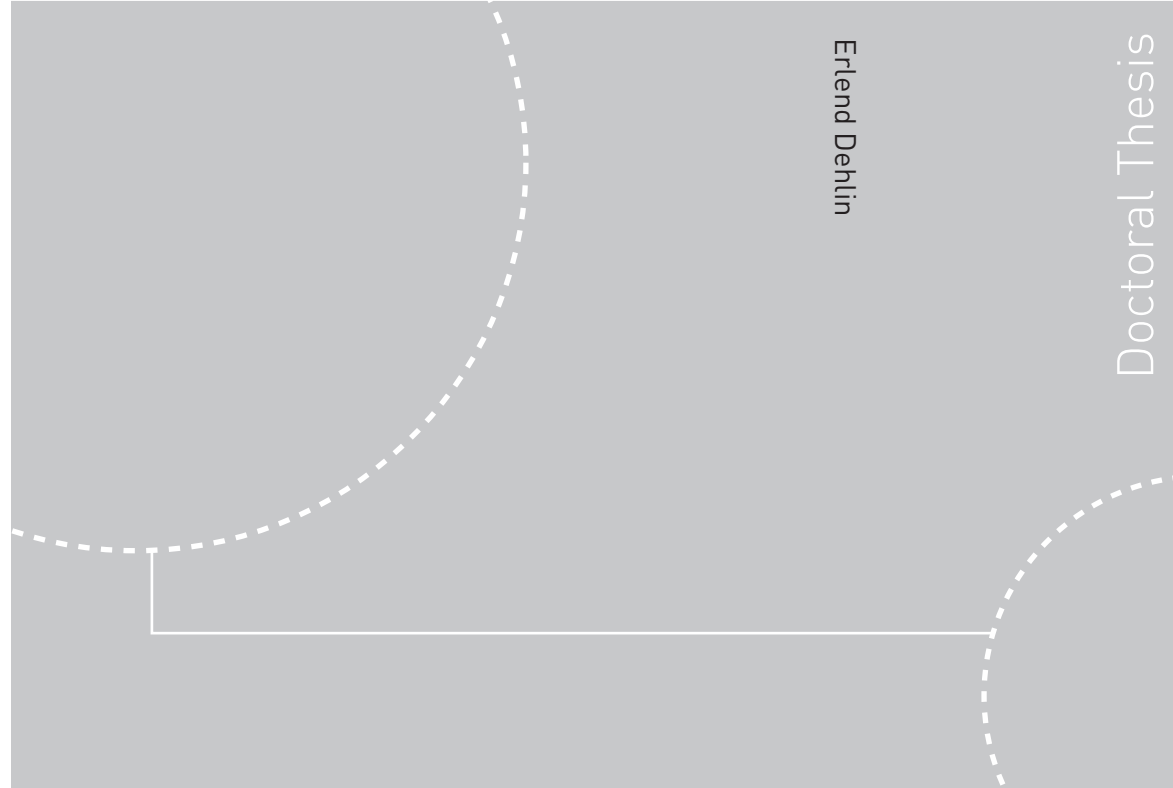


ISBN 978-82-471-1319-6 (printed ver.)  
ISBN 978-82-471-1320-2 (electronic ver.)  
ISSN 1503-8181



Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2008:307

NTNU  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology  
Thesis for the degree of  
philosophiae doctor  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Department of Industrial Economics and Technology  
Management



Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2008:307

Erlend Dehlin

# The Flesh and Blood of Improvisation

A Study of Everyday Organizing

Erlend Dehlin

# The Flesh and Blood of Improvisation

A Study of Everyday Organizing

Thesis for the degree of philosophiae doctor

Trondheim, September 2008

Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Department of Industrial Economics and Technology  
Management



**NTNU**

Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology

NTNU  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Thesis for the degree of philosophiae doctor

Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Department of Industrial Economics and Technology Management

©Erlend Dehlin

ISBN 978-82-471-1319-6 (printed ver.)  
ISBN 978-82-471-1320-2 (electronic ver.)  
ISSN 1503-8181

Doctoral Theses at NTNU, 2008:307

Printed by Tapir Uttrykk

*I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,  
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own  
funeral, drest in his shroud,  
And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the  
earth,  
And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds the  
learning of all times,  
And there is no trade or employment but the young man following  
it may become a hero,  
And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd  
universe,  
And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and  
composed before a million universes.*

*- Walt Whitman*

To Kathinka, August and Filippa

## Preface

In the preface of my master's thesis from 2003 I wrote that it was "*my belief that the emerging discipline of organizational improvisation now fully deserves the attention of organization theorists and practitioners*" (p. i). My assertion still stands. Although improvisation has indeed received some attention from both scholars and practitioners in many domains, a good deal remains to be done to consolidate it as a field of research. My dissertation is meant as a contribution towards this within the domain of organization theory, and the rationale for this study is that everyday organizing can be seen as a process of improvisation.

In order for its potential to be realized, improvisation must be made practically relevant for a more general public than, say, jazz musicians and actors. In this dissertation I hold that in order for this to happen, improvisation must be grounded in philosophy so as to avoid some of the eclecticism and narrow instrumentalism that characterizes parts of the field. Building on the works on improvisation by scholars such as Karl E. Weick, Donald Schön, Mary J. Hatch, Claudio U. Ciborra, Jack Petranker and Ronald E. Purser, I simultaneously bring the concept into philosophy and back into practice. The simultaneous move of theory and practice is facilitated by the non-dualistic philosophies of American pragmatism and Heideggerian hermeneutics. Under the common label of "Practical philosophy" these frameworks provide fertile ground for a refined version of improvisation tied to the emergent properties of everyday complexity-in-the-becoming, and it is through these lenses of emergent corporality, emotionality and sociality I have conducted a study of everyday organizing amongst hospital managers.

From a theoretical stance I argue that organizing is profoundly improvisatory; that it amounts to far more than remarkable and somewhat romantic instances of pure spontaneity and creativity. I see improvisation as inevitable in everyday practice, as practitioners are corporal beings of flesh and blood who seek to, and are compelled to, spontaneously make sense, contextualize knowledge and create genuine novelty. This is why I prefer going into the shades of improvisation as a living phenomenon rather than to make it a quantitative discussion of "either-or".

An overall empirical aim behind this dissertation is to open a window on typical day-to-day work situations for practitioners in order to get a better grasp of the use of improvisation as a sensemaking tool in authentic organizing practice. As a consequence, mine is a story of everyday defeat and bravery, of hopeless dilemmas, of boredom and endless paperwork, of humour and conflict. And, at the very least, the narratives and analyses presented may contribute towards reducing some of the solitude of organizing: the feeling that one is alone in experiencing interruption, dilemma and complexity in different forms.

## **A personal and professional background**

I remember clearly how, nearly a decade ago, while giving the best part of my time and energy to working as a middle level manager, I felt the lack of models and theories that might help me understand everyday problems. The management formulas I had been taught at various business schools seemed to merely hover above real life issues, thus failing to provide the necessary lenses for authentic understanding. As a manager, I was involved in and responsible for a variety of OD-projects, organizational and cultural change –processes, and system implementations, all of which had in common a goal of effectivity and efficiency. In the midst of all this, my co-workers and I complained about lacking the time to do real work on account of “putting out fires”. I often blamed myself for being a bad planner when something unexpected occurred, and I spent many nights trying to catch up with administrative issues and planning activities. Typically, however, the next day did not go as planned, which resulted in emotional tension and stress. In desperate attempts to achieve stability and other utopian goals, unexpectedness was seen not only as undesirable, but even as unnecessary and avoidable: as a sign of bad organizing.

As a freshman I turned to central management for advice. The remedy invoked was simply more planning, more systems, more control, and more structure; but rather than improving, the situation just got worse. Not only did people respond negatively to yet new regimes and structures – some out of fear of losing their position, others from sheer exhaustion – but as more time was spent on linear organizing; on thinking first and acting later, less was spent on everyday operations. After numerous attempts at improving the linearity of organizing, I finally decided to resign from my position. I did so pondering many questions; most of them in some way related to the pitfalls of the strict thinking-before-action organizing that was encouraged and performed. In particular, I remember wondering about the point of theory, given the fact that the discrepancy between theory and practice was so radical.

A few years later, during my course of further management studies, my supervisor handed me a paper written by Michael Zack (2000) on the topic of metaimprovisation. The paper was a critique of the contributions to a symposium in Vancouver, Canada, in 1995 called “Jazz as a Metaphor for Organizing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. It was later published as a special edition in *Organization Science* (1998) under the heading “Jazz as a Metaphor for Organization Theory”. As Karl E. Weick and Mary J. Hatch – two authors in which I had already taken a special interest – were amongst the most prominent of the contributors, Zack’s paper lured me into a domain that has captivated my professional attention ever since. Being an amateur musician, I had for a long time speculated on the parallels between organizing and jazz improvisation; and combined with a lifelong interest in philosophy, ideas soon began to emerge that have ultimately culminated in this dissertation.

Over the last few years I have worked with improvisation in many arenas. The sheer variety of practitioners with whom I have had the pleasure to discuss the concept has given me confidence and faith in the fruitfulness of it, and after the empirical study I am more convinced than ever that focussing on improvisation is an important contribution to understanding organizing practice. In that regard, it is of special importance to me that the practical insights gained from improvisation have emerged from a solid basis in philosophy, and thus a deeply held personal desire to bring theory into practice has been realized. Thus I have sought to achieve a dual ambition: firstly to get in touch with authentic work practice through improvisation, and secondly to develop a concept of improvisation based on the traditions of western philosophy. It is my opinion that the former was made possible by the latter, and that the latter would be of little worth if not pursued in order to achieve the former. Indeed, the research process has evolved precisely in such a reflexive, hermeneutical manner, as theory has fertilized practice and vice versa. Hence, it would be no exaggeration to claim that simultaneously practicing theory and theorizing about practice has contributed greatly to my own personal growth.



## Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude and love goes to my extraordinary wife and life companion, Kathinka, for putting up with and supporting me through all the difficult phases of my Ph.D. studies. Without your tolerance and capability to bring me back from metaphysical and emotional turmoil, this journey would have been impossible. And my lovely children, August and Filippa, in your own ways, you have inspired me and shown me the true nature of improvisation through your genuine playfulness and young curiosity. Appreciation also goes to my dear parents who have given support of various kinds whenever it was needed.

For the ability to create focus and provide mind-sparking suggestions I would like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Roger Klev at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and co-supervisor Professor Morten Levin, also at NTNU. I am indebted to both for giving me the necessary confidence to finish the project and for helping me with giving it a functional structure. Furthermore, I would like to extend my gratitude to friends and colleagues at Trondheim Business School (TBS): The numerous conversations with Professor Frode Nyeng have given much inspiration and added depth to my dissertation, and without the continual support of Professor Tor Busch, Associate Professor Grete Wennes, and the Dean at TBS, Ove Gustafsson, this would have been a lonely process. I hope one day to be able to return your acts of kindness and the understanding you have given me. In different ways the four of you have made it possible for this project to be completed. Thank you also Associate Professor Irene Hepsøe and Research Scientist Eva Amdahl for your significant contributions and good conversations, Ph.D. candidate Fay Giæver and Ph.D. candidate Lin Olderøien for many good inputs, Bente Hansen for taking the time to proofread my text, Associate Professor Ola Ottesen for your inspiring French lessons, and Professor Harry Arne Solberg, Associate Professor Arve Pettersen and Associate Professor Espen Gressetvold for believing in my project. Furthermore, for spurring me in the improvisational direction many years ago, and for being a wonderful conversational partner, I thank my good friend and colleague Arnulf Hauan, Associate Professor at Bodø Graduate School of Business/Unikon Research Network. My sincere appreciation also goes to my other good friends in Unikon, Kurt Helge Johansen, Professor Anders Lindseth, and Dag Erik Hagerup. Your support has been essential in the completion phases of this dissertation, and has strengthened my belief in practical philosophy. I am proud to be part of such a fine group!

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Professor Stewart Clegg and Lecturer Tyrone Pitsis at the University of Technology, Sydney, for welcoming me and my family with such exceptional warmth, and for including me in the ICAN research network. I am also grateful for the many wonderful conversations with Research Scientists Kjersti Bjørkeng, Emil Røyrvik, and Arne Bygdås at SINTEF. And for recognizing, motivating and supporting academic work on improvisation and cross-disciplinary research, as well as for the many intriguing conversations over the years, my gratitude goes to Associate Professor Bjørn Altherhaug at NTNU. Thank you, also, Professor Jan Ole Vanebo at Nord-Trøndelag University College for believing in my project and for providing support and motivation along the way.

Finally, I would like to accredit two institutions for giving me the opportunity to complete this project: NTNU for taking me into their Ph.D. program, and TBS for giving me the necessary support and financial means.

## Summary

In my Ph.D. dissertation I study the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice, and how improvisation relates to technical rationality. I go about this study by means of a two-step strategy: the first strategy is a theoretical elaboration of organizing as improvisation, and the second an empirical study of improvisation in everyday organizing practice amongst eight department managers and one section manager in a large Norwegian hospital called InSitu. This summary follows the structure of the dissertation, presenting essential theoretical insights first. Next follows a summary of the methodological approach of this study, and finally, I present the main insights and findings from the empirical analysis.

Through a preliminary literature study I found that the existing conceptualizations of improvisation were unsuitable as a sensemaking tool for an empirical study of improvisation as an *everyday organizing* phenomenon. Consequently, I saw it as a crucial part of my dissertation to contribute to such conceptualization, and as indicated I have attempted to do so from two angles: Firstly through a study of the domain of practical philosophy – a philosophical perspective associated with American pragmatism and supplemented by Heideggerian hermeneutics; and secondly by means of an empirical study of organizing amongst hospital managers. I accentuate that it is the *hermeneutical combination* of

philosophy, theory and empirical research that has led up to the findings, conceptualizations and insights of this dissertation.

