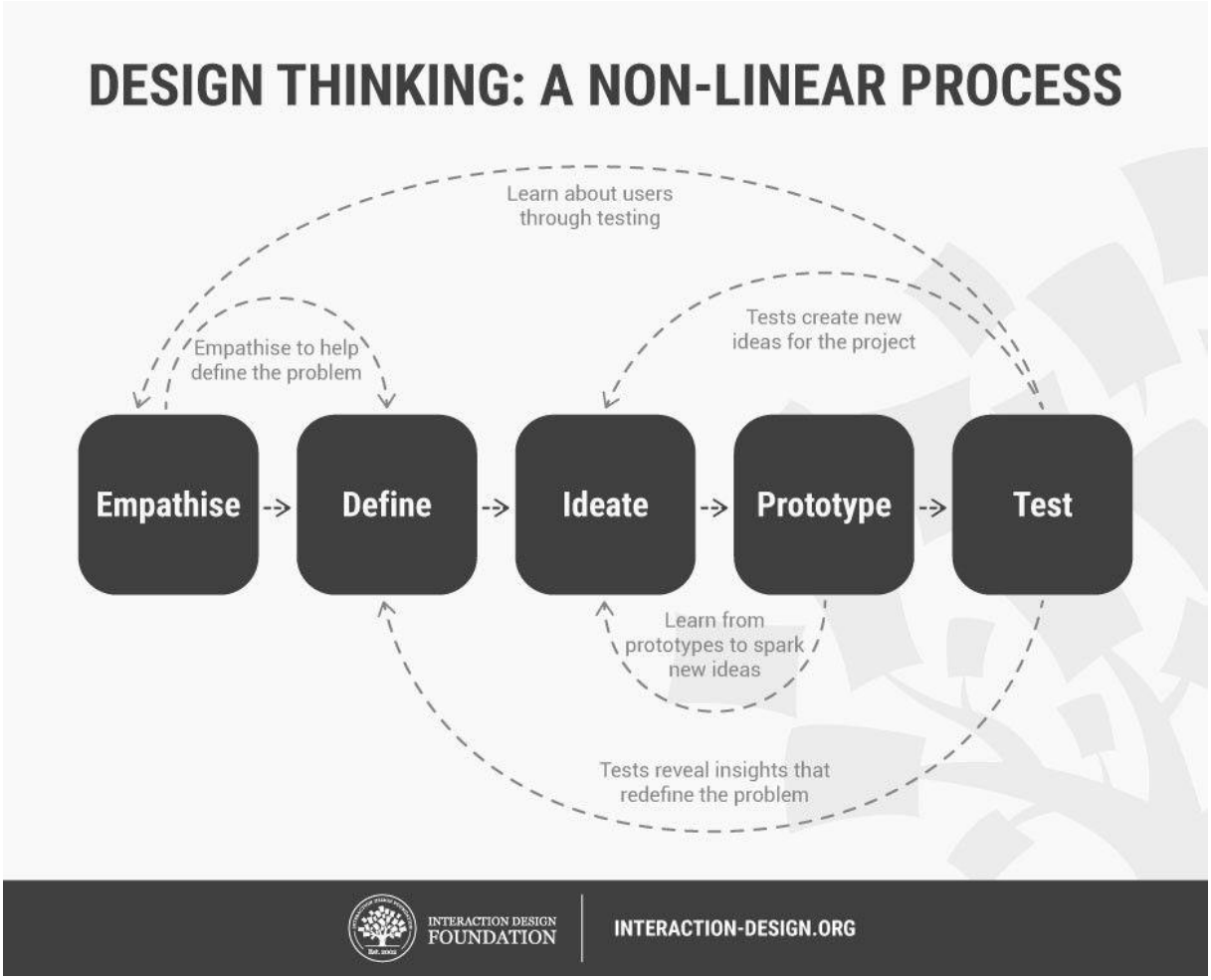

Figure 1 Desing thinking: a non-linear process

Available from

https://www.startupbootcamp.org/blog/2018/07/design-thinking-non-linear-process/

Managing such processes can be a headache. In fact, The District now has recoursed to step-by-step portfolio management to oversee the complexities of our multiple step-by-step processes. At our last conversation around the summer meeting, Rita criticised these 'top-down' linear structures, which she characterised as failing to focus on individual needs.

Different but congruent reservations inform the work of Turnbull & Hoppe (2019), who reject the wicked/tame distinction proposed by Rittel and Webber and adopted by their many admirers as "flawed both in its original conception and in the subsequent interpretation of that conception" (ibid p. 319). They "reject [...] the idea of a 'wicked problem' as a special ontological class of policy problem. 'Wicked' is instead a specific, rhetorical term, used by scholars to help them think about the most difficult, unstructured policy problems and used by practitioners to label persistently problematic distances between stakeholders to a problem, a labelling that itself has political aims" (ibid., p. 333).

While recognising that some of the uses of the term 'wicked problem' that have been made by myself and others are emptily rhetorical and/or philosophically problematic, I have to report that I find Turnbull & Hoppe's proposed alternative formulation, "higher and lower levels of problematicity in problem structuring efforts" (ibid., p. 315) unsatisfactory of some of the same reasons I have been critiquing above. Higher and lower levels have a spatial dimension that easily could be connected to root-causes and the same rational thinking around social problems as critiqued by both Rittel & Webber, to which I agree and also explore in this project. Anne's problem seemed authentically 'wicked' to her. I will therefore continue to use the term 'wicked problem' but will do so advisedly.

I will now turn to practice-based theories and approaches to explore the paradoxes of my narrative further.

Colliding practices and habitus

The French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu is noted for his thinking of the logic of practice and praxeology. In his own words, he started out as a 'blissful' structuralist [18] (Bourdieu, 1990, p.9), but came to recognise two embedded fallacies in the methodology with which he was engaged; firstly in the objectification which

[18] It is worth noting that (service) design also has roots in structuralism. For instance, one of the design and systems theory gurus, Béla H. Bánáthy, started off as a linguist – closely linked with structuralist thinking.

necessarily accompanies the study of human practice (the creation of structures as representations of practice); and secondly in the shortcomings of subjectivity (phenomenological or ethnomethodological attempts at making "explicit the truth of primary experience in the social world" (Bourdieu 1977, p 4)).

Seeking an epistemological method that would avoid both these problems, Bourdieu turned his attention to what he termed the logic of practice and the "subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action" (Bourdieu, 1977 p. 86) which he termed *habitus*.

Our *habitus* is the product of generations of practitioners who have collectively produced:

> systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53).

He goes on:

> Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (ibid.).

To Bourdieu practice is a site of the dialectic of *opus operatum* (the objectified products of our practice) and *modus operandi* (the ways we work around here – the products of historical practice). Any organisation is a locus of multiple practices, with different qualities of habitus based on gender, education, roles, and specific practices in the different local workplaces, and each of us is socialised into our particular habitus to the point that it becomes our 'values made flesh' according to Charles Taylor's reading of Bourdieu (Taylor, 1995).

When we work with other people, the differences between our particular values, experiences, and ways of working can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and strong emotions. It is unsurprising that this topic is a recurrent theme of my last project and of this one – a professional change agent or innovator will inevitably have to deal with

issues of clashing practices. However, it is important to remember that such an individual will have the same inculcation and socialisation into their particular developmental or managerial practices as other professionals have in theirs.

Indeed, in the case of Anne and the Deviationist Designer, it is conspicuous that my values tended to be in tune with those of the case officer at Social Services.

We both stand on the shoulders of the generations of public servants that came before us: upstanding guardians of established/socialised laws and procedures; egalitarian dispensers of public 'goods' to our citizens; even-handed functionaries who always treat similar cases in the same way... and who react negatively to any instance of (unrightfully) special treatment. These would be our idealised values, as we would like to see them (although the statement should properly be delivered with a hint of irony, as is appropriate for an ideal that is not always realised).

The laws and procedures to which we aspire to adhere in 'The District' are informed by concerns about fairness and the protection of individual rights, but such rule-following may fail to protect a particular individual, as in Anne's case. (This could be an example of a multidimensionality of rights; global and local patterns forming and being formed by each other?)

My narrative speaks of the importance of treating equal cases equally, but ignores the logical corollary of that statement, which is that we should treat different cases differently. This simple dictum points the way to the contrasting habitus of Rita. She stands on the shoulders of generations of service designers[19] whose modus operandi was to explore user needs, generate specific responses, and then convert them into more generally applicable solutions. 'Special treatment' is thus her starting point.

My gut reaction to Rita's attempt to 'push' Anne's case – and by extension that of my colleague at Social Services – perfectly illustrate the distinction between these two approaches. Rita's motives were impeccable, but her actions elicited unconscious

[19] It is worth noting, however, that referring to 'many generations' in this context might be a bit of an overstatement, given the field's novelty. However, service design, while a relatively recent discipline, draws upon the empirical methods of various social sciences.

responses of a particular type, which convinced both of us that we knew the correct course of action 'in our hearts'. Blindsided by our particular practices, we could not be open to Rita's suggestions.

An extreme instance of such 'blindsiding' is that given in Arendt's (1963) famous report of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Arendt was unimpressed by the famous Nazi mass-murderer that she saw in the dock, commenting on his mediocrity, his clichéd speech, and his "normality":

> (H)e was not what he called an *innerer Schweinehund*, a dirty bastard in the depths of his heart; and as for his conscience, he remembered perfectly well that he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to to—to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care. This, admittedly, was hard to take. Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as "normal"— "More normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him," one of them was said to have exclaimed (ibid, p 25).

She goes on: "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else" (ibid. p 49). The Israeli journalist Amos Elon wrote in his introduction to Arendt's report: "Evil comes from a failure to think. It defies thought for as soon as thought tries to engage itself with evil and examine the premises and principles from which it originates, it is frustrated because it finds nothing there. That is the banality of evil."

We are back with the fundamentals: right vs. wrong, good vs. evil. In *'The Human Condition'* Arendt states:

> What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. "What we are doing" is indeed the central theme of this book. It deals only with the most elementary articulations of the human condition, with those activities that traditionally, as well as according to current opinion, are within the range of every human being. For this and other reasons, the highest and perhaps purest activity of which men are capable, the activity of thinking, is left out of these present considerations. (Arendt, 1958, p 5).

Obviously, I am not suggesting moral equivalence between the deeds of a Social Services case officer in Norway and myself and those of a high-ranking Nazi in WWII. But I believe that, if we insist on 'treating similar cases similarly', following the standardised bureaucratic 'rules' and acting without reflection, we may end up doing evil to the many Annes out in the world, each of whom is a unique individual with a need for and entitlement to unique treatment.

This also links to writing on what is called bureaucratic violence. According to Cooper & Whyte (2017) routine administration can be seen as violent. In his writing on *Modernity and the Holocaust* the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1989) connects modernity to the death camp, stating that the Holocaust has to be understood as deeply connected to the nature of modernity – not as an exception, but as directly connected, without modernity, no Holocaust. There are some distinct elements to bureaucratic violence (Bauman, 1989; see also Norberg, 2021) that are illustrated in my narrative as well:

- Ethical considerations become isolated to organisational guidelines (Norberg, p. 3) – the inner-organisational "rules as source and guarantee of propriety" (Bauman 1989 p. 22). This is seen in my narrative in the way the officer and I defend the way we do it around here.

- Invisibility, depersonalisation and distantiation of victims/target groups. This is illustrated when I state, 'I saw an interesting case' and maintained what I call a 'professional distance'. Rita on the other hand, saw a suffering human being and I was questioning whether she was getting too close in her relationship with Anne.

In sum, this could turn into bureaucratic violence to the Annes out there.

Managers at The District aim for professionals who are not only user-oriented but also possess the ability to empathise and "be in the citizens' shoes." This includes understanding the needs of citizens and co-creating solutions with them. That implies an ability to deal with difficult situations where user expectations are unrealistic, or

where solutions are either impossible or make such extreme demands on the citizen that they may be unable to handle them.

It is a lot to ask… and I have noticed some of my colleagues holding back – not from lack of empathy, but rather from the wish to duck the conflict that arises if expectations are not met.

We might also regard this holding back as habitual. (Subjectively, this might be akin to saying 'no' to a beggar on the street, an experience that I had at the time of writing. In such circumstances, whether we give money or withhold it, our actions are likely to be habitual rather than being full responses to the demands of the situation.)

In confronting a mandate such as Rita's, we must expect to have our practices challenged... but when our identities are threatened and our morality and ethics questioned, we get defensive. Or we might disarm the challenge by saying "yes, *but* we already knew that", or derail the process by pretending to participate while silently dragging our feet and changing nothing.

Such considerations explain why innovations are slow to arrive. As innovators (or service designers), we are supposed to come up with new solutions based on our explorations of the users' needs. However, as we have seen, this may be an over-optimistic account of the realities of service design.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus emphasises the continued significance of the past as *embodied* history. "It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Bourdieu, 1990, p 50). It is a system of dispositions, a present past "that tends to perpetuate itself into the future (ibid.)". In other words, our gut feelings about how to proceed continue to determine our action – an *anti-innovative genealogy*[20], if you will.

[20] Something similar to what I have called the Imperative of sameness

Or not, according to Loïc Wacquant (2007) "habitus is a principal of *both social continuity and discontinuity".* I have covered the continuity part above, it can also be a principal of "discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues" (ibid, p. 268). I will return to this.

Bourdieu has a lot more to say about habitus' influence on our responses to 'new' information. Habitus, he says, "tends to insure its own constancy and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information (ibid, p. 60)". He goes on to argue that habitus tends to protect itself from crisis and critical challenges and therefore to stifle change. (I will go on to critique these points, which I believe indicate a tendency on Bourdieu's part to the reification of habitus.)

Rita was absolutely an outsider. She did not fully understand the logic of our practices as public servants and she disagreed with our handling of Anne's case, going so far as to call our actions unethical and immoral. I found Rita's criticisms indigestible, but they enabled me to reflect, changing how I viewed the case, and how I acted.

Yet things were not quite so easy. In a previous section, I discussed the possibility that, by 'solving' Anne's case, I may actually have obstructed the development of new practices within The District.

This consideration brings me to one of my main points, a critique of Bourdieu.

Bourdieu states that, "Sociology treats as identical all biological individuals who, being the product of the same objective conditions, have the same *habitus"* (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 59, italics in original). Bourdieu rejected structuralism because of its claims to objectivity, yet it remains an important part of his thinking. A number of commentators have noted his reliance on reified structures (see Taylor, 1995, p 175; Nicolini, 2012, p. 64). Theodore Schatzki (1997) emphasises the problem of what he calls Bourdieu's 'over-intellectualising' account of human activity, and Charles Taylor

(1995) notes that Bourdieu's account of the underlying structures that are causally operative in our actions signifies a reified understanding of rule-as-representation.

Bourdieu's *'Outline of a theory of practice'* (1977) was based on studies of Kabylia, an agrarian and patriarchal farmer society in Algeria. Although Bourdieu follows Wittgenstein in arguing that the construction of representations is impossible, his portrait of the Kabyle habitus appears to be an attempt at just such a construction.

Nicolini (2012) states that Bourdieu seems to be aware of such contradictions in his thoughts and that he suggests that "the only way out is for sociologists to embrace a 'reflective' stance toward sociology that, if not capable of eliminating the problem, at least can keep it under control" (Nicolini, 2012, p 65). Nicolini also argues that these problems can be overcome in practice: "Praxeology as an ontology militates against the search for universal invariance: practices are always situated both historically and socially" (p. 66).

It can be argued that our practices and habitus are more liquid than Bourdieu's writing would suggest. The educational theorist and practitioner Etienne Wenger (1988) surely refers to such a conception when he states that "identity is more than just a single trajectory; instead it should be viewed as a nexus of multimembership. As such a nexus identity is not a unity but neither is it simply fragmented" (p. 159). He goes on: "(W)e engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves, and gain different perspectives" (ibid).

My own experiences in a variety of different roles exemplify these points. I do not have *one* practice. Instead, I go from meeting to meeting, connecting with different practices as I do so. Some are more equal; some are rather different. My actions when I am supporting the consultants in the main project and the management team are different from those of my explorations with Rita. The orthodoxy that attaches to my practice as an HR manager is central to this particular narrative but, at the same time, I have been socialised into acting as an innovator by the demands of my other role and my earlier experiences.

In the Case of the Deviationist Designer, we could conceptualise the mutual challenge which arose in my interaction with Rita by saying that both of us were negotiating our practices through our interactions; and thus, that habitus is paradoxically both stable and unstable at the same time.

I would argue that coming to an understanding of the logics of our practices is a way of making this negotiation possible. Such understanding does not come easily, however. None of us 'knows' our habitus, as it is a "subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action" (Bourdieu, 1977 p. 86).

Standardisation and the paradox of the particular and the general

My narrative also reveals a paradox of the particular and the general, the local and the global. Although Rita's challenge to me highlighted the case of one individual, her practice as a service designer makes explicit connections between such individual cases and generalised principles of operation. For my part, although my practice foregrounds general and abstract rules of conduct, my explorations with Rita prompted a refreshing engagement with a single case.

In his fascinating book *'Seeing like a state'*, the political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (1998) describes standardisation as one of the building blocks of the modern state. Through a number of striking examples, he reveals how for instance standardised surnames, measures and systems of land tenure became constituents of the power relations between the state and (groups of) individuals. We might also describe standardisation as the vehicle of emancipatory simplification: "At one stroke the equality of all French people before the law was guaranteed by the state; they were no longer mere subjects of their lords and sovereign but bearer of inalienable rights as citizens" (ibid, p. 32).

Before standardisation, the cacophony of local regulations made public administration difficult or impossible: "Indeed, the very concept of the modern state presupposes a vastly simplified and uniform property regime that is legible and hence manipulable from the hence manipulable from the centre." Scott generalises from this point to state

categorically, "Officials of the modern state are, of necessity, at least one step and often several steps removed from the society they are charged with governing. They assess the life of their society by a series of typifications that are always some distance from the full reality these abstractions are meant to capture" (ibid p. 76).

The innovations described by Scott lead us towards modern statistical methodology, a field that is also dependent on standardisation. A paradoxical relationship exists between the emancipatory effects of standardisation to which Scott refers and the enslavement of uniformity. Arendt (1958) states that such statistical uniformity is "by no means a harmless scientific ideal" (p.43) and states:

> The laws of statistics are valid only where large numbers or long periods are involved, and acts or events can statistically appear only as deviations or fluctuations. The justification of statistics is that deeds and events are rare occurrences in everyday life and in history. Yet the meaningfulness of everyday relationships is disclosed not in everyday life but in rare deeds, just as the significance of a historical period shows itself only in the few events that illuminate it (ibid. p 42).

When public sector organisations seek 'knowledge-based (scientific) solutions', the choices they make tend to be based on statistical methods. They apply standardised practices that are designed to achieve 'the good of the many' – but may as a result risk causing damage to a particular individual, as we at The District appear to have done in the case of Anne.

Standardisation serves as a mechanism to manage complexity that might otherwise be overwhelming. By its nature, it is reductive by simplifying processes to avoid delving into the unique needs of each citizen, which could result in a disarray (cacophony) of individualised solutions. This raises an intriguing question: how detrimental would it actually be to tailor responses to each unique case?

As a fundamental component of bureaucracy, standardisation brings its own contradictions. Its intent to streamline processes can unintentionally inflict a form of inadvertent harm on individuals, as broad, standardised rules may not adequately consider unique personal circumstances. On the other hand, moving away from standardisation in favour of individualised care risks introducing disparities, as it could

lead to the neglect of those who do not receive the same level of tailored attention. This presents a striking paradox: while bureaucracy aims for equity, it can inadvertently perpetrate harm. Similarly, forgoing bureaucratic standardisation in an effort to provide compassionate, individual-focused care can result in a different kind of injustice, potentially perceived as harmful, unfair (or violent) to those not receiving equivalent consideration. Paradoxically, bureaucracy can be violent while lack of bureaucracy can be likely violent.

These same considerations apply to my narrative as a whole... and in particular to the e-mail from the case officer from Social Services asking for the case to be treated in accordance with the standard procedures. We might regard the latter as a warning against cacophony! To borrow Scott's title, *we do indeed 'see like a state'*.

Practice theories and the paradox of continuity and transformation

I believe that the family of practice theories of which Bourdieu is one of the progenitors has more to offer, so I will give my narrative another reflexive turn.

I began by describing and critiquing service designers' attempts at 'solving' wicked problems by repurposing step-by-step models. In doing so, I made particular reference to the work of Rittel and his followers and showed some of the shortcomings of his approach.

Next, I introduced the theory of practice developed by Bourdieu and his followers. Bourdieu's concept of habitus usefully informed exploration of my 'gut reaction' in response to what I experienced as Rita 'pushing' Anne's case – a response which had been shared by the case officer at Social Services. The same events also prompted a detailed critique of what I characterised as Bourdieu's reification of rule-as-representation.

All my investigations begin with the intuitive certainty that *we change too*. This sense of the paradox of continuity and transformation (Stacey, 2003) runs through all my projects. I will now continue along the same path…and, since rule-following has

become a primary concern of this project, I will do so by invoking the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's primary concern was with language, or the 'language game' as he calls it, but his work has frequently been co-opted for use in other fields of study, practice theory among them. Nicolini (2012) states that Wittgenstein's work influenced "some of the most interesting voices in contemporary practice thinking" (ibid. p. 37). He goes further, arguing that Wittgenstein's "belief in the primacy of practice is strictly related to (…) his far-reaching view on language and meaning".

That belief in the primacy of practice is evident in the following extract (my inspiration for the Goethe quote in the introduction): "The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction. Only from this can more complicated form develop. Language – I want to say – is a refinement, 'Im Anfang war die Tat [in the beginning was the deed)'" (Wittgenstein, 1998, p 36/36e).[21]

The belief that language is a collective and social process is core to the work of Wittgenstein and his followers. (Johannesen, 1996; Nicolini, 2012; Taylor, 1995). John Shotter (1997) sums up this position neatly: instead of looking into the inner dynamics of individuals, he says, we must study "the continuous, contingent flow of language-intertwined interaction between people" (ibid., number I).

A few much-quoted lines on rule-following from *'Philosophical Investigations'* (Wittgenstein, 1953) will serve to demonstrate his profound engagement with practice.

Firstly, there is the uncoupling of rule-following from 'intellectual representational interpretation' (Nicolini, 2012). Wittgenstein states: "There is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is manifest in what we call "following the rule" and "going against it" (Wittgenstein, ibid., No. 201). It is an embodied following.

The next remark (ibid., No. 202) couples rule-following with practice: "'Following a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule." This

[21] He also notes that "Words are also deeds" (Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 155)

decoupling of rule-following from individual volition is reinforced when he states: "If that means "Have I reasons?", the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons" (ibid., No. 211).

Finally, there is the famous Proposition No. 217: "When I follow the rule, I do not choose. I follow the rule *blindly*," (ibid, p. 91). This might be regarded as the end of the "rationalist programme of 'deciding before acting'... emphasizing the unarticulated nature of the basis of our understanding" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 39). It constitutes an inarticulate distinction of truth from falsehood.

The 'gut reaction' that I described previously is a prime example of this 'embodied sensation of rule-following'. This 'reading' aligns with that of the philosopher Charles Taylor (1995) when he speaks of Wittgenstein's "incorporated understanding; that is, a grasp on things which although quite unarticulated may allow us to formulate reasons and explanations when challenged. In this case, the links would not simply be de facto, but would make a kind of sense, which is precisely what we would try to spell out in the articulation" (Taylor, 1995, p 168).

In his critique of the reified 'disengaged first-person-singular self' of contemporary scientific culture and its associated epistemology, Taylor characterises this account of consciousness as omitting both the body and the other. He argues both must be returned in order fully to grasp what Wittgenstein is saying. He regards agents not primarily as "the locus of representations, but as engaged in practices, as a being who acts in and on a world" and states that "much of our intelligent action in the world, sensitive as it usually is to our situation and goals, is carried on unformulated. It flows from an understanding that is largely inarticulate" (ibid., p. 170).

According to Taylor our understanding is embodied, "that is, our body know-how, and the way we act and move, can encode components of our understanding of self and world" (ibid. p. 173). Moreover, he emphasises that actions are dialogical. "My embodied understanding does not exist in me as an individual agent, but also as the coagent of common actions. This is the sense we can give to Wittgenstein's claim that obeying a rule is a practice. He means by this a social practice" (ibid, p. 173).

Wittgenstein also links rule-following to 'training' and 'custom', prompting Taylor to turn his attention to Bourdieu and his concept of habitus. "Express rules can only function in our lives along with an inarticulate sense encoded in the body. It is this habitus that "activates" the rules. If Wittgenstein has helped us to break the philosophical thrall of intellectualism, Bourdieu has begun to explore how social science could be remade, once freed from its distorting grip" (Taylor, 1995, p. 180).

Upon receiving the email from Rita calling our practice immoral and unethical, I experienced a bodily reaction accompanied by feelings of anger. We might regard this as an example of Taylor's 'encoded sense'. Yet it seems to me that something is missing from this account. Along with my gut feeling of the importance of rule-following and 'no special treatment', I recognised that I had the opportunity *not to* follow a rule – that is, of becoming the Deviationist Designer or the Transformative Head of HR.

Criticism of Bourdieu has tended to focus on the limitations of his concept of practice theory in relation to innovation. "(T)he habitus approach fails to deal, or deals unsatisfactorily, with (…) change, mediation, and reflexivity" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 67). The sociologist Nick Crossly (2001) states:

> Furthermore, though Bourdieu is at pains to emphasize that habits facilitate improvisation, he does not take the next and important step of considering that and how the underlying structures or principles of fields of practice mutate over time, and with them the habitus required to produce them. The social world is not the perfect circle described earlier. It changes. And as a consequence of this we must recognize the potential for creativity and forms of innovation in practice, which generate a transformation of habits (ibid, p. 95).

It is possible, however, to link practice theory to the possibility of transformation through reflexivity and mediation/negotiations, as we saw in the discussions between Rita and me, which could be regarded as negotiations… demonstrating how habitus is paradoxically stable and unstable at the same time.[22]

[22] It is worth mentioning that not all researchers agree on Bourdieu's supposed failure to address change. The sociologist Bridget Fowler (2020) calls this the orthodoxy concerning the heritage of Bourdieu. She points to his later writing on social crisis as a source of (historical) change.

The anger I experienced on my own and my colleagues' behalf at being called 'immoral and unethical' in some ways constitutes a breakdown. Breakdowns can be seen as the basis of both knowledge and change (a recurrent theme in project 2). At this point, I can usefully invoke Heidegger's (1929) famous example of the hammer. Taught how to drive nails in the course of their socialisation, an experienced carpenter no longer needs to consider the concept/object of their hammer. Only upon having lost it or finding it broken does it, so to speak, 'take up a separate existence'.

Being called immoral and unethical came as a hammer-blow... from a hammer that I only noticed at the moment it struck my head. Resulting in a lost or broken sense of self.

That heated conversation with Rita marked the beginning of a process of reflection, which led me to consider the paradoxes we are facing differently.

The American philosopher William Blattner (2000), comparing Heidegger and Dewey's accounts of practice, states that cognition is a continuation of practice, and "arises in the context of ongoing practice and is an alternative means whereby we achieve the pretheoretical goals of that practice" (Blattner, 2000, p 232). Facing obstacles requires cognition, "because sometimes unmodified practice confronts obstacles to its habitual ways and proves unable to surmount these obstacles without the aid of the explicit attention afforded by cognition (…) Cognition is an episode within our practical activity" (ibid).

This brings me back to Goethe's Faust: In the beginning was the deed. The word, the sense, and the power are all in the deeds. We are our practices.

Dewey thinks along the same lines. In *'Does Reality Possess Practical Character?*, (1908) he states that, "Awareness means *attention*, and attention means a crisis of some sort in an existent situation". He adds, "awareness means inquiry as well as doubt" (ibid.) adducing a chair in an example resembling Heidegger's hammer. Regarding Dewey's notion of knowledge, Blattner (2008) states: "Knowledge is an adjustment to ongoing practice, an adjustment that emerges from competent inquiry" (p. 68). He goes on:

> Now, for Dewey's proposal to make sense, inquiry and the knowledge that results from it must be continuous with ongoing practice. Practice is prior to inquiry in at least two different ways. First as we have already seen, inquiry is always an episode within ongoing practice. Second, the constraints on inquiry that guide it internally and that determine the conditions that a judgment must meet in order to count as warranted are constraints that are present in the practical context in which the inquiry arises. (ibid).

Comparing Heidegger and Dewey (or, in his own words, "trying to marry them"), Blattner (2008) goes on to show how Heidegger brings emotions into the picture. All practical understanding is "suffused with disposedness (…), an attunement – what are rendered as 'state of mind' and 'mood'." He argues that:

> To be attuned to one's situation of action is in part to "have a feel" for whether one's activity is going well or ill. We can feel "out of control," "masterful," "confused," "vague." These feelings are not mere internal states of a subject, a mind. As Heidegger says, they "co-constitute the There. ("The There" is roughly the situation in which one acts.) (Blattner 2008, p 70).

My feelings of anger in the situation with Rita constituted an emotional breakdown, a breakdown that engendered an inquiry that in turn provided me with (new) knowledge. As a result, this last section opens to a more balanced and dynamic view of practice than that which might have been anticipated from my critical reading of Bourdieu. This dialectical take on practice and knowledge makes it easier for me to reflect on the changes described in the narrative. It is time to conclude.

Three Conclusions and a path forward

1. The (possible) rejection of insights gained from exploring the particular

This project describes an attempt to use the discipline of service design to deliver a new, innovative 'solution' to a wicked problem of social exclusion. The case in question is that of Anne, a low-income single parent from a minority background concerned about making a living for herself and her children.

The practice of service design resembles in certain respects the academic discipline within which this project was written. Starting from observations of individual experience, it employs a similar process of iterative reflection to derive generalised principles.

In my case, those observations related primarily to my practice as a public servant. I critiqued the use of step-by-step models in service design, as well as the idea of 'designing' solutions to social problems. However, I reserved my strongest criticism for that body of practice that occasioned my own negative reaction to what I perceived as the special treatment accorded to Anne's case.

This account thoroughly explores the first numbered point from my introduction, showing how *knowledge and insights gained through exploration of individual cases or particular needs risk rejection when they encounter the standardised/generalised rule-following and 'embodied understanding' of our habitual practice.*

Addendum: It is a painful irony that the insights I have gained writing this thesis may well face exactly the kind of rejection described above. Nevertheless, it remains that my inquiry is *qualitative,* and narrative based at time when the prevailing tenor of public sector research is *quantitative* and *statistically-driven*.

2. The paradox of stable and unstable habitus

I showed how my dual roles as Head of HR and Innovation – as well as my stint as The District's acting CEO – complicated my responses to the challenge of a particular wicked problem brought to my attention by Rita, the Deviationist Designer.

To explain my intensely negative reaction to Rita's intervention, I turned to practice theory, and in particular to the seminal work of Bourdieu. I found Bourdieu's concept of habitus helpful in understanding how the logic of practice tends to lock us into the adoption of our predecessors' practices. Habitus provides a helpful explanation of the 'gut reaction' I experienced upon being challenged in my own practice.

While I found Bourdieu's account of continuity helpful, I critiqued him for reifying the concept of habitus. A key insight for me in compiling this project has been that individual practices are not unitary, but rather polyvalent.

I found some support for my ambivalence among the works of Bourdieu's successors, but, in order to interpret those processes of reflection that are occasioned by conflicts between practitioners and innovators, I looked to other thinkers. I found the works of Heidegger and Dewey, which consider the experience of breakdown as a prerequisite for mediation, to be particularly valuable in making sense of my own process after a breakdown occasioned by accusations of being 'immoral and unethical'.

These deliberations clearly demonstrate the second point from my introduction, which is that the *habitus of our practices is paradoxically stable and unstable at the same time and that change can thus be enabled by mediation of our various practices.*

3. Iterative reflexivity as a path to new insight

In the course of my dive into the field of practice theory, I paid particular attention to those scholars who seem to be engaged in attempts to maintain the paradox of continuity and transformation in social processes. Having located some of the roots of this mode of thought in the works of Heidegger, Dewey, and Wittgenstein, I went on to show how these thinkers have continued to influence recent practice theory.

However, I must stress my conviction that the adoption of practice-based approaches may lead us to over-focus on the practitioners and forget about the citizens. To ensure that our services are as good as possible, we need to ensure that we are exploring our citizens' needs as well as our own practices.

In order to deal with complex social problems, I advocate iterative, reflexive processes that engage both historical practice and present user needs. User needs must also be considered historically, from the present and with thoughts of the emergent future. Perhaps we could explore the 'practices' of our citizenry. After all, as Bourdieu tells us, practice is always co-created with others.

My discussion of these points illustrates the third point from my introduction: *How new insights can emerge through an iterative reflexive process on paradoxes like that of the particular and the general, the local and the global; and of continuity and transformation.*

Further research

Project 1 and 2 both focused on emotional and existential breakdowns in the field of change and innovation, which is closely connected with ontological questions of the views on self, identity, and organisations. In both projects, I focused on breakdown as a source of change – and showed that change does not necessarily come easy (if at all).