In the first part of my thesis I develop a framework of improvisation called “The improvising man”. I emphasize that this is not an attempt to break with leading theoreticians of improvisation such as Karl E. Weick (1979, 1989, 1995, 1998, 2001) and Mary Jo Hatch (1997, 1999), but to build on the theories of these authors and further expand on them *from a philosophical standpoint*. In my view, these attempts do not succeed in conceptualizing improvisation as a feature of everyday life, as they tend to overfocus on the phenomenon in its pure and exceptional forms. “The improvising man” represents, however, a thesis that improvisation is an inextricable feature of human practice, and hence, of organizing processes. From this stance I seek to overcome a perspective on improvisation as an either-or phenomenon. In this regard I build on authors such as Schön (1987, 1991), Ciborra (1999), Purser and Petranker (2005), and Petranker (2005), who conceptualize improvisation as the fundamental, everyday phenomenon from which organizing activities flow. Although sharing the same grounds, I have concentrated on certain aspects of improvisation that these authors do not focus on, so as to deepen the concept and facilitate understanding of authentic organizing practice.

I end up defining improvisation as “*spontaneous and hermeneutical sense-making via external action*”. Three words are particularly important here: spontaneity, sensemaking, and external. First of all, as practical philosophy builds on a non-dualistic premise of mind and body (Peirce 1974a, 1974b), I argue that spontaneity can be seen as a cornerstone of existence. Spontaneity implies being “glued to” the present (Dewey 1929; Bergson 1944; Gadamer 1975; Heidegger 1996; James 2007), and from this perspective spontaneity and emotionality are inevitable traits of the human body, and thus, of improvisation. In my view, however, improvisation is more than mere corporal existence (spontaneity). Improvisation entails creativity: It is a process of hermeneutical and dialogical sensemaking (Weick 1989, 1995, 1998, 2001). Contrary to Weick’s (1995) celebrated theory of retrospective sensemaking, however, I suggest that sensemaking is “improspective” in essence. This implies that making sense is fundamentally a way of looking *into* the present, rather than *backwards* at the past (Ciborra 1999; Petranker 2005). Moreover, I hold that improvisation concerns creative attempts to make a difference in the external world. Improvisation is more

than thinking and improvising: It implies acting sensibly in the physical and irreversible sense (Weick 1998).

I argue that the purity of improvisation varies with regard to two aspects: 1. the degree of spontaneity; and 2. the genuineness of creativity. By the former I indicate that even if all (creative) action is spontaneous to some extent (The improvising man), the degree of spontaneity in sensemaking processes varies according to the perceived distance between thought and action. The shorter the delay, the more spontaneous the appearance of the action; and I should emphasize that measuring this is not a matter of quantification, but of qualitative evaluation. Secondly, the purity of improvisation is depicted by the extent of genuine and open-ended creativity, which is also a qualitative measure. This means that for improvisation to become pure, creative actions must take on a quality of contextual problem definition – of resolving complexity – or of genuine innovation, or both, rather than mere technical problem solving and routine. The purest form of improvisation can be labelled flow: a phenomenon where spontaneity and creativity reach such high levels that radical transformation happens in real time (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

Improvisation is always based upon something, and I choose to call this something “tools”. In accordance with practical philosophy I see tools as instruments to achieve certain ends (Dewey 1929; Schön 1991), and in general, all aspects of embodied forehaving, such as memories, skills and language can be used as tools in improvisation. More specifically, as this is a study of organizing, I have given special attention to what Schön (1987, 1991) in conceptual terms speaks of as “technical rationality”, which as a phenomenon reflects instances where action flows from the basis of a preset thought-model. In an organizational context, examples of such technical rational models can be administrative issues like routines, structures, plans, and systems. In the light of improvisation and tools I suggest that technical rationality can be seen from two angles: either as a model of action that is chosen contextually and used as a tool, or as a model that is followed blindly. In the first version technical rationality can be part of an improvisatory organizing process of doing whatever the situation requires, whereas in the latter it takes the form of a taken for granted paradigm in which context has little significance. These ideas on technical rationality both result from the theoretical study of practical philosophy and from the empirical study of InSitu managers.

As opposed to Ciborra (1999), Purser and Petranker (2005), and Petranker (2005), authors with which I share a similar perspective on improvisation, I have conducted an *empirical* study of improvisation as an everyday phenomenon. Methodologically, my empirical research is conducted from a strategy of “qualitative ethnographic social research” (Vidich and Lyman 2000). From this standpoint I use the method of “shadowing” (McDonald 2005), and follow in the footsteps of eight department managers and one section manager at InSitu hospital. In accordance with the research strategy the field notes are written within a genre of “narrative ethnography” (Tedlock 2000). In order to obtain a good grasp on the managers’ organizing reality in terms of both “theory-in-use” and “espoused theory” (Argyris and Schön 1974, 1996), I compare my observations with in-depth interviews. Using an interview-guide, the interviews are a mixture of what Fontana and Frey (2000) call structured and unstructured, in which each of the managers engages in exchanges about their typical everyday practice. Following McDonald’s (2005) and Fontana and Frey’s (2000) notes on ethnographic research, I also conduct frequent informal interviews so as to obtain continual intersubjectivity between myself and the managers.

In the process of empirical analysis I realized that in order to be able to categorize qualitative experiences of improvisatory organizing practice amongst managers, I had to make a distinction between “pure” and “sufficiently pure” improvisation. Moreover, as I found improvisation in practice to vary between proactive and reactive forms, Taylor’s concepts of “negative” and “positive” freedom (1985) inspired me to separate between negative and positive improvisation, both of which I regard as *sufficiently pure* forms of improvisation in practice. *Negative* improvisation occurs when complex events compel the individual to react, whereas *positive* improvisation represents a more voluntary and proactive form of action. In the negative version, then, improvisation is a tool to resolve uninvited complexity, and in the positive form, improvisation is a tool to achieve continual improvement, knowledge growth, and innovation.

I want to emphasize that I propose no natural or categorical distinction between positive and negative improvisation, as it is difficult to say in a given situation what comes first, want or need; or indeed, whether the one can at all be separated from the other. Another important point is that both negative and positive improvisation are based in emergent contextuality, a fact which separates them from the kind of linear organizing action where technical models are followed blindly. From this perspective, the improvising practitioner attempts to act

spontaneously in accordance with the context of his present whereabouts, thus signalling an attitude of improvisation and context-sensitivity: He/she acts negatively because he/she has to; or positively, because a personal desire drives him/her.

In the case of InSitu managers I find negative improvisation in their dealing with vague and ambiguous situations, in their simultaneous handling of multiple events-in-the-becoming (turbulence), in their dealing with unpredictability and the unexpected, and in the complexity of social and emotional interaction. Often, positive improvisation is found under similar circumstances, as the managers display an attitude of context-sensitivity, continual improvement, and knowledge growth, which they seem to carry out in practice in the pursuit of effective organizing. Positive improvisation is also found in play, idea-making processes and humour.

A third finding is that managers typically act from a basis in the here-and-now, rather than acting blindly on the basis of an abstract model. In general, everyday work life for managers seems to be centred on processes of creating sense, interpreting, defining, and improvising. This has encouraged me to separate between “good” and “pure” improvisation, and with the former category I attempt to capture contextual and practical wisdom – a wisdom which can often be quite impure with regard to improvisation, but still improvisatory in essence. With regard to the relationship between improvisation and technical rationality (Schön 1987, 1991), good improvisation implies that technical rational models such as structures and systems are used as tools, and not as “restraint jackets”. For the outsider, good improvisation may seem like strict routine even if it is not; and in good improvisation, routines are breathed into life for contextual reasons, not followed blindly for acontextual reasons. Consequently, *improvisation may involve elements of technical rationality*, which shows that it does not categorically contradict it, and the key lies in “use” (tool) as opposed to “blindly follow” (restraint-jacket).

Weaving these findings together, I find that in practice, good improvisation can be impure, but it can be recognized by an observer in the sufficiently pure forms of negative and positive improvisation. I emphasize that all the new concepts that have grown out of the empirical analysis are in line with “The improvising man” as a philosophical framework, and for me, their value lies in their ability to facilitate the conceptualizing of improvisation as an *empirical* phenomenon. In short, I made these conceptualizations as I saw that everyday

organizing practice is not always exceptionally pure, but still essentially improvisatory in form.

To sum up, my study concerns improvisation – improvisation in all its fluent facets of everyday practice, and of *good* improvisation, not only improvisation as rare instances of spontaneous and radical transformation (e.g. “flow”). Based on my observations of organizing amongst InSitu managers I suggest that improvisation is the rule rather than the exception. Not only do social and emotional factors continually create an atmosphere of complexity, of unpredictability and ambiguity, that is reactively handled and organized through improvisation; but in addition, the managers actively pursue an improvisatory approach to creating knowledge, improving services, and ensuring (technical) *workability*. I have found that as contexts vary, problems vary, and that whereas some situations require immense efforts of pure improvisation, others are more technical and closed. Thus, in some instances it can be good improvisation to employ impure improvisation in order to achieve workable solutions. With regard to workability, this indicates that administrative measures such as computer systems, bureaucracy, and plans are used as *tools of improvisation* and not as restraint-jackets: They are made to work in context rather than followed blindly.

My observations of practice, of *theories-in-use*, are in harmony with the *espoused theories* of managers, as they typically proclaim an attitude of positive improvisation, and hold context-sensitivity and improvisation to be amongst the most important qualities in relation to organizing. Both theories-in-use and espoused theories, however, seem to contradict *the language* managers use in practice and in interviews, which seems to be heavily influenced by technical-rational metaphors. In other words, the managers seem to lack an adequate vocabulary to describe their own practice, as they tend to use systems metaphors and analogies instead of an improvisatory language. This point is reinforced by the fact that there seems to be an immense systemic pressure to cut budget expenditures by implementing political reforms, directives, and computer systems, and much weight is typically put on planning, routine-making, and bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, such issues have great influence on the official agenda and on management talk. As a consequence, I suggest that the framework of “The improvisation man” can contribute positively to a more authentic dialogue over everyday issues. An improvisatory vocabulary can play an important role in providing both a language close to the practical realities of the field and in preventing technical rationality from becoming *too dominant* in terms of “Managerialism”, which represents a

reified and taken-for-granted form of systems thinking (Carter and Mueller 2002; Mueller and Carter 2005, 2007). Improvisation is a language of contextuality and has room for all kinds of rationality (except the reified one), and as such it may facilitate a realistic, multifaceted, and balanced conversation on organizing and potentially contribute to higher effectivity as a result.

To conclude, from my perspective organizing is not so much a matter of either employing improvisation or not doing so. It is not a question of either employing technical rationality or not, or of imposing administrative measures like planning, routine, structure or not. Rather, it is a matter of how organizing *as* a process of improvisation can *make use of* these and utilize them intelligently in the unique and emergent setting at hand. And as it seeks truth in the contextual rather than in the acontextual, organizing as improvisation implies a countermove against reified systems thinking and technical organizing taken to the extreme, i.e. against Managerialism.



# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>A personal and professional background</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>XVI</b>
<b>Tables and models</b>	<b>XX</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Organizing as improvisation: A background</b>	<b>1</b>
Research focus and anchorage	1
Field of literature	1
Choice of empirical context: InSitu hospital managers in everyday practice	3
Studies of managerial behaviour	5
Challenging the early linear model of organizing	11
Process thinking: Towards an improvisatory concept of organizing	15
Research goals and research question	18
The structure	20
<b>Chapter 2. Organizational improvisation</b>	<b>24</b>
Introduction	24
Hatch' concept of improvisation	27
Weick's concept of improvisation	29
Four degrees of improvisation	29
Improvisation and retrospection	31
Improspection – an alternative to retrospection	36
Other influential attempts to conceptualize organizational improvisation	39
<b>Chapter 3. Practical philosophy: An epistemological backdrop for improvisation</b>	<b>44</b>
Introduction	44
Pragmatism and non-dualism	44
Mead's theory of "the self"	46
Non-dualism and complexity	47
Pragmatism is a practical philosophy	50
Heidegger's pragmatism	54

<b>Chapter 4. The improvising man</b>	<b>56</b>
Introduction	56
Spontaneity	58
Version one: Spontaneity as a feature of existence	58
Version two: Spontaneity as a practical measure of situational focus	59
Improvisation as creative action	61
Thinking is action – Improvisation is external, irreversible action	62
Emotionality	65
Hermeneutical movement and intuition	71
Social complexity and improvisation	73
Pure improvisation and flow	77
Tools of improvisation	82
Examples of tools in improvisation	82
Experience and memory	84
Skills	85
Contextual factors	88
Technical rationality or improvisation: Tools – guiding or controlling	90
Suggesting a synthesis: The improvising man	95
<b>Chapter 5. Organizing as improvisation</b>	<b>99</b>
Organizing - once more from the top	99
Organizing and change	101
Routines	106
Organizational structure	114
(Un)predictability and plans	118
The system: A metaphor or an analogy for organization?	122
Organizing and management - the impact from systems thinking	125
Organizing as improvisation - some implications	129
<b>Chapter 6. Methodology</b>	<b>133</b>
Introduction	133
Against dualism	134
The ontological objective - a trajectory through western philosophy	134
Some shortcomings of dualism in organizational research	141
Non-dualism: a practical philosophy	143
Non-dualism and choice of design	147
Research objectives and research question	148
Research objectives	148
Research question	149
Empirical design	149
A qualitative study of organizing as improvisation amongst hospital managers	149
The empirical research context and the participants	152
Choosing design: Narrative ethnography	153
Choosing a method: Qualitative shadowing	154
About the shadowing venture	157
Interviews	159
The analysis	161
Trustworthiness & credibility	164
The hermeneutics of the research process	167
Non-dualism and transferability	169
Concluding remarks	171