In project 3, I researched the possible rejection (or embracing) of innovations gained from exploration of particular needs when facing the generalised habitual practices of public servants. Less existential, the theme of breakdown was a recurrent theme of this project, and indeed made these reflections possible.

I see now that an emergent theme in project 3 that has not been covered is that of the relationship between power and innovation. For instance: Who gets to be heard, who is 'deciding' what is considered 'good' and 'bad', which innovations are to be embraced or rejected? In fact, the whole discussion on the narrative could have rewritten to illustrate power issues, which also surfaces in a lot of my experiences almost daily.

Project 4 will hence focus on power and how it influences the paradox of continuity and transformation. I intend to stay with the themes of *what may happen to our social selves when we try to innovate.* Something is bound to happen; I anticipate new breakdowns and I am already anxiously looking forward to it.

Project 4: Innovation and the Role of the Fool. Exploring the Interconnection between Power, Judgement and Taste

Completed January 2023

My real concern was and is philosophic, not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing.
(Hans-George Gadamer, 2013)

Introduction

As demonstrated in Projects 2 and 3, innovation is not a quick fix. The concept of scaling up solutions to suit everyone, everywhere, is questionable. Both in the public and, likely, in the private sector, we have repeatedly seen how versions of innovative service delivery, when scaled up, are often rejected when they encounter specific practices. What works in one situation does not necessarily work in another, as they become generalisations applied to different contexts and practices (Scott, 1998), replete with pre-judgements and embedded in power relations.

The context of Project 4 remains The District, a 1500-person-strong organisation providing services for children, young people, disabled individuals, and elderly adults. The narrative of this project includes two vignettes from the seven months under a new CEO before his departure. The focus here is not so much on 'doing' innovation per se; rather, it explores the enabling and constraining of innovators often entangled in political games that challenge established practices, as discussed in previous projects. This project delves into the power dynamics that paradoxically enable and constrain.

The first vignette recounts a management team meeting where I perceived a threat to my position and mandate to continue innovation work. I felt my competencies and practices being questioned; a situation entrenched in power relations. In my discussion, I draw upon sociologist Norbert Elias' (1978) metaphor of the power game. In the second vignette, I describe an incident where I made a joke that my then-CEO perceived as sarcastic. I explore the role of the fool (Southworth, 1998) in revealing a gossiped 'truth' or a hidden transcript (Scott, 1998) within The District.

Central to both vignettes are judgments and social negotiations concerning perceptions of what is right, good, and humorous. These judgments can be seen as a matter of taste

(Gadamer, 2013) and a way of knowing. I will argue that the innovation of services is dependent on hermeneutic dialogues where our judgments and the pre-judgments of what we consider good, true, right, and knowledgeable are negotiated. These negotiations of taste are embedded in power relations and connected to ontological questions of identity, the social processes of the self, and the paradox of continuity and transformation.

The two questions (Q1, 2)

I will explore two interconnected questions in the project:

> *Q1: How do power relations that are paradoxically both enabling and constraining contribute to the paradox of continuity and transformation?*

> *Q2: How does the community sense (sensus communis) of judgements of taste (telling right from wrong, good from bad, funny from unfunny, beautiful from ugly) influence processes of sameness and otherness?*

I'm getting tired of your meddling. This town ain't big enough for the both of us and I'm going to give you 24 hours to get out. If I see you in Carabinas by this time tomorrow, it's you or me!
(Nick Grindell – The Western Code, 1932)

Narrative

Background: The Half-Year Regime

Firstly, I must briefly recount the events surrounding the turbulent last two years of The District's management team. Jens, my former boss and the CEO who had hired me, left us in February 2021. Subsequently, I became the facility's acting CEO for the six months it took to find his successor (the period covered in Project 3). I was among the applicants for the CEO position and made it to the final round of interviews with the Vice Mayor for Health, Ageing, and Municipal Services. I did not secure the job, leading to a mix of emotions including disappointment, embarrassment, shame, and, paradoxically, a sense of relief. This episode could have been a project in itself, but I will leave it at that. It is worth mentioning that this experience influenced the power dynamics within the management team, affecting their mixed feelings towards me for not getting the job and their reactions to the new appointee.

Thor was the successful candidate and began his tenure as CEO in August 2021. This gave me half a year's experience as acting CEO before I formally resumed my original role as Head of HR and Innovation. This dual role has been a feature of the previous narratives and comes with its own set of challenges, including internal conflicts and external expectations of both continuity and transformation.

The arrival of a new CEO meant a potential reshuffling of roles and responsibilities. Given my recent stint as acting CEO, I was mindful of how this might impact my

relationship with Thor, who could be wary of having a former acting CEO in his management team. I greeted him with a mix of anticipation and anxiety, wondering whether we could coexist in this 'small town'.

Thor's tenure lasted only six months. Consequently, there were effectively two half-year regimes – mine and Thor's.

A few months into contemplating and writing this project, I attended the theatre with an old friend. Post-show, we decided to grab a drink. As we entered the bar, I unexpectedly saw Thor among a group of people leaving. His presence startled me so much that I abruptly stopped, causing my friend to bump into me. I then quickly left the venue. My visceral reaction to seeing Thor was evident and strong. "It is him," I explained to my friend, "my former boss."

Having previously discussed the project with my friend, he understood the context. Once we settled at another bar and I began to relax, he commented, "I now realise that something significant must have affected you, given that seeing him caused you to completely freeze."

This incident outside the bar serves as a backdrop for the ensuing exploration; it vividly demonstrates the embodiment of the power struggles during this period. In my analysis, I will focus on how both Thor and I, along with others, contributed to making this town too small for the both of us (or maybe even for all of us).

The duelling innovators

In meetings with Thor, being well-prepared and having read the agenda and any supplementary documents was essential. Admittedly, preparation is not my forte. I excel at improvisation but often struggle with pre-planning. This lack of preparation frequently led to me attending meetings without having fully reviewed all the materials, due to time constraints or difficulties in structuring my work. With Jens, my previous CEO, this approach was not necessarily problematic, as he himself was not always thoroughly prepared. For him, the importance lay in the discussions rather than

in written briefings, which were often not provided to begin with. However, Thor had a different approach.

For the management team[23] meeting on 19th October 2021, just over two months after Thor's start, he prepared a discussion item about innovation and development. He had even written a note on this item, focusing on the optimal utilisation and organisation of innovation resources for the organisation. Thor and I had briefly discussed his ideas before he composed this note, and during our conversation, I expressed support for his viewpoints. Despite my agreement, I felt a sense of uncertainty about my position and whether Thor had a hidden agenda. As I entered the meeting, I felt anxious. Was his intention to strip innovation from my responsibilities and manage it directly, or to reinforce it within my department? Was this his way of expressing dissatisfaction with my performance as Head of Innovation or asserting his authority as CEO to address any potential competition between us?

Thor's suggestions in the note were influenced by his previous experiences, where he had effectively organised innovation work in a particular manner at his former job. I believe he was proud of these achievements, having previously shared details of the project. However, I found it peculiar that he had written the note himself instead of delegating it to me, the Head of Innovation. By taking on this responsibility, it seemed that Thor sought to be recognised as an innovating CEO, much as he was in his previous role, which contributed to my apprehension about potentially being seen as an obstacle.

During the subsequent discussion, I pointed out that Thor's ideas aligned closely with a structure for innovation work in The District that Tore, the raging innovator, Signe, the frustrated service designer (both from Project 2), and I had developed. This plan involved forming an innovation team with representatives from all departments, collectively working on innovation projects, coordinated by my department. This approach had been approved by the management team under Jens, but its implementation was halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

[23] Consisting of Thor (CEO), Terje (CFO), Karen (line manager and the one who took over after Thor and is now the CEO), Jenny (line manager), Per (Chief District Medical Officer) and Katerina (information officer).

My whole argument with Thor's suggested solution of how to organise the innovation work reminds me of the irritation I sensed when I was also new to the organisation six years previously. I had started my work on innovation, but was often met with, 'Yes, *but* we already do this, or yes, *but* we have already thought of that, and it will not work here.' Now I was the one saying, 'Yes, *but*…' trying to re-negotiate Thor's proposal, as it was not invented here – yet another iteration of the Not Invented Here syndrome (Anton & Piller, 2015).

There is an alternative way of looking at it, I have come to realise (doing the seventh iteration of the project). I had to go back to what was actually written in the proposal. Doing so, I see that the proposal identified questions that were also important to Karen and Jenny, the two line-managers. They both have staff on their teams that have the roles as innovators; the proposal is open and just asks some questions on the organising of the work, with the possibility that there could be a more centralised innovation department. This would mean that they would have to 'hand' them over; to my department would be one possibility, the other was (my fear) to centralise it directly under Thor. So, in my argumentation on what we had previously agreed upon, I defended and negotiated Karen's and Jenny's case as well as my own, stating I think that they should keep their developmental resources – and that the 'innovation structure' would be to support their innovators, not to take them over.

Hence, I was attempting a 'fusion of perspectives', striving to align Thor's ideas with our prior agreement. Throughout these discussions, I consistently expressed my belief in the value of keeping 'developmental' resources near their required development areas rather than centralising them. This belief was a key element in the 'power game' of Project 2, where Tore, the raging innovator, and I had differing views – with him clearly stating the impossibility of having one Head of *both* HR and innovation. Karen and Jenny, though playing their parts more subtly, possibly relied on me to lead this debate. Thor's proposal merely raised questions, leaving the potential for conflict open for a later time. They did offer some verbal support, but I cannot recall their exact words.

The meeting concluded with the decision that Thor would prepare a final case for future discussion. His choice not to assign me this task intensified my apprehension

about my position. Adding to this unease was an unexpected agenda item Thor introduced: a proposal for a new senior position within the management team. This caught me off guard as I had missed this point in the agenda and neglected to read the accompanying note, highlighting once more that thorough preparation is not my strongest suit.

The discussion commenced with Thor outlining his ideas for a novel role within the management structure – a type of manager responsible for a specific subject area, but not for staff and finances. I found myself disagreeing with the rationale for such a position and its potential impact on our team and wider staff. Thor had briefly mentioned this to me before, and I had strongly advised against it, knowing it could lead to unrest among the staff. Upon hearing that, Thor just shrugged his shoulders and said something like[24], "So what? Maybe we need just that."

My surprise was not about the suggestion itself, but rather that he had swiftly moved to include it in the meeting agenda, ignoring my advice – a clear indicator of my diminished influence in the team. Jens, my previous CEO, would never have disregarded my strong recommendations in this way.

The new role was focused on planning, strategy, and public health, areas identified as needing improvement by our team, both under Jens's and my leadership. Thor's rationale for the discussion also referenced the future structure of innovation in The District, hinting at the need for a dedicated leader in this field.

During the debate, I was visibly tense and uneasy. The stakes felt high, and I was uncertain about Thor's actual intentions. My anxiety increased, even though the issue was not directly critical to my position. But perhaps it was significant, considering it involved a reshuffle of responsibilities. Caught off guard by this agenda item and the unexpected speed at which a decision was being sought, coupled with the apparent

[24] For methodical reasons, it is important to remark here that there are no notes from this meeting, so it is a recollection – the actual words might have been different, it is how I remember it (after much reflecting on what went on in these months). This text reveals some truths of an I, which is not necessarily true seen from the other's perspective. I will return to these deliberations in the methods section.

absence of input from unions and other staff, I expressed my surprise at the haste and lack of a thorough process in addressing the suggestion.

Thor retorted sharply: – Well, you would not have been surprised if you had read the agenda. It is all detailed in the note attached to it.

It was like being caught with my trousers down. I felt exposed and humiliated. I had expressed myself in a way that made it clear to everyone that I had not read the agenda or the note. Thor called me out for everyone to see, criticising my lack of preparation quite openly.

Looking at the agenda, it was clearly all in there. I blushingly apologised to him and to them.

A while later, recovering from the blow of having been outed as being unprepared, I stated that I found the discussion a bit forced, and was not sure about the thinking behind it. It was a new role positioned directly under the CEO, and in what almost was a direct attack, I asked:

> – Is this restructuring based on individual preferences from one person or is it based on needs in the organisation?

Thor emphasised that this was, of course, a need for the organisation; however, it was also based on dialogue with the person who was to have the position. Thor received support from Per, the Chief Medical Officer, who was stated as the co-writer of the note. What puzzled me though was that Per heads the Public Health Department and that they suggested making a subject manager for plan, strategy, and *public health*, which is his own expertise, outside of his line.

With reference to our discussion on innovation earlier in the same meeting, I asked Thor,

> – So, what is happening here is that you are suggesting the removal of public health from the Department for Public Health and later to remove innovation from the Department for Innovation?

Undoubtedly, this was asked with an emotional stress verging on anger. It was Per who answered the question, stating,

> – This is wrong. There are still plenty of public health issues being dealt with by my department. Are you stating that my work on the pandemic has nothing to do with public health?
>
> – Of course not, I replied. – My point is I think we have not thought these matters through and that it is a hastily made decision if we make it.

My opinion was rejected. I know that the line managers, Karen and Jenny, thought the same as me when it came to this decision, as did Terje (CFO) based on our story with the person that was to have the position. They (probably) did say a few lines in support but looking back I foolishly acted to place myself in the role of protagonist, making Thor (supported by Per) the antagonist of the story. Immersed in the power struggle of the situation I was somewhat blindsided and unaware of the (more silent) actions of the others, except for Thor and Per.

Thor decided to go forward with the process of creating a position as subject manager, with me as Head of HR having the responsibility for the process of further case management and the actual hiring. I felt he was putting me 'in my place', a place that seemed to suit him and probably a less influential place.

This part of the narrative connects to the first question of exploration in my introduction (Q1): *How do power relations that are paradoxically both enabling and constraining contribute to the paradox of continuity and transformation?*

I tried the best I could to constrain Thor. I enabled my colleagues, who agreed with me, to play a different and (looking back on it) wiser game, from which they, by letting me play the part of the duellist, probably got the upper hand. I was being constrained myself by being called out as unprepared. As a new CEO, Thor was trying to change the truths according to his beliefs; in many ways, what went on could be seen as a negotiation of (emergent) truths, to which I will return. However, I was not convinced about Thor's ways, and took up the fight.

As two duelling innovators, we stood up against each other in a somewhat too-small town and we did what we could to constrain each other – 'it's either you or me'. Then again, this could be mostly about me seeing it from my position as the duellist and making it about 'you and me'. And perhaps Thor was tired of my 'meddling'.

Post scriptum

Reading over the reports from these meetings again, I see that in the meeting the 16th of November it was decided after a process between Thor and me – and still with him writing the proposal – that one person would be transferred from the CFO's department to my department, creating a new position as 'subject' manager in charge of our portfolio management of projects and leading the innovation team. Karen and Jenny's department would keep their resources (as they wished). Indeed, it was a strengthening of my department.

The process between Thor and me leading up to the decision was a good one; we had good and constructive conversations where the solution of moving one person from Terje's (CFO) department came up. Therefore, the power dynamics in the vignette that with the first reflections looked constraining was indeed (with time) also enabling.

The joke – the innovating fool telling 'truth' to power

Our weekly online emergency meeting[25] with the senior management team and next level managers happens every Friday at noon. Thor had been with the organisation for five months and had announced his departure at the end of the following month.

On this particular Friday, I was preoccupied and logged onto the meeting a minute late, joining the screen filled with around 10-15 managers, including the senior management team. Having worked with most of them for years, I was familiar with them all; some had been with the organisation even before my arrival, while others

[25] It has been going on since the beginning of the Covid19 situation, for dealing with the pandemic, vaccination etc.

joined later, with my involvement in their recruitment. The atmosphere was quiet; some managers had their cameras on, others did not.

Thor, who normally started meetings promptly, had become less punctual since announcing his departure. His commitment seemed to wane, and at times we found ourselves waiting for him to join, unsure of his whereabouts. It seemed that he did not care anymore. As one of my staff on the innovation team stated, he seemed to change personality once he had decided to leave. A CEO stepping down is in many ways a 'lame duck', so it is strange he was kept in office and had not stepped down directly (as discussed amongst us in the management team). Therefore, his 'change of personality' might be more about how we viewed a departing CEO.

Thor logged on just some minutes or so after me, stating:

> – It's very quiet in here.

I am often in the position of being the one with a humorous comment on happenings in the management team and elsewhere. The others in the meeting would not be surprised to find me joking; I guess they are used to that and normally I would have an awareness of the time and place for it. So here I was, attempting to answer Thor in a humorous way (albeit with probably less trust and a changed atmosphere with a different tone in the management team – as shown in last vignette) in a joke to the online heads:

> – Well, you know, that is the way it is here in The District, nobody talks until the CEO has spoken.

Thor answered:

> – Are you being ironic or sarcastic?

> – Well, delete as required… I replied.

> – Then, I say you were being sarcastic.

I do not recall any of the reactions from the faces on the screen to my joke and to Thor's quick flip of my flippant joke. With the online format, it is hard to get the

embodied reactions of others. In hindsight, I see how this underlines the extra danger of online joking – it can be dangerous in real life, but with the embodied reactions, you have the opportunity to try making amends sensing when the joke fails, which is not the same online. Clearly, the joke was about Thor, and it was about the way we speak (and not) and directed to the others whom I imagine trust me and maybe support me; at least some of them.

The meeting continued, but I was stuck with what had been going on between us. Not being in the room picking up any embodied reactions from the others, I was sort of left on my own and felt a sense of shame (upon having been disciplined). Straight after the meeting I quickly checked the dictionary. I sort-of knew what being sarcastic meant, but did I really? Was I being sarcastic or not?

The dictionary states: *Sarcasm is the mockery of, or ridicule of, a person, situation, or thing. It is often used in a humorous or ironic way, is expressed through the intonations of the voice such as overemphasising the statement in question or certain words and is often performed with a condescending body language.*

The half year with Thor had been tiring, with a lot of effort going into trying to adapt to his ways of managing, or to fight it, as my previous vignette showed. I found the previous half year with him a waste in so many ways, especially since he had decided to leave us, stating that he had received an offer he could not refuse. As we saw it, it was probably connected with his experience of us in a job that in many ways was a step down for him.

I had not truly returned to my place in the organisation and did not feel as influential as I had been. Still, my comment was not meant to ridicule anyone. Surely not? Alternatively, was I just trying to convince myself of this?

Shortly after the meeting, I forwarded an email to him on a follow-up arising from the agenda and he replied:

> Thx ☺And sorry for my comment in the meeting, I probably misinterpreted you, I did not mean to.
>
> Thor

I immediately replied:

> Or it came out wrong. I urgently had to look up the word sarcastic [and then I repeat the definition on mockery and ridicule from above]. That was NOT my intention ☺
>
> Have a nice weekend!

On the face of it, it might appear that two adults had now cleared up a possible misunderstanding. Yet, there was probably more to it than that – evidently, it said something about our relationship. There was a possibility that he found me sarcastic, and it is a possibility that I was being not only ironic but sarcastic as well, albeit unintentionally. Alternatively, perhaps I was being passive-aggressive in telling a 'joke' that failed to conceal underlying aggression. What is more, it could easily be seen as his disciplining of me, or rather our ways of disciplining each other, and a power relation still in the making; now with a stepping down CEO.

Reflecting further, I have come to realise there is more to it than this. My 'slip of the tongue' joke reveals a 'truth' that had been talked about before by others who visited to present ideas report etc.; that the management team had become a scary place for people to talk, in which the tone seemed to be hostile. Thor had brought this up himself in a meeting, as he had been told this by some (not me) and he was wondering about it. When he raised the question in that meeting, I stated I could recognise it. Probably nobody had ever told him directly that it was also to do with him and his ways with us, as well as our ways with him. This new tone was in many ways represented in the last vignette, and the online joke (as well as his reaction) probably added to the feeling of hostility.

In many ways I was playing the role of the court jester, telling the king an unpleasant truth (Southworth, 1998) – somebody else's truth, perhaps, but a truth he did not want to hear. Thinking back, maybe it was a 'truth' I wish had remained unsaid – given '*the* truth' that we all played a part in making the tone. Besides, I was not in that sort of relationship with Thor. I was not *his* fool, though I used to be the former CEO's jester. I was his licensed fool and was welcome to tease him in public. Perhaps this had led me not to know my place, hence stepping out of line with my joke. Taking up a

generalised position without paying attention to the specific situation and being non-reflexive in the two-dimensional online meeting, my joke was indeed in bad taste.

This connects to innovation in the way that the role of the innovator[26] is often the same as that of the king's fool; there is a natural questioning of the status quo and the revealing of unpleasant truths to kings and the rest of the court, as well as people in general. Moreover, a further link to innovation – that of freedom of speech and the licence to question truth – is probably at the crux of the matter. I will return to this in the discussion.

A further perspective could be that of the new CEO who had decided to leave his post. Thor had probably also acknowledged his role as a questioner of truths as he sees them, judging from his previous experiences of implementing innovation and management strategy elsewhere. This is also a power game; in that I was trying to constrain him from implementing his truths and not granting him the freedom to speak (or rather to listen to what he really said – in many ways the same thing). This was not exploring; it was aggressive fighting. Alternatively, to avoid making the question of enabling/constraining an either-or dichotomy or a both-and-dualism of separating both elements, the power relations are true paradoxes of enabling and constraining in that they are both true at the same time (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). We were both enabling *and* constraining each other in the management team.

Taking up the role as the duellist allows me to frame it with the Western code, 'It's you or me'. Of course, it is not; all the others are part of it too, even if it is hard to see from the position of the (self-made?) duellist. In speaking or being silent, and in our embodied reactions, we are all part of the power relations, contributing to the paradox of continuity and transformation – to sameness and otherness. Besides, we are all carrying the embedded paradox of the imperative of innovation: we want change and yet we hate change.

[26] Given my argument of a broader social understanding of the emergence of innovation (or not), the role of the innovator here is someone who undertakes (or are given the role) to 'do innovation' – a role I have had together with my innovation staff and a thinking I am problematising in this thesis.

Again, we see that what we judge as true (and good) in a situation is dependent on our pre-judgements – what came before and how this is interpreted in light of the new context (Gadamer, 2013). Apart from still being embedded in power relations (Q1) this part of the narrative also links to the second question in my introduction (Q2): *How does the community sense (sensus communis) of judgement of taste (telling right from wrong, good from bad, funny from not funny, beautiful from ugly) influence processes of sameness and otherness.*

Now it is time for a further discussion and reflections on what was going on in these meetings in the light of such theory.

In a world of fools, it is the person who realises (or who can be brought to realise) his own innate folly who is truly wise. This is the universal message of the clever fool. (John Southworth, 1998)

Discussion

Introduction: Coming up against people

A thinking of the self as a social process (Mead 1934; Elias, 1991; Stacey & Mowles, 2016 – see also project 1 (p. 14) and 2 (p. 35)) and organisations as social selves' complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey & Mowles, 2016)[27] profoundly influences my perspective on change and innovation. Much traditional literature on innovation, commonly used in business schools (e.g., Furseth & Cuthbertson, 2016; Bason, 2010), originates from managerial, systemic thinking (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). It is based on the idea that autonomous individuals can stand apart from the 'system', thereby facilitating change and innovation (e.g., change agents, innovators, managers).

Most of the literature also idealises innovation. For instance, Bason (2010) in his book with the title that says it all: *Leading Public Sector Innovation. Co-creating for a better society*. He argues that the public sector is 'not up for the job yet' (ibid, p.16). His central thesis is that if civil servants were adequately prepared and committed, innovation would be possible, leading to societal improvements. However, I find that his analysis lacks an in-depth exploration of why we may not be 'up for the job', an aspect I delve into in this and my three other projects, thereby contributing to our understanding of the issue. Advocating that innovation also involves scrutinising

[27] Ralph Stacey was the one of the founders and director on the Doctor of Management programme, which this project is in part fulfilment of. Chris Mowles followed him. My thinking of social selves' as complex responsive processes of relating is a part of the ongoing discourse on the program, a conversation that has been going on for 22 years and I am now a part of. Therefore, you will see me referring to them quite often – it is then a primary source of our discourse, even if it sometimes looks like they are secondary sources in my discussion on key scholars which we lean on as a community or thought collective (Fleck, 1935).

established practices – and such scrutiny inevitably leads to questioning identities, a theme I have explored in my previous project and continue to investigate in this one.

Viewing the self as a social process implies that no one is external; thus, we are always embedded in power relations that enable and constrain, creating a paradox of continuity and transformation (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). I propose that innovation can similarly be seen as a social process, containing these dynamic paradoxes and embedded in power relations, as discussed in this project. This forms my first question (Q1) for later discussion.

It may be easy to endorse the broad concept of improvement, change, and innovation as universally positive. However, when generalised ideas of innovation (or management) are implemented, they become contextual and require local interpretation (Scott, 1998). My evolving argument suggests that in applying generalised solutions, we encounter people's deeply held beliefs and feelings about what is right, good, and desirable. My narratives have consistently illustrated this – for example, resistance from staff to a new 'trust-based' organisational model introduced by us, the frustrated 'innovators' (see Project 2), or my being labelled immoral and unethical in my role as an HR manager in Project 3, operating from my generalised belief in equal treatment.

All these situations are entwined in paradoxical 'enabling and constraining' power relations (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Furthermore, I will argue that this links to the judgements we make about what is 'good', 'right', 'beautiful', 'funny', etc. – or, as I will argue, what we find tasteful. Our social judgements (of taste) are based on our preconceptions (prejudices) (Gadamer, 2013) and are therefore connected to our interpretations of past events. In turn, our interpretations of past events influence current happenings (and our expectations of the future) – a concept known as hermeneutics. This forms my second question (Q2) for later discussion.

Q1: The power relations of the enabling and constraining (of innovation)

The will to obedience, where obedience is due

Bent Flyvbjerg's 2002 article *'Bringing Power to Planning Research'* delves into how power dynamics within a municipality he worked with derailed the processes, leading the project astray. While reading it, I was particularly struck by his question: 'Who gains and who loses, and by what mechanisms of power?' Although his focus is on urban planning, the relevance to innovation is unmistakable, highlighting similar power mechanisms at play. However, I do find the use of the term 'mechanism' somewhat problematic, which I will revisit later.

I have come to realise that I have been both a player and a pawn in a similar 'game' (Elias 1978) of enabling and constraining my staff (considering the 'raging innovator' from project 2 and the 'deviant designer' of project 3), as well as experiencing being enabled and constrained myself. The 'existential' breakdowns that have been a central theme in my projects are intrinsically linked to these power relations. It is conceivable to conclude that what I encountered in the first part of my narrative was a form of breakdown too, and thus a necessary condition for facilitating learning, change, and innovation (as discussed in project 2) (p. 35) and 3 (p. 68)).

In the first part of my narrative, where I am resisting the creation of a new senior position on the management team, Thor holds the (legitimate) power to decide the organisation's structure[28]. Max Weber (2019), in his posthumously published *'Economy and Society',* which has recently been re-translated into English, defines *power* as "every Chance, within a social relationship, of enforcing one's own will even against resistance, whatever the basis for this Chance might be (ibid., §16, p. 134, italics in original)". Viewing the events in the management team through a Weberian

[28] Under the Norwegian Working Environment Act and the Collective Agreements with the City of Oslo's unions, the formal authority for decision-making lies with the District's Co-determination Committee. In their meetings, unions and management have an equal number of votes. However, in the event of a tie, the CEO holds the deciding vote in the subsequent meeting, effectively having the final say. An interesting nuance is that I am one of the representatives and could, in theory, vote alongside the unions. But doing so would likely cost me my job, as the employer representatives always vote unanimously (without exception). Therefore, the actual decision-making occurs in the management team meetings, as I have described in the narrative. Following the decision, I found myself in the position of having to draft the case presentation, which I disagreed with, and then vote in favour of it during the committee meeting.

lens, it seems as it was Thor's will against mine and, except for Per, the rest of the team. My challenge to Thor's authority was an open act of resistance, but he enforced his will through his formal position, and I 'lost'. This aligns closely with Weber's concept of *rulership* – "the Chance that a command of a particular kind will be obeyed by given persons (ibid.)". However, I exercised the discipline to desist, reflecting Weber's idea of *discipline* as "the Chance that (...) a command will find prompt, automatic, and schematic obedience among a definite number of persons (ibid.)". Yet, the narrative illustrates that power dynamics are not simple games of rulers and obedient followers. They are emergent, socially negotiated power relations, part of a game we all play, either openly or covertly, as I will discuss later using Elias's (1978) metaphor of the power game.

Moreover, a lingering question from this Weberian interpretation of power is: What is the will, where does our will come from, and what are we fighting for? I propose that this 'will' is intrinsically linked to our perceptions of truth and the notions of right or good, thus connecting to judgements (Arendt, 1992; Gadamer, 2013; Kant, 1790).

The typology of social power by French & Raven (1959), frequently cited in management literature, identifies five types of social power: referent, expert, reward, coercive, and legitimate power. Here, power is seen as relational but also as something an individual possesses and uses. Such distinct categories are useful for research involving dependent and independent variables. Yet, this approach leads to a reified concept of power (see also Griffin, 2002, p. 200), perceived as a mechanism or tool for achieving organisational goals. This is part of my earlier expressed scepticism towards Flyvbjerg's (2002) interpretation of power mechanisms. My narrative demonstrates that power is not straightforward or easily categorised; it is complex, co-dependent, and under continuous social negotiation (Elias, 1978; Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Based on the latter writers, I argue that power is anything but a mere mechanism.

Steven Lukes (1974), a social philosopher, proposes three dimensions in the exercise of power. When I relate this to my situation, in the first dimension (*decision-making power*), Thor asserts his influence and position by making me to do something I do not want to – namely, preparing a case for the District's Co-determination Committee, which I strongly disagree with. In the second dimension (*non-decision-making power*),

it concerns who sets the agenda and how we choose to discuss certain topics (like my apprehension about Thor writing the memo for the meeting and reorganising our meetings). The third dimension (*ideological power*) revolves around shaping and influencing our thoughts and desires (negotiating our wills, echoing Weber's concept). Thor, advocating for change and a different operational approach, tries to align our desires with his vision, which I resist in our power negotiations within the management team. Viewing the events through Lukes' three dimensions, it seems that Thor was less effective in the third, ideological dimension – yet, the situation is not so straightforward. I argue that power possesses a social nature characterised by an enabling and constraining paradox. Thor influences both agenda-setting and our thinking processes in our negotiations (or quarrel) in the narrative and other situations, upon which I return shortly.

Norwegian socio-anthropologist Tian Sørhaug (2004) discusses what he calls the dual nature of power: "power is structure and process, quantity and quality, capacity and efficiency, possibility and consequence, cause, and effect (ibid., my translation, p. 28)". These paradoxes must be acknowledged in discussions about power. He continues, "To explain something solely with power often means concluding your research prematurely and settling for a (too simplistic) tautology (ibid.)".

In the narrative, I am depicted as resisting Thor and his proposals. However, the final decision[29] was Thor's, and I was aware of my position. I was showing "The Will to Obedience, where obedience is due" as the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1651, p. 352) stated in '*Leviathan*', a seminal work in political philosophy. Thor, being 'in authority', is authorised to make decisions – and to stay in the game, one must follow certain rules. Thor manages to discourage further opposition from me and could enforce his will through coercion. Ultimately, outright refusal to comply with an order is a valid ground for dismissal.

Hannah Arendt's (1954) perspective on authority offers insights that resonate with the events in my narrative. She emphasises that authority is paradoxically situated between

[29] Interestingly, the etymology of the word decision, is the meaning "to cut off"

coercion and persuasion, incorporating elements of both. Arendt articulates this by stating:

> Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. (…) If authority is to be defined at all, then, it must be in contradistinction to both coercion by force and persuasion through arguments (ibid. p. 92)

Reflecting on this in the context of my narrative, I do not perceive Thor as having this kind of authority in our relationship – but it is possible that I pragmatically chose obedience after a period of resistance. However, considering power as a socially negotiated, paradoxical dynamic that both enables and constrains, the narrative suggests there is more at play than just coercion and following orders. It implies a complex interplay of recognised authority, the limits of persuasion, and the subtle nuances of power dynamics within our interactions.

In our management team discussions, a pivotal point is the negotiation of both authority and 'truth', including our perceptions of what is right and good. This aspect is crucially relevant to innovation. Facilitating innovation likely necessitates reaching a position where one can effectively negotiate truth and meaning with colleagues. Gadamer (2013), to whom I shall return later, suggests that recognising 'truth' requires an initial understanding or negotiation of the meanings inherent in the traditions we uphold. Our understanding does not emerge in a vacuum; it is always grounded in a historical context that shapes our 'horizons'. These horizons, along with our situations, are in constant flux, dynamically interacting with each other through our engagements in various situations, themselves outcomes of prior interactions. In this project, when I refer to 'truth', I am not alluding to an objective or individualistic notion of truth, but rather to a truth that is socially negotiated and deeply embedded within power relations.