<b>Chapter 7. Introduction to the InSitu manager's context</b>	<b>174</b>
Introduction	174
Getting to know the managers	178
Confidentiality	178
Camilla	178
George	179
John	180
Howard	180
Chris	181
Elisabeth	182
Karina	184
Peter	184
Thomas	185
Characteristics of the InSitu Hospital management context	187
Stories of complexity - an introduction	187
Trait # 1: Open-ended problems	187
Trait # 2: Ambiguity and vagueness	189
Trait # 3: Clustering of events	198
Trait # 4: The emotional challenge	201
Trait # 5: Unpredictability: Complexity-in-the-becoming	209
An analysis of everyday contextuality amongst InSitu managers	212
Everyday contextuality as emergence	212
Unpredictability produces complexity	214
Emergence and some outlines of improvisation	216
<b>Chapter 8. A call for new concepts of improvisation in everyday organizing</b>	<b>218</b>
Introduction	218
Introducing negative and positive improvisation	219
Negative (reactive) improvisation	221
Positive (proactive) improvisation	223
Risk-in-context: Positive improvisation and provocative competence	227
Improvisation in practice	229
Good improvisation is not necessarily pure	230
Some concluding comments	233
<b>Chapter 9. Improvisation amongst InSitu managers</b>	<b>235</b>
Introduction	235
Negative improvisation	236
Emergence, context-sensitivity and improvisation	236
Presenting some stories of negative improvisation	237
Emotion and improvisation	250
Humour at work – some cases of pure improvisation	257
Positive improvisation	264
Some opening statements	264
Some illustrative cases	266
Good improvisation: a bridge between attitude and practice	270
Discussing and concluding	274
A preliminary conclusion	274
An everyday story of the InSitu Hospital manager	279

<b>Chapter 10. Technical rationality in everyday organizing amongst InSitu managers</b>	<b>281</b>
Introduction	281
Some introductory examples of technical rationality at work	283
Technical rationality and workability	289
Temporality and subjectivity - structures as tools of improvisation	289
Some concluding thoughts on technical rationality and workability	296
Plans in practice: technical rationality or improvisation?	297
Agendas	297
Some reflections by the managers on plan and the unexpected	299
Some concluding thoughts on plan and improvisation	302
Discussing some problems of technical rationality: taking it for granted...	304
Conclusions and implications	308
Everyday organizing practice: Managerialism or improvisation?	308
Aspects of practice	310
Aspects of talk and language	313
 <b>Chapter 11. Conclusion</b>	 <b>315</b>
A hermeneutical journey between text and context	315
Main empirical findings	318
Forms of negative improvisation	318
1. Improvising sense from vagueness and equivocality	319
2. Improvising sense from experiencing clusters of events	319
3. Improvising sense from unpredictability	319
4. Improvising sense from emotional complexity	320
Negative improvisation versus decision-making	320
Forms of positive improvisation	321
Improvisation as utilizing elements of technical rationality	322
If not improvisation, then what?	324
Some practical implications	325
Implications for research	328
 <b>References</b>	 <b>329</b>

## Tables and models

<b>Table 1.0</b>	<b>Elements in linear organizing</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Table 5.0</b>	<b>Routine in practice</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Table 8.0</b>	<b>Good improvisation, authenticity and purity</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Model 2.0</b>	<b>Hatch' (1997) positioning of improvisation</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Model 2.1</b>	<b>Retrospective sensemaking</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Model 2.2</b>	<b>Bracketing</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Model 3.0</b>	<b>Complexity and the complicated</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Model 3.1</b>	<b>The ontology game</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Model 4.0</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Model 4.1</b>	<b>Identity as Mead's "self"</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Model 4.2</b>	<b>Purity of improvisation</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Model 4.3</b>	<b>A conceptual model of technical rationality</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Model 4.4</b>	<b>The improvising man</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Model 5.1</b>	<b>Organizing as improvisation</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Model 5.2</b>	<b>Routine</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Model 5.3</b>	<b>Routinization</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Model 5.4</b>	<b>Unpredictability and the unexpected</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Model 5.5</b>	<b>Organizing as improvisation in practice</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Model 6.0</b>	<b>The analytical process</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Model 8.0</b>	<b>Improvisation in practice</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Model 8.1</b>	<b>Positive improvisation</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>Model 10.0</b>	<b>Management talk and practice</b>	<b>309</b>

# Chapter 1. Organizing as improvisation: A background

*“Abstractions detached from practice distort or obscure intricacies of that practice”.*  
(Brown and Duguid 1991, p. 40).

## Research focus and anchorage

### Field of literature

With this dissertation I want to make a contribution to organization theory. Within the domain of organization theory I take special interest in Weick’s (1979, 1995, 2001) perspective on *organizing as a process of sensemaking*. In particular, there is one aspect of Weick’s organizing as sensemaking perspective that has caught my attention: *Improvisation* (Weick 1998, 2001). In the spirit of Weick’s writings on organizing and improvisation the rationale for my dissertation is that everyday organizing can be seen as a process of improvisation, and I have made a theoretical and empirical study to authenticate this.

Although it is Weick’s theorizing about organizing and improvisation which has triggered and inspired this dissertation, there are some aspects within Weick’s thinking that I have found somewhat inconclusive and insufficient as my reading and thinking have evolved. One of these aspects concerns Weick’s strong interest in the retrospective nature of sensemaking (and improvisation). Another concerns what I regard as an overfocus on rare and exceptional instances of pure improvisation, as well as on radical transformation, accompanied by a categorization of less pure forms as non-improvisatory. For my purpose of studying everyday organizing practice this focus on *pure* improvisation seems too limited, and both theoretically and empirically much of my work has involved to widen the scope and to see how improvisation can be valuable as an organizational construct under less exceptional circumstances than covered by Weick’s work. In short I have tried to build a theory of improvisation as an everyday phenomenon, rather than, as in Weick’s case, as an exceptional phenomenon.

A third aspect is particularly evident in the two classics “The Social Psychology of Organizing” (1979) and “Sensemaking in Organizations” (1995), and concerns what I see as an underemphasis on emotionality. Although Weick, Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and David Obstfeld later address these issues in the paper “Organizing and the process of sensemaking”

(2005), they do so only briefly, and I would therefore argue that there is still a need for giving emotionality a more central position in sensemaking theory, and for linking it more closely to improvisation. These are a few examples of what may be seen as theoretical gaps in Weick's understanding of improvisation. Other authors have tried to fill some of them (for example Kamoche et al., 2002), leaving yet others open. My study attempts to fill these gaps, and as much as Weick provides a professional fundament and creative inspiration for me in that regard, I have found it of great value to bring in insights from philosophy and, naturally, from other authors on improvisation.

My ideas and interpretations of theory differ from Weick's with respect to certain crucial areas, but without a creative dialogue with Weick's writing, my project would not have been possible. Also, it was mostly Weick's (and partly Ralph D. Stacey's (2000, 2001)) reference to the pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead (1967) that led me into the domain of American pragmatism, which marked a theoretical turning point for me. From a lasting interest in Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1992, 1994) philosophy, I was now able to identify in American pragmatism very similar conceptions, and I discovered their common basis in human existence as "praxis". Further literature studies led me to Martin Heidegger's (1996) thinking, which also emerges from a similar fundament in praxis (Okrent 1988). Identifying important bonds between European and American philosophy, I started seeing the outlines of what is often labelled "practical philosophy" – a non-dualistic process philosophy that takes human *action* as the theoretical point of departure (Joas 1996); as opposed to, say, ontological objective being (see explanation of "non-dualism" and the "ontological objective" in chapter six). Exploring the depths of several versions of practical philosophy gave me the necessary tools to expand on and add to existing improvisation theory. In particular, different practical philosophical notions of corporality, spontaneity, emotionality, creativity, and functionality have contributed to renewing and synthesizing my contribution to a holistic theory of improvisation, and it is in holding all these different notions together that my contribution can be valuable.

Working with practical philosophy has allowed me to synthesize a theory of improvisation which defines it as a general trait of existence, and thus of organizing, rather than as a rare phenomenon that occurs under special circumstances. This work, however, only brought me half the way, and as part of my aspirations of contributing to build a practically relevant theory of organizing as improvisation I conducted an empirical study.

### **Choice of empirical context: InSitu hospital managers in everyday practice**

My study emerged in a hermeneutical manner (Heidegger 1996). It builds on both existing theory and data from an empirical study of organizing as improvisation conducted especially for this dissertation. In order to produce such an empirical study I needed to find somewhere to conduct it. In theory, many options were open, but I wanted to avoid some of the types of research context used in existing improvisation research, and to bring a fresh approach to the study of improvisation. I wanted to avoid, for example, improvisation as found in improvisational theatre (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997), jazz music (Weick 1989, 1998, 2001; Hatch 1997; Barrett 1998; Bastien and Hostager 1988, 1992; Zack 2000; Alterhaug 2004), radical change processes in organizations (Orlikowski 1996; Orlikowski and Hofman 1997), radical innovation (Bastien and Hostager 1988; Cunha and Kamoche 2001), and temporary projects (Leybourne 2006), and to test the relevance of improvisation in a more everyday setting that resembled “ordinary” life on the whole. Preferably, for reasons to do with my scholarship, the setting should be a public organization, or at least an organization dealing with considerable amounts of administrative work. This coincided with my work experience from administration and management, as well as with my profound interest in organization and administration theory. The principal matter for me was to bring the two aspects together: organization and administration on one side, and improvisation on the other.

The background for this dissertation is a lasting interest in how activities such as planning and systemizing are related to improvisation – in how improvisation can be related to the use of, for instance, structures and routines in an administrative work environment. This interest has emerged over many years as I have experienced that discussions around planning and structure, for instance, often follow an either-or logic. Many times, I have seen people listing improvisation on one hand; and planning, routine and structure on the other, as if they were separate traits. As argued by for instance Crossan and Sorrenti (1997), Ciborra (1999), and Alterhaug (2004), some speak of improvisation as if represents a form of inferior action that occurs when planning breaks down, indicating that improvisation is action without preparation or plan. Following this line of reasoning, an image can be portrayed of administration as *unrelated* to improvisation; i.e. one can *either* have administration *or* improvisation. My personal work experience, however, contradicts this, and since I lacked a proper vocabulary to address this paradox, I soon developed an interest in organization theory – and more specifically in Weick’s (1979, 1995, 1998, 2001) sensemaking perspective, which to a large extent builds on his insights from practical philosophy.



As ideas in their pure form, of course, a separation between administration and improvisation is understandable, and in Fayol's (Urwick 1934) and Taylor's (1967) writing, for instance, the ambition was to create models and systems of objective, universal value from which efficient practice could be effectuated. Donald Schön (1987, 1991) has described this kind of linear thinking through his notion of *technical rationality*, which he sees as a rule-bound form of organizing action that strictly follows an administrative model or procedure. In this light, then, early administrative theory could be said to follow the logic of technical rationality, which is an idea I give much attention in this dissertation since it opposes an important insight from the sensemaking perspective: that ideas, models and systems in their pure form *cannot* be implemented as such in practice. This sensemaking perspective indicates quite a different take on administration than the one exposed in the early classics. And from years of philosophical and theoretical studies I had a crude hypothesis that administration, if seen from a sensemaking perspective, might be close to improvisation. In this particular project, then, in order to find interesting and usable empirical data, I started looking for a practice context that fulfilled two needs: *Firstly*, it had to involve *administrative work practice* where plans, routines, structures and systems were of great concern; and *secondly*, it should be the kind of work-place where radical transformation and/or innovation were *not* the primary objectives. Again, I was more interested in exploring how typical everyday work life evolved through organizing practice and how improvisation could be related to this, than in artistic creation, (product) innovation and radical change.

Through contacts in my research network I was allowed admittance to a large Norwegian hospital. Instead of choosing only one particular department or sub-department, I soon realized the advantage of casting my net more widely in that sense, so as to ensure *variety* as well as *similarity*. This is why I primarily ended up studying several top-level hospital managers/administrators (department managers), and why I also chose to include one section manager. In addition, I spent a few days observing two medical practices for the sake of getting a feel for the hospital context (and because I was curious). By studying a group of eight department managers (DMs) and one section manager (SM) from the same hospital and with similar formal responsibilities and role structures, I believed I would get rich, varied and comparable data on the relation between administration and improvisation in everyday work practice. *Variety* would flow from the fact that different DMs would have different professional focuses related to the medical area of their respective departments. An equally

important concern, however, was to ensure sufficient *similarity* between the informants with regard to administrative responsibility and role structures. All being part of the hospital director's joint management group, I anticipated that DMs would share important general administrative concerns both with regard to the hospital as a whole and their respective departments. Studying a selection of DMs would therefore provide important contextual correspondence, and in that regard strengthen the validity of my findings about the managers as a "group".

From an initial three-hour long conversation with the hospital director, I had high expectations that precisely the traditional aspects of organization theory, such as the use of structures, plans, routines and systems, played a significant role in the work (i.e. everyday practice) of DMs. The initial theoretical separation between administration and improvisation would therefore be put to a scrutinizing test, and I saw this as an exceptional opportunity to study the role of improvisation in authentic organizing practice. A reason for not choosing other professional groups such as nurses or doctors lower down in the hierarchy was to avoid to the largest extent possible the intricacies of, and problems related to, patient anonymity. In addition, I saw initially a significant risk in not being allowed to be present during, and thus observe, patient treatments. For that reason, studying DMs appeared to be a more logical and cost-efficient approach with lesser risk of being denied access. I wanted to exploit the fact that I had considerable personal experience from administrative practice, and believed that I had valuable prior knowledge about the administrative language in use amongst DMs. Having to learn in detail a range of unfamiliar contexts of medical practice seemed unnecessarily difficult and incommodious considering that I had the chance to follow DMs who to a great extent carry out administration as a central part of their jobs.

### **Studies of managerial behaviour**

My contribution is first and foremost to the fields of organization theory and improvisation, but I did not choose just any practical context for studying improvisation as much as *one particular kind of* context, namely managers in everyday settings. Thus, due to my choice of empirical context, there are certain parallels between my research and research on "managerial behaviour"; a field that deals explicitly with the nature of managerial work (for example Carlson, 1951; Stewart, 1967; Mintzberg, 1970, 1973, 1994; Kurke and Aldrich, 1983; Kotter, 1986; and Tengblad, 2002, 2006). In this section I will address a selection of

this literature; give an account of its content on a general level; and try to point out similarities to and differences from my study.

It seems natural to start with Sune Carlson (1951), who can be seen as a pioneer in the systematic research on the behaviour of managers in daily work. In his study of Swedish business executives from a range of different branches, Carlson takes an explicit interest in making note of and theorizing from emergent everyday details, rather than using “. . . *necessary hypotheses to arrange [his] observations in a neat theoretical system*” (Carlson 1951, p. 9). In that respect Carlson’s descriptive approach differs significantly from early management theory, which Carlson claims is more concerned with general speculations regarding the functions of the executives than with actual descriptions of their work. In a similar attempt to that of Carlson, Rosemary Stewart (1967) sets out to study how managers spend their time, and in that regard to investigate the variation between different management jobs. She does this from a hypothesis that the previous management literature is too general to be of help in deciding how managers should be selected and trained. This slightly more normative approach is to some extent contrasted by, but still in the same vein as, Henry Mintzberg’s (1973) classic descriptive study, where he uses a technique of structured observation to study five chief executives, resulting in the formulation of 10 management roles and 13 propositions about the characteristics of managerial work. (Mintzberg’s (1973) study is later replicated and confirmed by Kurke and Aldrich (1983)). Later, in what he claims is the largest study of its kind ever conducted, John P. Kotter (1986) follows a similar approach to that of Carlson, Stewart and Mintzberg, except that his research focus is on general, rather than top, managers. Lastly, and more recently, another researcher who shares the interest in the nature of managerial work is Stefan Tengblad (2006). In his comparative study of four Swedish CEOs Tengblad builds on the work of Carlson (1951) and sets out to make a comparison to Mintzberg’s (1973) study. The scope of Tengblad’s work is to investigate whether or not apparent changes in management discourse have contributed to changes in everyday practices.

In some ways, the field of managerial behaviour is related to my studies of organizing as improvisation, but important and fundamental differences can be pointed out. *Firstly*, we do not share the same methodological approach. Whereas the authors on managerial behaviour employ a structured approach of quantifying certain elements in the manager’s context, and of to some extent using qualitative data as a backdrop to quantitative results (for example

Mintzberg, 1973), I do not operate with quantifiable categories. Mine is not a time-study of certain categories of managerial behaviour, such as the amount of or the time spent on correspondence, meetings, or telephone conversations, or the length of working hours (Carlson 1951; Mintzberg 1973; Stewart 1967; Tengblad 2006), to name a few. In contrast, I have conducted a narrative ethnographic study (Tedlock 2000) of improvisation as a qualitative, emergent practical phenomenon, which for reasons explained above was conducted amongst hospital DMs.

Authors on managerial behaviour find structure in a selection of specific empirical categories for purposes of quantification. Structure in my study, however, flows from working systematically with a sensemaking perspective (Weick 1979, 1995, 1989, 1998, 2001). Thus, as opposed to Carlson (1951), I *do* have a vision of systematic theory. More specifically, my analyses are not accidental: they are related to improvisation. An important difference from studies on managerial behaviour is that in my observations I have tried to let the context speak for itself to the greatest extent possible (Geertz 1973), and as part of the narrative ethnographic tradition I have simultaneously tried to bring to the surface my personal views, reflections and perceptions (Alvesson and Sköldbäck 2008). I have done this partly from a desire to present rich and multifaceted narratives; and partly to avoid covering up the inevitable forehaving that has accompanied the observations (Schwandt 2000). Rather than employing preset categories such as meetings and telephone conversations, I operated with ideas from improvisation theory and practical philosophy. These ideas were explicitly addressed during the interviews, and more specifically they included unpredictability, complexity, context-sensitivity, spontaneity, and creativity, as well as the role of plans, organizational structures and routines in everyday practice – matters of special concern for a theory of organizing as improvisation as I initially saw it. Next, from my analysis many more related themes and topics emerged, and before writing out a revised version of organizing as improvisation – which was to large extent spurred by the empirical study – I had some 200 N’Vivo categories at my disposal; all of which were systemized logically through the use of N’Vivo software. The last, and most important, task then begun: to systemize these further in relation to improvisation. I ended up with significant revisions in my original concept of improvisation, as well as some new conceptions of improvisation pertinent to the particular context of InSitu DMs.

*Secondly*, and related to the first point, my dedication to organizing as improvisation comes first, and the particular empirical context later; whereas in the field of managerial behaviour there seems to be a *primary and more general occupation with managers as such*. Consider for example this statement by Carlson (1951):

*. . . I have, above all, lacked a theoretical system in which to arrange the observations I have made. . . . As a first implication of the present study on further research I would, therefore, place the desirability of developing a systematic theory of executive behaviour. With such a theory at our disposal, it would become much easier to arrange the necessary empirical research in its proper place (Carlson 1951, p. 115).*

In a way, I have followed Carlson's incentive as I have in my dissertation attempted to theorize coherently about the executive behaviour that I have observed, *but I have done so with a framework of improvisation in mind*. My contribution is not primarily aimed at management behaviour as such, however, but at all kinds of administrative practices that can use improvisation as an interpretative lens. My work has been about contributing to building a theory of organizing as improvisation from:

1. Empirical data.
2. Philosophy and existing theory of improvisation.

The neatness of my conceptualizing is open for discussion, but my attempt is to construct a logical, coherent, and functional theory of improvisation that aligns with practical experiences and which is also consolidated in philosophy. What comes first of the two, an interest in practice or in philosophy? The question is rhetorical and misleading. My interest is in both, and philosophically I would argue that there can be no theory without practice, and vice versa (see chapters three and six). I want to add, however, that as a student of practical philosophy I am more taken by theory that deals with authentic practice, than with ideal concepts of dualist philosophy (see chapter six). In that sense, for me practice comes first, but as stated by Lewin (1951), "*. . . there is nothing so practical as a good theory*" (p. 169).

The *third* and major difference between the studies of managerial behaviour I have referred to and my own, is closely related to the previous two: Whereas the studies of managerial behaviour are centred on quantifiable categories, and lack a systematic theory in which to frame their observations, I am fundamentally qualitative in my approach, and I try to develop

a framework of improvisation to make sense of my observations. These two aspects, however, are only made possible from a *paradigmatic standpoint of sensemaking, as opposed to a paradigm of decision-making*. Carlson (1951), Stewart (1967), Mintzberg (1973, 1994), Kotter (1986) and Tengblad (2006), however, all display an explicit focus on decision-making, and are devoted to showing characteristics about the milieu in which managers *gather information, and make strategies and decisions*. This is reinforced by Tengblad (2006), who argues that Mintzberg (1973) pursues a doctrine of “*rational administrative behaviour*” which places Mintzberg within the “*stability camp*” (p. 1441). Also Mintzberg (1994), who builds on Marples (1967) in his critique of Carlson (1951) and Stewart (1967) for their constricted focus on pre-quantification and time-studies, ends up arguing that the manager should be studied as a decision maker so as to account for the manager’s “output” as well as “input” (Mintzberg 1994, p. 89). As a last note, in a review of Mintzberg’s (1973) study, Weick (1974) points out that Mintzberg employs a stimulus-response view, and that his research approach stems from a decision-making perspective. This is a very important difference from my sensemaking study, and as Weick et al. (2005) explain: “*Sensemaking is about the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice. When action is the central focus, interpretation, not choice, is the core phenomenon.*” (p. 409).

According to Weick et al. (2005), the discrepancy between the two perspectives is of substantial importance, and depending on which one is employed, different facets of practice will be addressed, investigated and theorized upon. The important matter for Weick et al. is that it is on a *paradigmatic and conceptual level* sensemaking and decision-making are seen as antagonists. *In practice*, however, sensemaking may involve decision-making; but from a sensemaking perspective, this is seen as part of a more fundamental process of creating identity and meaning. As a consequence, a “decision” is merely a fraction of the deep-seated processes associated with the dialogical “self” (Mead 1967). To sum up, it is from this difference in *fundamental perspective* I hold that my study differs from studies of managerial behaviour. Paradigmatic differences and their consequences for the conceptualization of improvisation is dealt with in chapter six; and the discussion on sensemaking versus decisionmaking is also an important part of my analysis (chapters seven to ten).

Although there are important differences between the research on managerial behaviour and my own research – differences which predominantly have to do with my anchorage in the sensemaking perspective and my motivation to build a theory of organizing as improvisation

– there are *similarities* as well. Some of these have already been implied, such as a shared focus on practical authenticity as opposed to the early generalizations of management and administration theory. As discussed earlier, the similarity in research context is particularly evident (i.e. managers), even if the prime motive for choosing such a context differs. Other central similarities in observations, findings, and insights are referred to throughout my analysis. On the occasions where the opposite is the case, this is naturally addressed as well.

To sum up, improvisation from a sensemaking perspective has from the very start been my principal interest, as I have wanted to contribute to the field of research on organizational improvisation. This field seems to have had a peak in the 1990s (for example Weick 1993a, 1993b, 1998, 1999; Hatch 1997, 1999; Barrett 1998; Bastien and Hostager 1992; Brown and Eisenhardt 1997, Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Moorman and Miner 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Ciborra 1996, 1999; Orlikowski 1996; and Orlikowski and Hofman 1997); but it has also received some attention in the new millennium (for example Hatch 2000; Zack 2000; Weick 2001; Kamoche et al. 2002; Kanter 2002; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005; and Leybourne 2006). Although my branch of research belongs to organization theory, it is also a valuable contribution if my research can contribute to the field of managerial behaviour. In principle, the implications from my study are usable for all organizations, for all levels of organizations, and to all sorts of practitioners who are interested in improvisation as a phenomenon. Thus my study contributes towards:

1. A general understanding of how improvisation evolves in organizing practice, with special regard to organizing in a social milieu, which in my study is found to be linked to ambiguity, vagueness, turbulence, corporality, spontaneity, emotionality and unpredictability. This is further linked to creativity in the form of problem definition and meaning-making (chapter nine).
2. A more specific understanding of the relationship between improvisation in organizing practice and the practical employment of administrative instruments such as routines, structures, systems and management models (chapter ten).

In these opening sections I have tried to explicate the scope of and motivation behind my study. I have also indicated how my theoretical study has been fuelled by my empirical project, and vice versa, and provided some examples of this. I hope this can be of aid in the succeeding discussions, so as to carve out a red line through my argumentation. As for the

logical place to start, it seems to me to be the kind of early linear thinking about organizing that my take on sensemaking and improvisation seeks to supplement and contrast. It is to this subject I turn next. From a general discussion on how a sensemaking perspective differs from early thoughts on organizing, I indicate how a sensemaking view can be developed into a theory of organizing as improvisation, and from this basis I derive the particular research goals and the research question of my study.

## **Challenging the early linear model of organizing**

To understand the potential contribution and impact of organizing as improvisation it may be useful to gain an overview of the kind of linear thinking an improvisational view attempts to complement. As throughout the dissertation I study different aspects of improvisation and organizing, however, central issues in linear organizing thinking will reappear and be discussed many times over; which is why in this opening chapter only key aspects will be addressed, and on a somewhat general level. I have chosen one of Weick's (2001) detailed discussions in "Making Sense of the Organization" as my point of departure for identifying these key aspects. Here he addresses the limits to what he refers to as the architectural design of organizing:

*Organizational design modelled along the lines of architectural design is viewed as a bounded activity that occurs at a fixed point in time. The activity is largely decision making, concentrated in a small group, which translates intentions into plans. The plans are based on assumptions of ideal conditions and envision structures rather than processes. The structures are assumed to be stable solutions to a set of current problems that will only change incrementally. (Weick 2001, p. 57).*

With roots in the early doctrine of "homo economicus" (Blaug 1992), such an architectural design is what in the following will be associated with a *linear perspective* on organizing. Central in this orthodox doctrine are elements of *technical rationality* (Schön 1991), as emphasis is put on ideal conditions of stability and structure, and on plan(ning) before execution (thinking before acting), thus depicting *linearity* in time. An early formulation of linear organizing is found in Fayol's seminal work on "administrative theory" (Urwick 1934), which depicts a technical rational image of administration where a strict logic governs organizing action. From such a strict linear focus on administration "decision-making" (for example Simon 1968; March and Simon 1993; Cyert and March 1992) and "control" (for example Ouchi 1979, 1980; Eisenhardt 1985) are topics that are given much attention. In the



same manner, as argued by Stacey et al. (2000) and Stacey (2001, 2003), *prediction* is given much emphasis as a tool for making forecasts of the organizational future. In linear thinking prediction is facilitated through careful analysis of systemic elements in the internal and external environment which subsequently can be “monitored” and “manipulated” objectively as a consequence of management decisions (Stacey et al. 2000; Stacey 2001, 2003). Finally, as the linear approach focuses on facets of organizations as “systems” and “entities” (Weick 2001; Andersen 2000), *dualisms* are set up between “manager” and the “organization” (for example Senge 1990), and between “choice” and “action” (for example Simon 1968; March and Simon 1993; Cyert and March 1992). A last example of dualism in the linear approach is the one between “individual” and “culture”, of which Griffin (2002) holds Schein (1992) to be a central advocate.