Later in this text, I will explore the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. I find his insights on identity and power pertinent and enriching for a broader understanding of power in societal contexts, moving beyond narrow perspectives of

micro-aggressions and individual power struggles. However, next, I plan to engage with the work of sociologist Norbert Elias, focusing on a more detailed examination of the social power games as they are presented in the narrative.

Transformation in the feel for the game

The game metaphor is a recurrent theme among the scholars referenced in my research. This concept was also a focus in my discussion about practice and rule following in project 3, drawing on Nicolini (2012) and Taylor (1995). Ludwig Wittgenstein ([1953], 2009) likens language to a game, positing that:

> Just think of the kinds of case where we say that a game is played according to a particular rule. The rule may be an aid in teaching the game. The learner is told it and given practice in applying it. – Or it is a tool of the game itself. – Or a rule is employed neither in the teaching nor in the game itself; nor is it set down in a list of rules. One learns the game by watching how others play it (ibid. p, 31).

Wittgenstein further suggests that the rules are discernible from the gameplay itself, akin to a 'natural law governing the play'. One can ascertain correct or erroneous play by observing players' behaviour and the reactions of those around them. He contends that even without language knowledge, one can discern, for example, a person correcting a verbal slip.

In my narrative, a similar dynamic is observable. Without prior knowledge about The District or our management team dynamics, one could infer rule violations from my behaviour when caught unprepared and publicly disciplined.

Additionally, with the arrival of a new CEO in our narrative, the 'game rules' began to evolve. Previously, certain procedures, like processing a case without a note or attending meetings unprepared, were met with light-hearted discipline. However, the game's tone has changed; unprepared participation now results in serious consequences, such as public shaming. This shift illustrates the negotiation of new behavioural expectations – engaging in discussions unprepared is no longer trivial. This evolution of rules gradually becomes intrinsic, as described by Bourdieu (1998)

who refers to it as developing ‘a feel for the game’, encompassing a historical awareness and an adeptness at anticipating others’ moves, mastering the ongoing game (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 431). My argument is that the game represents an emergent negotiation of power and authority.

The sociologist Norbert Elias (1978) links the metaphor of the game to power in his discussion of game models, utilised as didactic tools to explore society. For Elias, power is “not an amulet possessed by one person (...); it is a structural characteristic of (...) all human relationships (ibid., p. 74)”. He discusses what might be termed a dynamic of power balances, which are “always present wherever there is functional interdependence between people (ibid.)”. Elias interprets function as a relational concept. Social functions refer to interdependencies “which constrain people to a greater or lesser extent (ibid.)”.

This concept of functions is exemplified in the reciprocal interdependency between Thor and me. The power balance in our relationship is skewed. Thor is in a position to withhold or decide on matters that I want or oppose, thereby fulfilling a function for me, and vice versa, I am functionally significant to him. Furthermore, there is an intrinsic link to power, as “People or groups which have functions for each other exercise constraint over each other (ibid., p. 78)”. This dynamic is in a constant state of negotiation. This ties into what I discuss as enabling and constraining – maintaining it as a paradox and avoiding an overemphasis on constraining aspects alone, which I perceive Elias tends to do.

Considering the interaction between Thor and myself as ‘the duelling innovators’ in the guise of a two-person game (which is not exactly the case), the power ratio (Elias, 1978) skews in favour of Thor. We both must contemplate each other’s strategies, yet Thor seemingly exerts more control over our game’s trajectory. It could be argued that my lack of responsiveness in the pre-meeting, where Thor launched his ideas, resulted in diminished influence on my part. I could have been more impactful had I been better prepared. Thor skilfully manoeuvred the situation, bringing Per to his side and utilising the rules to his advantage for the management team meeting by crafting a note that placed me, and possibly others who neglected the papers, at a disadvantage.

However, my position is not entirely powerless; if it were, the game would cease to exist. The closer the power ratio between two players, the less likelihood there is of either controlling the game – a concept that might not be entirely achievable – transforming it into "a game process which neither of them has planned (ibid., p. 82, italics in original)". Furthermore, "The more the game comes to resemble a social process, the less it comes to resemble the implementation of an individual plan (ibid.)"[30].

However, the games in the narratives are not mere interactions between the two of us (although I appear to have adopted the duellist's tunnel vision of my opponent). They involve a broader group. Thor still commands more power than the other individual members of the management team, and as long as he can engage us individually, it closely mimics a two-person game, in line with Elias's (1978) description. Were we, a group of middle managers, to unite against the CEO without significant internal rifts, our collective power would be enhanced, making it tougher for Thor to steer the course of the game. This situation reminds me of a remark from a colleague reflecting on our group dynamics under Thor, stating, "He succeeded in splitting us. I am not sure if he was conscious of what he was doing, but that is the result of what has been going on here for the last half year." The relative silence from the others, while probably agreeing with me in the discussion, exemplifies this division. In effect, Thor managed to engage us individually, which augmented his chances of dominating the game. However, the dynamics could be more intricate than this. The silence might also indicate an unwillingness to take sides with either party (and/or a silent agreement with me).

Furthermore, as my second supervisor highlighted, attributing the 'splitting' solely to Thor aligns more with other perspectives on power (previously referenced and discussed) than with the social one I advocate. This splitting was a social process to which we all contributed – me in voicing the resistance, and additionally, even silence

[30] A statement that could be critiqued, as Elias seems to 'forget' that the game is a social one in the first place in his thinking

plays a role. Could their silence have been a strategic move in the game, a way to participate without overtly aligning with either side?

Alternatively, my duel-focused mindset might be obscuring the roles of other players. As Ralph Stacey (2010) observes, and this serves as a summary of my approach here,

"However, we also have the capacity to become aware of our preoccupation with the game, to reflect upon our practical action, which expresses the habitus in which we live, in order to make conscious sense of what we are doing (ibid., p 108)".

The presence of more players seemingly reduces the ability to 'plan' the outcome of the game. Thus, considering our management team within the broader context of an organisation, where the possibilities to oversee the game are limited, an organisation might be viewed as an 'ordered network of figurations' (Elias, 1978). Here, "[N]o action by either side can be regarded as the action of that one side alone. It must rather be interpreted as continuing the interweaving process and forming a part of the future interweaving of actions made by both sides (ibid, p. 84)". This perspective leads to a point where I could engage with Foucault's ideas, but I will reserve that for the next part.

In his finishing remarks on the game model, Elias (1978) states the following on power being understood,

> [U]nequivocally as a structural characteristic of a relationship, all-pervading and, as a structural characteristic, neither good nor bad. It may be both. We depend on others; others depend on us. In so far as we are more dependent on others than they are on us, more directed by others than they are by us, they have power over us, whether we have become dependent on them by their use of naked force or by our need to be loved, our need for money, healing, status, a career, or simply for excitement (ibid., p 93).

The power relations I have described in both episodes of the narrative can then be seen as a change in conversations, which again links to innovation. Stacey & Mowles (2016) expresses it this way:

> If one takes the perspective that an organisation is patterns of conversations (relational constraints or power figuration), then an organisation changes only

> insofar as its conversational life (power relations/ideology) evolves. Organisational change is the same thing as change in the patterns of conversation and therefore of the patterns of power relations and ideology. Creativity, novelty and innovation are all the emergence of new patterns of conversations and patterns of power relations and ideological themes (ibid., p. 421).

Our conversations in the management team indeed evolved, along with the rules of the game. However, it is not always certain that such changes lead to innovation or improvement. Stacey & Mowles (2016) remark, "[P]ublic, vocal conversations (group relationships) and private, silent conversations (individual minds) are both aspects of the same phenomenon. Change in one means some kind of change in the other at the same time. (…) Change is possible when conversational life is fluid and spontaneous and impossible when conversational life remains stuck in repetitive themes, and thus the power figuration is more fixed. (ibid.)". This statement seems somewhat problematic in its dichotomous view and idealisation of fluid conversation. My projects have explored how breakdowns and stagnation can be sources of innovation (or lead to further stagnation). Paradoxically, I also find this statement relevant to my experience. Comparing the periods before and after Thor, I observed that our earlier conversations were more fluid, while those depicted in this narrative were more rigid, potentially hindering the emergence of innovative patterns. This could be a romanticisation of the pre-Thor era, remembering the stuckness mentioned in earlier projects.

Furthermore, the sensed lack of conversational flow is likely tied to what I have described as freedom of speech: the comfort in joking about our practices. It may also relate to anxiety and possessing a 'good enough' feel for the game to sense whether our jokes will be well-received.

Post scriptum:

When Thor stepped down, Karen (the line manager) assumed the role of acting CEO. We both applied for the permanent position, reaching the final round of selection (this being my second attempt within a year). We told each other, "It does not really matter

who wins as long as one of us insiders gets the job". I meant it then and still do, despite the mixed feelings of not being the chosen one."

During a spring conversation, when Karen was the acting CEO, we shared our frustrations about being part of Thor's regime. We acknowledged the necessity of some of his desired changes, yet also recognised the 'unnecessary messes' he caused, with Karen specifically mentioning the restructuring decision from the narrative. She concurred with my view of the situation and had approached it differently, aware of the potential turbulence it could cause. I suspect that Thor might have influenced her selection as his successor. Karen's handling of these situations, alongside her suitability for the role, might have contributed to her selection over me.

In that conversation, I recall thinking, that I was relieved that she got the job and the responsibility of the CEO to clean up messes. Thor likely believed he was doing the same, clearing the aftermath of Jens – and my tenure.

The unlicensed fool offends by breaching the etiquette of power

In his book *'Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts'*, James Scott (1990) examines how subordinate groups adopt strategic poses in their speech, conforming to the public transcripts expected of them when addressing power (such as slaves talking to their masters). In private, they speak from the hidden transcripts, expressing their thoughts and feelings more freely. Scott contends that the contradictions and tensions between the public and hidden transcripts significantly influence outcomes.

Scott asserts that impression management in power-laden situations has been a key survival skill (ibid., p. 3). This might be what I overlooked when speaking my (and others') truth to power in various situations throughout the narrative. According to Scott, the first open statement of a hidden transcript is "a declaration that breaches the etiquette of power relations, which breaks an apparently calm surface of silence and consent, carries the force of a symbolic declaration of war (ibid., p. 8)". This dynamic

is evident in the narrative. I have previously referenced the potential duel, 'it's you or me', from the movie 'Western Code' (1932), embedding warlike imagery.

There is also a connection to assuming the role of an 'innovator'; in my projects, I have observed that viewing ourselves as change agents or innovators often involves articulating our 'truths' about the need for change. For instance, in project 3, Rita, the 'deviant' designer, labelled our treatment of inhabitants as 'unethical and immoral', which I perceived as a declaration of war, being the acting CEO of the organisation.

Two points are crucial here: firstly, when conceptualising innovation in paradoxical and emergent terms of continuity and transformation embedded in social processes, it is vital not to reify the role of the innovator, nor innovation itself. Thus, when I refer to 'innovators', I am simply indicating those assuming the role (like myself as the Head of Innovation). Secondly, 'truth' is also socially and contextually negotiated – in my forthcoming discussion of Q2, I will relate this to our (social) judgements (of taste) that are founded on our pre-judgements (prejudices) (Gadamer, 2013).

In this narrative, I was the one articulating an uncomfortable 'truth' to power. This resonates with the role of the jester – kings often valued having a fool to convey truths to them (and/or sometimes to obscure them). However, there is often a delicate balance between speaking truth and survival, or risking execution for it (Southworth, 1998).

Now, Thor's position was not one of absolute domination, unlike the scenarios Scott examines (master/slave, landowners, etc.). Power *could also be viewed as the (social) process of enabling what one believes to be right*[31] (my reinterpretation of Weber's (2019) definition of power as every chance of enforcing one's will even against resistance). Thor, like myself, is committed to realising what he deems right and good. He aims to transform our methods but confronts resistance from hidden transcripts.

The 'truth' I spoke, that people do not feel they can speak freely in the management team, had been circulating as gossip for some time. I was joking about it indiscreetly without negotiating an alliance with the new CEO to speak in this way as I had with

[31] A*nd/or maybe think you and others deserve*

the previous one. By joking about it the way I do, I am blaming Thor for the tone in the management team – however, as we have seen in my narrative, we are all a part of creating the tone. My joke also transgressed the etiquette of our power relations, which were themselves being renegotiated in this interaction – what is considered polite, how we converse, and the boundaries of our humour. On etiquette and politeness Pierre Bourdieu (1977) notes that performance is infused with power: "The concessions of *politeness* always contain *political* concessions (…) the symbolic taxes due from individuals in the exchanges which are set up in every group between the individuals and the group (ibid, p. 95)."

To follow Scott (1990):

> Being on stage in front of subordinates exerts a powerful influence on the conduct and speech of the dominant. They have a collective theatre to maintain which often becomes part of their self-definition. Above all, they frequently sense that they perform before an extremely critical audience which waits in eager anticipation for any sign that the actors are losing their touch (ibid. p. 49).

In this instance, I acted as something of a 'fly in the ointment', positioning myself as a jester while voicing my opinions about the suppression of speech. This perceived 'flippancy' of the 'fly in the ointment' became a topic of discussion with my supervisors and learning set. It underscored the complex nature of humour. My approach aimed to empathise with Thor's viewpoint and to reflect on how he might react to being accused of stifling speech. Yet, due to my consistent use of humour, it left others questioning my seriousness – was I genuinely empathetic or not? To make it perfectly clear: I now understand that my joke was in poor taste and accept that the reaction it provoked from him was justified.

Scott further states: "[T]he power to call a cabbage a rose and to make it stick in the public sphere implies the opposite, to stigmatise activities or persons that seem to call into question official realities (ibid, p. 55)". I was being labelled and stigmatised as sarcastic by Thor.

My interpretation of Scott (1990) prompted me to consider the role of the jester. Recollecting (perhaps idealising?) my time with Jens as CEO, I realised that I had

assumed the role of the fool. Interestingly, Jens had indirectly invited me into this role when he advised me to "tell me when I do stupid things". My response to this request was often to adopt the persona of the jester, an approach that Jens (and others) welcomed. For example, during a workshop where I was gathering input from line managers on a topic I now have forgotten, Jens became overly involved, answering all the questions himself. In response, I jokingly suggested in front of everyone, 'If you could just sit on your hands for a while, we might hear some other voices and get their input as well.' This elicited laughter, and Jens, with a laughter, acknowledged the point I made.

So, Thor inherited this joker without having asked for him and had not 'licensed' me to be his fool. This is partly why the joke was taken as an offence – because I no longer held that role.

According to actor and writer John Southworth (1998) the jester could only gain his identity in relation to the master. The bonds could be close, even intimate, and the jester sometimes got a "real, if incalculable influence on his master's policy and decisions" (ibid. loc. 104). Southworth states:

> The curious double-act of king and fool, master and servant, substance and shadow, may thus be seen as a universal, symbolic expression of the antithesis lying at the heart of the autocratic state between the forces of order and disorder, of structured authority and incipient anarchy, in which the conditional nature of the fool's licence ('so far but no further') gives reassurance that ultimately order will always prevail (ibid. loc. 116).

My role with Jens was really to give reassurance that order prevails. By joking. The (good) jester is able to communicate "in a uniquely acceptable form as humour was a crucial factor in the relations between them from which the fool derived much of his raison d'être (ibid. loc. 215)". Further, Southworth states that the jester is "most effective (and funny) when he contrives to hold a mirror to the king in which his patron can see a magnified image of his own attitudes and decisions and recognise for himself the folly in them (ibid., loc 227)". This is what I could do and was specifically asked by Jens to do. Being a CEO can be an isolated place with people feeling they need to say what they think the CEO wants to hear instead of what he needs to hear, so

he/she needs truths – as does the King. There is a link here with the capacity for humour to address the forbidden. We laugh at the expression of the taboo and can say it is just a joke.

Now in the case of Thor, I was not in this position, so my speaking *a* 'truth' was not heard positively; rather it was words that "would cost a wise man his life" whilst being "surprisingly enjoyable when uttered by a clown (ibid. loc. 246)". Not being the licensed fool anymore, I ended up offending. There might of course be more to it than this. As my peer in the learning set commented upon reading, it was not just that I did not have the jester-king relationship, but also my judgements of Thor's actions with us. I might have been more of a 'judge' in my relationship with him than a jester, with the element of respect and 'fondness' connected to the latter role.

I would argue that innovation is about questioning what we judge as right, good, and true - and to be heard in the questioning; a questioning embedded in power relations, which is what this narrative is about. In *What Is Sociology?* Norbert Elias (1978) comments,

> At the core of changing figurations – indeed the very heart of the figuration process – is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, and inclining first to one side and then to the other. This kind of fluctuating balance of power is the structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration (ibid, p.131)[32] .

The licence of the innovator is a negotiation between implied parties, and includes being trusted to question, a welcoming of critical thinking, freedom to speak and to explore and question particular practices. Humorous comments and jokes are also a part of this. If this aspect is shut down, it could hinder a fluid and spontaneous conversation, engendering a more fixed conversational approach that remains "stuck in repetitive themes, and thus the power figuration (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p. 421)". That is being (more) stuck in sameness.

[32] Note Elias' paradoxical use of fluctuation in connections with the words equilibrium and balance. The problem with the statement is that it states that balance and equilibrium actually do exist, even if they are (paradoxically) fluctuating. I would argue, they do not necessarily exist – however, the fluctuation does.

It needs to be added though that jokes can of course contribute to shutting down as well. I guess it could be argued that my joke in the narrative did that. It was not an invitation to explore who can speak and not, it just blamed Thor. In the same way, it needs to be added that sameness is not necessarily a 'bad' thing, as it might be implied in the way I framed it in the last paragraph. Our practices benefit from routines and professional 'scripts' which help get things done. Continuity and repetition in itself require quite a lot of hard work and energy.

I will now look closer into how these judgements are negotiated and how they influence processes of sameness and otherness. As stated in the introduction, my second question (Q2) is: *How does the community sense (sensus communis) of judgements of taste (telling right from wrong, good from bad, funny from unfunny, beautiful from ugly) influence processes of sameness and otherness?*

Q2: The sensus communis of the judgements of taste

Judgements, Kantian dualism, and the paradox of the particular and the general

Much of the managerial research on power, as previously mentioned, focuses on variable-based thinking to produce standardised knowledge for best practice application. However, management is equally about navigating specifics and exceptions as it is about generalisations. There are always exceptions that cannot be subsumed under a rule. In various managerial situations, decisions often boil down to personal/professional beliefs and judgements. Norwegian social anthropologist Tian Sørhaug (2004) aptly notes, "Beliefs and acts of faith are necessary to simplify a complex past and present while advancing an unrealised future (ibid., p. 29, my translation)".

The power dynamics I have been examining also tie into a recurring theme in this thesis: the paradox between the particular and the general. Thor advocated for what he termed knowledge-based practices, favouring a generalist approach, which in many ways is a credo in the public sector these days. The statistical methods of generalising from numerous particulars, using methods that correlate a dependent variable with one

or more independent (explanatory) variables, generate generalised 'truths'. Advocating the application of these 'truths' in the public sector often lends more weight to your assertions than 'truths' derived from practice-based explorations or conversations seeking to understand specifics in greater depth.

During my research, I was almost diverted into an extensive exploration of aesthetics. This theme piqued my interest, as I recognised aesthetics as an underlying and unexplored element across my projects, ranging from the young man aspiring to be a writer in Project 1 to the interplay between (service) design and aesthetics[33] in project 3. This curiosity was sparked by Immanuel Kant's distinction between reflective (aesthetic) and determinant judgements, which I will elucidate shortly.

Initially, I will delve into Immanuel Kant's dualistic concepts of judgement before introducing the thoughts of German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer and his work *'Truth and Method'* (2013). He critiques the dualism (and subjectivism) of Kant. Through my interpretation of Gadamer's work, the paradox of the particular and the universal/general is preserved.

Hannah Arendt (1992) notes that Kant was the first philosopher to prominently focus on the faculty of judgement. She intended to write '*Judging'* as the third and concluding part of *'The Life of the Mind'*[34]. In her lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, which aimed to connect the dots in areas Kant himself had not explicitly addressed, Arendt underscores the significance of Kant's (1790) third Critique, *'The Critique of Judgement'*, in understanding the concept of judgement.

Kant (1790) posits that humans possess three faculties of the Mind: 1) cognitive faculties; 2) the feeling of pleasure and displeasure; and 3) the faculty of desire. The cognitive faculties comprise understanding, judgement, and reason. Understanding legislates for nature, while reason legislates for morality. Judgement, according to

[33] Writing this project, I was randomly walking the streets of Boston, I turned my head to the right, and there I saw it, the office of The Institute of Human Centred Design, International Association for Universal Design. On the windows outside, they quoted the Japanese design professor Kazuo Kawasaki: "Design must balance ethics and aesthetics for the good of society" (Fjell & Fjell, 2001, p. 146), which clearly shows this link – and the Kantian dualism of a separation of these two.

[34] According to the editor Ronald Beiner in his introduction to Hannah Arendt's lectures.

Kant, is the capacity to subsume what is separate/unique under what is general. However, there are two distinct approaches to this: beginning with the general and arriving at the particular or starting with the particular and then generalising.

In Kant's first two critiques, *'Critique of Pure Reason'* and *'Critique of Practical Reason'*, the process of judging aligns with the former approach: subsuming the particular or unique under the general (rules, principles, laws). Both reason and morality are guided by certain (general) principles applied in specific situations. Kant refers to this as determinant judgement. In *'The Critique of Judgement'*, he explores the latter approach, where judgement commences from the unique and seeks the general, which he calls reflective judgement. Here, Kant's dualisms of determinate and reflective judgements are distinctly articulated.

Reflecting on project 3, I grappled with the paradox of the particular and the general, and the local and the global. I demonstrated how the practice of service design claims to start with individual needs and generalises solutions for the many based on these. I also revealed how my role as a civil servant foregrounds (standardised) general and abstract rules (considerations of what is good) applied to individual situations. This mirrors the two methodologies Kant describes – and it suggests that service design relies on reflective judgements.

However, as I also demonstrated in project 3, there exists a paradoxical relationship where the particular and the universal coexist simultaneously. This is a subject I will revisit when discussing the pre-judgements inherent in our assessment of the particular (Gadamer, 2013), as well as in our judgement of the general. This paradox is also evident in the narrative of this project; the power game we are involved in is largely a 'struggle' for what we perceive as right. We rely both on our generalised knowledge (pre-judgements) and our judgements of the specific context (being new to each other). A peer in my learning set observed that in our power game, while advocating for our generalised 'truths', we defend ourselves against competing 'truths' or competing values. This mirrors the dynamics in Project 3, where our practices in The District were criticised as unethical by Rita, the service designer.

Purposiveness is a key principle in reflective judgement – a subjective principle, as opposed to the objective rules that reason prescribes for nature. However, according to Kant, this principle is also a priori, not derived from experience. Thus, in Kant's perspective, purposiveness is both subjective and a priori.

Purposiveness can be aesthetic or teleological (again reflecting Kant's dualism). The purposiveness of an object can be seen as the harmony between the object's form and our cognitive faculties (reason and imagination), even in the absence of specific concepts for this cognition. This harmony forms the basis of a feeling of pleasure, which is central to aesthetic judgement. The feeling of pleasure or displeasure is a necessary condition for cognition shared by everyone. When we make judgements of taste, they are considered universal. The object of such a judgement is deemed beautiful (or ugly). Hence, Kant defines taste as the faculty of making reflective judgements with the aid of aesthetic judgement.

I encountered challenges using aesthetic judgements to discuss my narrative in the first three iterations before introducing hermeneutics. To apply aesthetic judgement in the narrative, using Kant's framework alone, I had to portray Thor's decisions as ugly or distasteful, which does not entirely fit; our power struggle was not solely about beauty. I had to compare the decision-making styles of Thor and my former CEO Jens (labelling Jens' decisions as beautiful and aligned with our socially constructed taste) to make the concept somewhat plausible. Yet, I discovered something intriguing in the judgements of taste, and will revisit this when incorporating Gadamer's views. For Gadamer, judgements of taste are not exclusively aesthetic but encompass the entire realm of morality and manners (Gadamer, 2013, p. 35).

Kant, on the other hand, privileges two kinds of subject matters where (subjective) reflective judgement is pivotal: aesthetic judgements of beauty in art and the sublime in nature. Conversely, what is considered morally good is associated with determinant judgement. In Kant's view, judging what is good involves applying a general/universal rule to a particular situation. He reconciles this issue by asserting that beauty is a

symbol of moral goodness (Kant, 1790a, §59, p. 392), thereby aligning the concepts of beauty and goodness[35].

Sørhaug (2004, p. 53) observes that artistic experiences involve discovering and feeling something common through the particular, without losing sight of its uniqueness. These experiences are characterised by emotions and immediate feelings of joy, pleasure, and discomfort. Every work of art is exceptional, a unique entity that enables us to experience something universal by appreciating its distinctiveness. Sharing aesthetic judgements, as Sørhaug notes, encourages expanding one's awareness. It involves choosing community and sharing a world that impacts us internally through our imagination rather than reason. While reason delineates in concepts, imagination combines in notions. Art invites participation in a 'sensing community' (sensus communis), alongside other reflexively judging subjects. This community is built around exemplary experiences (with exemplary validity, as Kant terms them (Arendt, 1992, p. 76; Kant, 1790b, p. 225)). These examples foster shared general notions that cannot be encapsulated by general concepts (Arendt, 1992)[36].

This concept is relevant to my narrative. My judgements in relation to Thor are not solely individualistic but are rooted in our collective negotiations within a sensing community. Discussions about what can and cannot be talked about, and what is humorous, are all subject to negotiation.

These points are significant. However, there are some issues to consider. Firstly, as Gadamer (2013) observes, Kant's perspective represents a departure from the long-standing Aristotelian tradition of practical knowledge (phronesis) – where beauty is viewed as an experience rather than knowledge. Gadamer notes, "But the price that he [Kant] pays for this legitimation of critique in the area of taste is that he denies taste any significance as knowledge. He reduces sensus communis to a subjective principle.

[35] This is not to say that aesthetics does not play a part in both management and power games. However, for my use, it was a too narrow perspective of reflective judgements – as I see we are fighting for what we sense as good.

[36] Upon discussing this with my colleague Rita, the service designer, she shared an interesting reflection upon our conversation on aesthetics. Her use of aesthetics, drawing, illustrations in her work as a service designer often serves the purpose of illustrating complexity – of making complex connections visible to people. An illustration of how this works was also part of my narrative at one point, but it had to be taken out due to the overall word count.

In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them a priori in the subjective consciousness (ibid, p.40)".

Secondly, another issue is that (reflexive) judgements extend beyond the aesthetic. In the narrative, the disputes between Thor and myself involve more than aesthetics, encompassing judgements about truth, goodness, humour, knowledge, and so forth. One could argue that judgements always possess an aesthetic element, yet they are more than merely aesthetic. My argument is that the sense of these qualities (taste) is negotiated through power relations. An additional point is how innovation can be perceived as distasteful because it challenges the status quo – similar to traditionalists' harsh critiques of innovative or modernist music and art.

Thirdly, Kant's dualism of determinant and reflexive judgements warrants further scrutiny. Sørhaug (2004) states that the work of art is something unique that makes us experience something universal precisely by grasping how it is unique. The key is that the unique and the universal coexist; we paradoxically judge from both general knowledge and the specific situation simultaneously. This aligns with Gadamer's (2013) perspective, to which I now turn to examine the paradoxical nature of judgement.

Taste as an embodied mode of knowing and judging

Introducing the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and hermeneutics requires some preliminary remarks. Firstly, in my reading of Gadamer (2013), I noticed that his work appears somewhat 'lost in language', a point also made by the practice theorist Nicolini (2012) when he states that hermeneutics (and post-structuralism) "tend to privilege language over other types of activity (ibid, p. 165)". This is evident considering hermeneutics' roots in text interpretation (Gadamer, 2013, p. 403). Nicolini (2012) contrasts this with most practice theorists' 'emphasis on bodily action' (ibid.). While I am exploring my embodied interactions with others and will continue to do so, I find that hermeneutics offers valuable insights into the understanding of practice, a point I will revisit shortly.

Secondly, my approach is closely linked to my writings in project 3 about practice. In the last section, I concluded that the judgements within the management team's power game are based on a sensus communis – a social community sense. Nicolini (2012) argues that practice is 'the house of the social' (ibid, p. 162). Therefore, in employing Gadamer's thoughts, I intend to situate them within the context of practice theory, building on scholars who incorporate Wittgenstein and Heidegger (see Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 1997), as I did in project 3 after examining and critiquing Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

Thirdly, a recurrent theme in my research is the exploration of meaning (central in both project 1 and 2) – which aligns with the practice theory perspective I am adopting. Philosopher Charles Taylor (1985), in his chapter *'Interpretation and the science of man'* on hermeneutics, notes, "[W]e have to think of man as a self-interpreting animal. He is necessarily so, for there is no such thing as the structure of meanings for him independent of his interpretation of them (ibid. p. 26)"[37]. Taylor, drawing on Heidegger and Wittgenstein, emphasises that experiencing one's situation through certain meanings is fundamental to human existence (ibid, p. 27). Nicolini (2012) elaborates, , "[P]eople respond to their conditions of life on the basis of how they make sense of what is going on, although such sense-making ought not to be explicit and too like decision-making. Humans are thus neither serial rational decision makers nor cultural/rule/habitus dupes (ibid, p. 163)". Additionally, people do "whatever makes sense to them to do (and say) (ibid, p. 162)". In this context, what makes sense can also be viewed as a judgement of what is perceived as true and good – thus, the conflict in the narrative also revolves around what is meaningful.[38]

[37] What he says in the following of this quote also has methodologic consequences. The writing of this project is based on interpretations of what was going on in the narrative, but as Taylor (1985) states, "[W]hat is interpreted is itself an interpretation; a self-interpretation which is embedded in a stream of action (ibid. p. 26)".

[38] Sense-making could be seen as making sense of the external world (Weick, 2011)) whereas meaning-making in this context could be seen as connected to the man's existential need for and striving to find a meaning, or *will* to meaning as Frankl (1992) calls it. However, they are connected, as I have argued for a social self and the complex responsive processes of relating, and with it, there is not a dichotomy between an 'inner' and 'external' world. Stacey (2003) states: "There is no 'internal world' and there is no social system (ibid. p. 5)".

Holt (2006) contends that engaging in a conversation inherently involves stating our positions on what we perceive as good, which I argue is based on judgements of taste. The narrative depicts a negotiation between Thor, myself, and others in an (online) public space, centring on what we consider good and humorous. The joke reveals something that was meant as funny from my side, which, with reflexive iterations throughout this project, turned out to contain a hidden truth. However, it was poorly received, leading to my understandable labelling and stigmatising (Scott, 1990) by Thor as sarcastic, a term that often implies underlying contempt. By bringing the 'hidden transcripts' of gossip – about people feeling unable to speak freely in management team meetings – into this public space, I might also be seen as labelling and stigmatising Thor as a 'bad' CEO, who stifles open dialogue. Therefore, Thor's reaction could partially stem from my gesture of making a 'bad taste' joke.

Mowles (2015), in his interpretation of Gadamer (1993), suggests that practice involves "deliberation with others and an assessment of the good in particular concrete situations' (ibid. p. 85)". He further notes, "Practice draws on universal theory but requires an assessment by people in a given situation about what is reasonable, rather than what is rational[39]. Practice involves a paradox of the general and the particular, how more universal themes are to be taken up in particular situations with others (ibid, p. 85)".

In the narrative, Thor's judgements regarding the proposed restructuring did not resonate with me. I perceived his decisions as misguided and his approach as unwise and hasty. My judgements stemmed from my sense of right and wrong in the situation, but the origin of this sense is worth considering. Relating back to my earlier discussion on Kant and reflective judgement, it could be linked to a socially negotiated taste.

Gadamer (2013) offers an intriguing critique of Kant's concept of taste. He points out that prior to Kant, taste was more commonly associated with morality than aesthetics. Gadamer argues that taste, as mentioned earlier, "embraces the whole realm of

[39] It could be argued this being an overly dualistic statement, as things can be reasonable and rational at the same time

morality and manners (ibid., p. 35)". Contrary to Kant, Gadamer considers taste to be a form of knowledge, noting:

> Good taste is always sure of its judgement—i.e., it is essentially sure taste, an acceptance and rejection that involves no hesitation, no surreptitious glances at others, no searching for reasons (ibid., p. 33).

He goes on:

> Taste is therefore something like a sense. In its operation it has no knowledge of reasons. If taste registers a negative reaction to something, it is not able to say why. But it experiences it with the greatest certainty. Sureness of taste is therefore safety from the tasteless (ibid.).

Kant posits, and Gadamer concurs, that while disagreements over taste can arise, they cannot escalate into disputes – beauty, after all, is in the eye of the beholder. Yet, aesthetic judgement extends beyond mere private or individual perception. When judging what is considered beautiful, you implicitly make a universal claim, expecting others to concur with your viewpoint. This is evident in my narrative where I questioned Thor's judgements and perhaps even implied that others should share my perspective.

Gadamer views taste as an intellectual faculty of differentiation, functioning "in community, but is not subservient to it (…). [S]ure taste preserves a specific freedom and superiority (…). It follows that taste knows something—though admittedly in a way that cannot be separated from the concrete moment in which that object occurs and cannot be reduced to rules and concepts (ibid. p. 34/35)." And he further states,

> Like reflective judgment, it belongs in the realm of that which grasps, in the individual object, the universal under which it is to be subsumed. Both taste and judgment evaluate the object in relation to a whole in order to see whether it fits in with everything else—that is, whether it is 'fitting'. One must have a 'sense' for it—it cannot be demonstrated. (ibid. p. 34).

The paradox of the particular and the universal is preserved and, in the judgement, reciprocally influencing each other. Gadamer uses the example of the judge presiding in a court case, who does not just apply the (universal) law in the concrete situation. His/her judgement is also developing law.

> That means nothing less than that judging the case involves not merely applying the universal principle according to which it is judged, but co-determining, supplementing, and correcting that principle. From this it ultimately follows that all moral decisions require taste — which does not mean that this most individual balancing of decision is the only thing that governs them, but it is an indispensable element. (ibid., p. 36)

The entire management team is involved in the negotiation of taste and the correction of our principles. In evaluating Thor's actions and decisions, I am like "[t]he man who finds that what is bad goes against his taste has the greatest certainty in accepting the good and rejecting the bad—as great as the certainty of that most vital of our senses, which chooses or rejects food (ibid.)". Similarly, Thor likely perceived my joke as being in poor taste.

This underscores why I consider the concept of taste highly pertinent to my discussion of the events in the narrative (and in my earlier projects). It brings to mind the incident that occurred after Thor resigned: my entry into a bar, freezing and then fleeing at the mere sight of him. In writing about this, I referred to it as a gut reaction, a term I have used in previous projects to describe similar responses. I argue that the power dynamics we engage in are profoundly embodied; they evoke strong emotions, akin to bodily reactions to distasteful food when encountering the 'other'. Our bodies know. *Taste is an innate, embodied, and generalised form of knowledge that grounds our judgements in the particular contexts.*

Returning to the theme of innovation: as innovators, we frequently find ourselves questioning the tastes of others, confronting the status quo and the established ways of doing things (as evidenced in my projects). This clash with the tastes of others partly explains why 'doing' innovation, both for others and ourselves, can be such a profoundly (embodied) painful experience.

The (idealised) hermeneutic dialogue

As previously mentioned, Taylor views humans as self-interpreting animals, and this is the link to identity and processes of the self. In hermeneutics, interpretation is a key

concept. Gadamer's approach to interpretation underscores the paradoxical interplay between the particular and the universal. We interpret specific situations based on our prejudices as pre-judgements, meaning that the past is in the present and influences both our current understanding and our interpretation of the past (in light of the emergent future). We are in a constant state of both forming and being formed. Jeff Malpas (2018), in his article for the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, asserts, "The prejudicial character of understanding means that, whenever we understand, we are involved in a dialogue that encompasses our self-understanding and our understanding of the matter at issue (ibid.)."

History plays a pivotal role in Gadamer's thinking as part of our pre-judgement and understanding, a theme evident in my narrative. The significance of our history is negotiated in the meetings I have analysed, for example, in 'clearing out the messes of former CEOs', as previously discussed. Gadamer emphasises the importance of being aware of our historically-determined situation, using the phenomenological term 'horizon' (Malpas 2018; Kögler, 2014). However, understanding and horizons are dynamic, continually reshaped through interactions with others. Herein lies the essence of hermeneutical dialogue. According to Gadamer, negotiating horizons involves understanding the subject matter by establishing a more common horizon, where our prejudices are questioned. Horizon, in a sense, represents the lens through which we view the world, encompassing history, experiences, and the broader context of meaning in a situation. Understanding is a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 317) which "always involves the formation of a new context of meaning that enables integration of what is otherwise unfamiliar, strange, or anomalous. In this respect, all understanding involves a process of mediation and dialogue between what is familiar and what is alien in which neither remains unaffected (Malpas, 2018)". This interpretative and perpetual process of understanding connects Gadamer to Wittgenstein (1953/2009).

In my research, I have linked innovation to the social processes of the self, which in turn is connected to the mediation of the familiar and the alien. I have used terms like sameness and otherness, relating innovation to ontological questions of identity. In project 2, I discussed Ricoeur's (1992) 'Oneself as another', where sameness refers to

the constancy of identity, and selfhood to the contextual experiences of the self in social settings. Narrative identity reconciles the permanence of identity (sameness) with the dynamics of otherness mediated through selfhood, liberating itself from sameness. *I argue that the dynamics explored in this project can also be viewed as a power game of narratives; the power of the more compelling narrative is essentially a power game of negotiated identities*.

My further argument is that:

- Innovation of services is dependent on hermeneutic dialogues where our judgements and the prejudgements of what we consider good, true, right, and knowledgeable are being negotiated.
- These negotiations of *taste* are embedded in power relations, thereby connecting to ontological questions of identity and the social processes of the self.

The narratives do not explicitly detail 'doing innovation' per se but illustrate some negotiations that both enable and constrain the possibilities of innovation, mindful of the paradox between continuity and transformation. As mentioned in the introduction, the vignettes perhaps more visibly demonstrate constraints. In reflecting on this, I find that the sensation of being constrained tends to amplify awareness more than the experience of being enabled, akin to the narrow focus experienced in the duellist's tunnel vision. However, upon reflecting on the seventh iteration, I did identify some enabling aspects in the narratives.

Gadamer's approach could be critiqued for being overly idealistic in his conceptualisation of dialogue, as well as for being too language-centric (Nicolini, 2012) and lacking in addressing social practices (Kögler, 2014). In many ways, my exploration in this narrative exemplifies how organisational conversations are sometimes stifled by the power dynamics inherent in the games we play, in which attempts at innovation can be suppressed. This partly explains why innovation is challenging to achieve; it *could be* regarded as just another game we are playing.

Kögler (2014) suggests that it "would take an additional critical-hermeneutic mode of reflexivity to distance oneself from one's power-ingrained habits and practices to allow for the possibility of a truly transformative dialogue (ibid. p. 57)". This transformation did not occur in the narrative; however, my exploration of it might have been a beginning, as I have evolved through the reflexive process. I will revisit this transformation in the synopsis.

Conclusions

Q1: The negotiations of licensing the innovating fool

My first question was: *How do power relations that are paradoxically both enabling and constraining contribute to the paradox of continuity and transformation?*

From my exploration of this question, I argue that the power dynamics prevalent in the workplace significantly influence innovation processes. Perceiving the self as a social process implies that we are invariably embedded in power relations that both enable and constrain, reflecting a paradox of continuity and transformation. Similarly, innovation can be viewed as a social process, characterised by these dynamic paradoxes and embedded in power relations, as discussed in this project.

I have explored the interactions between the new CEO of our organisation, myself, and the rest of the management team. My struggle was to be enabled and not disabled in this context. I have also demonstrated how the rules of the game were negotiated and contended that, in the context of innovation, the manner in which the power game was played – the negotiated rules and changes in our understanding of the game – led to more rigid conversations, fixed in our positions and closed to exploration. I also highlighted how conversational fluidity can facilitate change. However, to avoid idealising and reifying fluidity, I have shown that sometimes, stagnation and breakdowns are necessary for change (or continuity) to occur, as evidenced through my projects.

Furthermore, I explored the role of humour as a means of articulating hidden transcripts. Finding myself as an unauthorised jester, I presented an uncomfortable

truth to power and was (understandably) dismissed and labelled as sarcastic. I propose that critically exploring our judgements of taste (what is considered good/bad, funny/not funny - and true) could be central to enabling innovation. In some respects, the role of the innovator mirrors that of the jester in relation to the king and court in bygone days. I further contend that the innovator's licence is a negotiation among involved parties – the social selves – encompassing trust to question, receptiveness to critical thinking (even when it is challenging), freedom of speech, and the liberty to scrutinise specific practices, all contributing to the paradox of continuity and transformation.

Through these reflections, I aim to embody John Southworth's (1998) wisdom, "In a world of fools, it is the person who realises (or who can be brought to realise) his own innate folly who is truly wise. This is the universal message of the clever fool (ibid, loc 225)".

Q2: The judgements of taste and (enabling) hermeneutic dialogues

My second question was: *How does the community sense (sensus communis) of judgement of taste (telling right from wrong, good from bad, funny from not funny, beautiful from ugly) influence processes of sameness and otherness?*

In understanding specific situations, we base our judgements on our prejudgements. We depend both on our generalised knowledge and on our assessments of what we experience within the situation. My exploration revealed a negotiation within the sensus communis regarding the rules of discourse – what can and cannot be discussed, how it should be approached, and what is deemed humorous or tasteless. This is essentially a negotiation of our taste, which, according to Gadamer (2013), is an embodied form of knowledge. In judging a particular situation, we also negotiate principles and the general. I posit that for innovation to occur, such negotiations of taste might be necessary; these are invariably enmeshed in power dynamics and tied to the social processes of the self.

I also contend that a critical hermeneutic dialogue of reflexivity (Kögler, 2014) could establish a basis for merging the horizons of the particular and the general, potentially fostering change and innovation within public sector practices. However, this is not a simple solution; as demonstrated in my narrative, power dynamics can impede dialogue. It is important to recognise that horizons are likely never fully merged but are in a state of continual negotiation.

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Social selves and the paradox of continuity and transformation

The central question guiding my research has been: *How do social processes of self contribute to a paradoxical potential for continuity and transformation in the public sector?*

My research focuses on innovation within Norway's public sector. Essentially, my four projects have been an exploration of the challenges inherent in innovating practices and services.

Returning to Gadamer (2013): "My real concern was and is philosophical, not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing (ibid., loc 351)". This concern echoes my question in Project 1: What happens to us when we try to innovate. This thesis does not offer prescriptive methods for innovation; rather, it is a reflection on the difficulties encountered[40]. Through my investigation, I may have unearthed some truths (Misak 2004), but I am aware that such inquiries never truly conclude; and the reflections will continue in the synopsis.

A succinct answer to the question of why innovation is so challenging, based on this final project, is that the processes of social selves inherently involve power relations.

[40] The greater the change, the more challenging it becomes. Innovation that aligns with our self-perception tends to be more manageable and can even pass by unnoticed. My focus is on situations where the process becomes more difficult, particularly when breakdowns occur, much like a carpenter who, upon accidentally hitting their thumb with a hammer, suddenly becomes acutely aware of the hammer they are holding.

These dynamics can either facilitate transformation or lead to the suppression of exploratory ventures into otherness, thus reinforcing sameness and continuity. This project presents additional examples of these complex processes.

To reiterate, I argue that service innovation relies on hermeneutic dialogues, where our judgements and the preconceptions of what is considered good, true, right, and knowledgeable are negotiated. These negotiations of taste are steeped in power dynamics and linked to ontological questions of identity, the social processes of self, and the paradox of continuity and transformation. The role of the fool, whether licensed or not, in calling out folly, is part of these negotiations. Furthermore, innovation can often be seen as just another game we play – ultimately, it is possible to engage in hermeneutic dialogues of exploration without changing anything.

Innovation is far from straightforward; paradoxically, while it is sought after, it can also be profoundly unwelcome. When we find innovators meddling, we often find the town is not big enough for all of us, giving them less than 24 hours to get out, and making it clear they are up for the duel if they do not. “It’s you or me”.

Synopsis – more than a summary

Core to my life is the theme of change. The important stories in my life are about how I changed, how hard it was to change, and that sameness lurks as a shadow side of every change project. From my young (suffering) years into taking up the role as an innovator in the public sector to support and facilitate change and innovation of others (which I have persistently been critiquing throughout my thesis) it is clear to me how threatening change can be to the sense of self and social relationships. All my projects are foremost about *why 'doing' innovation and taking up the role as an innovator is so hard.*

In the following synopsis, I reassess the four projects and their connection to the overarching theme of *social processes of self and their contribution to a paradoxical potential of continuity and transformation*.

In the following, I will summarise the four projects, as I am able to make sense of them reflexively from the point of looking back, not being immersed in the actual writing of them. I will relate each of them to the overarching theme of my research.

Project 1 – The Young Man's Re-imagined Self

Project 1 centres on preparing for research and takes the form of an 'auto-intellectual' exploration. It delves into the influences on my thinking, stemming from practices I have engaged in and relevant readings. Revisiting this project, certain themes now stand out more clearly in hindsight than they did at the time of writing. It is striking how these themes are deeply interconnected and how they relate to my other projects. I began by describing a significant breakdown in my younger days, finding myself curled up on the floor, despairing over the meaninglessness of life. This episode I termed the 'Shipwrecked I' – a breakdown of a Western, individualistic, and isolated self. Throughout this exploration, overarching themes emerged: the pursuit of meaning, the occurrence of breakdowns, and a desperate need for change. These themes have been a consistent thread throughout all my projects, informing my research questions.

Narration is another theme, linked to meaning and breakdown, appearing from the first page of the project. As a young man dreaming of becoming a writer, I used writing to make sense of my experiences. Whether it was short stories or (admittedly not very good) poems, writing helped me make sense of my encounters with the world, which I perceived as 'outside' of my sad 'inside' (autonomous/Kantian) self. While writing provided solace, it did not alleviate my loneliness or fulfil my longing for love and connection. Reflecting on this project and the process of writing most of the projects, I realise I probably have an egotistical[41] wound from my family upbringing and the society of a small west coast town in Norway.

My mother was depressed for several years of my childhood. Mirrored in me is her upbringing in a lighthouse on a remote, tiny island off the north coast of Norway. My grandfather, the lighthouse keeper, cared for my grandmother who suffered from tuberculosis, often with limited access to the children. Writing this thesis coincided with the loss of both my parents, leading to frequent discussions about our childhood with my siblings, both at their bedside and after their passing. My sister recalls a conversation with mother concerning her philosophy of child-caring, where she stated that she aimed at making us self-sufficient. This is probably what I did and did not at the same time. Studying to become a gestalt therapist, I found Gordon Wheeler's (1998) perspective on egotism particularly insightful for exploring my childhood, when stating, "By uncritically maintaining the introject, 'Nobody will pay any attention to me', he is compelled to reply, 'so I have to do it for myself' (ibid., p. 83)."

Despite probably having enough people around, including my mother, to care for me, such experiences are common to a greater or lesser degree. This realisation resonates with me as I see its recurrence in the social process of writing these projects. The breakdowns I have experienced at work and throughout this doctorate often manifested

[41] Revisiting new literature used on the Norwegian Gestalt Institute, where I trained, I find that they have changed the word egotism into self-consideration (Skottun & Krüger, 2017) to avoid connotations to egoism. Self-consideration is a way of staying with your choices and thinking things through for/by yourself. When it is too much of self-consideration you enter into a bubble where others find it hard to reach you, as you are sometimes unable to reach out to others. The polarity would be giving yourself to others spontaneously and impulsively. Both can be healthy, too much mono-polarity of the one is as dangerous as too much of the other.

as narcissistic tendencies[42] (as seen in Project 2), leading to introspection about the perceived meaninglessness of my projects and work life. This introspection made it challenging to maintain meaningful relationships, effectively isolating me from both others and my own sense of self.

In Project 2, I delved into the societal and social dimensions of narcissism. This exploration helped me realise that narcissism extends beyond merely taking care of oneself in a sad manner. I argue that the narcissistic breakdown is also social; it involves adopting a distorted and unlovable version of how I believe others perceive me, reflecting Mead's (1934) concept of the 'generalised other'. Paradoxically, this occurs while still maintaining the self-love characteristic of narcissism. Reflecting on my descriptions of change, particularly the relational shift in my life and the rescue found in embracing others, I recognise that sameness is always a lurking presence. Change is not a straightforward, linear journey.

An important theme of change, gaining more significance upon revisiting Project 1, is my struggle with my sexual identity as a young, suffering man who was gay but unable to embrace his gay side fully. When presenting my research, I share an excerpt from my diary from the night I came out. The entry, written late at night in a Berlin gay bar, shows my handwriting becoming slightly intoxicated and indistinct as I notice an intriguing man. Revisiting these notebooks while preparing for my first project, I discovered that I had recorded my experiences in real-time, engaging in written self-dialogue about my next steps, culminating in a decision to act. A blank line in the diary marks the moment I stood up to approach the man, with the next entry, written the following day, radiating the joy of newfound love.

[42] This is not meant as a diagnosis in this context. Freud (1914) saw it as a normal and healthy process of taking care of ourselves (given we had enough sense of love from others). He states, "Narcissism in this sense would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature (ibid. p. 2)." Further, "A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love (ibid. p. 18)" The problem starts when we have to make up the feeling of love for ourselves. Besides, it does include some 'omnipotence of thoughts' and shutting out of others, which is the way I take it up here.

Interestingly, I narrated my coming out, which symbolised a reaching out to others and marked a significant relational shift in my life. I described this transformative event as the 'Rescue of the Shipwrecked I'. Sharing my coming out story in Project 2, I directly connected with the imperative of (embodied) change, a major theme of the project. This narrative underscores the interplay between personal transformation and the broader theme of change and innovation..

Reflecting on Project 1, now from the perspective of three projects later, I revisited Peter Marris' (1986) book *'Loss and Change'*, which I had not read at the time. Marris compellingly links the loss of meaning to grief,

> Our purposes and expectations come to be organised about particular relationships which are then crucial to the way we constitute the meaning of our lives. When we lose such a relationship, the whole structure of meaning centred upon it disintegrates (…) If grieving is a response to loss of meaning, then it should be provoked by all situations of loss, including social changes, where the ability to make sense of life is severely disrupted (ibid., p vii).

The loss I sensed (and in my pre-coming out period I would include missing and longing) was severe. Marris states,

> (T)he construction of meaningful perceptions is cumulative, so that the more fundamental the revisions which have to be made, the more of the structure must be dismantled, and the more disruptive revision becomes (ibid., p. 10).

In my countless walks past the only gay bar in the town where I lived, I hesitated to enter, fearing the loss of myself; unconsciously fearing that embracing my gay identity would change me irrevocably. I was torn between yearning for it and fearing it deeply. This mirrors the challenge in adopting the role of an innovator, as our job is to facilitate change, pushing people towards transformations they may simultaneously fear and desire. The more fundamental the change we advocate for, the higher the stakes. Marris refers to this as the conservative impulse (ibid, p. 6) – the instinct to protect our sense of meaning and identity, a topic I will revisit later.

During the process of writing Project 1, my supervisors and peers often asked me, 'What is the meaning of your queerness, how did it contribute to the way you think, and why should we read about your encounters in the bars?' Upon completing the

project, I concluded that I did not fully understand the intellectual significance of my queerness, but it certainly means something, just as straightness does to heterosexuals[43]. In my progression report, I noted that, due to all my reflections (or, as Marris would say, the fundamental revision involved), my queerness probably holds greater meaning for me[44].

Looking back, I find this particularly intriguing because I see numerous connections to the overarching question of why innovation is so challenging, as well as the difficulties faced by innovators and change agents. It boils down to our sense of identity – how humans interpret life, a process co-created with others. Innovators often confront people's sense of meaning, including their own. Reimagining myself as gay was a fundamental experience that significantly influenced my thinking. Engaging with others' sense of meaning includes negotiating the innovator's own sense of meaning – it is about navigating competing values and identities: 'I define myself as this because you are defined like that', which is how we become insiders and outsiders to one another (Elias & Scotson, 1994).

Another notable aspect from my first project, and continuing to be relevant in my subsequent projects, is the relational shift in my life. This shift became apparent in my coming out experience and later during my exploration of gestalt therapy. I have realised that a sense of meaninglessness is closely linked to a cognitive feeling of loneliness and isolation, paralleled by a loss of connection with others. Conversely, I have discovered that meaning is deeply tied to maintaining genuine connections with others. This understanding does not suggest a rigid dualism; rather, it underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping our sense of meaning and fulfilment. My training as a gestalt therapist introduced me to the concept of social selves (Clarkson & Mackewn, 1993; Perls, 1957; Perls et al, 2003)[45], which was later

[43] Which of course is based on a dualism, as there are many states other than straightness and queerness – but I will keep it in just with this comment.

[44] I will return to this in the critical evaluation of my research when having a closer look on Michel Foucault.

[45] It is interesting to note (as I did in Project1) that in gestalt therapy as presented by Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (2003) *self* in itself is connected to change: it is not a structure but a changing process. Whereas I argue that the social self is a paradox of continuity and transformation.

reinforced by Ralph Stacey's writings (2003), inspired by pragmatists, group analysts, and sociologist Norbert Elias. These influences profoundly impacted my research.

My initial research question, stemming from Project 1, arose from my belief that I could not have been the only one experiencing fear and meaninglessness in attempting to change or innovate (as corroborated by Marris). Thus, I asked: 'What happens to us when we try to innovate?'

I concluded Project 1 by affirming that change is deeply intertwined with a profound and life-saving sense of meaning. Reviewing my old notebooks from my youth, I encountered a quote seemingly from Nietzsche: 'Tunc bene navigavi, cum naufragium feci' – 'I then had a good voyage, although I was shipwrecked.' Reflecting on this quote now and looking back on the sometimes-shipwrecking process of drafting a thesis, I conclude that the journey was indeed worthwhile.

Project 2 – The Breakdowns of Innovators

In 2015, I took on the position of Head of HR and Innovation in the District, an organisation consisting of 1500 individuals dedicated to providing services for children, young people, disabled individuals, and elderly adults. Project 2 marks the start of my exploration into the experiences of innovators within the public sector in Norway. In this project, I delve into the challenges and emotional breakdowns that we, as innovators, encountered while fulfilling our roles.

Jens, the boss who hired me and gave me the title of Head of HR and Innovation, stated upon my hiring that 'innovation is not as much about technical gadgets as it is about people'. I agree. During the writing of Project 2, my peers consistently asked me, 'You seem to say that change and innovation are the same, but to us, they are not.' As a reply I came up with a definition of innovation as change (of something) for the better (see Project 2, p. 53).

Upon completing all four projects, I would say that most of my findings hold relevance regardless of whether we label it organisational development, change, transformation,

or innovation. However, I do revisit the literature on innovation during the critical evaluation of my research in the section following the project summaries (see p. 172). This process enables me to prepare statements about the contributions made to the existing theoretical framework.

In Project 1, I explored how I came to embrace the belief that the self is a social process, symbolised by the concept of rescue. However, during the writing process of Project 2, I discovered that the discontinuity of my individualistic sense of self was not as straightforward as I initially thought. The notion of the autonomous Kantian self persists, like a ghost in the machine (Kitzler, 2007). Reviewing my text, I still identify remnants of this individualistic perspective. For example, when I state in the project, 'the loss of meaning takes place *within* me' (italics added), this spatial reference to the self indicates individualistic thinking. This observation underscores the challenge of embracing the concept of social selves, which almost feels like contemplating the unthinkable within Western culture.

The initial iteration of my project was written during the summer of 2020, following a hectic spring of working long hours from home and numerous team meetings addressing the Covid-19 challenges in the District. While innovation was not explicitly discussed, we were continually adapting and finding new ways to navigate the unprecedented situations. It was a period filled with virtual meetings and, reflecting on it now, I realise these interactions felt less embodied and more draining. This feeling of being drained led to a sense of isolation and disconnectedness (echoing the Shipwrecked I from project 1).

When summer arrived and I had the opportunity to start working on Project 2, I intended to reflect on my current work without feeling trapped in the past, as I sometimes felt while writing my first project. However, I experienced a breakdown of boredom or perhaps even depression. Everything in life, especially work, seemed utterly meaningless to me during that time. This sense of meaninglessness differed from the breakdowns I explored in Project 1, yet I can discern the connections between them—the existential breakdown of a young man and the middle-aged man's anguish over the meaninglessness of his actions and inactions.

Commencing this project, my approach was initially centred almost narcissistically on feelings of boredom. Through the sometimes-arduous process of iterating the project seven times, my perspective gradually expanded to include my colleagues' experiences. This shift from a personal to a social viewpoint in the context of emotional breakdowns within the innovation field marked a crucial transition. I came to understand that peer critique was not an obstacle to be combated with frustration (or narcissism?), but rather a form of valuable and supportive feedback. This realisation helped me make sense of the breakdowns experienced not only by myself but also by my colleagues as we endeavoured to facilitate innovation.

The narrative includes three colleagues in innovator roles: The Frustrated Service-Designer, the Raging Innovator, and myself, the bored Head of Innovation. Various vignettes depict our interactions; for instance, a heated debate about the best way to recruit and support 'change agents' within the organisation, which nearly drove the Raging Innovator to a form of madness. This was likely due to his frustration at being unable to initiate the desired changes upon joining The District, leading to his isolation. Another significant vignette details the launch of a major organisational development programme, where the Service Designer and I attempted to implement new policies (termed trust-based practices) involving a reorganisation of services. The event evolved into a profound breakdown of our plan, vociferously criticised by some attendees. The session ended with the intervention of a senior practitioner who asserted that little needed to change, "The users will be the same, our colleagues will be the same, and we will still know how to do our jobs". Indeed, a very good defence of the meaning of sameness.

Reflecting on this narrative, I now recognise the deeper importance of these episodes. Firstly, they emphasise the social aspects of change rather than focusing solely on the innovators' emotional breakdowns. Secondly, they highlight the social paradox of continuity and transformation, a theme I explore throughout the thesis. The imperative for change often coexists with a desire for sameness or the 'conservative impulse', as termed by Marris (1986). Thirdly, these experiences connect to the discussion of practice habitus in my subsequent project, where the knowledge of 'what' and 'how' to perform tasks is intrinsically linked to identity.

A notable aspect of the narrative is how we, as innovators, embraced the imperative of change, embarking on a 'heroic' journey to deliver innovation. However, this journey led to breakdowns that, in retrospect, presented opportunities for learning and change (Dewey, 1910/1933; Koschmann et al, 1998; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011).

In discussing emotional breakdowns within the field of innovation, starting with my experience of boredom, I initially provided an overview of the literature on boredom. However, this focus narrowed with each iteration, as most literature on boredom examined the breakdown 'within' the individual. Jack Barbalet's (1999) insight that boredom is also a social imperative towards meaning was pivotal. It led me to explore the high expectations of individualistic, modern western workers for work to provide meaning[46]. I examined this concept with the aid of Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen (2016), Max Weber (2002), and Charles Taylor (1989), who trace the origins of this expectation back to Christian values and Protestant ethics.

My conclusion was that when innovators fail to control the processes of innovation, it can lead to emotional breakdowns into meaninglessness. This was further explored in the context of our societal obsession with 'doing innovation', influenced by Taylor's (1989) observation of the Western belief in leaving the world more prosperous than we found it, and the perception of time as linear, striving towards a 'better' future (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). My breakdown in boredom reflected a breakdown in the perception of time, characterised as a *Langeweile* or slowing of time (Barbalet, 1999). I also discovered that overt breakdowns in anger and covert breakdowns in boredom were two sides of the same narcissistic coin – emotional responses that can occur when one takes on the role of an innovator amidst the occasional sense of meaninglessness in innovation efforts.

Reflecting on the connection between the first two projects, I maintained a special interest in narration, such as narrating my coming-out in real time. This focus continued in Project 2, as the summer breakdown occurred while I struggled to narrate. Paul Ricoeur's (1992) concept of narrative identity in '*Oneself as Another'* provided a

[46] Which also found its way into the Norwegian Working Environment Act, aiming at ensuring a working environment that provides the basis for a health-promoting and meaningful work situation.

framework for understanding this struggle. Ricoeur develops the idea that narrative identity mediates between selfhood and sameness, connecting us to ourselves and others. This brought me back to the significance of social selves in my thesis, a theme I discuss further in my first argument (p. 191). The narcissistic breakdowns in boredom and anger, resulting from the inability to 'deliver' change, could be seen as breakdowns in the capacity to narrate and relate to others' narratives.

Throughout the project, metaphors of caged animals, particularly birds, inspired by Tina Øllgaard Bentzen's (2019) work, served as a powerful tool for reflection. Bentzen's exploration of the Danish trust-based model, similar to what we were implementing, posed the question, 'The birdcage is open, but will the birds fly?' This metaphor led me to consider the cage as a symbol of confinement, boredom, safety, meaning, and identity, mirroring the experiences of a senior nurse who defended the comfort of sameness. Personally, I felt trapped in the monotony of sameness, yet engaging in narration, as suggested by Ricoeur, became a means of escaping this sense of confinement.

In hindsight, Project 2 may seem somewhat dichotomous and preoccupied with fitting all pieces together neatly. The paradoxes of continuity and transformation, along with other complexities, were more thoroughly explored in the final two projects.

Project 3 – The Immoral Habits and Reflexive Dialogues

Project 3 delves into the potential rejection or embracement of innovations that stem from exploring the specific needs of citizens when facing the generalised habitus of public servants' practice. The narrative centred on a service design project within The District, focusing on innovatively meeting inhabitants' needs. Service design fundamentally involves narratively exploring individuals' needs, starting with the particular and then generalising through a step-by-step development of concepts and solutions for better citizen services – a process I critique.

The project aimed to investigate whether our methods in The District might contribute to or even create social exclusion. Unexpectedly, my own practices as an HR manager were called into question for being exclusive.

My colleague, Service Designer Rita, explored the needs of Anne, a low-income single mother from a minority background, reliant on social services and with children struggling to fit in. Anne, sleep-deprived and anxious, had been working as a temp unqualified care worker in our Elderly Services team for four years. Initially, without having met Anne, I maintained a detached, professional stance as a public servant, viewing her situation as an 'interesting case' and recognising the HR limitations regarding unqualified workers' permanent employment.

Rita's engagement with Anne's case appeared to me as crossing professional boundaries. She informed me about her efforts to assist Anne in finding work and planning for an apprenticeship. Rita's view that there was something unethical and immoral about Anne's treatment by us as her employer initially provoked a strong reaction from me. As acting CEO and HR Manager, I was taken aback by being labelled immoral and unethical, along with our colleagues. However, a turning point, and indeed a breakdown, occurred when I began to acknowledge the validity in Rita's accusations and realised the complexity of Anne's situation.

In my reflective discussion, I turned to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of habitus – the "subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 86)". This framework helped me understand the generational legacy of public servants and my role within it. This legacy could be described, perhaps with slight irony, as morally upright guardians of established laws and procedures; egalitarian distributors of public goods to citizens; impartial functionaries treating similar cases identically – and resistant to perceived instances of unfair special treatment, as was my initial fear in Anne's case.

Habitus is the product of generations of practitioners. To Bourdieu practice is a site of the dialectic of *opus operatum* (the objectified products of our practice) and the *modus operandi* (the ways we work around here – the products of historical practice). I argued that any organisation is a locus of multiple practices, with different qualities of

habitus based on gender, education, roles, and specific practices in the different workplaces. The laws and procedures to which we adhere are informed by concerns about fairness and the protection of individual rights, but such rule-following may fail to protect a particular individual, as in Anne's case.

Reflecting on the narrative, it was an unpleasant surprise to find myself in a situation which drew parallels with the case of Adolf Eichmann and his responsibilities for the Holocaust industries. By referring to Hannah Arendt's (1963) report from his trials and her *Human Condition* (1958) I stated that if we insist on bureaucratically 'treating similar cases similarly', acting according to the rules of the modus operandi without reflection, we may end up doing evil to the many Annes out there, each of whom is a unique individual with a need for and entitlement to unique treatment. However, the literature on bureaucratic violence (Bauman, 1989; Cooper & Whyte, 2017; Norberg, 2021) often overlooks that while rule-following can be violent, its absence can be equally harmful. The lack of bureaucracy, implying special treatment of individual cases based on their unique needs without considering the implications for similar cases, can also result in violence. My thesis contributes to this discussion by highlighting the paradoxical nature of bureaucracy and its potential for harm. In my forthcoming argument (p. 197) I stress the importance of recognising this paradox when working on innovation.

Exploring the challenges of adopting the role of an innovator in the public sector, I referred to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which could be seen as an anti-innovative genealogy[47]. Bourdieu describes habitus as an embodied history, a system of dispositions, a 'present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future' (Bourdieu, 1990, p 50), inherently resistant to new information that challenges established norms. Yet, change does occur, embodying the paradox of continuity and transformation. Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been critiqued for reification (Taylor, 1995, p 175;

[47] As noted in project 3 not all researchers agree on Bourdieu's supposed failure to address change. The sociologist Bridget Fowler (2020) calls this the orthodoxy concerning the heritage of Bourdieu. She points to his later writing on social *crisis* as a source of (historical) change.

Nicolini, 2012, p. 64), even though he advocates a reflexive stance to mitigate this issue (Nicolini, 2012).

Political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott argues that standardisation is fundamental to the practice of civil servants (Scott, 1998), forming a cornerstone of the modern state. Typification is essential for the modern state, aiding in tasks such as tax collection, property registration, and remote management. Standardisation in some ways served as an emancipatory tool, distinguishing individuals from mere objects owned by monarchs or landowners and guaranteed (more) equal treatment. However, as Anne's case illustrates, standardisation also harbours the potential for unjust and harmful treatment of individuals. Recognising that the absence of standardisation – radical individualisation without fairness – can be equally violent, *I advocate a reflexive stance focusing on the paradox of the particular and the general* in a Hegelian process where the "contradictions are preserved but brought together in a higher state (aufgehoben) (Mowles, 2021, p 117)".