Many of the basic assumptions in the linear view have been challenged and nuanced over the years. For example, the assumption of rationality was, at least seemingly, considerably nuanced in Herbert Simon’s (1968) classic theory of limited rationality. One might ask, however, what the word *limited* should be compared to; and the answer can be found in the concept “homo economicus”, which builds on a premise of *absolute* rationality (Simon 1968). As a critique of the assumptions of “homo economicus” Simon argues that rationality cannot be thought of in such ideal terms, as it is restrained by people’s ability to process information, by physiological factors, and by values (p. 40). I would argue, however, that this view is problematic with regard to at least two aspects:

1. What and where is this rationality, or this striving for rationality, that is *not* restrained?
  - What does it look like, and
  - Where is it to be found, if not in an ideal universe?
2. Where can the objective information that Simon claims is processed be found?
  - Can objective information be identified as such?

For now I shall not move further into the dualistic rhetoric of early organizing thinking, as this is a topic dealt with later (chapter five). Still, the previous questions may serve as creative stimulators and indicate an alternative epistemological direction to the linear approach.

In Donald Schön’s (1991) vocabulary linear thinking is referred to as *technical rationality*, which he claims is the dominant epistemology in thinking about professions and the

institutional relations of research, education, and practice. James March and Herbert Simon seem to support this claim, and 35 years after the first publication of the branch standard *Organizations* they state in the foreword of the 1993 edition that the original intention was to: “. . . list generalizations (preferably true ones) and to assess the empirical evidence supporting them” (March and Simon 1993, p. 1). Having consolidated their root in a technical rational paradigm, they continue by claiming:

*If there were any general pronouncements we would want to utter today, it would be that no events during this long period have shaken the foundations of organizations or organizations theory so roughly as to make them unrecognizable, or even greatly distorted . . . the new phenomena we have observed, and perhaps most of the new concepts as well, fit without too much Procrustean squeezing or folding into the earlier framework that was designed to hold them. That is one reason (among many) why we limit ourselves to these comments instead of rewriting the book. (March and Simon 1993, pp. 1-2).*

If we are to believe the authors of this highly influential treatise, its basic assumptions persist and have at least not until the early nineties been challenged significantly by alternative theories. I would like to point out, however, that newer contributions within decision-making theory seem to have softened some of its core assumptions and taken in central insights from sensemaking theory. For example, in March (1994) and March and Olsen (2004) the focus is changed from a “logic of consequences” to a “logic of appropriateness”, and phenomena like identity and interpretation are given much attention. But even if much has happened within the tradition of decision-making, and even if there has been a great expansion of alternative thinking, such as in post-modern theory, symbolic-interpretative theory, and complexity-theory to name but a few (see for example Stacey 2003; Hatch 2004), I argue that there is still a need to provoke and renovate organization theory, and that one way to go about this might be through a non-dualistic sensemaking view of improvisation. First I would like, however, to sum up some of the most important aspects of what I identify as the intrinsic values of linear (technical rational) organizing:

<i>Elements:</i>	<i>Examples:</i>
Preoccupation with <b>nouns</b> :	Organization, structure, plan, culture, system, routine and administrative models of any kind
Preoccupation with <b>dualisms</b> :	Manager versus organization, individual versus culture, plan versus action, talk versus action
<b>Linear</b> thinking:	Analysis → prediction → plan → strategy → action → evaluation/control
<b>Systems</b> thinking and <b>technical</b> management:	A-contextual prescription, objective analysis, plan, implementation, control, quantification and reductionism, rational choice and decision-making

**Table 1.0 Elements in linear organizing**

The elements in table 1.0 have inspired a range of different schools and directions within organization theory, and by facilitating a structured conversation on organizational topics they have made a tremendous contribution. One might say that in promoting its ideas, linear thinking has succeeded in comprising a language that stretches beyond social and cultural differences. But as argued by Berger and Luckmann (1991) ideas may be taken for granted as representatives of objective reality, and as a consequence taken too far. More specifically, concerning the organizational field of research, Schein (1996) argues that what has been missing in organization studies is:

*. . . the anchoring of our concepts in observed reality . . . . We have gone too quickly to formal elegant abstractions that seemingly could be operationally defined and measured, i.e., centralization-decentralization, differentiation – integration, power, etc., and failed to link these to observed reality. I say “seemingly” because in the effort to define such concepts, we often relied on further abstractions, i.e., questionnaire responses, and began to treat the abstractions as the reality. Not only does this create fuzzy theory and research that is made significant only by massaging the data statistically, but the results are often useless to the practitioner. (p. 232).*

Karl Weick’s (1979, 1995, 2001) theories on organizing as sensemaking can be seen as a countermeasure to such a tendency of alienation and exaggerated abstraction within linear organization theory, and based on a process view on organizations Weick was amongst the

first to develop a concept of *organizing as improvisation*. Going into more detail I will now address what new insights such a process view can offer; and what is more important, I will address its relevance from a process perspective in terms of the development of an improvisational view.

### **Process thinking: Towards an improvisatory concept of organizing**

Let me start off with a personal comment: My interest in organizing as improvisation stems from a desire to contribute to a language that facilitates authentic contextual understanding of day-to-day practical organizing. In that regard I hold that a language other and more profound than the technical rational is of the essence; we need a different vocabulary to understand everyday organizational life than the one provided by strict linear thinking. Constructing such an alternative language is not so much a new idea, as it is one of increasing importance – both because the world is about to become a different place than before, and because linear thinking continues to be very influential within organizing theory and practice. Inspired by Hatch (1999) my dissertation is thus less about doing something that has not been done before, than it is about doing something worth doing again.

From a linear viewpoint, organizing is thought of roughly in the way Christopher Robin from the books about Winnie the Pooh approaches the topic: “. . . *organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up*” (Milne 1992). Alternatively, expanding on Weick (1979, 1995, 2001) and Schön (1991) organizing can be seen as something we engage in continuously. In the latter case organizing is not so much a matter of thinking first and (mechanical) execution later, but rather of evolving, ongoing action involving varying degrees of creativity and spontaneity. From this viewpoint, organizing may be projected as a form of sensemaking process, but in order to be labelled organizing it presupposes external action or the intention of such: there is always something in the social or physical world that *is* organized. In this regard Weick’s (1979) classic definition of organizing offers great insight:

*. . . organizing . . . is defined as a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors. To organize is to assemble ongoing interdependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes. (Weick 1979, p. 3).*

Expanding on Weick’s definition, organizing takes place on the inside *and* the outside of individuals, and it evolves as a reflexive process of producing objectives and solving

problems, some more vague and ambiguous than others. In Weick's definition the words *consensus*, *interlocked behaviour*, and *interdependence* are central, thus highlighting organizing as a social practice. What is somewhat less explicit in this definition, however, is that in spite of its fundamentally social nature, consciousness can often emerge in isolation. Likewise, it is hardly self-evident that organizing presumes an organizational context. To organize a living room, for instance, means something else in everyday speech than managing an organizational development project in a hospital. Weick's (1989) view on organizing, however, is very wide and general, and does not discriminate between contexts:

*To organize anything means to impose order on it, whether what is being arranged are ideas, closets, people, or time. To organize ideas is to make them more orderly and one way to make them more orderly is to arrange them into stories that explain and justify commitments. (Weick 1989, p. 245)*

As a label, then, organizing may be used in all kinds of situations, but it means something unique in all of them. Still, in general organizing presupposes an intention of creating sense and order involving the use of reflective capacities and mindful action, which are the elements that are primarily given attention in the following. Inspired by Weick (1979, 1989, 1995) and Weick et al. (2005) I understand organizing as *externally oriented acts of sensemaking carried out in the private, social, and organizational sphere*, and to further narrow it down, my interest in this study concerns organizing *in an organizational setting*.

If organizing implies making sense of and acting in an *organizational context*, it signifies organizations as themes of conversation (Stacey 2001; Shaw 2002), as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2004), rather than as entities. What an organization *is*, then, is a somewhat peculiar question. Organizations do not exist as such, but as social arenas of joint sensemaking. Following the thoughts of Berger and Luckmann (1991) and Scott (2001), an organization could be seen as emerging through acts of institutionalization, and it becomes recognizable as an object to the extent that patterns of (organizing) action are developed that are clear enough to provide sense. In the same vein, Weick et al. (2005) suggest that organizations are talked into existence. From this view organizations are social constructions upheld by interacting individuals, and they remain organizations for as long as they are perceived as such by workers, owners, the government, customers, and other stakeholders. In Czarniawska-Joerges' (1992) words:

*Organizations are nets of collective action, undertaken in an effort to shape the world and human lives. The contents of the action are meanings and things (artefacts). One net of collective action is distinguishable from another by the kind of meanings and products socially attributed to a given organization. (p. 32).*

What, then, can be learned by studying how organizational constructions are brought to life? Posing this question implies directing focus towards everyday practice and organizing as an *emergent* phenomenon (Mead 1967). Doing this produces a subtle change of attention from “*a sociology of nouns towards a sociology of verbs*” (Chia 1996). Shifting the focus from the ever passing and temporary objects of consciousness to the process of producing such opens up a rich source of knowledge. For example, studying a structure or a plan will always be a somewhat outdated project, as reality has already moved on (Weisbord 1988). Thus, in the following reflections organization as a noun will be de-emphasized, benefiting the concept of organizing as practice, as process. And following the general approach to organizing as explicated by Weick (1989) and Weick et al. (2005), I end up with a similar view to that of Orlikowski (2002) who sees everyday practice of organizational members as the source from which organizing is constituted.

What happens if we contrast a process view with linear thinking? A fuller attempt to answer this will be given in chapter five, but to get some guiding ideas I shall indicate a few points. First of all, from a process perspective organizing is vastly more than thinking and planning before action. With regard to the seminal works of Simon (1968) and March and Simon (1993), a process view seeks beyond the concept of (bounded) rational decision-making (Ciborra 1999). And as it builds on verbs rather than nouns it marks a difference from the Carnegie-school’s portrait of organizations as arenas where problems and solutions are meshed together like entities (nouns) in a garbage can (Cohen et al. 1972). Furthermore, routines, structures and systems – which are root concepts in a linear perspective (see table 1.0) – are from a process point of view merely temporary constructions in an ongoing flow of organizing activities (see chapter five).

In my view, a process view is not abstract, but concrete, as it focuses on authentic ongoing practice: on people meeting and communicating on both a conscious and unconscious level as they are brought together in processes of joint sensemaking (Mead 1967; Blumer 1969; Weick 1995, 2001; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2004). They come to these processes

with certain intentions for the future which are simultaneously influencing and being influenced by everyday actions (Stacey et al. 2000; Stacey 2001). And if we perceive everyday organizational life as a dynamic feature, organizing will always differ between contexts (Purser and Petranker 2005). Sometimes it will involve planning and routine behaviour; other times calculation and implementation of models; and yet other times it will presuppose genuine spontaneous action and risk taking behaviour with little anticipation or preparation. Thus, as it is defined as sensemaking activities targeted at the external sphere (social or not), *organizing can be seen as a process of improvisation*. This may seem a radical statement, but as a guiding thesis for the following discussions it gives a clear idea of where I am heading. And perhaps it will seem less radical as some of the core issues are sorted out in the succeeding chapters.

## **Research goals and research question**

From the assumption that organizing can be seen as a process of improvisation I have derived the following two research goals for my project:

1. To achieve and verbalize an understanding of the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice and of how this relates to complexity and context.
2. To achieve and verbalize an understanding of the nature of technical rationality in everyday organizing practice and of how this relates to improvisation.

In my opinion, understanding everyday organizing presumes a perspective which is close to actual practice and which takes into consideration the inevitable complexity in which organizing is embedded: a dynamic framework that acknowledges the genuine emotional, creative, and structuring efforts typical for everyday practice. From a basis in theoretical analysis I attempt to provide such a framework, and I suggest that “The improvising man” serves as an appropriate name for it. Within this framework improvisation is defined as *spontaneous and hermeneutical sensemaking via external action*. Subsequently, the framework and the proposed definition provide grounds for a sensemaking tool for understanding authentic work practice. I have chosen to formulate this tool through the following research question:

*What is the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice and how does improvisation relate to technical rationality?*

One cannot look at all things simultaneously, not even if one wants to. And a way of seeing is a way of not seeing (Poggi 1965), but that does not stop us from seeing in the first place. To highlight certain traits of practice – in this case the hermeneutical, emotional, spontaneous and creative – is not, however, equivalent to categorically denying the validity of all others. Thus, as much as improvisation encourages certain angles and perspectives, it is not my intention to push aside alternative views, but to supplement them.