In looking back on project 3 and taking a pragmatic stance, the reflexive exploration of the paradox of the particular and the general might lead to the emergence of something that looks like (innovative) solutions that are good enough for now and to go on exploring together – which could be called *conducting a fallibilistic inquiry with ethical-ends-in-view* (Martela, 2015).

In the final reflexive turn of the narrative, I delved deeper into practice theories. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1998) posits that practice is primary, with language serving as a refinement and a collective, social process. In both language and practice, we follow rules, often unconsciously or, in Wittgenstein's terms, 'blindly' (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 91). It constitutes an incorporated embodied understanding (Taylor, 1995). My 'gut' reactions on Rita's actions in the case, could be seen as stemming from this embodied understanding of 'the rule'. I will return to 'gut' reactions when discussing taste in Project 4 as well as in my argument 3.

However, during my reflective process with Rita, I experienced a breakdown in my understanding, prompting another reflexive turn on the concept of breakdowns, a key theme also in Project 2. Breakdowns are foundational to both knowledge and change

(Dewey, 1908; Heidegger, 1929). I argued that *new insights (and innovation) can emerge through an iterative reflexive process* on paradoxes like that of the particular and the general and the local and the global.

Project 4 – Judging the Good, the Bad (and the Ugly)

As I revisited my first three projects while preparing the progression report, I realised that power was an underlying theme in Projects 2 and 3[48]. These projects demonstrated how, in adopting the role of innovators, my colleagues and I became entangled in enabling and constraining political games, challenging established practices, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. In Project 4, after transitioning from acting CEO back to Head of HR and Innovation under a new CEO, I encountered conflicts that threatened my position and authority in continuing innovation work. This mirrored the frustrations of the innovator in Project 2, who also struggled to sustain his role in driving change.

The narrative of Project 4 includes two vignettes. The first, set in a management team meeting, depicts a dispute over a restructuring proposed by the new CEO, where our interactions and the 'rules of the game' are negotiated amidst conflict. The second vignette centres on a joke I made in an online community of upper-level managers in The District, revealing a hidden truth about the increasingly hostile atmosphere in the management team. Both my joke and the CEO's reaction mirrored this hostility.

During our last residential meeting, the concept of 'speaking truth to power' became a focal point of discussion, leading me to contemplate Noam Chomsky's (1992) critique: "Speaking truth to power makes no sense. There is no point in speaking the truth to Henry Kissinger – he knows it already" (ibid. p. 313). This insight was illuminating, especially considering Thor's awareness of the management team's perceived hostility.

[48] This is a good illustration on the reflexive process of doing autoethnographic explorations of my own practice. The events of P4 took part during the writing and finishing of P3 – so in a way the events are in the background and playing a part of my thinking finishing P3. Hence, I was aware that power was as much a part of what was going on in P3 even if I explored it from a different perspective. And vice-versa, my thinking on P3 influenced my thinking on what was going on in the power games I experienced in the narrative of P4. This also develops practice.

Power's awareness of the truth implies it also defines truth, yet, as my thesis explores, truth is a matter of negotiation.

In discussing these events, I delved into how our interactions in the management team were embedded in power relations. I examined our conflicts through Norbert Elias's (1978) metaphor of the power game, which emphasises negotiations of enablement and constraint, where the rules of the game are continuously negotiated.

Reflecting further, I realised that despite the necessity of the embedded power game in the project, it would have concluded in an anticlimactic 'so what' had I halted my engagement with power alone. This prompted the question: what were we truly battling over? As the Norwegian social anthropologist and management thinker Tian Sørhaug states: "Explaining something with power in itself very often means that you have finished your research too early and settled down with a (too simple) tautology (Sørhaug, 2004, p. 28, my translation)". Inspired by Sørhaug, I explored the interplay between power, judgement, and taste.

The confrontations in the narrative, particularly in the first vignette, centred around influence and judgements of what was considered right and good. The link to judgement became even more evident in the second vignette, where my bad-taste joke about the CEO was met with immediate criticism. This led me to investigate the concept of taste, a significant part of my third argument (p. 202). I will therefore keep it short here.

My Projects 3 and 4 show a lot of judgements of what we consider good, right, knowledgeable, and sensible. I referred to Kant's (1790) taking of judgement as the ability to think what is unique under what is general, which can be done in two distinct different ways (Kantian dualism), the determinant and the reflective judgement. In the former one starts with the general principle (rules, laws) and apply them on concrete situations, in the latter one starts with the unique and then generalise. To Kant *taste* is the faculty of passing judgements reflectively with the help of aesthetic judgements, primarily for the use in judgement of art (also as a symbol of what is good) and the sublime in nature.

Bringing in Hans Georg Gadamer (2013) and his notion of taste in discussing Kant, taste embraces "the whole realm of morality and manners (ibid., p. 35)". Taste is knowledge, according to Gadamer, and it's an embodied way of knowing good from bad (and ugly). And in bringing in the hermeneutics the universal and the general are there at the same time – we paradoxically judge from general knowledge (the law, history, concepts) and from the particular at the same time. Taste "has no knowledge of reasons. If taste registers a negative reaction to something, it is not able to say why. But it experiences it with the greatest certainty (ibid. p. 33)". This links back to the certainty I experienced in my judgements of Thor, the new CEO, (and the service designer in Project 3). *Taste is a deeply ingrained, embodied, and generalised knowledge that makes us sure of our judgements in the particular situation*. This led to my argument 3 to follow.

Critical evaluation of the research in light of the overarching themes

As I reflect further on my research and summarise the findings from my four projects, the interconnection between the overarching themes of social processes of self and the paradox of continuity and transformation becomes increasingly apparent. To lay the foundation for my arguments and articulate my contribution to knowledge, it is necessary to engage more deeply with the extensive literature on innovation. This will involve conducting a critical mini literature review, with a particular focus on the discourse of innovation, particularly within the public sector. Additionally, I will revisit and critically evaluate my research on social processes of the self, incorporating the insights of scholars I have promised to return to throughout my thesis. This section also includes a last reflexive turn on paradoxes which is a part of the required amendments from the examiners after the viva voce.

This critical evaluation serves as a further reflexive turn that is needed to state my arguments.

The imperative of innovation revisited

In examining the existing research on innovation, it becomes evident that there is a widespread underlying assumption that 'innovation is good,' commonly known as the 'pro-innovation bias' (Pfotenhauer et al, 2019; Gripenberg et al, 2012). The field of innovation studies has expanded significantly since the 1960s. A study conducted by Fagerberg & Verspagen in 2008 highlighted that approximately 5000 scholars globally identify with innovation studies (ibid. p. 229). However, as Sveiby et al. (2012) point out, their searches in peer-reviewed journals and several influential handbooks revealed that only a minuscule proportion of articles (0.1% and 0.4%, respectively) focused on the unintended and undesirable consequences of innovation.

Nevertheless, critical voices in this field are gradually becoming more prominent. Walsh (2021) describes it as an 'emerging field' of critical innovation studies. I

propose that this thesis makes a significant contribution to this developing area of inquiry, offering a more nuanced understanding of innovation that acknowledges its potential downsides and challenges the prevailing pro-innovation bias.

Innovation was not always considered as good, as Benoît Godin (2012) states

> How did we get there? As a matter of fact, innovation has not always been highly valued. For over 2,500 years, innovation was essentially seen as negative. The innovator was a heretic, a revolutionary, a cheater. (…) It was only in the mid-19th century and even more so in the 20th century that the representations of innovation changed. How did a concept that had been seen as pejorative for so long come to be a term of honour and a central category of Western thought (ibid, p. 76)?

The concept of innovation evolved when it became linked to the notion of 'introducing a useful thing to the world' (ibid. p. 80). As stated in the introductory thoughts, Fuglsang (2010) notes that innovation involves two key activities: 1) doing something new, and 2) developing this novelty to function effectively in a specific context (ibid, p. 67). Innovation is often perceived as intentional, with changes that occur unconsciously or indirectly not typically categorised as innovation (ibid, p. 68). This definition is consistent with many found in various books and articles[49]. However, there is a prevalent pro-innovation bias, leading most readers to associate innovation with the development of something positive for the greater good[50].

In reality, the concept of innovation in the public sector is not always so straightforward. When managers in this sector talk about innovation, it sometimes translates to cost-cutting and increasing staff productivity. The discourse around empowering people to take care of themselves can also be interpreted as a more palatable way of expressing the need to reduce support services. Thus, the discourse of innovation in the public sector can sometimes serve a euphemistic role.

In Project 2, I examined what I termed the 'Imperative of Innovation', a notion also referenced by several scholars (Jordan, 2014; Pfotenhauer et al, 2019; Thøgersen &

[49] See also similar definition in project 2, p 53

[50] See also https://www.ideatovalue.com/inno/nickskillicorn/2016/03/innovation-15-experts-share-innovation-definition/

Waldorff, 2022). This imperative suggests that 'innovation' is seen as a route to positive change, with any opposition branded as conservative or obstructive (Thøgersen & Waldorff, 2022, p. 3). Revisiting this idea in my arguments, I highlight the challenge innovators face in defining what is 'good' or desirable in their context. Project 4 delves into the concept that these negotiations are essentially about judgements of taste, a topic I will explore in relation to my arguments 2 and 3II. Project 3 illustrates the paradoxical nature of innovation. For instance, the service designer, advocating for insights deemed 'good' from exploring a specific case, clashed with my more general perspective on what is good. Despite our best intentions, we were both 'right', underscoring the importance of not assuming that innovation is inherently 'good' in public service innovation. What benefits one party may not necessarily benefit another, and vice versa.

Sara R. Jordan, an American researcher in AI and ethics, analyses the ethics of the innovation imperative within the public sector in her seminal paper. She observes, "Within the public sector, quality improvement and innovation have become unwritten duties of public employees (Jordan, 2014, p. 68)". She questions the nature and origin of this duty, comparing it to the research imperative in biomedical sciences.

Sara R Jordan states,

> [W]e risk moral sanction if we do not use the best tools (means) to bring about the best ends. There is not an imperative to do our duty as a causal agent of good, but to do our duty to select from a range of other causal agents (tools) to perform the stated duty in the best way. Public managers are duty bound to use the process of innovation and entrepreneurship as a means to a higher, public good, end (ibid. p. 75).

Jordan argues that government services is an absolute necessity for the good life and looks for philosophical support in pragmatism – for instance John Dewey, "whose works heavily influenced the American school of thought in public administration and public management, public services should be infused by a spirit of bold experimentation chastened by the participation of an educated, civic-minded and enlightened public (ibid. p. 77)". And she further argues that ethical explorations are important as innovations intervene with people's lives in ways which are not

necessarily for the better. “As such, innovation may entail uses of power that need to be checked against the possibilities of abuses, *ex ante* by ethical principles and *ex post* by democratic processes (ibid. p. 79)”.

These are additional statements that underscore the significance of my research, as it is not frequently represented in mainstream literature. Jordan goes on to state, “Vis-á-vis an empirical research agenda, additional research into the question, ‘Do bureaucrats behave as if innovation is an imperative?’ would advance this area of research markedly (ibid., p 87)”. Empirically having researched my own practice as a bureaucrat and manager as well as an innovator, I can confirm Jordan’s point: We do behave as if innovation is an imperative in numerous ways as my thesis reveals.

Pfotenhauer et al (2019) state that innovation “has become a leitmotif of policy making and institutional design”, and further that, “The call for more innovation has become a panacea policy response that promises to solve problems almost independently of their specifics (ibid. p 896)”. They analyse what they call the ‘deficit model’ of innovation, in which “societies are unable to address grand societal challenges or ensure economic competitiveness because their policies, institutions, scientific activities, or individual predispositions are not sufficiently oriented toward innovation – in short, because of *lack of innovation* (ibid. p. 897)”. They go on, “In this sense, innovation has ceased to be a purely analytic concept used to explain sociotechnical change and economic growth. Rather, it is a policy goal and a professionalised discourse that is reshaping society in fundamental ways (ibid, p. 898)”. Pfotenhauer et al (2019) further warn against a lack of institutional reflexivity with a “blind adherence to the present deficit logic may result in the widespread erosion of public trust and credibility to innovation policy. (…) The continued deference to a global innovation imperative obscures the political stakes and diverse needs across diverse contexts and distracts from potential negative or disruptive social consequences of innovation (ibid, p 903)”.

My thesis explores the interconnections between the social processes of the self and the paradox of continuity and transformation/innovation. In the book *Challenging the Innovation Paradigm* (Sveiby et al, 2012a) I found an article/chapter (Fougère & Harding, 2012) written by Martin Fougère, professor in management and politics and critical scholar of business, politics and society and Nancy Harding, professor of

Human Resource Management, that serves as a bridge from my writing on innovation and the processes of self in a very interesting way. In what they call a Foucauldian genealogical trek they explore the discourses of innovation in analysing two core texts in order to "denaturalize what has come to be understood as 'innovation' (ibid, p. 42)". The first text is a sociological one by Everett M. Rogers and the other text the Oslo Model[51], by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Rogers' text is concerned about people and innovation whereas the OECD-text leaves people and the richness of the context out, which is not unusual in mainstream literature on innovation from more economically oriented scholars. Fougère & Harding (2012) study the development of the discourse through the many versions of these seminal texts. They criticise Rogers for connecting 'failed innovations' to the less developed countries but take away that "successful innovations are part of the constructions through which the West knows itself as 'modern' or 'advanced'. They argue that innovation therefore cannot fail, because failed innovations would have devastating ontological consequences – we would no longer be 'advanced' (ibid. p. 50)". And as my peer commented upon reading this: 'And if we as individuals do not embrace it, we will be labelled as laggards!'

In the following quote Fougère & Harding (2012) make a further connection to self:

> This absence [of examples of negative consequences of innovation] suggests that innovation man may not need stability or ontological security. Yet is innovation man not an embedded self too? How about the consequences of such an embedded self embracing an ethos of permanent innovation and consumption of innovative products, services, and experiences? Does this not lead people to a permanent sense of uprootedness—a disembeddedness that removes all ontological security? And is this not problematic? (ibid. p. 58).

Finally, they give some advice as to further research, which connects to my research (actually in many ways sums it up):

> If we can acknowledge how fundamental innovation is to identity as well as to the economy, we can perhaps allow ourselves to open new and different ways

[51] https://www.oecd.org/science/inno/2367614.pdf It was quite surprising to see that there was such a thing – I was not aware of the Oslo model before reading this article, coming from Oslo.

of thinking about innovation, and in particular about 'bringing the human back into innovation studies (ibid.).'

The key points of this critical mini literature review on innovation connected to my research are:

1. **Pro-Innovation Bias:** There is a prevalent assumption in innovation literature that innovation is inherently good (Jordan 2014). However, critical voices in innovation studies, are emerging, challenging this bias and highlighting the often overlooked negative consequences of innovation. *My thesis further explores the difficulties in judging what is good in the first place and ways in which the Pro-Innovation Bias plays into the processes of the social selves. It questions the inherently goodness of innovation.*

2. **Historical Perspective of Innovation:** Historically, innovation was not always seen positively. As noted by Godin (2012), it was once associated with negative connotations like heresy or cheating. The shift in perception towards innovation as beneficial occurred around the mid-19th century. *My thesis further explores the roots of the Imperative on innovation and its connection to the western thinking around self and identity as well as time.*

3. **Ethical Considerations:** The ethics of innovation in the public sector are crucial. Public managers are expected to use innovation for the public good, but this raises questions about the moral implications and the potential abuse of power. *My thesis delves further into ethical considerations of innovation and the role innovators take up when working to implement innovative solutions. I point to the negotiation of what is seen as 'good' and argue that in public service innovation, it is important not to take for granted that innovation is universally 'good'.*

4. **Foucauldian Perspective on how fundamental innovation is to identity:** Fougère & Harding (2012) take a Foucauldian approach to analyse innovation discourses. Innovation is connected to the western notion of being 'modern'. They suggest that understanding innovation's role in shaping identity could open new perspectives in innovation studies, particularly in bringing human

> aspects back into focus. *My thesis delves deeply into the fundamental connections between innovation and processes of the social self and the paradox of continuity and transformation.*

In summary, this critical evaluation sheds light on the complex and often paradoxical nature of innovation, especially in the public sector. It calls for a more nuanced understanding that considers both positive and negative impacts, ethical considerations, and the profound influence of innovation on the social self and society at large. This serves as a very good bridge to revisit the overarching theme of the social self and the connections to innovation.

Social selves revisited

The social processes of the self are implicitly embedded throughout my research, acting as integral components of the experiences facilitating innovation. I delve into the origins of this thought process in terms of an (Kantian) autonomous self, and the concept of Western individuality (as discussed in Project 2 p. 35). Additionally, I explore the isolation that results from perceiving oneself as being (narcissistically) detached from others – a departure from the social fabric, reminiscent of the 'shipwreck' scenario from Project 1.

The literature I have referenced thus far has aided in understanding the micro-actions – our gestures and the corresponding responses (Mead, 1934) within specific workplace situations. Going forward, I intend to take a deeper reflexive turn to concentrate on the societal and cultural patterns – the broader influences of those who came before us – that are present in our interactions as we engage with one another.

There is a striking example of how this works already on the first page of Project 1, where I present the Shipwrecked I curled up on the floor in agony of the existential crisis and the total meaninglessness of life (p. 15). I put it forward as the suffering of the autonomous Western I and that the rescue came in the form of Norbert Elias' (1991) idea of involved detachment in coming away from feeling isolated and self-contained while "the others are something separated from him by an abyss (ibid. p.

56)". However, there is more to it. The young suffering man is also a product of those who went before him. The suffering is societal as well as individual – with Elias' words (ibid.) we are *Societies of Individuals*.

Understanding the suffering of this particular homosexual individual benefits from Michel Foucault's perspectives. The shipwrecked I lies there curled up in the late eighties around fifteen years after the legalisation of homosexual acts in Norway. Up until a few years earlier, doctors had pathologised homosexuality, the law had criminalised it, and the church had condemned it. Growing up in a religious family, the concept of hell was a tangible reality in response to my desires.

For Foucault, the analysis of the self is connected to the "socially and historically situated knowledge within which human experience is constituted (Burkitt, 2008, p 85)". In his works, Foucault challenged the conventional views of sexuality and argued that it is a social construct shaped by power relations and discourses. In his seminal work, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978; 1985) argued that the repression of sexuality was used as a tool to control and discipline individuals.

> We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required (Foucault 1978, p. 7).

As illustrated in the preceding quote, this concept also connects to innovation. The young man in distress must reimagine himself. Despite its extreme nature, my argument throughout the thesis has been that this kind of pain, in a broader sense, can be related to change and innovation. A pertinent example from my professional life in the narratives supporting this idea is the discomfort I experienced when I was accused of being immoral regarding the person my colleague was attempting to assist.

This is a notion substantially backed by Peter Marris' (1986) writing on *'Loss and Change.'* I argue then that *innovation is also about a reimagining of the selves.* [52] It was upon revisiting this paragraph while preparing my synopsis and introduction for submission that I realised, in a moment of vivid awareness, that this needed to be included in the title of my thesis, as it encapsulates the essence of my explorations throughout.

According to Foucault, sexuality is shaped by a range of discourses, including scientific, medical, religious, and legal discourses. He challenged the traditional view that sexuality is a natural and universal phenomenon and argued that it is rather a product of historical and social processes. These discourses produce knowledge and practices that define what is considered normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological, and acceptable and deviant. His aim was to explore how we came to see ourselves "as subjects of a "sexuality", which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints (Foucault 1985, p. 3) " and to "determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire (ibid, p. 5)" which he links to the practices of the self "bringing into play the criteria of an "aesthetics of existence" (ibid. p. 11)". The young suffering gay man (the socialised self) sees himself as perverted (internalising the view of the generalised other (Mead, 1934)), so the punitive discourse of sexuality is embedded in his own taking of himself.

Foucault's examination of sexuality pivots around the key concept of power. He postulated that power relations are fundamental to the regulation of sexuality, specifically focusing on how power is exercised through the production of knowledge and the establishment of norms and values. His examination of power and sexuality reveals how power functions within various institutional structures, including family, church, medical professions, and the state. In both Project 3 and 4, the concept of disciplining power (Foucault, 1975) as wielded by a CEO is explored (in the former by me in the role of acting CEO and in the latter by Thor). This concept is most fully realised in the last project, which highlights the negotiations around influencing

[52] A reimagining that sometimes arises from a deep need to 'belong', much like the transformation I yearned for in my younger years, which stemmed from a profound sense of not belonging

gestures and coordinating collective action, along with the discipline enforced by expecting preparedness for meetings. Furthermore, as previously stated, our obligation as employer representatives to participate in the Co-determination Committee for the final decision, and unanimously vote in line with Thor's directive, underscores the institutionalisation of power.

As Solsø (2016) argues in her doctoral thesis, "disciplining power is unavoidable in organisations. Whenever people get together to do something, discursive practices emerge, which produces the dynamics of discipline (ibid, p. 163)."

As I delved into the micro-level details and particularities of my practice through the experiences of us as innovators, the more general elements were inherently present from the onset. This was demonstrated in my discussions when referencing Pierre Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) concepts of habitus and the logic of practice, as well as my interpretation of Hans George Gadamer's (2013) hermeneutics. However, I could also have drawn upon the work of Foucault. As Ian Burkitt (2008) puts it in '*Social selves',* "Thus, the micro-social power politics of becoming a self is linked by Foucault to a macro-power politics in which selves are created through discipline and knowledge in various institutional sites (ibid, p. 92)".

In the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault states, "There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all (ibid. p. 8)". This quote captures my own innovatory process through the many iterations of the projects of this thesis – the innovatory reimagining of myself and others.

In addition to my writing on Pierre Bourdieu in Project 3 and Hans George Gadamer in Project 4, the bringing in of Michel Foucault strengthens the general aspects of the paradox of the particular and general/universal. In my narratives I have explored the re-patterning of the social selves in our struggles to innovate and Foucault's work emphasises the patterns of the ones who came before us, which are vital parts of the struggle as we struggle – when we fight for what's good, useful, funny, beautiful, and true.

The same discussions as above on the micro-level details and particularities of my practice and the general elements goes for my discussion on taste in Project 4. In the narrative I show how our tastes are being negotiated in our encounters. In my exploration of taste, I turned to Hans Georg Gadamer (2013) and his taking of taste as a way of knowing which "embraces the whole realm of morality and manners" (ibid. p. 35) negotiated through the sensus communis. Gadamer further states that the universal and the particular are reciprocally influencing each other when judging. However, I could also have turned to Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the Kantian (1790) taking on taste. In *Distinction. A social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu (1984) shows how our judgements of taste are influenced by the social class we belong to and/or want to show we belong to, by "seeking in the structure of the social classes the basis of the systems of classification which structure perception of the social world and designate the objects of aesthetic enjoyment (ibid, p. xiii)". Lately the National Museum in Oslo had a separate exhibition of the English artist Grayson Perry, which was brought to my attention by my supervisor. It was an amazing exhibition, and Perry's work links to my discussion on taste. As he says: "Taste is a phenomenon. Most of taste is unconscious - it comes from your upbringing, from your family, from your society, your gender, your race; it's a melange of all those things."[53]

Bourdieu is more concerned about aesthetics and still some of his distinctions are applicable to my discussion on a more general taking of taste as well (judging the good, the bad *and* the ugly). In my case of discussing the negotiations of taste in the management team, our preferences are coloured by our social and educational background. "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed (ibid, p. 6)." And further with Grayson Perry: "The basic premise of taste, as Stephen Bayley, the cultural critic, said, is that taste is that which does not alienate your peers. Most people want to fit in with their tribe in some way or another, so they give off signals, whether it's with their clothes, their behaviour, their car, their whatever, and gain status. Every tribe has a

[53] https://www.azquotes.com/author/35619-Grayson_Perry

hierarchy, and that is what taste is: it's an unconscious display of who you are, and where you want to be."[54]

As with the bringing in of Foucault in relation to power and the social selves, I find that bringing in Bourdieu (and Grayson Perry) in relation to my discussion of taste highlights the general patterns that are embedded in our negotiations in the present. Bourdieu's clear social taking of taste (as Gadamer's) adds to my arguments. When we fight over something we consider good, it contains statements of what we consider good in the first place, and at the same time it is a negotiation of judgements of taste in the particular based on statements that speak the general of our social backgrounds and who we want to be seen as when we negotiate and judge.

A last reflexive turn on paradoxes – and some points for future research

The nature of writing this thesis is such that at the outset, one cannot foresee the final destination or the full scope of exploration, as the themes and readings evolve throughout the process. When initiating the projects, the emergence of certain key themes was not initially apparent. However, upon completion, there is a clearer understanding and recognition that additional insights could have been incorporated.

The final version of this thesis has been subject to a further reflexive turn, influenced by the feedback from and the required amendments given by my examiners during the viva. This section incorporates some of their observations, addressing various prevailing thoughts in the academic community that might have enriched the understanding of the developments discussed. It also examines how my conclusions and arguments correspond with existing knowledge, extending beyond what has been discussed in the thesis so far. Although some of the examiners' insights could have led to an entirely new thesis, I will draw attention to a few connections between my research and other pertinent studies not previously mentioned.

[54] Ibid.

Firstly, in my section on *Social selves revisited*, my examiners highlighted that while Foucault's perspectives on self and sexuality are deemed helpful, these could also be viewed in conjunction with other theorists. A particularly prominent theme in my thesis, which has not been thoroughly covered, is that of paradoxes. This theme gained significance through projects 3 and 4, and notably in my arguments that follows. In many ways, this section represents another reflexive turn on the self, highlighting thinking in terms of paradoxes. In my thesis, the self is, in many ways, a paradox in itself.

It is natural to begin with the split between the inside and outside of the self, the autonomous Western Kantian 'I' that I described in project 1. A starting point of this split could be seen in Descartes' statement, "I think, therefore I am" – where thinking is the only certainty. This represents a split, or a dualism. Descartes was not even sure of the existence of a body (Mowles, 2015), and nature was also to be doubted. According to Mowles, Kant expanded on these dualisms, terming them antinomies, arguing, "that we can come to know phenomena, appearances, but we can never get to know 'things in themselves'. The search for truth is to try to get closer and closer to 'things in themselves', but which will always elude us. Reality was counterposed against the knowing subject: two poles of an antimony but which can never be reconciled (ibid., p 20)".

The split between the 'inside' *I* and the 'outside' *other* (the world) embodies the (lonely) Western autonomous self, which I termed the Kantian self, or the 'shipwrecked I' from project 1. The un-reconciliation of these contradictions or antinomies, in the Kantian sense, is the crux of this split. The 'rescue' in project 1 was through social reconciliation – with Hegel's engagement with these dualisms being pivotal to the pragmatic conception of a social self in this thesis. Hegel problematises the splitting, the divide between the knowing subject and that what is known, as well as between mind and body. Our capacity to be both the subject and object of our own thinking is key, and Mowles (2015) refers to this as the "primary paradox from which all other paradoxes flow (...). We can both think, and reflect on our thinking about ourselves thinking, i.e., we can be both reflective and reflexive (ibid., p.20)". Hegel (1807) states:

> I *distinguish myself from myself*, and *in doing so, what is immediately for me is this: What I distinguished is not distinguished.* I, the like pole, repel myself away from myself; but what is distinguished, what is posited as not the same as me, is, while it is differentiated, immediately no difference for me. Consciousness of an other, of an object as such, is indeed itself necessarily *self-consciousness*, being reflected into itself, consciousness of its own self, in its otherness (ibid., p. 100).

As mentioned several times in this text, "reconciliation occurs not through a cancelling out, but through the preservation of the contradiction in a higher order, a higher unity, which in turn provokes another contradiction (Mowles, 2015, p. 21)". This is what Hegel calls '*Aufhebung'*. Linking this to the pragmatist concept of the I/me-dialectic and the generalised other in this thesis (Mead, 1934), there emerges a double paradox: "we are subjects to other people, who are our objects, but we are also objects to ourselves because we can take their perspective on us (ibid., p. 22)". This is a constant movement – through which we become a self intersubjectively. We are paradoxically forming and being formed.

Mind in the pragmatic sense is a social phenomenon. Drawing on Honneth (1995), Mowles (2015) continues, "we recognize ourselves through the recognition of others (ibid.)". This perspective marks a significant deviation from Kant's concept of antinomy. It suggests that from the fundamental paradox of consciousness, a variety of paradoxes emerge, for example, that the process of individualisation is inherently social. We develop a sense of self because of the presence of other selves. These paradoxical processes of the social self are illustrated in my thesis and underlies most of my arguments – further my research highlights how embedded the taking of an individualistic self is to western culture. This clearly needed to be stated more explicitly.

Secondly, psychoanalytic theory also discusses the split between the subject and the object. We are not born with it; it develops through our interactions with carers in the first months of our lives, when we learn that the mother (or carer) is a distinct being other than us, someone who can both give us what we need and also can withhold it. Psychoanalytic thinking does not operate with or develop this into a dynamic social

self in the pragmatic sense described above; the split is still implicit. However, paradoxical thinking is core to psychoanalysis through the internalisation of the others, as for instance demonstrated in Freud's (2002) brilliant *'Civilization and its Discontents'*. The discontents stem from the paradox of drives (and their sublimations) and simultaneously the renunciation of them. Freud states that while "it is at first the conscience (...) that causes us to renounce the drives, this causal relation is later reversed. Every renunciation of the drives now becomes a dynamic source of conscience; every fresh renunciation reinforces its severity and intolerance (ibid., p. 65)". He then points out that he is tempted to "endorse the paradoxical statement that conscience results from the renunciation of the drives, or that this renunciation (imposed on us from without) creates the conscience, which then demands further renunciation (ibid.)". Now, as Leo Bersani points out in the introduction to Freud's work, these paradoxes are resolvable – as when saints call themselves sinners (we are all sinners) – "frustrated temptations are inescapable temptations (ibid., p. XVII)."

However, Bersani further points out that Freud goes on by stating that renunciation produces conscience, and that internalisation becomes an internal watchdog. "Civilization thus inhibits aggression by sending it back where it came from; conscience, or the super-ego, treats the ego with the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would like to direct towards others. On the other hand, Freud tells us, external authority – civilization and its representatives – is internalised *in order to be attacked* (ibid., p. XVIII)".

Paradoxically then, civilisation becomes both a safety for us and at the same time something to attack (within ourselves), hence a root for the discontent. This echoes the discussions in project 2 around the cage that is both inhibiting and a source of safety. It could be argued that the paradoxical wanting and resisting of change is rooted in this paradox. For my discussion, the pragmatic double paradox (as described above) is the primary source of discussions of the self in being both subjects to others, who are our objects, and that we further are objects to ourselves in taking their perspective on us (Mowles 2015, p. 22). To my thesis, this is arguably more important in being a constant movement – through which we become a self intersubjectively. However, the discontent element of civilisation that Freud describes is a helpful perspective to understand underlying tensions of sameness and otherness in the projects. This also

underscores the paradoxicality of the self, for instance in what I called the narcissistic breakdown into anger and/or boredom in project 2 – it is the self taking care of itself and at the same time aggressively and/or introvertedly wanting the support of others by attacking itself.

This thesis argues a close relationship between processes of self and innovation, and this last reflexive turn on the paradoxes in general and of the self was necessary to describe the tensions inherent in taking up the role as an innovator of others.

Thirdly, the questions of the knower and the known, which I discussed above, tracing back to Descartes and Kant, are also central to sociological discussions. In his preface to Mannheim's *'Ideology and Utopia'*, Louis Wirth (1955) introduces the thinking of the work and discusses what he calls the ancient enigma of the interconnection between being and knowing – and the distinctions and tensions between a natural scientific approach and the sociology of knowledge connected to the social realm.

In relation to innovation, Wirth highlights how Japan enthusiastically adopted the results of physical and biological science, contrasting this with the cautious and guarded cultivation of western economic, political, and social investigations. These latter subjects are, for the most part, considered under what the Japanese term *kikenshiso* or "dangerous thoughts" (ibid., p. xvi). He further states, "For thought is a catalytic agent capable of unsettling routines, disorganising habits, breaking up customs, undermining faiths, and generating scepticism (ibid., p. xvii)". These are important points that relate back to my discussions on the negotiation for 'truths' implicated in the process of innovation. Indeed, innovation as a breakdown of habits.

The root of this is that any statements of 'facts' in the social world are embedded in the interests of individuals or groups. Earlier scientific approaches to understanding the social tried to eliminate personal and collective biases and aimed to approach objectivity by positing an *'object'*, distinct from the *'subject'*. More modern perspectives (seen from Wirth's time) recognise an intimate relationship between the object and the perceiving subject. "In fact, the most recent view maintains that the object emerges for the subject when, in the course of experience, the interest of the subject is focused upon that particular aspect of the world (ibid., p. xx).", which is

close to my pragmatic approach to social 'objects' and 'truths' in this thesis. Wirth still argues for the discovery of general trends and predictable series of events – much like my discussion of evocative versus analytic autoethnography in the method section (p.213). However, in our generalising, we are always present; our assumptions or (ideological) schemes of evaluations are always implicit (in my thesis argued as pre-judgements). Wirth advocates for a 'sympathetic introspection', where it is "the participation in an activity that generates interest, purpose, point of view, value, meaning, and intelligibility, as well as bias (ibid., p. xxii)". This has been a reflexive turn that ties the paradoxes of the being and the known to my research approach.

Fourthly, paradoxes and the self are not only discussed in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and sociology but also emerge in the seemingly exact science of mathematics. Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead attempted to develop a mathematical system free from contradictions in number theory (Hofstadter, 1999). The Austrian mathematician Gödel, a key figure in Douglas Hofstadter's work, fascinated by Russel and Whitehead's work, formulated two incompleteness theorems, demonstrating that no mathematical system could be either complete or consistent by reference to itself. Hofstadter argues, "the Gödelian strange loop that arises in formal systems in mathematics (…) is a loop that enables such a system to 'perceive itself', to talk about itself, to become 'self-aware', and in a sense it would not be going too far to say that by virtue of having such a loop, a formal system *acquires a self* (ibid., p. P-3 – emphasis in original)". In Hofstadter's work, there are few distinctions between consciousness, mind, and self (Mowles, 2015) – however, it presents a "material and mechanical explanation of consciousness, a reverberating loopiness of the brain as a complex system (ibid., p. 15)". This is all intriguing, but within the framework of 'complex responsive processes of relating' (p. 4), mind and organisations are not considered as systems; they are viewed as ongoing patterns of relating between individuals – so I will leave it at that.

Fifthly and lastly, a theme that emerged as important during my work on project 3 was bureaucracy. I connected it to the paradox of continuity and transformation and hence also to my discussion around social selves, without exploring this in depth. In his book, *'Bureaucracy: A Key Idea for Business and Society'*, Tom Vine (2021) discusses

this theme. He defines bureaucracy as "*immanent, emergent, existential, anthropological and socially-embedded* (...) [and] characterised by a bewildering *complexity* and *resilience to change* (ibid., p. 4)". In many ways, this echoes my portrayal of myself as the immoral Head of HR when resisting possible change from the insights gained through explorations of a particular case, by referring to a rule of conduct.

Also, Vine's conception of bureaucracy is closely linked to identity. He argues that it is an emergent logic, which resiliently preserves itself, and any "attempt to eliminate it paradoxically results in more of the same (ibid., p. 8)." He goes further and states that bureaucracy *is* organisation – "to demonstrate any semblance of organisation is to bureaucratise (ibid., p. 9)" – and brings it together with identity in what he calls the "oft-overlooked existential function (ibid., p. 13)" of bureaucracy, as well as a life pattern, "patterned into the very fabric of our emergent civilisations". This connects to this section's theme of paradoxes, when stating that bureaucracy is characterised by a pervasive form of paradox, representing "a clear manifestation of the agency-structure duality. It both enables and constrains; empowers and emasculates (ibid., p. 14)".

These statements on bureaucracy bring the theme of bureaucracy even closer to my exploration in this thesis of the paradoxes of enabling and constraining as well as continuity and transformation. It also offers a new perspective on what I was doing when bureaucratically pursuing equal treatment. Vine's last points are that bureaucracy becomes a "receptacle for organisational knowledge", making organisational life less dependent on individuals, and (primarily through paperwork) "carves out the organisation's very essence as a form of discourse (ibid., p. 15)". Finally, it has a historical-mnemonic function, which in many ways echoes my discussion of Bourdieu's habitus as our ways of acting based on the generations that came before us.

This could be linked back to my metaphor of the birds (that is the employees) being afraid of flying out of the cage in project 2 when offered a "trust-based" organisational model, the "cage" provides both a sense of captivity and also safety. This echoes the theme of bureaucracy. Vine (2021) argues that bureaucracy paradoxically provides both a sense of "existential security and ontological belonging (ibid., p. 81)" as well as a sense of being contained.

All in all, Vine's book provided me with different perspectives on my explorations of what went on in the projects, and the connection between innovation (in the public sector) and bureaucracy can be pointed out as a path for further research.

My Arguments

It is only in concluding my research that I can really identify how the taking up of the role of the innovator in the public sector of Norway connects to the themes of *the social processes of self and their contribution to a paradoxical potential of continuity and transformation*. In the following, I present my arguments and will further elaborate on how they are supported by my explorations and empirical findings throughout my projects.

Argument 1: Social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is socially co-created

My first argument is:

> *Social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is situationally and socially co-created. Innovation can be influenced by a negotiation of our narrative identities – a reimagining*[55].

My first argument primarily grows out of my explorations in Project 1 and 2 and yet it is relevant to the whole thesis as well as to the method of narrative inquiry (Mowles, 2017) (see method section p.209) which is used in the research.

In Project 1, I examined how my aspirations as a writer influenced my efforts to comprehend life events. This exploration revealed how themes of change intertwine with both self-processes and narratives, marking a shift from traditional Western

[55] See also argument 3 which highlights self as narrative and *embodied* social processes – I leave the embodiment out in this argument and return to it later.

notions of an autonomous, self-contained self towards a concept of the self as a social process, as discussed by Elias (1991).

Project 2 delved into the breakdown of narration in the realm of innovation. As the Head of HR and Innovation in a Norwegian municipality, I grappled with articulating my experiences, resulting in what I termed 'dead narratives.' This led to a profound sense of boredom and a crisis of meaning in my work, where nothing seemed to make sense. However, this breakdown in narration eventually fostered new insights and sense-making.

Further I would say that Project 3 also showed a narrative process whereby the service-designer and I both explored the narratives of a citizen in need as well as having an ongoing negotiation of our practices. Project 4 showed the emerging power dynamics when negotiating narratives in the management team when receiving a new CEO who wanted to change our practices.

To construct this argument, I will draw from the explorations and discussions, as well as the sensemaking of my experiences as presented in my thesis. However, to solidify my position and strengthen my argument, I found it necessary to delve deeper into the literature on narratives, sensemaking, and discourses.

In Project 2 I put the *self* centre-stage in my considerations of change and innovation, and since self must be narrated[56], I argued that narration should take the stage alongside the self – at that point it came out as a split, the developing thought in this argument is that they cannot be separated.

Stacey & Mowles (2016) states, "ask anyone who they are, and they will respond with a narrative (ibid. p. 420)". In stepping away and detaching from the preoccupation with (Bourdieu, 1998) and immersion (Stacey & Mowles, 2016) in the game of our experiences, reflecting on it, and making sense of it, the narrative form is the most prominent (first order) abstraction according to Stacey & Mowles (thinking in lines of propositions, maps, models etc would be called second order abstractions). As they

[56] And physically performed, a point I leave out here and return to.

further state, human thought "has always been paradoxical acts of immersing and abstracting at the same time (ibid. p. 434)", so in putting forward my argument, I reiterate the statement of putting narrative centre-stage alongside the self and go one step further and argue that *the social self is a narrative process,* as there is – in being paradoxical acts – no way of separating the abstraction from the immersion. *The narratives are us* in a sense, which I will come back to.

There is a wide literature on storytelling and narratives as ways of sensemaking (see Boje, 2011, 2019; Czarniawska, 1998; Weick, 1989, 2001; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). According to Enninga & Lugt (2016) there is an abundance of literature on storytelling in organisations, and little on the "use" of narratives during innovation projects. A lot of this literature focuses on the "use" of narratives as tools and is connected to the discourse of innovation as "good" in itself – so there is not much literature on narratives supporting a critical perspective on innovation and the paradox of continuity and transformation in organisations.

Narratives are embedded in the power dynamics of being together and if one can say they are "used," which constitutes a problematic reification of narratives as a tool, they can be "used" both to stay the same as well as to transform (as demonstrated in Project 4). In my argument of social self being a narrative process, I take a further step away from the reification that is implied in most of the literature on narratives, storytelling and sensemaking and state that, *the narrative processes (that are us) situationally and socially cocreate the paradox of continuity and transformation.* I will further elaborate on the social selves being a narrative process later.

There are some variants in the literature on the taking up of stories and narratives. Enninga & Lugt (2016) with the support of Denning (2005) treat them as synonyms – however, they all treat them as abstractions and tools. Stacey & Mowles (2016) state that narratives are more than storytelling, "a narrative contains within it a story but is a more complex form of communication than a story because it involves some kind of evaluation (ibid. p. 435)". One key scholar on storytelling, David Boje (2011), sees this differently; to him the narrative is part of his overarching triadic model of storytelling, with three genres that are in interplay: narrative (with a structure in time and place), living story ("often without beginning, and are never-ending (unlike

narrative) (ibid p. 3))" and what he calls ante narrative ("a bridging of past narratives stuck in place with emergent living stories (ibid.))" which is a before-narrative as well as a bet on the future, rather than the usual backward-looking "retrospective-narrative-sensemaking" (Weick, 2001). Ante is a before and a beneath in communicative processes, an in-between "in preparing in advance" as well as a bet on the future (Boje, 2019, p. 341). They are "self-organizing frontiers, fragments that seem to cling to other fragments, and form interesting complexity patterns of assemblage relationships to context and one another (Boje, 2011, p. 3)".

This is a crucial point which also poses as a critique on the method I have applied in this thesis. In the social process of drafting this thesis with feedback, reflections, and reiterations, it becomes a retrospective-narrative-sensemaking process (Weick, 2001). I stopped, I wondered what went on for me and the others, and I created a (reified?) narrative to understand more of what was going on. However, a lot of our working together goes by without stopping and wondering whilst being immersed (Stacey & Mowles, 2016) and with a feel for the game (and/or not as Project 2 shows) (Bourdieu 1998). This is what Boje is trying to capture with his triadic collective storytelling dynamic which connects the (sensemaking) stories of the co-created past, with the living moment and the emergent future which we narratively co-create in the present in light of the past and in expectations of the future.

It is easy to see that my narrative in Project 4 on the power dynamics in the management team and how it is put forward in my retrospective sensemaking narrative only encompasses a fragment of what went on – there are also all the stories I do not tell, the gossiping in between meetings, the conversations before and after the decision – most of which I would not know a thing about. A narrative inquiry will never be able to capture the complexity of all the micro actions and micro narratives going on between people.

However, I do not see David Boje problematising the narrator. I see that he refers to the pragmatists, but he does not seem to accept that vital aspect of narratives and/or storytelling – who are we, the storytellers? Storytelling is then a reified concept which is separated from the narrators, the social selves, which I will return to now.

In arguing *social processes of self are narrative processes*, I build on Paul Ricoeur's (1992) taking of the narrative identity. In his interpretation of the word 'identity,' we can identify an embedded kind of sameness – something identical, something that remains the same (over time), and a recognition that the word 'same' (as something) is used in contexts of comparison, and thus that the contrary of 'same' would be 'other'. He also states that self is not just *the same*, and he makes a distinction between self as *sameness* (that which constitutes identity over time), and self as *selfhood* (the contextual experiences of the self).

There is a "dialectic complementary to that of selfhood and sameness, namely the dialectic of *self* and *other than self* (ibid, p. 3, emphasis in original)". Selfhood is what reconciles and ties the self to the other (Durand & Calori, 2006). Selfhood and otherness are inseparable. In Ricoeur's own words, "*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 (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3)." Otherness is then not only external "but belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood (ibid., p. 317)." Ricoeur has an interesting reiteration of the title of his book: "Oneself inasmuch as being other" (ibid. p. 3).

Ricoeur "asserts that (…) sameness and selfhood may or may not coincide. This interstice between sameness and selfhood constitutes the history of the self, accessible through the narrative identity. Narrative identity reconciles the permanence of identity with its dynamics (Durand & Calori, 2006, p. 101)". Ricoeur echoes the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), which he also quotes and discusses, and his writing on the narrative unity of human lives. MacIntyre states, "I can only answer the question what am I to do if I can answer the prior question, of what stories am I part (ibid. p. 216)". This is also echoed in the Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen (2005) words:

> To have a personal identity is to have some representation of a narrative thread in life, where past and future can provide the present with a meaning. I do not believe that meaning and identity can be properly understood independently of time and narrativity. To have an identity, to be a self, requires that one is capable of telling a story about oneself (….). However, in order to be able to

> tell such a story, one must also be able to relate to others (Svendsen, 2005, p. 78).

The problem with my breakdown of narration in Project 2, was that I was (narcissistically) stuck in boredom and striving to relate to others, with no sensemaking connection to the narrative thread in my life, which I return to in argument 2.

Ricoeur sees narrative identity as a mediator, "where selfhood *frees itself* from sameness (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 119, italics added). I find his use of the word 'free' in this context interesting as remarked before, and it connects back to my discussion on change and the imperative of innovation in this thesis. There is something in (the boredom of) sameness (continuity) that makes us want to break free (the imperative of change). We yearn for transformation and paradoxically, as I discuss in my Project 1 and 2, sameness is also safety and identity, which transformation (and innovation) threatens (Project 3 and 4). This is the conservative impulse (Marris, 1986) or what I have called the imperative of sameness.

In short, my thesis raises the question, '*why doing innovation is so hard*' and a short answer based on my argument 1 would be – *'because innovation can threaten (and/or enhance) our narrative identities'.*

Lastly, I need to point at the literature on discourse studies in organisations. According to Alvesson & Kärreman (2000) a well-known taking on discourse is attributed to Foucault. "Language, put together as discourses, arranges and naturalizes the social world in a specific way and thus informs social practices (ibid. p. 1128)". My thesis explores the micro-interactions and storytelling based on the experiences of innovators in the public sector of Norway, and still, it is clear that the discourses of society and organisations also contribute to constituting the stories as we tell them. Boje (2019) makes the crucial point that storytelling and discourse are in dialogical and dialectical relationships. Our negotiations locally influence the global and the global influences the local, which I return to in argument 2.

In conclusion, I am arguing that we, in having narrative identities, in a sense are our narratives, the narratives are us – we have narratives about our lives and the narratives

have us. The narratives are socially (re-)constructed in our everyday negotiations, as well as being constructed by the discourse of the society we live in. We are forming and being formed. *Social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is situationally and socially co-created. Innovation can be influenced by a negotiation of our narrative identities – a reimagining.*

Why doing innovation (in public sector) is so hard?	My argument
1. *Innovation can threaten (and/or enhance) our narrative identities*	1. *Social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is socially co-created*

Argument 2: The potential of innovation can emerge through the breakdown of habits and be supported by (re-imaginary), iterative, reflexive, narrative-based processes/negotiations

My second argument in full is:

> *The potential of innovation of public services and practices can emerge through the breakdown of habits and be supported by (re-imaginary) iterative, reflexive, narrative-based processes, which engages both historical and present practice of practitioners as well as citizens in the light of the emergent future. This includes negotiating within the paradoxes of the particular and the universal, as well as continuity and transformation.*

In my second argument, I expand on the first one, which posits that social processes of self are narrative processes whereby the paradox of continuity and transformation is socially co-created. The focus of Argument 2 is on the iterative, reflexive processes that may arise when our habitual patterns break down. Narratively reflecting on these breakdowns can challenge our customary ways of doing things, thereby introducing

the potential for innovation in our practices. However, this same process can also pose a threat to our identities.

Core to my argument 2 is the breakdown, which constitutes the starting point of the (narrative) reflexive process. To reiterate: In Project 1 I showed the existentialistic breakdown of myself as a young gay man struggling to make sense through narration. Project 2 showed a breakdown of narration in boredom (in the field of innovation), and the striving to relate to others with no sensemaking connection to the narrative thread in my practice as a public servant.

The breakdown I underwent in Project 3, while less existential, was closely tied to my public sector practice. I grappled with the potential rejection of innovation borne from a service design process aimed at addressing a citizen's specific needs. This encounter exposed me to my generalised/universal habitual practices as a public servant (Bourdieu 1977; 1990), which the service designer deemed unethical in relation to the citizen's needs. Realising the validity in her accusations marked a turning point and a breakdown, recognised as foundations for both knowledge and change (Dewey, 1908; Heidegger, 1929). This connection brings us to the crux of innovation - without such breakdowns, our practices are unlikely to evolve.

Heidegger's (1929) renowned example of the hammer illustrates this: an experienced carpenter, socialised into her trade, need not consciously consider her hammer while working. However, misplacing it, breaking it, or accidentally striking her thumb forces the hammer to, in a manner of speaking, 'assume a separate existence'. As I expressed in Project 3, being labelled as immoral and unethical struck me like a blow from a hammer—a hammer whose existence I only registered when it hit. I further add, this results in a fractured or lost sense of self, linking the concept of breakdown with narrative identity. Following from this link the thesis further posits that innovation can be viewed as a reimagining of the self—a process inherently social in nature (Elias, 1991).

The paradox of continuity and transformation has consistently surfaced throughout my research, particularly when delving into the intricacies of Project 3. It was here that Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) logic of practice and the concept of habitus came to the fore.

Habitus, tied paradoxically to both the universal and the particular, embodies generational practices morphed into "systems of durable, transposable dispositions...as principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

Habitus, at its core, is universal yet deeply rooted in the particulars. It is the summation of countless strategies and responses employed in diverse situations, equipping us to intuitively navigate new circumstances. However, this same habitus can falter when confronted with unique situations, as I experienced in Project 3.

Such anomalies, when disruptive, can threaten our established worldviews and narrative identities, leading to a fundamental breakdown in our habitual practices. This breakdown, where our established habits fail us, calls for a reimagining of how we navigate the situation. It is within these disruptions and the subsequent reflexive, iterative processes that potential for innovation and a reimagining of the self can arise.

In discussing the power dynamics of Project 4 I referred to Immanuel Kant's (1790) thinking of determinant and reflective judgement (judgement being the ability to think what is unique under what is general). Determinant judgement is the ability to subsume something separate/unique under the universal – starting with the general principles (rules, law) that are applied in concrete situations. Reflective judgement on the other hand is starting with the unique and then to generalise. This is echoed in Project 3, where the process of service design claims to start with the individual need and (step-by-step) generalises solutions for the many based on that (reflective judgement)[57]. My practice as a civil servant foregrounds (standardised) universal and abstract rules of conduct applied in the situation (determinant judgement). I will bring some further points on both, before problematising the Kantian dualism.

Firstly, service design uses narrative exploration in the reflective process of identifying the user needs – narratives are shared and explored in order to step by step designing solutions in a process of diverging and converging, assessing, implementing, testing,

[57] For a critique see my Project 3 (p 86) and Appendix 1.

and modifying (Bánáthy; 1992; Rittel, 1972; 1973[58]). There is a further connection to the method used in this thesis (the narrative inquiry) – and service designers do for instance use ethnographic methods (see my method section to follow).

Secondly, another point is the connection I made to James C Scott's (1998) taking of standardisation as being a building block of the modern state. This is also a point made by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) in his article *'Is a Disinterested Act Possible'* where bureaucracy in "using the law, assumes submission to the universal, to the general interest, to public service, as law, and which recognizes itself in the philosophy of the bureaucracy as a universal class, neutral, above conflicts, at the service of public interest, of rationality (or of rationalization) (ibid, p. 90)".

It is possible to view the breakdown happening between the service designer and the civil servant in Project 3 as a clash between reflective and determinant judgements, but then there is the problem of the Kantian dualism. *I am arguing the universal and the particular are in a paradoxical relationship – they are both there at the same time and judging the one involves re-judging and re-negotiating the other.* The universal breaks down facing the exceptions (the particular) as it did in my case. And, it goes the other way too, the particular and individual need sometimes must be rejected in the view of the universal (the fair and equal treatment of the citizens in light of the law and human rights etc.).

In both Project 3 and 4, I underscored the point that while typification is a necessity in a modern state, my experience as the Head of HR in the public sector reveals that standardisation also has its darker sides, manifesting as unfair, and potentially violent, treatment of individuals. At the same time, it is crucial to recognise the opposite end of the spectrum, the potential for radically individualised and unfair treatment in the absence of standardisation. To rephrase: *I advocate a reflexive stance focusing on the paradox of the particular and the general* in a Hegelian process where the "contradictions are preserved but brought together in a higher state (aufgehoben) (Mowles, 2021, p 117)".

[58] Critique in Appendix 1.

Connected to this is the idea that step by step generalised solutions can be scaled-up and brought as functioning solutions in other situations, with new practitioners and citizens. However, as stated before, when general(ised) ideas of innovation are to be implemented they are contextual and need local interpretation/negotiation.

As Ralph Stacey (2010) aptly puts it, "We also have the capacity to become aware of our preoccupation with the game, to reflect upon our practical action, which expresses the habitus in which we live, in an effort to make conscious sense of what we are doing (ibid., p. 108)." The service designer and I engaged in a reflexive process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Griffin & Stacey, 2005; Mowles, 2015), to which I will return in my methods section (p. 209). We explored the breakdown we jointly experienced through a shared narrative inquiry. This inquiry encompassed both the story of the specific citizen and my perspective as a civil servant, and also the narrative of our negotiations regarding our roles as service designer and Head of HR.

To an outside observer, our dialogue may have resembled an argument between a long-married couple. However, the product of our 'fight' was an increase in knowledge, fresh insights, and a potential for innovation[59]. This 'marital squabble' (or professional disagreement) can be generalised to illustrate why service designers sometimes struggle to implement solutions in the public sector. They are occasionally overly insistent on applying specific solutions universally, as we the civil servants are not always recognising that the generalised application may fail to account for individual exceptions, leading to unjust treatment. The Kantian dualism should be reconciled by treating the particular and universal as a paradox; both exist simultaneously and influence each other, a point I revisit in Argument 3. As Mowles (2015) articulates, "Practice involves a paradox of the general and the particular, how more universal themes are to be taken up in particular situations with others (ibid, p. 85)."

In conclusion, as stated earlier the theme of the thesis could be stated in the question, '*why is doing innovation so hard?*' and a short answer based on my argument 2 would

[59] Which is of course not always the case, sometimes old couples find themselves stuck in their patterns of quarrelling and narration of the same stories. It might take a breakdown of communication to change.

be, *'because the habitus of (public sector) practitioners is often directed to the (bureaucratic) universal – doing the best for the most – which sometimes makes it hard to see the exception of the (potential innovative) particular'.* Argument 2 points on a way out in staying with the paradox of the general and the particular (and I will return to the reflexive process in the method section): *The potential of innovation of public services and practices can emerge through the breakdown of habits and be supported by (re-imaginary) iterative, reflexive, narrative-based processes, that engages both historical and present practice of practitioners as well as citizens in the light of the emergent future. This includes negotiating within the paradoxes of the particular and the universal, as well as continuity and transformation.*

Why doing innovation (in public sector) is so hard?	My argument
2. *The habitus of (public sector) practitioners is often directed to the (bureaucratic) universal – the best for the most – which sometimes makes it hard to see the exception of the (potential innovative) particular*	2. *The potential of innovation can emerge through the breakdown of habits and be supported by (re-imaginary), iterative, reflexive, narrative-based processes/negotiations*

Argument 3: Innovation is in effect a reimagining of the self involving hermeneutic dialogues and dynamic, power-related negotiations of the embodied judgements of taste

My third argument in full is:

> *Innovation of services essentially involves a reimagining of the self. This process entails hermeneutic dialogues in which our embodied preconceptions and (pre)judgements about what we consider good, true, right, funny, and knowledgeable are negotiated. These negotiations of taste are embedded in paradoxical power dynamics that enable and constrain. They are related to*

> *fundamental questions of identity and to the paradox of continuity and transformation.*

Building my third argument primarily on the insights gleaned from Project 4, I also draw significant connections to the narrative presented in Project 3. As I concluded Project 3, I came to realise that the narrative was laden with judgements on morality and ethics, manifesting in the negotiations that occurred between the service designer and myself. It was also apparent that power dynamics were intricately woven into our interactions, mirroring a theme that is similarly pervasive in Project 2. During the process of working on Project 3, the organisational dynamics shifted as a new CEO assumed the position I had been temporarily holding for the previous six months. I suddenly found myself navigating and negotiating my place in the evolving organisation.

This argument weaves together a complex array of interwoven themes that recur throughout my thesis. I have repeatedly alluded to the "Not Invented Here Syndrome" – a concept that Anton & Piller (2015) criticised in their examination of 647 scholarly papers, describing it as a negative force that impedes the 'good' of innovation. When attempting to implement ideas from a developmental project in other units of The District (as discussed in Project 2), I was met with dismissive responses such as, 'but we already do that'. This may have been an accurate reflection of their practices, but it equally might not have been, as I interpreted it. I also encountered the flip side, 'yes, but that would never work here,' which ties back to my second argument that 'scaled-up' or general solutions do not always translate well to new contexts.

At times, these solutions are swiftly rejected without thorough consideration, and other times they are disregarded because practitioners with deep-rooted understanding (phronesis) can quickly contextualise to the specificities of their setting that innovators may overlook. The solutions are sometimes deemed 'bad' by practitioners in the new context – a judgement that can be rooted in solid reasoning or simply a knee-jerk reaction to what is not invented here. In essence, they can perceive anything that does not originate from their group as a threat – a concept I touched upon in my first argument.

The young gay man's shattered sense of self upon coming out also resonates here. I had a sense of who I was – as tumultuous as that state was. I knew something about my current situation but was unsure about what the future would bring. More so, I did not know who I would become in that imagined future – a future I was paradoxically desperate to reach. Just as this young man had to reimagine himself, innovation also necessitates a reimagining of the self.[60] This is the juncture where hermeneutical dialogues come into play, but I will revisit that topic later.

In Project 3 I was on the other side of this spectrum in that I dismissed the solutions gained from the particular need of a citizen, judging them as unequal (unfair) treatment. In Project 4 I was fighting the solutions of the new CEO who wanted to implement some of his generalised thoughts and experiences from other places in the new context of managing us – again, what is not created by me/us, is a threat to me/us. My judgement of the CEO resulted in a bad taste joke to an online meeting of managers and him fighting back by pointing to my wicked sarcasm (see p. 118). All these episodes are embedded in power dynamics, so it is clear that innovation, power, judgements, processes of (narrative) social selves, and taste are interconnected themes, which eventually led me to this third argument.

Viewing self as a social process means that *we are always embedded in power relations,* which I argued *are paradoxically enabling and constraining* (another paradox in my thesis) and connected to the paradox of continuity and transformation. I argued that innovation can be seen as a social process along the same lines. I discussed my fight with the new CEO in light of Elias' (1978) metaphor of power as a game, and I argued that what was going on was a negotiation of rules, authority, 'truth' and what we sensed as right and good. I made the point that this is relevant to innovation as well, because if one intends to facilitate innovation it is probably necessary (unavoidable) to arrive at a position of being able to negotiate truth and/or meaning with others.

However, I referred to the Norwegian social-anthropologist Tian Sørhaug (2004) who makes the point that, "Explaining something with power in itself very often means that

[60] Not being able to imagine this future, makes it scary to even start this re-imagining.

you have finished your research too early and settled down with a (too simple) tautology (ibid, p. 28, my translation)". There was more to it – how do we know what is right and wrong? – what is behind the judgements we make as they seem to be strongly embodied reactions to what is judged bad/wrong/unknowledgeable-/senseless…? This is how I came to bring in *taste as an embodied way of knowing*[61] [62]. To reiterate from my reflexive turn above, when we fight over something we consider good/right, it contains statements of what we consider good in the first place, and at the same time it is a negotiation of the judgements of taste in the particular context informed by the general of our social backgrounds and who we want to be seen as when we negotiate and judge in the particular situations.

My discussion on taste started with Hannah Arendt's (1958) pointing out of Kant as the first philosopher who made the faculty of judgement a major topic. In this she highlights his third Critique, *The Critique of the Judgement,* (Kant, 1790). I referred to his distinction of the reflective and the determinant judgement in argument 2, and that his notion of taste comes from his discussion on the former, the reflective judgement. To Kant *taste* is the faculty of passing judgements reflectively with the help of aesthetic judgements, primarily for use in the judgement of art and of what is sublime in nature.

As Sørhaug (2004) points out, the work of art is an exception, something unique that makes you experience something universal precisely by grasping its uniqueness. Art makes us participate in a "sensing community" (sensus communis) together with other reflectively judging subjects, formed around exemplary experiences with exemplary validity – as Kant calls them (Arendt, 1992; Kant 1790) which in a way echoes the process of writing this thesis and its exploring of more or less exemplary experiences.

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[61] As pointed out earlier in the synopsis, the concept of taste has similarities to a concept of values where values can be seen as criteria for good actions (Griffin & Stacey, 2005).

[62] Interestingly there is an etymological connection between the words *crisis* and *judgement* as well as *decision*, which in a sense links my writing on breakdowns and judgements. Crisis (or Greek krisis) is a turning point in a disease, indicating recovery or death, "literally judgment, result of a trial, selection, from kriniein "to separate, decide, judge." Source: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=crisis

However, in bringing in Hans George Gadamer (2013) I took the notion of taste from aesthetics only to the more general, embracing "the whole realm of morality and manners" (ibid, p. 35) (as well as the aesthetics). With Gadamer I further argued that taste is knowledge, it is an embodied way of knowing good from bad. And lastly, linked to Gadamer's hermeneutics, the universal and the particular are there at the same time (as opposed to the Kantian dualism). We paradoxically judge from general knowledge and from the particular at the same time. Gadamer's example of the judge presiding is a good one; the judge sentences the particular crime by applying the law, and by judging the particular she is developing the general law at the same time. Taste has "no knowledge of reasons. If taste registers a negative reaction to something, it is not able to say why. But it experiences it with the greatest certainty. Sureness of taste is therefore safety from the tasteless (ibid, p. 33)".

This links back to the certainty I experienced in both Project 3 and 4 in judging the solutions of the service designer as well as the new CEO. This is also core to the 'gut reactions' of the Not Invented Here Syndrome: 'Yes, but it will never work here!' Why? 'Because it is bad (for us)!' I argued that the power relations we are part of are very much embodied; they set up strong emotions, like bodily reactions to disgusting food, in our encounter with otherness. Our bodies know. In summary, *taste is a deeply ingrained, embodied, and generalised knowledge that makes one sure of one's judgements in the context.*

As to the repeated question that summarises my thesis – *'why doing innovation is so hard'* – a short answer based on my argument 3 would be*, 'Because as innovators we are questioning/negotiating what people/we judge as right, good and true – the embodied taste*[63] *– and our (narrative) sense of who we are for which we are willing to put up a fight and/or silently ignore'.*

And lastly, the feasible way to negotiate innovation happening then could be the hermeneutic dialogue (of reimagining the selves). As I already stated we interpret the particular situation in the present, based on our prejudices as prejudgements, so the

[63] Which is also exposing and including the innovators own embodied sense of taste in the negotiation, which is the reason for using 'we'.

past is in the present and influences the present as well as how we interpret the past (in the present and in light of the emergent future) – we are paradoxically forming and being formed. As Jeff Malpas (2018) states in his article on Gadamer, "[W]henever we understand, we are involved in a dialogue that encompasses our self-understanding and our understanding of the matter at issue (ibid.)".

To Gadamer (2013) awareness of our historically determined situation is a key, for which he uses the term 'horizon'. Negotiations of horizons are constant ongoing processes of understanding the matters by establishing (more) common horizons, our prejudices being questioned in the process. By connecting this to argument 1 about the social selves and narrative identity, and argument 2 regarding the social, iterative, reflexive, narrative-based processes, and further incorporating the power dynamics discussed in argument 3, I believe I have followed Kögler's (2014) suggestion. He recommends an approach to escape Gadamer's somewhat idealistic interpretation of hermeneutic dialogue. Kögler advises adopting "an additional critical-hermeneutic mode of reflexivity. (ibid. p. 57)". This mode allows us to distance ourselves from our deeply ingrained power habits and practices. Such a distancing can pave the way for a truly transformative dialogue.[64] The dialogue following the breakdown between the service designer and me posing as an example of a transformative dialogue that made the writing of Project 3 and 4 possible.

In conclusion, having picked all the pieces apart and put them together again I am reiterating my argument 3: *Innovation of services essentially involves a reimagining of the self. This process entails hermeneutic dialogues in which our embodied preconceptions and (pre)judgements about what we consider good, true, right, funny, and knowledgeable are negotiated. These negotiations of taste are embedded in paradoxical power dynamics that enable and constrain. They are related to fundamental questions of identity and to the paradox of continuity and transformation*.

[64] Which could again of course be criticised for idealising the transformative dialogue.

Why doing innovation (in public sector) is so hard?	My argument
3. *Innovators are questioning/negotiating what people/we judge as right, good and true – the embodied taste – and their/our (narrative) sense of who we are for which we are willing to put up a fight and/or silently ignore.* *In the questioning innovators expose their own embodied sense of taste which is also a part of the negotiation.*	3. *Innovation is in effect a reimagining of the self involving hermeneutic dialogues and dynamic, power-related negotiations of the embodied judgements of taste*

Research method

In my research, especially in Projects 3 and 4, I grapple with the paradox of the particular and the general as well as continuity and transformation. These are themes intertwined with methodological considerations.