## The structure

*“And the seasons they go ‘round and ‘round  
And the painted ponies go up and down  
We're captive on the carousel of time  
We can't return we can only look behind  
From where we came  
And go round and round and round  
In the circle game”  
- Joni Mitchell*

The purpose of chapter 1 is to position and contextualize my dissertation theoretically and philosophically: to provide a rough sketch of its assumptions, foundations, inspirations and findings, to set the tone for the succeeding chapters, and indicate a red line throughout the study. I start by giving an overview of the scope and motivation behind my study; the field of literature that I relate to; the empirical context I have chosen and the reasons for this; and finally, I also include a short discussion of the paradigmatic stance that underpins my research. Four points sum up these opening sections: firstly, that mine is a study of organizing as improvisation; and secondly, that it is conducted from a sensemaking, not a decision-making, perspective. Thirdly, I explain how the choice of hospital managers as my objects of study comes as a consequence of an interest in the relation between administration and improvisation in organizing practice; and fourthly, I show how my project differs in important regards from studies of managerial behaviour – a field that has some similarities to mine, but which works from different assumptions and motivations. Towards the end of chapter 1 I provide an introduction to some early and very influential perspectives on organizing that I seek to complement; and inspired by the seminal work of Karl E. Weick, I indicate in broad terms an alternative concept of *organizing as improvisation*. Finally, I present the research goals and research question for my study.

Chapter 2 provides an overview and discussion of the most prominent of the existing attempts to conceptualize organizational improvisation, with particular focus on Karl Weick's work. The discussion builds on a premise that existing attempts provide insufficient basis for understanding the richness of improvisation in authentic everyday organizing, and I suggest that improvisation can be re-conceptualized, embellished and turned into a more fruitful concept.

In chapter 3 I present a philosophical backdrop in order to facilitate such a re-conceptualization. Here, the works of the American pragmatists are of special importance, and their line of practical philosophy is supplemented by insights from hermeneutics and phenomenology.

In chapter 4 I build up a framework of improvisation which I call “The improvising man”. This chapter is written in the fashion I myself would have liked to be introduced to the topic of organizing, improvisation, and sensemaking, combining an extensive epistemological anchorage with an interest for the emergent practicalities of everyday life. Lastly in chapter 4, I expand on the role of tools in improvisation, and discuss how improvisation relates to Donald Schön’s (1991) concept of “Technical rationality”.

Chapter 5 picks up where chapter 1 left off and sets out to bring the insights from chapters 2, 3 and 4 into the domain of organizing. As an introduction, I make some reflections on the limits to the concept of “change” as a root-concept for organizing, and argue that improvisation might provide an alternative and fruitful point of departure. To underpin this claim, I subsequently address and re-conceptualize some of the most important topics of organization and administration theory via the framework of “The improvising man” (chapter 4). These topics include routine, structure, planning, and system. Picking up the discussion on improvisation and technical rationality from chapter 4, I argue that all four of these may be seen as tools in a process of improvisational organizing rather than as control instruments. Towards the end of chapter 5, I compare organizing as improvisation to management, and two possible perspectives on management are sketched out: one as a measure of improvisation, and the other as a more idealized form: Managerialism.

Chapter 6 presents the methodology, theoretical and empirical, supporting this dissertation from start to end. Much energy is devoted to emphasising the reflexive and hermeneutical relationship between my form of theoretical and empirical research. Building on the philosophical insights from chapter 3, I begin with a section on the philosophy of science, thus providing a crucial foundation for the dissertation with regard to methodology, process, content, and structure. Two points sum up the contents of chapter 6: Firstly, I discuss the role of non-dualism in the philosophy of science, and show how this affects my research – which makes use of a social ethnographic strategy, and qualitative shadowing and in-depth

interviews as research methods. Here, I accentuate how non-dualism presumes an interpretative approach which emerges hermeneutically as a reflexive process between theory and empirical data. Secondly, I present the empirical context, which includes nine managers at a major Norwegian hospital called InSitu; and explain the details of the research process from start to end. Since chapter 6 involves a detailed account of the practical research process, it works as a natural introduction to chapters 7 – 10 which consist of an empirical analysis and discussion of organizing as improvisation amongst InSitu Hospital managers. As they illuminate different aspects of the same research experience, I see these four chapters as an integrated whole.

Chapter 7 deals with the typical context, complexity and challenges faced by InSitu managers on an everyday basis. There are many reasons for including an opening chapter on contextuality alone: Firstly, this provides an introductory overview of characteristics of the research context. Secondly, a study of contextuality displays the multitude of challenges InSitu managers encounter in everyday life, and by postponing an elaborate discussion of *the way* these challenges are enacted and dealt with, a more intuitive understanding of improvisation may emerge. And thirdly, as a consequence of the two former, discussing contextuality in isolation allows for a detailed view of what the InSitu context is *not*; namely a pre-ordered, stable, calm or unequivocal arena.

Chapter 8 presents some key theoretical issues that came out of the empirical analysis of InSitu managers. These issues emerged as a result of a need to explicate practical facets of improvisation that were not covered by my early concept of “The improvising man”, and in that regard they contribute both towards expanding this framework and making it more practically applicable. Firstly, I separate between “pure” and “sufficiently pure” improvisation, so as to facilitate the identification of improvisation in other, and more ordinary, settings than for example jazz music and improvisational drama. Secondly, inspired by Taylor (1985), I propose a separation between “positive” and “negative” improvisation as I have found that in organizing practice the improvisation can sometimes be of a more proactive and voluntary (positive) nature; while at other times it is more reactive and involuntary (negative). Lastly, as a normative contribution, I suggest a separation between “pure” and “good” improvisation, as I have observed instances where practical wisdom and action evolve through rather impure forms of improvisation. This last discussion expands from an empirical stance on the theoretical discussion in chapter 4 and 5 of improvisation and technical rationality.

Improvisation implies enactment of context, and as context is inextricably tied to improvisation the two cannot be categorically parted. This is the central theme of chapter 9, where I link the context of InSitu managers to improvisation. Chapter 9 follows the structure from the two previous chapters and presents narratives that in my view are highly illustrative of negative and positive improvisation and the way this relates to contextual ambiguity, clustering of events, emotionality, and unpredictability.

In chapter 10 I continue and expand further on the discussion from chapters 4, 5 and 8 on the role of technical rationality in everyday improvisation, and how the use of administrative models relates to good improvisatory practice. Here I present and discuss some findings from the empirical analysis regarding perception, perspective, and functionality. Finally, I conduct an analysis of the InSitu managers' espoused theory, theory-in-use, and language-in-use, and propose some areas where the managers can improve their organizing processes.

In chapter 11 I present my conclusion based on the empirical findings and theoretical discussions and sketch out some implications for future practice and research.

## Chapter 2. Organizational improvisation

### Introduction

This chapter deals with some of the most influential of the previous attempts to conceptualize organizational improvisation, and through a review of these I attempt to give grounds for a re-conceptualization of improvisation and its role in everyday organizing. As a key line of argument I hold that improvisation in most of these early attempts is seen as a rare and exceptional phenomenon, and that their focus is mostly towards improvisation in its pure forms. As will be elaborated in chapter three and four my dissertation proposes a much broader approach, and instead of seeing improvisation as something that occurs only under special circumstances I suggest to redefine improvisation as a philosophical trait of existence that is always present to some extent in everyday practical life. It is from this basis I hold that the authors on improvisation who are presented in the current chapter provide a too narrow view, although I make use of many of the same ideas as them, such as spontaneity, creativity, and intuition. For example, in chapter three I propose with basis in “practical philosophy” that *spontaneity* and *creativity* are necessary conditions of humanity, something which indicates that improvisation, which emerges from these phenomena, also is a ground condition of humanity. This contradicts the authors who will be presented in this chapter as they seem to be occupied merely by *high degrees* of spontaneity, creativity or both, something which implies that improvisation from their view is a temporary phenomenon which is *either* present *or* not.

As my theoretical interest in organizing as improvisation was initially inspired by Karl E. Weick, his work receives special attention. Somewhat paradoxically, however, some of the greatest analytical problems I have encountered when working with the concept of improvisation have also in many ways been spurred by Weick’s work. Even if I disagree with many of his assumptions, however, Weick has certainly made me think hard, and some of my deepest reflections have come about as a result of identifying analytical problems in Weick’s work. Weick continues to be a major inspiration for me, and his reflections on organizing, sensemaking, sociality, identity, and improvisation are still at the core of my studies.

In the title of this chapter I use the term “organizational improvisation”. This is in line with Kamoche et al.’s (2002) comprehensive work *Organizational Improvisation* where they

review most of the existing theory of improvisation in organizational theory. Inspired by Weick's (1989) more general take on organizing, however, I prefer in my work to use the term "organizing as improvisation". A reason for this is that I want to avoid a possible connotation embedded in the term "organizational improvisation": namely that improvisation takes on a special form in organizations as opposed to its occurrence in other parts of everyday life. In other words, when working *conceptually* with improvisation as a general phenomenon in chapters two and four, I do not want to discriminate between social life in general and organizational life in particular.

As a last note, I should make clear that in this chapter *I do not attempt to make a full review of improvisation in organizational research*. Kamoche et al. (2002) have already done this meticulously. My focus is directed towards important aspects in most conceptualizations of improvisation, such as spontaneity, creativity and intuition, and as indicated I build on these aspects in my own work, although mostly from a fresh angle. In addition to expanding on and discussing the findings from Kamoche et al.'s thorough review, I give special attention to some of the contributions which have become classics in the field, for example Weick (1995, 1989, 2001), Hatch (1997), and Crossan and Sorrenti (1997). These authors, and others, are also discussed in appropriate places throughout the dissertation. Thus, rather than a full treatise of improvisation as a phenomenon, this opening chapter on organizational improvisation constitutes more of a starting point for raising certain fundamental issues.

It seems natural to begin this discussion on organizational improvisation by asking: What is improvisation? Weick (2001) explains that the term derives from the Greek *proviso* which means to provide in advance, but as *im* is put in front of *proviso* the meaning becomes quite the opposite: to provide the unexpected. Weick's positive version of the epistemological character of improvisation sets us off in the right direction, and I shall later return to some of the important connotations embedded in it. But first I want to present a few other popular and influential definitions of improvisation – from which I will draw and discuss four vital characteristics.

*Composing on the spur of the moment (Schuller 1986, p. 378).*

*. . . on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena (Schön 1987, pp. 26-27).*

*. . . intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997, p. 157).*

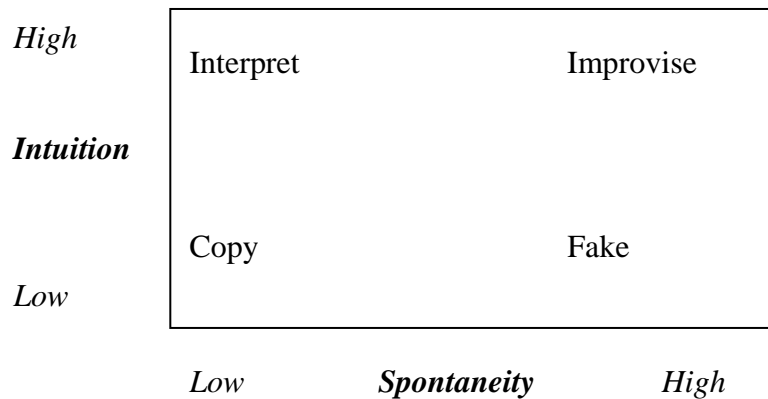
*. . . composition converg[ing] with execution (Moorman and Miner 1998b, p. 702).*

*Improvisation consists of deliberately chosen activities that are spontaneous, novel, and involve the creation of something while it is being performed (Miner et al. 1996 in Weick 2001, p. 286)*

Holding up these definitions against each other I observe strong similarities between them, and generally speaking, *spontaneity*, *creativity*, *intuition*, and *action* are recurrent dimensions. In the following I will give a presentation of these dimensions and discuss how they have been treated in the expositing literature on improvisation and organizing. Next, in chapter four, I shall explore the significance of all of these phrases from a practical philosophical position: expand upon them and see how they can be seen as connected and mutually constitutive. Thus, my ambition is not primarily to signal a break with the definitions above, but to potentially deepen and widen their meanings and their practical application via an integrative philosophical framework.

## Hatch's concept of improvisation

In Hatch's (1997) view, improvisation is a process of spontaneous and intuitive sensemaking. Inspired by Crossan and Sorrenti (1997), Hatch (1997) bases her concept on the two dimensions of intuition and spontaneity, from which she proposes the following framework of improvisation:



### *Model 2.0 Hatch's (1997) positioning of improvisation*

As I read Hatch (1997), she sees spontaneity as more or less equivalent to impulsivity, and regards intuition as an unconscious process based on embellished experience. Based on these two dimensions Hatch constructs a grid of four sub-dimensions: copying, faking, interpreting, and ultimately, improvisation. From my point of view these are interesting and mind-sparking categories that are in many ways essential to understanding improvisation as a practical phenomenon. Still, a few critical objections may be raised – not so much in terms of what Hatch's dimensions imply, but more in terms of what they leave out; or rather: how they are apt to be interpreted.

Firstly, seeing spontaneity as analogous to impulsivity represents a problem in the sense that uncommonness might be interpreted into it; it is open to the interpretation that improvisation is merely something that happens in rare instances. In one sense this seems quite plausible, as it intuitively rhymes with the way improvisation is often talked about in everyday speech – as a kind of *ad hoc* action, for instance when planning breaks down (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Ciborra 1999; Alterhaug 2004). In the same vein Hatch (1997) might be understood as suggesting that impulse action is something that can somehow be avoided, rather than it being



a natural part of existence (Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). Likewise, Hatch's (1997) use of the phrase intuition in her framework might come out as something exceptional, almost magical, as in everyday lingo we are not strangers to associating intuition with the likes of supernatural talents; as a sixth sense – for example women's intuition. My point is that the way Hatch presents the two concepts of spontaneity and intuition might contribute to blurring improvisation as a real life phenomenon, at worst even mystifying it.