Despite the prevailing preference for quantitative research in the public sector, my thesis, rooted in qualitative and narrative methods, aims to demonstrate that detailed exploration of individual cases can offer insights with broader relevance and generalisability. This concept of generalisability, understood as the ability to resonate with wider phenomena, is a critical aspect of my research within the DMan program framework.

I also acknowledge the inherent limitations of my approach, balancing the detailed exploration of specific narratives with the challenge of drawing wider conclusions from them.

Research as Social Activity – taking experiences seriously

As stated in the introduction to the outline of my research approach, the method of my thesis is connected to how organisations are viewed within the framework of the complex processes of relating, as outlined by Griffin & Stacey (2005). Organisations are not considered as systems or ‘things’, but rather as ongoing patterning processes of relating between people. This approach also ties into the theme of social selves, building on a pragmatist understanding of selves where the mind is created in communicative interactions between people, as described by Mead (1934).

Humans have the ability, through gesturing to others, to evoke in our own bodies a response similar to that in the others. In our actions, we can take on the attitude and the tendency to act of the other, which is fundamental to how we function as teams, departments, and organisations. Therefore, consciousness (knowing, mind) is a social

process. Our tendency to adopt the attitude and actions of the other is central to how we understand the functioning of organisations.

An organisation is not understood as a system, but as a patterning process that embodies both continuity and transformation. The only way to comprehend what is going on in an organisation is by exploring local interactions. Knowledge is a meaning-making process, and to understand what we know, it must be based on the interpretations of the experiences of the social process of local interaction (taking these experiences seriously (Griffin & Stacey, 2005)). Consequently, the research process and the methods need to align with these basic assumptions, starting with narratives from experiences in interactions as a form of 'raw material' for the research.

Narratives – the immersion in local interaction and experience

My research centres on my (social) practice, exploring my experiences as described by Griffin & Stacey (2005): "[T]he felt experience of bodily interaction between people, patterned as narratives of relating between self and other (ibid, p. 9)". Narration, linked to the concept of self (Durand & Calori, 2006; Ricouer, 1992; Stacey & Mowles, 2016; Svendsen, 2005; Taylor, 1989), is integral. As I have argued, narratives and self are inseparable – they embody who we are.

One might ask how to 'find' a theme worth exploring in research like this – and the answer might be something along the lines that the themes found me (Alvesson, 2009, p. 8). What I noticed in taking up the researcher stance on my own practice, was that whenever something stood out as a bit odd or problematic at work, which I normally might have considered just as a bothersome interruption to achieve our goals, I gradually started to think, 'well that is interesting, what is really going on here, for me and the others?'

A recurring element in my projects is the concept of breakdowns. Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) suggest using these experiences to challenge existing theories, seeing them as catalysts for creative and critical dialogue. Breakdowns, indicative of a loss of meaning, open up space for new theoretical development (ibid, p. 15). Thus,

breakdowns are not only key in my narratives but also in shaping my research methodology. They further argue that theorisation could be seen as disciplined imagination, starting with the breakdown as the place where "imagination can be put to work (ibid. p. 17)".

This research employs a narrative inquiry approach (Mowles, 2017), focusing on reflexive exploration of interactions in the workplace and within the DMan programme community. This method begins with experience and utilises narrative, connecting it to broader research approaches, which I will elaborate on subsequently.

Ethnomethodology/ethnography – a further understanding of my research

One of the directions inspiring the method applied in my research is ethnomethodology. It was originally based on the work of the sociologist Harold Garfinkel. According to his colleague Michael Lynch in his introduction to Garfinkel's posthumous book, *'Studies of Work in the Sciences'* (2022), ethnomethodology is "the detailed study of the observable performance of ordinary and specialized practical actions that produce and sustain social order (ibid, p. 14)". Joas and Knöbl (2009), in their book *'Social Theory'* state that the methods of ethnology (anthropology) used in studying other ethnic groups are "deployed to examine one's own culture, in order to reveal taken-for-granted and characteristic features, of which we are often entirely unaware – precisely because they are taken for granted (ibid. p. 150)".

According to Joas & Knöbl, ethnomethodology was concerned with analysing the hidden grammar of everyday knowledge and action (ibid, p. 168). They argue that the notion that human beings, when making decisions in everyday contexts, have a clear idea from the outset of the necessary conditions to reach a verdict is problematic, if not wrong. It is only retrospectively that it seems as if a clear decision-making strategy had always existed. They describe the reality we face not as something automatically given, but as 'reflexive activity'.

As actors in life, we mutually confirm the meaningfulness of our interactions. Garfinkel, building on Husserl's (1997) concept of the life-world – the very naïve

givenness of the world in which "we are always entangled as actors, is the outcome of the actions and experiences of past generations, our grandparents and parents, who have created a world that we have come to take for granted, which we do not question in everyday life, at least as regards its basic structures, because it is constitutive of the carrying out of action. The 'life-world' is, so to speak, the foundation of all our action and knowledge (Joas & Knöbl, 2009, p. 160)". According to Garfinkel, our everyday actions aim to prevent doubt about the world from arising in the first place. This links back to many of the themes I have explored throughout my thesis and connects to my discussion on taste as an immediate way of knowing.

Garfinkel's method involved 'asking for trouble' or creating breakdowns, as I have termed in this thesis. He used 'breaching experiments' and 'controlled deviations,' observing that test subjects tried to normalise the situation, offering 'normal' explanations to comprehend the experimenter's behaviour (ibid. p. 162). People constantly try to categorise unusual, distressing, impermissible behaviour as normal. We actively produce normality, reiterating that reality basically is reflexive activity. If the rules of our everyday living and knowledge are broken, we get furious and angry, echoing my own reactions in the narratives, as well as those from both the innovators and the members of our organisation upon being facilitated to innovate.

Joas and Knöbl (2009) state, "What guarantees social order is the self-evident validity of our everyday world (ibid, p. 167)". They highlight the strength of ethnomethodology in providing highly detailed descriptions of micro-situations, offering crucial insights relevant to a *theory of action* (ibid, p. 170). This approach resonates with my focus throughout this thesis on the patterning and ongoing negotiations of micro-situations, rather than macro-situations. I argue that the global and the local, the forming and being formed, coexist paradoxically, and thus, recognising existing and emergent global patterns is vital for innovators.

This focus has methodological implications, emphasising that breakdowns are central to learning and innovation. Unlike Garfinkel's breaching experimental approaches described above, my work within my own organisation resembled more of an ethnographic style, as described by Alvesson (2009) in 'At-Home-Ethnography.' This approach differentiates between 'the observing participant' and 'the participating

observer,' with my role aligning with the latter. My ethnographic inquiries were conducted within my own practice, where I was an active participant, engaging "more or less on equal terms with other participants (ibid, p. 4)".

However, I diverge from Alvesson's recommendation that the at-home ethnographer should address phenomena with which they are not deeply personally involved (ibid, p. 5). In contrast, my involvement was deep and personal, encompassing body and soul in the events, which also presented a dilemma of closeness versus distance. This level of involvement can potentially limit the research due to the difficulty in distancing oneself from taken-for-granted ideas. This limitation and how the reflexive inquiry approach of the DMan programme can address these dilemmas will be discussed later.

Alvesson (2009) also distinguishes between two methods of data collection in empirical research: a planned systematic approach and an emergent-spontaneous approach. I have adopted the latter, where the research begins when something revealing occurs. As Alvesson puts it, "The researcher does not find the empirical material; rather, it finds him or her (ibid, p. 8)". This approach was further enriched by insights from my research colleagues, who often helped in identifying significant empirical material through our cooperative inquiry process.

Autoethnography – more than 'inward'-looking

Another significant inspiration for the method is autoethnography, which emerged in response to the objectifying tendencies of traditional ethnography. Recognising that the researcher is an integral part of the study, autoethnography merges the self and the field (Adams et al., 2015). Emotions are considered "integral to doing and understanding social research (ibid, p. 10)", aligning with the emphasis on embodiment in my research.

Caroline Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000), prominent figures in autoethnography, observe that many researchers using I-stories tend to shift from an I-form in the narrative and introduction to an 'objective' and 'evidencing' approach in their

discussion, before abruptly reverting to the I-form in their conclusion. Reflecting on this, I recognise a similar pattern in my Project 2.

An ongoing discussion in my learning set, particularly during the writing of the first two projects, revolved around the transition from being a writer, who sometimes constructs stories with autobiographical content, to a researcher using personal narratives. Unlike in creative writing, where 'show, don't tell' is encouraged, autoethnographic writing required more explicit explanation, or 'telling,' to create *'thick descriptions'* (Geertz, 1973).

My peers and supervisor occasionally expressed doubts about the viability of my first drafts of my first projects as research. And I was vigorously fighting the feedback from my peers. At a particularly challenging moment, my supervisor questioned whether this was the right programme for me, marking a significant breakdown and a turning point for me. I recall drafting a 'defence speech' after a sleepless night, which I never delivered, but it helped me to engage more deeply with the feedback and embrace a more social research perspective.

This process addresses a common critique of autoethnography, which is its tendency towards an inward-looking (narcissistic) focus, where the research outcome appears so personal that its scientific contribution is unclear or unconvincing to many readers (Alvesson, 2009). The key to circumventing these challenges in the DMan community lies in its unique setup, involving learning sets and community meetings, which I will discuss later.

Leon Anderson (2006) criticises evocative auto-ethnographers, exemplified by Caroline Ellis and Arthur Bochner, for their emphasis on evoking an emotional response in readers as the key goal of their scholarship, arguing that this approach centres on subjective emotional experiences (ibid., p. 77). He highlights their postmodern sensibilities, particularly their scepticism towards representing 'the other' and generalising theoretical discourse (ibid.). Anderson advocates for what he terms 'analytic autoethnography,' distinguished by five key features: (1) complete member research status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical

analysis (ibid., p. 378). This stance counters Ellis & Bochner's (2000) call for a narrative text that 'refuses to abstract and explain' (ibid., p. 744).

The debate around autoethnography/ethnography often revolves around the issue of generalisability. Anderson (2006) elaborates on analytic reflexivity as an awareness of the reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants, advocating for self-conscious introspection to better understand both self and others (ibid., p. 382). He emphasises the importance of dialogue with 'data' or 'others,' viewing even ethnographic reflexivity as a relational activity rather than a purely subjective phenomenon (ibid., p. 386).

These concepts are integral to the methods on the programme, with ongoing dialogues about our narratives in both the workplace and with peers and supervisors. I recall Chris Mowles, the director, once remarking, "Doing a 'normal' doctorate might bring the Tyranny of Loneliness; on this programme, you sometimes face the Tyranny of the Social." Reflecting on my journey, I recognise the significance of Anderson's points about dialogue and relational activity. My initial resistance to feedback was a challenge in maintaining dialogue with both my 'data' and my peers.

Some participants leave the programme unfinished, often due to their work not meeting the required standard. Feedback from the learning set not being recognised with their comments is a common theme in these cases, signifying a breakdown in dialogue. Those who leave sometimes express feelings akin to the 'Tyranny of the Social' described by Mowles. When I was questioned about the suitability of the programme for me, it felt like a nomination to leave, a moment that felt tyrannical. In my farewell speech, I touched on the importance of breakdowns: "If you think you can just sail through without struggles, here is some advice from a departing student: Fake the breakdown until you can make the breakdown." This statement encapsulates the necessity of breaking down habitual ways of thinking for successful practice research using auto-ethnographic methods. Engaging in reflexive and hermeneutic dialogue with data and peers is crucial, it can be a painful yet enabling experience.

Leon Anderson (2006) represents the view that ethnography should be able to generalise. He states, "The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document

personal experience, to provide an "insider's perspective," or to evoke emotional resonance with the *reader*. Rather, the defining characteristic of analytic social science is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves (ibid, p. 387)". He advocates for transcending the immediate social world under investigation through broader generalisation (ibid., p. 388), landing on what could be described as a Kantian transcendental side with a "spiralling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding (ibid.)". This approach suggests a slightly reified notion of knowledge.

In contrast, Ellis & Bochner (2006) respond to Anderson's critique in the same edition of the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, expressing scepticism about generalising from experiences. They argue that Anderson "wants to use the world of experience primarily as a vehicle for exercising his head... we want to dwell in the flux of lived experience; they want to appropriate lived experience for the purpose of abstracting something they call knowledge or theory (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p 431)". From their perspective, autoethnography was designed to be rebellious and creative, aiming to set culture or society in motion. In contrast, they view the analytic version as seeking to bring it under 'the control of reason, logic, and analysis' (ibid., p. 433).

They find that Anderson ignores how stories work – a point they make that goes back to my argument 1 about the social selves as a narrative process. They refer to Hannah Arendt's (1968) conception of storytelling in that:

> It is true that storytelling *reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it*, that it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are … If it is true, as her [Isak Dinesen's] "philosophy" suggests, that no one has a life worth thinking about whose life story cannot be told, does it not then follow that life could be, even ought to be, lived as a story, that what one has to do in life is to make the story come true (ibid, p. 100, italics added)?

Ellis & Bochner (2006) accuse Anderson of seeing theory as superior to story – the story is merely data to be analysed. "If you turn a story told into a story analyzed, …, you sacrifice the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor. You transform the story into another language, the language of generalization and analysis, and thus you lose the very qualities that make a story a story (ibid, p. 440)". They argue for an

embodied I present in the autoethnographic text, with flesh and blood, whereas in Anderson the "I we hear is a disembodied authorial academic voice that argues and tries to persuade (ibid. p. 441)".

Atkinson et al. (1999) argues a middle ground on the tensions between scientific and interpretative inquiry and "conceptualize the field of ethnography in terms of continuing tensions, [which] give the field much of its vigour and impetus... Recent innovations do not have to be seen as wholesale rejections of prior positions (ibid., p. 470)". Which leaves me standing in the middle ground. I do try to generalise, argue, and convince. However, without losing my story – I argue that would be to lose myself.

Interpretations of narratives – more on reflection and reflexivity

An alternative label for my research could be *reflexive ethnography* (Davies, 1998), where reflexivity is understood as a social process involving the selves in relation to others. My arguments and conclusions are the result of a collaborative, iterative process with my peers and supervisors. This process takes place within a learning set that convenes eight times a year and includes up to four students and a supervisor, complemented by ongoing discussions with my colleagues at work. Throughout the thesis, I have incorporated some of the comments from these iterative discussions, especially when they introduced important new perspectives that I had not previously considered.

At times, my narrative and text were thoroughly questioned and annotated with comments from my peers. Once I overcame the initial threats to my (narrative) identity that these critiques represented, I could appreciate their value in enriching my descriptions and making them 'thick' enough (Geertz, 1973). Recognising the contributions of others in my research helped me to identify some of my own blind spots. This critical engagement by other researchers with the interpretations of my stories has been essential to the research process and contributes to the generalisability of the thesis – if one can speak of such, as I discussed above.

Mowles (2015) views reflection and reflexivity as two distinct and connected activities. Reflection is what he calls a second order process that happens in the detachment from our immersion. Reflexivity is a third-order process that includes thinking about how we are thinking about our immersion. On the process of reflection John Dewey (1910) states: "Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry; and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful. …To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry—these are the essentials of thinking (ibid. p. 10)." This also points back to my discussion on judgements of taste (which are embodied ways of knowing), and that the potential of innovation is reliant on a negotiation of them – as well as the dependency on the breakdown of habits. Svend Brinkman (2017) in his reading of John Dewey states that, "we primarily know the world through habitual activity rather than through anything mental or related to consciousness (ibid, p 83)." To pause one's judgement and to stay in doubt in a social reflexive process is a key for the changing of habits. As Dewey later and shorter states: "Reflection, roughly speaking, is the painful effort of disturbed habits to readjust themselves (Dewey 1922, p. 76)".

Brinkman (2017) states, "If the self is composed of habits and if habits are social, we can conclude that … the self is social (ibid. p. 84)". To which I add looking back on the process of researching: Yes, it was painful – to suspend judgements, to experience the breakdown of my habits as well as to reflect. In the end it was a reimagining of the self.

Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) propose four levels of reflexive interpretation, where reflexivity is regarded as a means of reflecting on and influencing existing perspectives, encompassing both metatheoretical reflection and practical application. This concept of reflexivity carries a dual meaning, and they suggest that "the levels are reflected in one another (ibid., p. 329)." In terms of interpretation, they imply that "there are no self-evident, simple or unambiguous rules or procedures, and that crucial ingredients are the researcher's judgement (ibid)."

It could be argued that Alvesson & Sköldberg's (2018) notion of levels may contradict my concept of an emergent process. Therefore, I would propose referring to them as four *qualities* of reflexive interpretation rather than levels, to avoid the implication of a

reified, step-by-step model. Here is a concise version of these qualities, applied to my research, with a focus on their interrelationships and inseparability:

1. **Interaction with empirical material:** My role as Head of HR and Innovation is where I engage with the material, forming narratives that serve as 'data'. This also encompasses an element of interpretation (level/quality 2), as immersion and detachment are paradoxically and intrinsically linked – the interpretation seeks to uncover the underlying meanings of these experiences.

2. **Interpretation through immersion and detachment:** This phase involves exploring the potential meanings of my experiences in innovation, with the learning set's feedback aiding in deepening these interpretations and considering alternative perspectives.

3. **Critical interpretation:** This stage involves examining ideology, power, and social reproduction and how they contribute to the paradox of continuity and transformation.

4. **Reflection on text production and language use:** This involves scrutinising the language used in the text, claims to authority, and the selection of voices represented.

The entire reflexivity process 'acts back' on the emergent social self, involving "self-reflection on elements of dominance in the researcher's line(s) of interpretation; the identification of and critical reflection on potentially problematic forms of authority; an openness to other representations, interpretations, and conclusions than those favoured (ibid., p. 335)". This is why I have positioned my main method section towards the end, as a reflexive turn. I outlined the approach at the beginning and reflected on the method throughout the research with my peers in the learning set and during our residentials. This can also be seen as an ongoing development of the methods. Writing these method sections reflexively has offered new insights into the research.

The community – the ways of the reflexive inquiry on the DMan

Important to the reflexive inquiry in the DMan programme is its unique setup, which brings together a community of researchers including peers and supervisors. This community engages in an iterative process of writing, discussion, reflection, and re-writing, aimed at deepening the understanding of our experiences and stimulating movement in thought.

My work is influenced not only by literature, scholarly thoughts, and my colleagues at work but also by the insights of this research community. We study in learning sets comprising four students and a supervisor, working collaboratively on each other's texts throughout the year. Our broader community consists of several such sets, operating year-round with regular meetings. Additionally, four annual residentials are held, where we engage with our specific sets and the community as a whole.

The research process within this framework is inherently social. Each project undergoes numerous iterations where feedback is exchanged, leading to further reflections. This cycle continues until the arguments are clear and well-substantiated, though they remain open to ongoing revisions. This critical juncture is largely determined by the faculty of supervisors but is also an integral part of the learning set dynamics. The process is reciprocal: my writing is shaped by the inputs and critiques from others, just as my feedback contributes to their work. This mutual exchange is vital for continually refining and enriching our collective understanding and the articulation of our arguments.

As Griffin & Stacey (2005) stated:

> Instead, then, of requiring the formulation of a hypothesis which is then explored, the complex responsive processes research method offers a process in which meaningful themes about organizational life emerge. Instead of resulting in a retrospectively tidy write-up, the complex responsive processes method leads to a research account that tracks its own actual development as further reflexivity (ibid, p. 24).

It could be argued that the iterative process of writing this thesis encompasses a retrospective-narrative-sensemaking process as I'm critiquing it in argument 1 (p. 191). Nevertheless, once a project reaches a stage of being 'good enough for now', we move forward, leaving it as part of a portfolio that documents the evolution of our

thoughts. This approach is essential for assembling the thesis and crafting the synopsis towards the end.

Having been established for over two decades, the DMan programme represents an ongoing conversation involving a multitude of participants and faculty members over the years. This research community functions as a 'thought collective' (Fleck, 1935/1979), where ideas and insights evolve and grow through continuous interaction.

The programme includes four residentials annually, featuring diverse conversations in learning sets, community meetings, and informal discussions during dinners and bar interactions. A unique aspect of these gatherings is the Community Meeting, conducted in the mornings. Inspired by the concept of experiential groups in the group analytic tradition (Foulkes, 1964), faculty and students engage in open-ended, agenda-free discussions. These conversations revolve around our work, happenings within the community, and our professional environments, both in formal and informal contexts.

Such a setup allows for the emergence of new patterns and insights within our research community, which, in turn, enriches my local practice. This enrichment comes from exploring my narratives with fellow researchers and colleagues, enabling a deeper understanding and a more nuanced perspective of my work and its implications.

Validity and generalisability – my research as abductive theorising

Norwegian philosopher and Action Researcher Olav Eikeland' (2008) brings in Aristotle's differentiation of *theoresis*, which would be the distant, detached, and non-interfering perceptual observation versus *theoria*, theory and science that comes from a deep involvement in and participation in the activities we study. My research can be connected to theoria:

> What *theoria* explores and searches for, then, are existential and basic historical concepts, practical concepts that we live and enact, receiving them first from our culture, societies and traditions through habituation and socialization, later sorting and sifting them critically and dialogically, acquiring them anew in a different, more distinguished way. *Theoria* is not only knowledge for practice. It is knowledge from practice, and necessarily so in order to be knowledge for practice (ibid. p. 306).

Narrative research is based on interpretations, and our social process of inquiry means that not any interpretations would be plausible. The learning set is a community of inquirers and through the process we aim at socially verifying the research. We are not so interested in final answers as we are to see that the research gives input to the ongoing inquiry of practice-based research.

As to the question of generalisability another important source of inspiration comes from scholars interested in the abductive research (Alvesson & Sköldberg; 2018; Martela, 2015; Mowles, 2015) originally termed by the pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce. It could be argued that my research is conducted within this framework. The method of abduction could be called a process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. As Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) express it:

> In abduction, an (often surprising) single case is interpreted from a hypothetic overarching pattern, which, if it were true, would explain the case in question. The interpretation should then be strengthened by new observations (new cases) …. During the process, the empirical area of application is successively developed, and the theory (the proposed overarching pattern) is also adjusted and refined (ibid. p. 4).

They further state that thinking in terms of abduction has a lot to do with hermeneutics (which I discuss in this thesis), where our theoretical preconceptions come into question through our inquiries, which also keeps developing and elaborating the theory. Further, according to Martela (2015) a pragmatist philosophy of science comes from the ordinary inquiry, "thus it starts and ends in experiencing, is always constrained by fallibilism, proceeds utilizing abduction, and instead of 'knowledge' it produces warranted assertions (ibid. 537)", the latter being "outcomes of inquiry that are so settled that we are ready to act upon them, yet remain always open to be changed in the future (ibid. p. 540)". Pragmatist inquiry is always done with end-in view, evaluating the value of theories in their applicability in practice – research is "an inherently ethical activity (ibid.)."

In producing warranted assertibility as a criterion to (socially) evaluate the research, the question of validity could be replaced by one that asks whether "one has enough reasons to accept a conclusion to use it as a resource in future inquiries and actions (ibid. p. 544)". Science is a collective inquiry in trying to make sense of the world.

"Individuals do not come up with their convictions in isolation, but as parts of a community of inquirers which further sets norms for reasoned justification of one's warranted assertions (ibid., 541)". The arguments and conclusions need (socially) to be argued in a plausible and convincing way. "If one's path of inquiry is successful on both individual and collective levels, this might lead to the tentative acceptance of one's conclusions by the scientific community, which brings one's current inquiry to a satisfactory resolution (ibid., p. 546)."

In building on a pragmatic understanding of science it can be argued, as do Weick (1989) when arguing for theory construction as disciplined imagination akin to an evolutionary process, "the contribution of social science does not lie in validated knowledge, but rather in the suggestion of relationships and connections that had previously not been suspected, relationships that change actions and perspectives (ibid., p. 524)".

My research could then be put forward as abductive theorising in the following way:

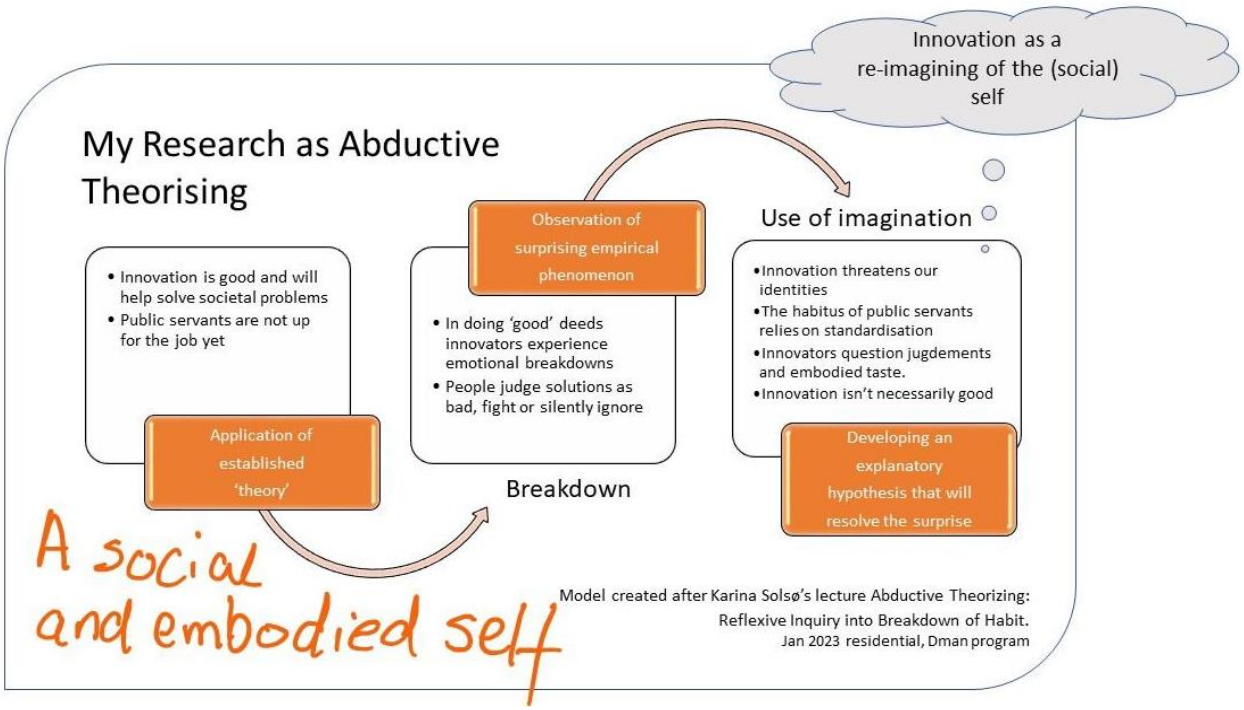

Figure 2 My research as abductive theorising

My last point on generalisability is to come back to the Norwegian socio-anthropologist Tian Sørhaug who reflects on Clifford Geertz's (1973) recommendation not to generalise between situations, but through them. Sørhaug (2004), states that we need to start with Gertz's thick descriptions and "try to generalise both through and between. We need to consider the relationships *between* (complex) individuals and (complex) situations in processes of management and try to express something of generalisable value *through* analysis of the patterns of these relationships (ibid., p. 39, my translation – italics added)."

The paradoxical absence and presence of the literature review

In my thesis, I diverge from a more traditional approach of conducting qualitative research, which typically begins with a literature review aimed at identifying gaps in theoretical understanding. Instead of relying on established knowledge to formulate research questions, my approach is grounded in practice. Alvesson & Sandberg (2011) critique the traditional method of 'gap spotting' for its reliance on existing understandings rather than starting with the experience from practice and the way the problem is constituted within it.

In the DMan programme, research questions originate directly from our field of practice. Literature used to understand emerges through a reflexive process of exploring our practices via narratives. This approach ensures that the literature used is relevant and contributes to a deeper understanding of the practical experiences. It is a social process, enriched by the thought collective within the community, where literature suggestions from peers, faculty, and other students' readings play a crucial role.

An example of the emergent nature of this process is how I unexpectedly (and unpleasantly) came to consider Arendt's (1963) report from Eichmann's trial and

Bauman's (1989) *'Modernity and the Holocaust'* and the concept of bureaucratic violence in relation to my work as a public servant. This connection, which surfaced during one of our residentials, provided a new lens to view the paradox of the particular and the general, as well as the local and global, within my practice and helped me understand what had been going on in my narrative.

The four projects of my thesis are compiled as a portfolio, with the final synopsis providing an additional layer of reflexivity. It was during the creation of the synopsis that I identified a gap in my discussion on innovation and social selves. This realisation led to a critical mini literature review, allowing me to connect more comprehensively with the extensive literature on innovation. Importantly, this gap was not a predetermined hypothesis, but rather a need that emerged from my reflexive process. This approach helped me develop a critique of the prevalent discourse on innovation as inherently positive, thus contributing a unique perspective to the field.

The emergence of ethics

As stated in the outline of the research approach in the introduction, my research focuses on real persons and involves colleagues at work and citizens. This, of course, raises serious ethical questions. Importantly, my research is not aimed at analysing others in the narratives but rather at deeply exploring my own practice through reflecting on our shared situations. This approach is designed to enhance my understanding and allow me to make generalisations about broader themes.

The ethical approval notification is to be found in Appendix 2 (p. 259). All main participants in my narrative were provided with participant information sheets (Appendix 3, p. 261) and signed consent forms (Appendix 4, p. 263). Furthermore, to protect the identities of the individuals and the organisation involved, I have anonymised both in the narrative. Additionally, I have applied for an embargo on the research following its submission to further safeguard the anonymity of those easily recognisable within the organisation, which has supported my research through sponsorship.

However, even with these preventive measures to assure, the ethical questions are not fully answered (and I will be arguing they never will be). In her article, *Ethical Autoethnography: Is it possible?,* Jane Edwards (2021) argues that "ongoing reflection is needed to consider how including others within an ethic of research practice (...) to ensure that *accountability* and *care* are situated at the centre in responsible research (ibid., p. 2, emphasis in original)."

Ethics in the DMan research community are considered emergent, continually negotiated in interactions within the community and with colleagues at work, as outlined by Griffin (2002). Given the emergent nature of the research, it is challenging to anticipate all ethical questions in advance or predict who will be part of the evolving narratives. The focus is on constant vigilance regarding my actions as a researcher, addressing ethical issues as they arise.

However, the issues do not stop with the final submission as ethical questions on my research can arise later, in other contexts, so they will continue emerging in a larger context, which is an important point made by Edwards (2021). In her article, she reflects on her own experience of firstly being a part of another scholar's research and then being named and pointed out in a conference, and then easily identified in the following article without a chance of offering a counter-narrative or further context.

The learning set's iterative process and my peer's engagement with my narratives play a crucial role. They challenge me and prompt critical reflection on the unfolding situations. For instance, in the initial versions of the narrative for Project 4, I portrayed Thor, my CEO, in a negative light, reflecting my own biases and missing the previous CEO (and myself as one). However, through the reflexive process and discussions with my learning set, I recognised that my judgment of 'badness' was as much about my perceptions and responses as it was about his actions. This insight, facilitated by the feedback from my peers, led to a more ethical and balanced representation of both Thor and myself, highlighting our respective contributions to the situation.

Even with consent, there are challenges, one being that the participants really know what they are getting themselves in for – as pointed out by Fine (1993) as one of ethnography's 10 lies. I will illustrate some of these challenges by referring to the

narrative of Project 2. Tore, named the raging innovator in the text, has signed the consent and has read the whole project and commented on it. In his feedback, he stated he felt understood. The picture painted of him is not necessarily flattering, stating his rage shows signs of narcissism. Signe, named the frustrated designer, commented that she stood out as a heroine in the text (comparing herself to Tore) – the only major thing she commented on was my portrayal of her tears; they were tears of anger, a point I had not realised in writing it, but could recognise as she said so. Thus, there is the villain, the heroine, and the bored Head of Innovation.

What is in my writing that makes Tore feel understood? Although not flattering, the picture painted is not evil. I stand there beside him, describing my actions (and inactions) reflecting on my own narcissism – and the narcissism is explained as contextual and societal[65]. Besides what I described, and he read, was already a part of our relationship – the many conversations we had on how he was (contextually and socially) perceived in his job and some of his actions to promote this perception. These conversations he himself had named our "catholic moments," and he did ask for them whenever something stirring had happened. Probably a relationship of trust. I still meet him socially from time to time, and he eagerly asks about my research – and we engage in some gossiping about the latest happenings in The District. And yet, it is problematic and will always be problematic: Even though he has signed a consent and stated that he felt understood – did he really, or did he (unconsciously) just sign his consent to be a good employee? Did he know what he was getting himself in for? Can we ever?

Andrew & Le Rossignol (2017) capture some of these challenges in stating, "[A]ll others have rights over how they are represented regardless of any apparent consent they may have given at the outset" (Andrew & Le Rossignol, 2017, p 245). And my point being, it never really stops.