Presenting three categories that are *not* improvisation and one that is, though they are all part of the same framework, potentially reifies the signal that improvisation is rare and exceptional. Notice how in Hatch's case a four-dimensional philosophical framework is more basal than improvisation: rather than a typification or gradation of improvisation her framework seems to represent more of a positioning of it alongside three other phenomena. It is my impression that Hatch, deliberately or not, elevates improvisation as a somewhat unique or exceptional skill/practice that supersedes other and more ordinary forms of action; forms that are important as building blocks on the way to mastering improvisation as a form of artistic brilliance. As a consequence, improvisation seems to come out as equivalent to *pure* improvisation. Again, this can be a practically valid, or even educative, way of perceiving improvisation *in some respect*, but in my view it is not exhaustive. It is therefore my perception that Hatch is in danger of overstating the kind of dualistic “either-or” thinking typical for the orthodoxy she wants to escape: She focuses more on particularly pure forms of improvisation than on the phenomenon as an everyday feature. A small excerpt may help highlight this point:

*In playing the head musicians usually interpret rather than improvise, which means that they play a recognizable or familiar line, perhaps giving it their own stylistic mark, but not really altering the basic ideas in any particular innovative way. (Hatch 1997, p. 183).*

Note the focus on the altering of basic ideas and on genuine innovation, which underpins the claim that improvisation is something out of the ordinary. And even if this is intended metaphorically as Hatch derives her inspiration from creative art forms like jazz improvisation and improvisational drama, the analytic distinctions made in a 2 x 2 grid separates improvisation from other modes of action, and potentially reifies it as something rare and exceptional rather than as everyday emergent and normal. I do not see Hatch's

approach to improvisation as a way of Being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1996) or an ordinary way of organizing (Ciborra 1999), which is my primary interest in this dissertation, but as a particular form of organizing that is either present or absent. In chapter four I will expand on this argument and argue that the kind of perspective Hatch (1997) presents is a limited one as it does not include improvisation as an evolving phenomenon which naturally takes form in organizing in its many shades of everydayness.

## **Weick's concept of improvisation**

### **Four degrees of improvisation**

Weick (1998) is possibly closer to a more nuanced approach than Hatch as he advances through the thoughts of Lee Konitz (Berliner 1994) and separates between 4 *degrees* of improvisation, starting with the least pure, interpretation, and continuing with embellishment, variation, and finally, (pure) improvisation. What strikes me as contradictive, however, is that Weick says that all four categories are *degrees of* improvisation, but at the same time he argues that only the purest of them is, in fact, improvisation. This latter notion seems to be Weick's main argument, and in the following it is on his view that improvisation is synonymous with *pure* creativity and *radical* altering that I will focus my attention.

As in Hatch's (1997) and Crossan and Sorrenti's (1997) case, typifying can go a long way, but objections may be raised against it. It seems, for instance, that instead of recognizing the inevitable presence of process and creativity in everyday life as such, the less explicit forms of improvisation in practice are also somewhat downgraded by Weick (1998). Again, his emphasis seems to be less on emergent contextuality than on *one particular kind of context*; one that is pure with regard to genuine creativity. Taking his inspiration from Berliner's (1994) elaborate study of jazz music, Weick (2001) argues explicitly that musicians only improvise when they “. . . *radically alter portions of the melody or replace its segments with new creations bearing little, if any, relationship to the melody's shape. . . .To improvise, therefore, is to engage in more than paraphrase or ornamentation or modification.*” (p. 287).

As in Hatch's (1997) case, Weick's stance is perhaps not so strange considering the source of inspiration he draws upon, namely jazz improvisation, and as a consequence he ends up with a concept similar to Hatch's. And having partly denoted improvisation as a radical altering of structures, Weick says the following in an effort at pointing out the limitations to the concept:

*The intention of a jazz musician is to produce something that comes out differently than it did before, whereas organizations typically pride themselves on the opposite, namely, reliable performance that produces something that is standardized and comes out the same way it did before. It is hard to imagine the typical manager feeling “guilty” when he or she plays things worked out before. (Weick 2001, p. 300).*

Again, for Weick’s critique to be valid it must come from a specific view on improvisation: something reserved for the few or a method or competence that can be employed in specific settings and/or which occurs only in rare instances. And the jazz metaphor seems to be a representative example. An importunate question, however, is whether jazz music itself lives up to the criteria indicated by Weick.

Weick (2001) explains that there is great variation between different jazz traditions, different performers, and performances. Following this line of reasoning, it can be argued that much of the music that is presented under the jazz label is quite distant from radical altering of melodies with little or no relationship to the melody’s shape. Perhaps it is only under exceptional circumstances that the jazz metaphor itself displays the characteristics that are necessary for it to be called improvisation, for instance in the case of free jazz (Zack 2000)? To single out jazz improvisation, then, as a special trait of genuine creativity – of breaking rules, patterns and harmonies; of disrupting rhythm and progression – may provide a biased image of jazz music, as it is not always improvisationally “pure”.

To be sure, both Hatch (1997) and Weick (1998) argue that jazz does not always display high levels of creativity and/or spontaneity, but they still tend to make improvisation synonymous with its purest forms. It is precisely this focus that I would like to question as I ask to which extent jazz is a suitable metaphor for *everyday* organizing practice. Can it at worst even be exaggerated? For instance, even if it can spur new perspectives, to which extent is archetypical jazz improvisation comparable to the everyday work reality of most people? Especially since jazz is commonly associated with the genuine and radical elements that define its creative and expansive boundaries, I fear that as a metaphor it may (at worst) alienate as much as it facilitates. In other words, even if jazz is more than pure jazz improvisation, the former is often associated with the latter, so as to comprise an image of the rare, exceptional and elitist (Mirvis 1998), and it is often this image that is transported out metaphorically; a point that Hatch and Weick (1998) discuss in a special edition of

*Organization Science* dedicated to improvisation. And finally, even if theorists use jazz and not merely jazz *improvisation* as the metaphor, they often place improvisation at the extreme end of the scale: improvisation is seen less as an emergent property than as a particular kind of radically innovative and creative emergence.

### **Improvisation and retrospection**

There is another aspect of Weick's concept of improvisation I would like to give some attention. This concerns the dimension of "retrospection", which according to Weick (1979, 1995, 2001) constitutes the essence of sensemaking, and hence improvisation. Retrospection is meticulously explicated in Weick's "Sensemaking in organizations" (1995), where he erects seven hypotheses that are crucial to understanding the sensemaking process. The hypotheses sum up the essential dimensions in sensemaking as being:

1. Grounded in identity construction
2. Retrospective
3. Enactive of sensible environments
4. Social
5. Ongoing
6. Focused on and by extracted cues
7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

Characteristics number one, three, four and five above are hypotheses that I build on explicitly in the succeeding chapters, together with other important insights from "practical philosophy", in an attempt to develop a comprehensive framework of improvisation. Number two, however, is at odds with my view on improvisation, and as the current chapter is about positioning and pointing out a need for theory-building in the field of improvisation, I choose to deal with it here.

In an article in the *Academy of Management Review* in 1996, Dennis A. Gioia and Aja Mehra give a review of Weick's *Sensemaking in organizations* (1995), and as much as they praise the book for being an intellectual challenge, they also provide some criticism. First of all they argue that Weick overplays the significance of retrospection as opposed to prospecting. Secondly, they criticize Weick for not dealing properly with the role of emotions in sensemaking. The latter is a criticism that I agree with, and which I address later in chapter

four. Considering the former, for Gioia and Mehra's criticism to be valid, it must contradict the essential (and philosophical) role of retrospection, which is the cornerstone of Weick's argument. In my view it does, and the following quote provides a point of departure for my succeeding discussion on the limits of retrospection as the essence of sensemaking:

*. . . if sensemaking were not also prospective, we would be forever at a loss when asked where we want to go. (Gioia and Mehra 1996, p. 1230).*

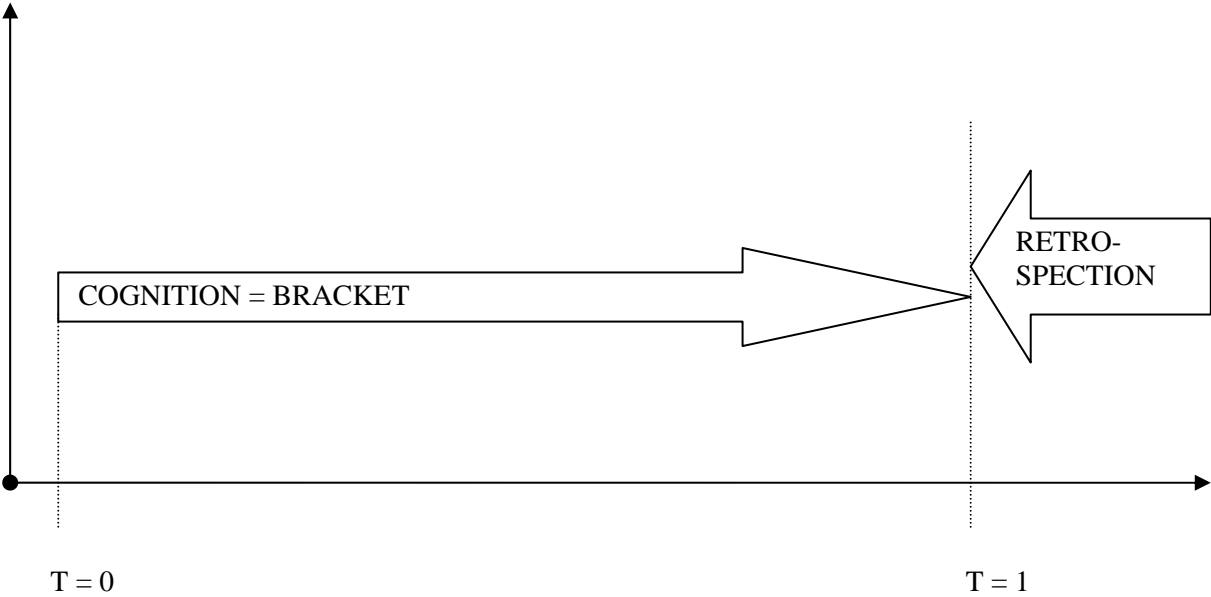
If sense can only be made retrospectively, an implication is that there is no way to predict what will happen in the future (Weick 1995). This has implications for organizing, as unpredictability will create complexity that must be dealt with in everyday practice. The way emerging unpredictability is dealt with, Weick (1995) argues, is through enactment, which is a process in which human actions bracket or punctuate an ongoing stream of reality.

*The concept of enactment has a touch of realism in its emphasis on bracketing and punctuating. To cope with pure duration, people create breaks in the stream and impose categories on those portions that are set apart. (Weick 1995, p. 35).*

Furthermore, with reference to Heidegger's (1996) concept of thrownness Weick claims that sensemaking is ongoing (characteristic number five). The fact that something seems to have a start and an end is thus a product of enactment (characteristic number three); that cognitions are categories imposed on pure duration (Bergson 1944). After having enacted brackets of reality, these can later be sensed retrospectively by a creative mind, Weick argues. Enactment is therefore a process in which people produce part of the environment they face.

In characteristic number two, Weick argues that it is impossible to know anything except in retrospect. This implies that a thought (noun) is only a thought to the extent that it is bracketed and "thought through" (verb), which is something that can only be discovered backwards. A sentence, for instance, can only be recognized as a sentence at the point when its last letter, its last verbal sign, is uttered. This is a way of stating the obvious – that something must happen before it has happened – and from this it is intuitive to picture cognition as a retrospectively enacted bracket with an identifiable beginning and end, which in retrospect can appear to be linear. Linearity is thus a product of a retrospective mind, and can only be identified standing in a present looking backwards.

In the following, however, I aim to show that characteristic number two is inherently contradictory, and secondly, that it contradicts point number five, indicating that Weick integrates two incompatible concepts into the same theory. I want to present two models to illuminate these intricacies. The first model gives an illustration of characteristic number 2: that sensemaking is essentially retrospective.