A problem in some autoethnographic texts is when the I-narrator insists on their versions of 'the truth' as exemplified by Jane Edwards (2021) above. The problem

[65] Again, it should be pointed out that narcissism is not necessarily unhealthy; it can be healthy as in self esteem and in taking care of yourself. Maybe our reactions in the situation were healthy ones in the situation we found ourselves in.

occurs when the I tells truths about others, truths they themselves do not recognise – or/and have a truth presented about themselves that they cannot or will not recognise. We had this question raised at us in one of the community meetings of the DMan, when a new student, who was the employee of a former student (now a Doctor of Management), read his text and was furious about the way she and her colleagues were presented. This sparked a good ethical conversation in the community. You can reach a point where the research is ethical enough – but never reach a stage where it is finally deemed ethical as these processes are emergent also after the research is completed (as in this case, when a colleague read the thesis long after it was cleared by the examiners). Autoethnography can be an assault. With or without written consent.

Edwards (2021) states, "Autoethnography cannot be one fixed and unassailable method but instead requires a potentially messy, fluid, and highly contextual approach to exploring and understanding self-experience in the context (ibid., p. 3)". She further states that instead of portraying the experiences of others, autoethnographic writing focuses on ourselves, specifically on our personal experiences and how they were shaped through interactions with others who were present during those moments. Or as Lee (2018) states: "The autoethnographer strives to achieve a version of the self and an account of events that is consistent and acceptable to their conscience (ibid., p. 5)". A version of the social self, I would add.

Some further lines on the treatment of data:

I briefly touched upon the treatment of data in the introduction and will use this last section of the Research Method to reflect a bit more on this theme. During my Master of Science degree, I used Action Research as a method. In the project I researched, I was the researcher, though deeply involved with my co-researcher and the individuals from the organisation I was researching with, which is central to the method of AR. In this project, all our meetings were recorded with permission, and I ended up listening to and transcribing hours of conversations, learning a great deal about how I acted with others in my role as an organisational development consultant (and researcher). In this project, it was clear what my 'data' consisted of, along with photos, emails,

programmes, presentations, etc. My role here was *more* akin to the 'observing participant' (Alvesson, 2009).

However, in this autoethnographic research, what constitutes my 'data' is less clear – as is my role as a researcher, being 'the participating observer' (ibid.), which are two sides of the same problem. My role in the organisation is as a manager, and in all the events of the narratives, this is my primary role. My role as a researcher is less evident in the present (though influencing me), hence my challenge to the reader to critically interpret the 'I' present in the text in the introduction. I do not have extensive field notes, taped conversations, or a lot of written material concerning my research. I have made some notes in conversations, but largely, the main source of data in the research is my recollection of events, looking back when something striking happened – and then linking this to previous events.

This is made clear throughout the research, and I will use some examples to illuminate the process and issues with my data. Section *Svein, the Head of Immoral and Unethical Conduct* (p.77) reveals some examples of the process. Firstly, the section contains an email I received from Rita, the service designer, which sparked the subsequent events. In the email, Rita raised serious concerns about the situation the citizen and employer Anne was experiencing. This email is just translated, and it remains in my inbox – and working in the public sector, it is strictly regulated what could be stored and how; this email contains no exact person-sensitive material, so it is not a violation of any data storage procedures, since Anne, the citizen, is not named, which would have been a violation. The next event in the narrative is my call to Rita – the first part of the conversation is my recollection. The next part is our jointly reconstructed exchange, which we used in a presentation on the service design project (a presentation that was online and recorded). We used the reconstructed conversation in the presentation to highlight important aspects of some of the problems in service design within the public sector, much as I have in this thesis – the question of bureaucratic equal treatment (the general) and the possible innovative particulars.

I have been clear about the status of my data throughout. In the above example, it is clearly stated what is an email and what is a reconstructed conversation. Other examples include the power game in project 4, in the section *The duelling innovators* (p. 112), from the meeting in the management team where I was uncertain of my future

role within the organisation with the new CEO. For instance, I state that I recall them (the others in the team) saying something (they must have…), but not exactly what. I also refer to an earlier conversation with the CEO, not recalling the exact words – I comment on that in the text and have added a footnote (number 24) discussing methodological considerations of this.

As is the case with recollections, they tend to be uncertain and coloured by the position of the 'I' recalling them – but the main point here is not the exact words. The point about my 'data' is to make the narratives rich enough to facilitate reflection. Through the reflexive process of creating a narrative and using theory to understand more about what was going on for me in this context and then possibly generalise. And again, others in the text might have experienced it differently, and there might be counter-stories. The way it is told and the process of being able to tell it the way I do, was as important as the data itself.

Conclusions and contributions

My conclusions will be in pointing to the way my thesis contributes to knowledge and practice:

Contributions to knowledge

In preparing my argument 1 I searched the literature on the use of narratives and storytelling and innovation to see how I was arguing in comparison to other thinkers. I came across an article by the author and 'management guru' Stephen Denning (2005), *Transformational innovation. A journey by narrative,* in which he states*:*

> And championing transformational innovation involves going to war with all the elements inside an organization that benefit from the status quo. Within the organization, such innovation may involve persuading managers and staff to turn their working lives upside down and inside out, and not to do so slowly and grudgingly but quickly and enthusiastically. Such a shift will never be easy because it puts in question existing strategies, jobs, careers, processes, brands, customers, and culture (ibid. p. 11).

This helps set the tone to discuss my contributions to knowledge, also in stating what I am *not* doing. Underlying this quote is again the thinking that innovation per definition is good (Pfotenhauer et al, 2019; Gripenberg et al, 2012; Godin, 2012). We see warlike images in fighting the laggards, the ones who do not necessarily buy into the imperative of the goodness of innovation.

I agree with Denning when pointing to the possibility of being turned upside down and inside out, those are the breakdowns I have been exploring together with the reflexive process and innovation as a reimagining of the self, which is adding contribution to knowledge. However, my contribution also implies a questioning of the implied goodness of innovation – through my explorations of the paradox of the particular and the general and its meaning to us as we try to negotiate innovation: What is good for one is not necessarily good for the many, and, paradoxically, what is good for the many is not necessarily good for the individual. Innovation is as connected to the exception as it is to the rule. Denning admits some might 'benefit' from status quo –

but he goes to war against the begrudged laggards, whereas I argue for the negotiation as there might be good reasons for the grudge.

As do I, Denning (2005) points to narrative as a way of working on transformation: "Thus it is through narrative that we discover a different view of who we are and what the organization might become. It is through narrative that we imagine a new story of the future in which we can passionately believe (ibid., p. 12)." To which I would add – it could paradoxically be an imagined future that we might want to resist. My argument and contribution to knowledge is on the negotiations within the paradoxes of the particular and the universal, as well as of continuity and transformation. This is where our judgements of taste play in as embodied ways of knowing and judging good from bad, beautiful from ugly. I further point at narratives as inseparable from who we are (and not just a reified tool) and thus that innovation can be influenced by a negotiation of our narrative identities – a reimagining of the selves – a point I have not come across elsewhere in this form in the literature on innovation.

My research presents new perspectives in the domain of public sector innovation, filling gaps that mainstream studies have overlooked. Mainstream studies posit that innovation is a necessity, even an obligation, in the public sector, advocating its crucial role in addressing major societal challenges (Jordan, 2014; Pfotenhauer et al, 2019; Thøgersen & Waldorff, 2022). A common critique is that the public sector is not appropriately designed to foster innovation and that public servants are ill-equipped for this task (Bason, 2010, p 18). However, less emphasis is given to understand why such a situation prevails. Thus, my thesis contributes to this field of knowledge in two distinct but interlinked ways:

Firstly, that it is an exploration of the roots of the imperative of innovation and further the habitus and logic of public servant's practice. Our modus operandi is typically aimed towards the bureaucratic ideal – trying to achieve the best and fairest outcomes for the majority. However, this might obscure the unique or exceptional cases which could either lead to potential unjust treatment of an individual or present opportunities for innovation. Highlighting this tension is a significant contribution to our understanding of public sector dynamics.

Secondly, the crux of my thesis revolves around the complex struggle we face when stepping into the shoes of innovators. This struggle is rooted in the negotiation of what constitutes the 'good' and, which I argue are negotiations of taste as an embodied way of knowing in judging the good, the bad and the ugly. By integrating the concept of 'taste' into the discourse surrounding power dynamics and innovation, my thesis offers a unique perspective that seems unexplored in the existing literature; neither academic resources nor a Google search yielded any pertinent findings. This innovative approach constitutes a key contribution to the field. Moreover, there are some references to aesthetics and innovation in the context of service design as an innovative solution generator (see Project 4, p 108). However, this aspect too appears insufficiently examined, indicating the potential for my work to illuminate this under-explored theme, thereby enriching our understanding in these areas.

My research can be characterised as a narrative and ethical exploration of the imperative of innovation in that innovation intervenes with people's lives in ways which is not necessarily for the better – for instance in the euphemising role of the discourse of innovation as a more palatable way of saying we need to cut the support for inhabitants. As pointed out by Sara R. Jordan (2014) this ethical exploration is lacking in mainstream literature and states, "vis-á-vis an empirical research agenda, additional research into the question, 'do bureaucrats behave as if innovation is an imperative?' would advance this area of research markedly (ibid., p. 87)", and this is one of the contributions of my research.

My thesis contributes to our understanding of organisational processes by offering an in-depth exploration of the connection between the social dynamics of self and innovation. This idea resonates with Fougère & Harding's (2012) assertion, "If we can acknowledge how fundamental innovation is to identity as well as to the economy, we can perhaps allow ourselves to open new and different ways of thinking about innovation (ibid., p. 58)". My work specifically focuses on how innovation fundamentally intertwines with identity—essentially positing that innovation is a breakdown of habits and in effect a re-imagining of the self. This novel interpretation presents a considerable addition to the existing body of knowledge on innovation and identity dynamics.

I would add that a further addition to the thinking about innovation would be to bear in mind the interconnection between social processes of the self and the paradox of continuity and transformation, in that wherever there is an imperative for innovation and change there is paradoxically also an imperative for (the potential security of) sameness. My research further both applies a reflexive, narrative inquiry of the experiences of innovators and points to the same to conceive innovation together with others in our joint reimagining of ourselves in the context of our history, our living present and the emergent future, which I agree calls for innovation.

In conclusion, my research makes a distinctive contribution to the knowledge of innovation in public sector by:

1. **Questioning the imperative of innovation:** Probing the origins and implications of the imperative for innovation – and showing innovation is not necessarily good. The research highlights how bureaucratic practices may overlook unique individual cases.

2. **Introducing taste:** Introducing the concept of 'taste' as an embodied knowledge, and judgements of taste affecting the discourse on power dynamics and innovation.

3. **Exploring narrative identity:** Exploring the significant role of narratives in transformational innovation and emphasising that our narrative identities can influence the innovation process

4. **Discussing the ethics of innovation:** Addressing ethical considerations surrounding the impacts of (the discourse of) innovation, an aspect that often has been overlooked in mainstream research.

5. **Linking breakdown of habits and the reimagining of the self:** Investigating the profound link between the social dynamics of self and innovation, positing that innovation necessitates the disruption of habits and reshaping of identity which might be sensed as a threat.

6. **Introducing paradoxical thinking:** Unveiling the paradox of continuity and transformation, which underscores the complexities of the innovation process.

Through these explorations, my work provides a rich, nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of innovation, challenging existing assumptions and illuminating previously overlooked aspects.

Contributions to practice

An important turning point for me came finishing Project 3 and coming to the progression via writing my progression report. To prepare, I started to talk about my research to my colleagues, gave presentations and a lecture to students of management, innovation, and co-creation at a University College. I have continued talking about it. Hearing myself talk my way through my research (gesture), seeing, hearing, and sensing how my overarching theme seemed to resonate with others (response), was as important as the writing of it in the first place.

Last year upon my progression I gave a two-hour presentation and discussion of my research to my fellow managers and union representatives of The District in an offsite meeting. One year later, and during the writing of my synopsis, we were off again to an offsite meeting. It is with pleasure I hear them refer to my talk on the theme of the negotiation of expectations of our citizens, which I both presented last year as well as discussed throughout the research process. Normally they would have called it expectation management, but they now re-imagine this as a negotiation, where we are parties who need to negotiate the level of service in the particular and difficult situations of some of our inhabitants. One size does not necessarily fit all and giving out big sizes to everybody would be impossible – they simply are too limited. The negotiation is a hard one, both for the civil servant and the service user in need. It might take a re-imagining from both sides. This is an important theme, and I will offer myself to talk about this in other contexts than in my own organisations.

To be able to give the presentations, I had to revisit my research and look for the red threads – as I have done while writing this synopsis. It is striking to see how it all

connects to the stories of my life (as I tell them) and the important learning point on how the stories I tell are influenced by the stories I have been told and read (as they told them). And further how others are influenced by me telling the story of how I got to be so obsessed about innovation.

One of the stories I tell presenting my research is my coming-out-story and what it meant to me as I have been exploring in this thesis. Another story I share is about my mother, who died as I finished my Project 2. She was a rather introverted woman, as opposed to my father who extrovertedly defined the world as he saw it and made sure to tell it to everybody, time after time. As she got dementia, mother started to show more of herself to the world. A favourite story from the last years of my family is when my father was haranguing her about putting in her hearing aid. She was walking around the house with her walker, and father, who had dementia himself, had been going on for quite a while about her hearing aid. Reaching the kitchen, father told her again (which she heard perfectly well without any hearing aid): "And remember to put your hearing aid in!"

"Or not!" my mother said in a low voice to herself in the kitchen.

The phrase "or not" has proven influential at my workplace, even infectious. My meaning behind using the story and the phrase was to open the possibility that things do not necessarily have to be the way they look at first sight – to add complexity to our stories. Suddenly people around me started saying "or not" in many contexts. Having shared the story in the bar at the DMan I even started to hear it there. Now I see that my mother could be criticised for being overly dichotomic, which the statement *'or not'* exemplifies. A better statement would be '*and not'*, and I have had relatively fruitless attempts to reintroduce this to my colleagues. The problem with this statement again is that it exemplifies the Kantian dualism of separating two options, you have this *and* then you have that – not necessarily true at the same time. What I am arguing here is the paradoxical interventions, where more things are true at the same time, so an intervention respecting the paradoxes might sound something like: Yes, and what else might be true? That would be an invitation for a negotiation and a possible re-imagining of the selves.

As stated several times before in this thesis, the reflexive process of becoming a practice researcher has profoundly affected and changed me. We have also seen how views on citizens' needs and how we perceive our context can change through a process of deeply engaging reflexively with colleagues through narratives from our practices. These are important points that also highlight how this research can contribute to the practice of organisational change and innovation. It is argued in the thesis that innovation requires a re-imagining of the self through reflections on breakdowns. This means that the methods of reflexive inquiry applied in writing this thesis are also relevant for the practice of innovators.

Words matter. My contribution to practice is that I engage in the conversations around change and participate with others in being open to a more fallibilistic exploration of innovation. The paradigm of New Public Management has been with us in the public sector for quite some time now. The vocabulary is filled up with performance management, profit realisation and other words that understand human and social needs in technical terms. Change happening by objectives seems to be a general strategy for innovation. My contribution is in the sharing of embodied experience in order to support different perspectives. I sense both resonance from people when talking in different terms around innovation and also a sense of relief for them when exploring both that innovation is not necessarily good and that we might have our good reasons for acting in the habitual way that we do. That sense of relief might be as good a contribution to practice as any. I have written a fair amount on the anxiety the imperative to innovate can provoke and some of the associated ethical and organisational difficulties associated with this. The relief of recognising that I and others are feeling anxious may offer the potential for new ways of thinking together.

After submitting the thesis and preparing for the viva voce, I continued sharing my research in various contexts, which became a theme during the viva. My examiners encouraged me to incorporate some of this, as the power of stories and the reflexive narrative approach to foster professional learning in these situations clearly demonstrates the potential of my work for the practice of organisational change. In presenting my research to a group of employees in a neighbouring District, who, besides their normal jobs, are appointed as innovators to facilitate the district's

innovation work (much like how we have organised it), my sharing of personal narratives about how change is deeply connected to our identities prompted one of them to state: "I have never thought of change this way." They immediately began sharing stories of how, as innovators, they had found themselves in situations where the idealisation of innovation broke down, facing practitioners who did not see the immediate value of what the innovators were trying to promote. And what they could do differently about trying to facilitate innovation.

I went back to my old organisation in the City of Oslo, which is involved in organisational development. During this session, a woman, whom I vaguely knew, approached me and thanked me for helping her in her situation. She was in the midst of divorcing her husband and, as I was talking, she realised that she was now experiencing a breakdown and that she was starting the process of re-imagining herself as not part of that marriage. In another recent situation, I found myself discussing with a colleague how quitting smoking requires a re-imagining of oneself as a non-smoker. Yet another time, a colleague spoke to me about the relevance of this concept in a conflict-resolution situation between two of her employees, one of whom refused to see any perspective other than her own. My colleague remarked that this would necessitate an unwanted re-imagining of oneself as part of the problem.

Right before Christmas, I attended a lunch party with some friends who asked me about my research. I explained the concept of the breakdown of habits and the re-imagining of the self. One of them dismissed my arguments, stating she had never experienced change as a threat to her identity. Knowing her story, that she had recently taken early retirement due to a difficult boss, I began to ask her questions about this. She eagerly started to talk about this boss and how she was insistent on the dysfunction of their working environment, what they produced together, and the need for drastic changes. Her emotional distress of what had happened was still apparent in her way of describing it even now after some time. "You know", my friend said, "she even called us a kindergarten". "And you resisted that?" I asked. "Yes, definitely, as I resisted her," she answered. "My point exactly," I stated – "she wanted you to change, and you did not want to change in that way. So, I think we do agree." She looked at me and started to smile. Then she raised her glass to me, "Touché!" she said.

Further I recommend staying with the paradox of continuity and transformation – staying with whatever is happening: The negotiation. My contribution to practice then lies in my argument that innovation is dependent on a negotiation and of reflexive processes in relation to our embodied habits of how we go on together – as the habitual selves which we are.

As stated in the introduction, the research starts with the "I" that works on change and transformation and argues the reimagining of the self as core to innovation. Starting with the social self, this is where I end again: In democracy as a school of self-reflection (Dewey, 2018), "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (ibid. p.93)". The contribution of this thesis to practice is in recommending negotiations and reflexive inquiries as a key concept of trying to find ways of going on together that are sustainable also for the future. It will take (democratic) negotiations of both expectations and solutions. Reflexive, narrative-based processes of exploring the breakdowns of habits can be a way to unlock the potential for innovation.

In conclusion, my research makes a distinctive contribution to the practice of innovation in the public sector by:

1. **Engaging in Conversations**: I actively participate in conversations about change, applying the unique lens of my research to inform and influence these discussions. Through this, I promote a fallibilistic and exploratory approach to innovation.

2. **Reframing Expectation Management**: My work has influenced how my colleagues perceive and think about the management of expectations, potentially transitioning from a top-down approach to one of negotiation. This not only impacts the provision of individualised services, but also empowers service users by recognising their unique circumstances.

3. **Introducing Paradoxical Thinking**: My influence has fostered a greater understanding of the paradox of continuity and transformation in the workplace. I have introduced a more nuanced approach in the workplace of

embracing the complexities and exploring the paradoxes. This can promote innovative thinking.

4. **Sharing Personal Stories**: By integrating my personal experiences into my research presentations, I make complex concepts more relatable and impactful. This results in a richer understanding of our practices and their implications and might enable the re-imagining of the selves innovation necessitates.

5. **Challenging Dominant Paradigms**: I offer an alternative to the dominant paradigms of New Public Management by shedding light on the complexities of innovation and its impacts on individuals. This can foster a more open and supportive environment for innovation. My research also questions the dominant paradigm, that innovation is good.

6. **Promoting Reflexivity and Negotiation**: My thesis puts forward reflexive inquiries and negotiation as fundamental components of innovation, emphasising the importance of considering our embodied habits in these processes.

7. **Disseminating Knowledge**: I am committed to sharing my research as widely as possible, through presentations, discussions, or future publications, ensuring its influence reaches beyond my immediate context.

Overall, my research contributes to the practice of innovation, especially in the public sector, by providing a humanistic and complex view of the process. My focus on negotiation, reflexivity, and paradoxical thinking paves the way for new approaches to explore change and transformation.

Father tells and mother comments – and some thoughts on further research

Future research, much like my reflexive process, is alive, emergent, and deeply interwoven with our ongoing efforts to facilitate public sector innovation. I have already been booked to give presentations and workshops for the forthcoming fall. I proactively reached out to a national conference, “Municipalities of Tomorrow,” and offered myself as a speaker. The response was to initiate with a podcast. In addition, I

am contemplating penning a book on some of the findings from this thesis once things settle.

One outcome of the re-imagining of myself as a researcher of practices is that I now perceive the wide-ranging relevance of my explorations of paradoxes, for instance the general and the universal. For the past few months, I have been managing the role of Head of Health and Care alongside my thesis work and my prior position as Head of HR and Innovation[66]. During our weekly decision-making meetings, where we allocate nursing home spots and more demanding care tasks, I sometimes find myself interjecting as the non-professional in the field I am, particularly when the team falls back on template solutions presented as equal treatment. I ask for more specific information about the cases, highlighting the paradoxical aspect of treating similar cases similarly while paying attention to their differences. This suggests that my research holds relevance in a broader array of situations within the public sector, and potentially the private sector as well and it also shows how I have developed my practice and how I contribute to the development of practice in The District. This is also a possible point of departure for further research.

Finishing a doctoral thesis, I realise is not the end of a journey – it is the first steps of the continuing fallibilistic inquiry of the reimagining self, upon which my father has something to tell. My father, who died as I wrote Project 3, was a storyteller who could and would tell stories in most situations. I will give him the last word – again – because of what he said to me before getting my driver's licence, which came back to me upon finishing the doctoral thesis[67]. My father said: "Once you get that licence, that is when you start learning how to drive."

"Or not," as my mother would have said[68].

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[66] I have been repeating to people lately: If you work full time and are doing a doctorate on the side, and your boss asks if you temporarily could fill another role, I say: Do not do it. I have been on the verge of a breakdown (again).

[67] Not an original statement probably, driving instructors all over the world probably say the same. Most of my father's stories (and mine) are really not that original – we are not as unique as we sometimes think we – and our fathers – are. However, it is important going on telling: We are our stories.

[68] Getting the final (dichotomous) words – for once

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Appendix 1: A critical discussion of Wicked Problems

In the following follows a critique on some of Rittel and Webber's ten 'distinguishing properties' of a wicked problem from Project 3.

- *(#1) Wicked problems have no definitive formulation*

  According to Rittel and Webber (1973), "(T)he problem can't be defined until the solution has been found." Formulating the problem is the problem, and to define the problem is to find its solution (ibid p 161).

  Firstly, these formulations carry various tautologies including 'if A, then A'; as well as 'A and not A' at the same time. For Rittel & Webber it is about the process of formulating and reformulating that might bring solutions, but it shines through that they are somewhat obsessed with solutions. They leave out the possibility of non-solvability.

  Rita and I attended an experience-sharing session with all the other Innolab project teams. One of the most striking takeaways was the advice: "Stay with the problem, do not be afraid of committing time and money to the process of definition. That is how solutions emerge," with which I sensed her profound agreement. The argument was that it was beneficial to spend a long time in the first phases of the step-by-step-models and not rush to the solution. But the person arguing (and Rita) did not stop believing in the (linear) step-by-step-thinking altogether. This thinking remains – as do solutions.

- *(#2) Wicked problems have no stopping rule.*

  According to Rittel & Webber, when dealing with a wicked problem, one should not expect any clear indication when *the* or *a* solution has been found. They further state, "The planner terminates work on a wicked problem, not for reasons inherent in the '*logic*' of the problem. He stops for considerations that

are *external* to the problem: he runs out of time or money or patience. He finally says, "That is good enough," or "This is the best I can do within the limitations of the project", or "I Like this solution" etc." (ibid, italics added). This could be seen in my narrative, when Rita questions whether the external consultants pushed too early in order to deliver.

However, these statements are problematic for several reasons. This distinguishing property follows from #1, hence it is problematic for the same reasons. So, when they talk about inherent logic of a problem, their whole taking of a problem (and the logic of it) is tautological based and would be logically problematic. The statement that they stop for reasons that are *external* to the problem, is likely problematic. They set up a spatial distinguishing property of internality versus externality to the problem (that is problematic in itself); time and money could be internal as well as external. So, we can see that Rittel & Webber's thinking becomes flawed within their own terms.

Further, Rittel & Webber's second point is problematic for more reasons. In project 2 I discussed how the imperative of change is connected to Western notions of chronological and linear time that have their origins in a sense of ongoing, continuous improvement. We link causality, time and rationality and, having constructed a past, a present and a future, we often strive for a 'better' future (Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

Rittel & Webber state, "the process of solving the problem is identical with the process of understanding its *nature*, because there are no criteria for sufficient understanding and because there are no ends to the *causal chains* that link interacting open systems, the would-be planner can always *try to do better*. Some additional investment of effort might increase the chances of finding *a better solution"* (ibid, italics added). My point exactly – Rittel & Webber might be trying to contest natural science rationality for solving (or resolving) social problems, but they are stuck in the same rational and causal thinking, linear time concept and within the same imperative of change.

- *(#4) There is no immediate and no ultimate test of solutions to wicked problems.*

  In this distinguishing property, they show their relation to systems thinking. Resolving wicked problems, "any solution, after being implemented, will generate waves of consequences over an extended – virtually an unbounded – period of time (…). The full consequences cannot be appraised until the waves of repercussions have completely run out, and we have no way of tracing *all* the waves through *all* the affected lives ahead of time or within a limited time span" (ibid, p 163, italics in original). Here there is a link back to the equilibrium state of systems, something stirs up the system (an external force of some kind) and then 'it' seeks its way back to the equilibrium state. Mowles (2021) points to an analogy of a game of billiards where the balls bump into each other – and in this line of thinking they stay unchanged by the bump. Within Mowles' thinking of complexity with its roots i.a. in pragmatism, we are forming and being formed as we go along – and there might not be such a thing as an equilibrium state. There is a quality of predictable unpredictability about our bumping into each other.

  For Rittel & Webber this comes down to the impossibility of tracing it all; equilibrium does exist – and planners (or change agents) stay outside of the system unchanged as they bump and get bumped. Contrary to what I explore in my narratives, where we get emotionally stirred up and possibly change (or not) is through our bumping.

- *(#6) There are un-enumerable potential solutions to wicked problems.*

  However, as we have seen in my narrative(s) and connected to the paradox of continuity and transformation that I am exploring, it might be un-enumerable ways of not finding or being able to implement any solution at all – not based on logical inconsistencies, but because we interdependently interact, play our power games, and 'fight' over solutions.

To conclude, Rittel & Webber critiques the rational 'scientific' thinking behind systems thinking of first order. However, they end up in a contradictory place with tautologies and contradictions. Stacey & Mowles (2016) have a summary of different ways of dealing with contradictions, which according to traditional Aristotelian logic are a sign of faulty thinking and hence should be eliminated. The dichotomy is the either-or (binary) version; the dilemma is the choice between two unattractive alternatives; the dualism is the ´both-and´ where you try to separate both elements in separate places instead of choosing between them. Finally you have the paradox. In the literature on systemic views on organisations, the paradox is "a state in which two apparently conflicting elements appear to be operating at the same time (Stacey & Mowles 2016, p. 39)". In this take the paradox is not so different from the dualism – which is apparent in Rittel & Webber's distinguishing properties above. Now, they start off by critiquing the step-by-step and the internal logic of this thinking – but by sticking to the 'inherent logic of a problem' and the 'either-or' or 'both-and' solutions of problems and also attempts to eliminate the contradictions in the hunt for solutions, the thinking is flawed.

Appendix 2: Ethics approval notification

University of Hertfordshire UH

SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS AND HUMANITIES ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO Svein Børge Hoftun

CC Dr Nick Sarra

FROM Dr Ian Willcock, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities ECDA Chair

DATE 12/05/2021

Protocol number: **cBUS/PGR/UH/04928**

Title of study: Sameness, Otherness and Narrative Identity: Social processes of self and how they contribute to a paradoxical potential of both continuity and transformation in the public sector

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

no additional workers named

Conditions of approval specific to your study:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the following conditions:

The supervisor must see and approve the following prior to recruitment and data collection:

- The supervisor must have sight of the written permission from the researcher's employer. This must show specific permission for the proposed research activities.
- The supervisor must agree a written text which will be used to periodically inform work colleagues of the ingoing research project and how interactions with colleagues might form part of the evolving narrative.
- Where work colleagues indicate they do not want to be included in the study, no reference to them or events including them (even anonymised) must be used in forming the narratives of the study. Merely agreeing not to quote them directly (as currently in the EC6) is not sufficient – they must have an assurance that they will not appear in any form at all in the study.

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection

1

commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 12/05/2021

To: 31/01/2023

Please note:

Failure to comply with the conditions of approval will be considered a breach of protocol and may result in disciplinary action which could include academic penalties.
Additional documentation requested as a condition of this approval protocol may be submitted via your supervisor to the Ethics Clerks as it becomes available. All documentation relating to this study, including the information/documents noted in the conditions above, must be available for your supervisor at the time of submitting your work so that they are able to confirm that you have complied with this protocol.

Should you amend any aspect of your research or wish to apply for an extension to your study you will need your supervisor's approval (if you are a student) and must complete and submit form EC2.
Approval applies specifically to the research study/methodology and timings as detailed in your Form EC1A. In cases where the amendments to the original study are deemed to be substantial, a new Form EC1A may need to be completed prior to the study being undertaken.

Failure to report adverse circumstance/s may be considered misconduct.
Should adverse circumstances arise during this study such as physical reaction/harm, mental/emotional harm, intrusion of privacy or breach of confidentiality this must be reported to the approving Committee immediately.

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

University of Hertfordshire UH Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ('ETHICS COMMITTEE')

FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1 **Title of study**

Sameness, Otherness and Narrative Identity: Social processes of self and how they contribute to a paradoxical potential of both continuity and transformation in the public sector

2 **Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University's regulations governing the conduct of studies involving human participants can be accessed via this link:

http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/secreg/upr/RE01.htm

Thank you for reading this.

3 **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to explore how an imperative of change in organisations is connected to dominating ideas about identity and meaning. I will be exploring how these processes of identity implicate change/innovation and sameness in the public sector. Further, I will explore the sources of self and the meaning of work and look for the connections to change and innovation, as well as to sameness and boredom.Throughout the process I will be reflecting critically on my own role as leader in these negotiations. The study will involve writing reflective narratives about my practice, within which participants and organizations will be anonymized.

4 **Do I have to take part?**

You do not have to take part as such. I will be writing narratives about my interactions with people as part of my regular work and will be completely anonymizing anyone appearing in those narratives. I would like to write a verbatim quotation of something that you have said as part of a conversation that we have had and it is for that reason that I am asking for your consent. Your participation is entirely voluntary and if you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. If I do not have your consent, I will not quote you directly in my written thesis.

5 **What does taking part involve?**

As the study is comprised of reflective narratives, focusing primarily on my own experiences as a leader and participants are only included as parts of my experience there are no restrictions preventing anyone from participating nor are there any disadvantages or risks associated with participating. I will not be keeping any personal data on you except your name on the consent

University of Hertfordshire UH Ethics Committee

form and you, as well as your organization, will be completely anonymized. Thus, there should be no issues regarding confidentiality.

Any collected consent forms will be stored in a secured file for the duration of the study and until my thesis is published. They will be kept for 6 months after the study is published and as such are in concordance with Danish laws about storage of this kind of information.

You are not obliged to take part in any activities. I ask for your consent because you have already been involved in an encounter with me that I wish to use in my studies as a written narrative.

As I am using anonymized narratives nothing will happen to you by participating. I am asking for your consent to quote directly and while I will be accurate in the quote, I will be anonymizing you as well as your organization thus making any identification impossible.

The data from this study will be part of my final thesis in narrative form. My thesis will be made public when I have passed my final *viva voce* examination. As partaker of the study you will be invited to read the final thesis if you wish to.

6 **Will the data be required for use in further studies?**

The data will not be used in any further studies.

7 **Who has reviewed this study?**

The University of Hertfordshire Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority

The UH protocol number is **cBUS/PGR/UH/04928**

8 **Who can I contact if I have any questions?**

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me, in writing, by phone or by email: Svein Børge Hoftun, sbh@sbhoftun.no, +47 959 86 592.

Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:

Secretary and Registrar
University of Hertfordshire
College Lane
Hatfield
Herts
AL10 9AB

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.

Appendix 4: Participant consent form

University of Hertfordshire UH Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ('ETHICS COMMITTEE')

FORM EC3
CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

I, the undersigned *[please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS]*

…… ……

of *[please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address]*

……
hereby freely consent to the publication of an attributed quote (as attached)

(UH Protocol number … **cBUS/PGR/UH/04928**)

1 I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people.

2 I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

3 I have been told that I may at some time in the future be contacted again in connection with this or another study.

Signature of participant……Date……

Signature of (principal) investigator……Date……

Name of (principal) investigator *SVEIN BØRGE HOFTUN*