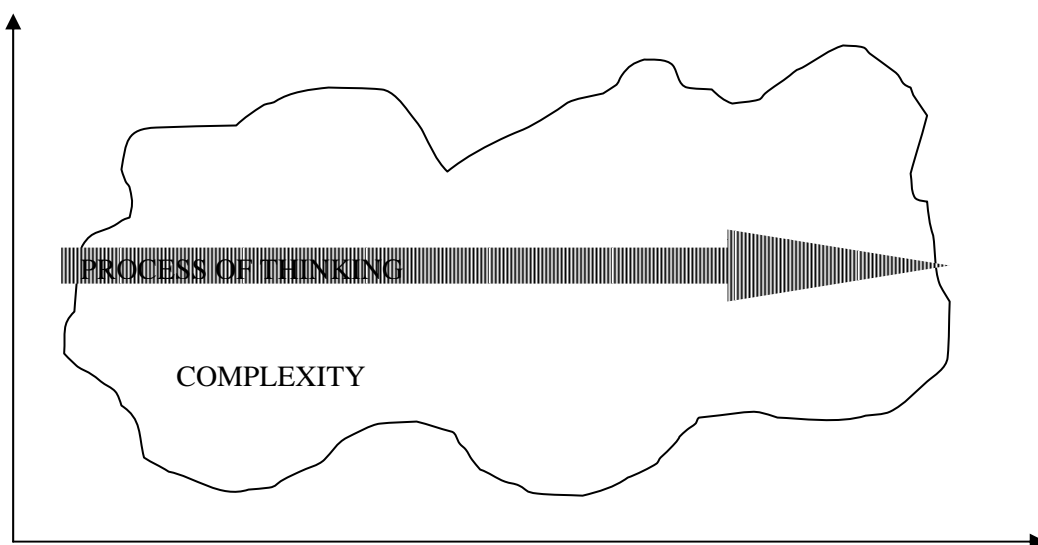
**Model 2.1 Retrospective sensemaking**

Model 2.1 illustrates the key point in retrospective sensemaking that one needs to think a thought through, speak a whole sentence, in order to make sense of it backwards as a bracket. The thought is not sensible as a thought until it has been discovered retrospectively. As a verbal illustration of this phenomenon Weick (1979, 1995, 2001) uses the following phrase, “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” It is as if the cognition itself, the bracket, has an extension in time – that it stretches out, so to speak. Simultaneously Weick argues that until the time of retrospective discovery the thought is merely a sensory process – an act of the body. Weick (1995) explains: “*Actions are known only when they have been completed, which means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us*” (p. 26). Logically this would imply that meaning is based on actions that are formed over time, which makes good sense to the extent that the past *has an opening for meaning* as opposed to being meaning in itself. The logic of retrospection as a philosophical strategy, however, implies that *cognition is in itself a process*. It starts at (T=0), continues, and stops at

( $T=1$ ), as it were, and only then can it be discovered backwards. It is the cognition, the speech, the meaning, that takes form, not the sensory process of producing temporal cognitions. This equals saying that cognition is both process and noun. The contradiction I speak of, then, is *not* that *sensemaking* happens over time, and that it makes use of the past. The contradiction is that *meaning* can only *be found* in the past, and that actions *cannot* be apprehended and made cognisant in situ. In my view this makes cognition inauthentic as it does not belong to the present, but the past. This also contradicts Berger and Luckmann (1991), who build on Mead (1967) as well, and explain bracketing as a temporary phenomenon of the present; and it contradicts Wittgenstein’s (1992, 1994) concept of language as a bracketing “tool”.

In retrospective sensemaking cognition must be finalized to become real, but who, then, is the one making sense? The process of sensemaking is carried out by an intelligent agent, but who is this agent? Could it be that the body unconsciously manufactures thoughts which only later can be made conscious by the mind? Surely this would account for the possibility of unconscious cognitions: the capability to know below the level of awareness. Such a conception, however, seems essentially dualistic, and potentially eradicates the meaning of cognition as a temporary bracket. For how can it be possible to know without knowing? If this were possible, life would be like a dream, with no way to wake up (Petranker 2005).

Consider another model which portrays characteristic number three in Weick’s (1995) theory:



**Model 2.2 Bracketing**

The difference between the two models is that in the latter model meaning is *continually* bracketed *in the present*, and not retrospectively after it has occurred. The hypothesis that sensemaking is an ongoing process (characteristic number five) aligns with Berger and Luckmann's (1991) concept that consciousness is a capacity to digitalize an analogous and ongoing process of emerging complexity; Bergson's (1944) concept of true duration and "becoming"; and James' (2007) image of "stream of experience": that nothing is itself even for an instant. As Weick (1995) himself explains, however, we cannot understand anything as process. We cannot experience pure duration. We can only grasp reality through the practical appliance of conscious action. Thinking is process, but thought is object. To make sense is to use the conscious capacity to piece together a meaningless flow of occurrences into practical concepts. Sensemaking, then, is best thought of, as Weick points out, a process of bracketing an ongoing flow of senseless experiences. And even if making sense is something that happens over time, the produced bits and pieces (cognitions) are nothing more than temporal snapshots (Weisbord 1988). They are objects working as vessels of sense. Bracket in this sense is a temporal accomplishment, and it has no start or end. Bracketing is based on a momentary perception of reality, which *flows from* earlier actions, but this does not make it fundamentally retrospective. *Being doomed to always look backwards is categorically different from using the past to make sense of the present.*

If sensemaking is fundamentally retrospective, it would imply that a thought is 100% constructed backwards, but where does this leave the present? Is not the body always situated in a passing present (Gadamer 1975)? How is it possible to be authentic (Heidegger 1996) when thoughts are always made in the past? Weick's hypothesis of retrospection implies that you are not conscious when you are authentically present, because the present is in fact not experienced. This implies that the agent is blind (Gioia and Mehra 1996; Petranker 2005), as authenticity occurs at some point after the body was authentic, which would mean that the present is never the present, but the past. Thus, Weick operates with two versions of the present: one in which the body produces sense (although senselessly); and one after that, where the body is cognisant of the present which is essentially the past. The logical asymmetry dwells in the claim that if you are to be authentic in the continual sensemaking process, in the producing of meaning, you have no possibility of being authentic in the present, where in fact you *experience* authenticity. Characteristic number two of retrospection therefore contradicts number three (bracketing) *and* five (ongoing).



To sum up, the contradiction in Weick's (1995) theory of retrospective sensemaking dwells in the postulate that cognition exists over time and must be ended before it makes sense backwards (i.e. "How can I know what I think until I see what I say"). As a metaphor, cognition is from Weick's viewpoint like a train of interconnected coaches, and not until the whole train has passed ( $T=1$ ) can you give a plausible account of it. Cognition must be completed, it must be *thought through*, before it can become cognition, and only then, at the end of it, can it be discovered retrospectively by a creative mind. This implies that it is not mindless action or earlier thoughts that provide grounds or horizons for retrospective cognition, but that the cognition itself is a process. Of course I, too, realize that something must happen before it has happened, but philosophically I would argue that *something is not made cognisant as an object that stretches out over time*, but rather, continually in the present as temporary brackets (model 2.2). In other words, there seems to be a mixture in Weick's theory between cognition as process and cognition as a noun (bracket). To state that sense is made over time does not imply that sensemaking (i.e. a process) equals cognition (i.e. a noun). From my perspective, sensemaking is a process from which cognitions are conceived perpetually, and thus cognitions can only appear as momentary and temporary punctuations: as snapshots (Weisbord 1988). As Weick says, actions leading up to cognition are not equivalent to meaning. Meaning is always new, and it is glued to the present, not the past (Bergson 1944). The past opens up horizons for meaning in the present, but it does not determine it.

### **Improspection – an alternative to retrospection**

As opposed to fundamental retrospection – that the only way of knowing is through observing the past – my interpretation of authors like Bergson (1944), Mead (1967), Berger and Luckmann (1991), Joas (1993), Heidegger (1996), and Vermersch (1999) is that we know what we are thinking *the moment we are thinking it*. Other authors have made the same suggestion (for example Ciborra 1999; Petranker 2005; Heron and Reason 2001; Park 2001; Senge et al. 2004). As Purser and Petranker (2005) elegantly put it, Weick's (1995) thought-after-action equals the old mechanistic thought-before-action in that the underlying strategy is "*know outside the flow*" (p. 245). As I have argued, however, cognition cannot be clutched on to in the same manner as time cannot be clutched on to. Sense is not categorically made backwards: it is a spontaneous experience repeating, or rather reconstructing, itself over time. Mead (1967) is very clear on this point as he suggests that it is the spontaneous "I" of the present that opens up for choice and authentic being, and that the "me" of the past (memory)

plays a dialogical role in the present (see chapter three for a closer examination of Mead's thinking). The key word is dialogue, which opens up for the unknown of a dynamic present, as opposed to being ". . . *doomed to live out our lives gazing at the wall in Plato's cave*" (Petranker 2005, p. 247). From Weick's (1995) perspective, however, choice is impossible. Choice is already made at the time you discover it, but in Petranker's (2005) words: "*Does it really have to be this way?*" (p. 245).

An instrumental, pragmatist interpretation of mental objects (brackets) implies that they are not meaningful in themselves, but that they provide meaning in context as they are experienced by a body situated in a particular time and space: in a "situation" (Gadamer 1975; Joas 1993). A bracket is not an empty vessel, however. It does not encapsulate meaning as a shell or container (Dewey 1929). On the contrary, a bracket is in itself sense, bringing together content and instrument, as it were. Moreover, content presents itself in the way that it is successfully interpreted as contextual meaning. In other words, the sensemaking vessel, although used for the purpose of "transporting" sense, cannot be separated from sense as such. It is always experienced by someone *as something* (Berger and Luckmann 1991), which means that it can only be realized as meaning, just as meaning can only be achieved through and as significant symbols (Mead 1967). The messenger is the message (i.e. Heidegger's (1996) "Dasein"), so to speak, and the message is in the philosophical sense always old news (Purser and Petranker 2005). As a consequence, a "problem" does not happen chronologically *before* meaning is shaped. Neither does the solution. As indicated by Joas (1996), the solution *is* simultaneously the problem *and* its meaning.

As a philosophy about the deepest characteristics of meaning, I propose a theory of "improspective" as opposed to retrospective and, for that matter, prospective sensemaking. This is merely a re-statement of bracketing: that sense is made and experienced spontaneously *as* and *through* temporal objects; not categorically towards the past (retrospective) or the future (prospective). Improspection captures the spontaneity of Mead's (1967) "I" as well as the "me", as the past (me) influences spontaneous sense (I), but does not dictate it. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of either retrospection or prospection. Clearly, intention can be directed backwards towards history as well as forward towards an imagined future, and in practice we do both. What is different about improspection is that it opens for the possibility to *look into*, *act in* and *make sense of* the present, and to the extent that this is accomplished, sensemaking takes the form of improvisation (see chapter four). From a

philosophy of retrospection it is impossible to reflect in action (Schön 1991), as you will inevitably arrive late (Petranker 2005). Improspection builds on the premise that thinking is in itself action, and it is immediate and authentic. I *inhabit* my own story: I do not unveil it backwards.

Impropection reflects Heideggerian (1996) thrownness in a different way than argued by Weick (1995), as it captures the essence of immediate being rather than past existence. Weick interprets Shütz's (1967) argument that attention “. . . *presupposes an elapsed, passed-away experience*” (p. 51) as a rationale for sense always being made after experience. I take a different view. What Shütz is indicating is that cognitions made by attention (i.e. Mead's “I”) are continually put in the past (i.e. Mead's “me”) due to their *temporality*. They are, however, *made* in a passing present, and at that temporal point they make sense in the here-and-now: not categorically by looking back at them, but by being filled by them continually. Impropection is a concept related to Tulku's (1994) “future infinitive”, which captures the essence of “. . . ‘*never arriving*’ of the future” (p. 93). Impropection is in a way a reconceptualization of Heidegger's (1996) “Dasein” and Mead's (1967) “self”, and indicates that improvisation may play a more essential role than in Weick's (2001) view. Weick accentuates that “*The importance of retrospect for improvisation imposes new demands that suggest why organizational improvisation may be rare*” (p. 291). Thus, Weick uses retrospection as grounds for arguing that improvisation is nothing in the way of a fundamental trait of existence, but a rare phenomenon. This contradicts my attempt with this dissertation, which is to argue the opposite. By toning down the importance of retrospection in favour of impropection we get quite a different image. Improvisation is not exclusively a rare, exceptional or elitist phenomenon: rather, it is a fundamental trait of existence (Ciborra 1999).

To sum up, I argue against Weick (1995) and hold that if sensemaking is seen as essentially retrospective, it becomes inauthentic and non-improvisatory. Sensemaking through impropection, however, opens up for the possibility that contextual and spontaneous improvisation is a basal characteristic of existence. These are the thoughts that I will bring into chapter four where I present the framework for “The improvising man”. The following quote from Petranker (2005) sets the tone:

. . . *the knowing that lets us improvise speech comes from the lived story of who we are, how things are, and what is happening* (p. 250).

## Other influential attempts to conceptualize organizational improvisation

In one sense intensely creative art forms, such as jazz improvisation, can through their vitality and explicitness teach us a lot about improvisation in its less pure forms (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Weick 1989, 1998, 2001), but if theoretical reflection never leaves the metaphorical level the metaphor might be taken literally – as if the only true forms of improvisation are found in its archetypes. In this light Kamoche et al. (2002) make an attempt to widen the scope of organizational improvisation beyond the mere elaboration of metaphors. In an extensive analysis of the literature on improvisation in the anthology “Organizational Improvisation” they address and discuss most of what has ever been written on the topic with relevance for organizations. And as a key line of argument, Kamoche et al. claim that a wider and more integrative understanding of improvisation as a practical phenomenon is needed than what they refer to as first, second and third generation improvisation theory – generations in which Crossan and Sorrenti (1997), Hatch (1997) and Weick (1998) are all situated. In a critique of earlier generations of organizational improvisation theory they charge authors with: “. . . *limiting themselves to quoting from jazz theory (e.g. Weick 1998) or to embellishing second stage definitions (Hatch 1997) . . . . Weick’s will of ‘not pushing jazz as much as [...] pushing improvisation’ remains, even in later generations’.*” (Kamoche et al. 2002, p. 98).

And from a meticulous and enlightening discussion on the most central of the existing definitions of improvisation, Kamoche et al. propose the following: “*Improvisation is the conception of action as it unfolds, by an organization and/or its members, drawing on available material, cognitive, affective and social resources*” (p. 99). The authors end up with this definition as a short résumé of their discussion. It is supposed to counter the many attempts to import jazz somewhat prematurely and normatively into organization theory; and is also intended as a critique of “. . . *treating only radical departures from plans as improvisational*”, which would “. . . *amount to treating [improvisation] as a punctuated equilibrium phenomenon*” (p. 108). At first glance, then, it would seem that Kamoche et al. are pursuing a genuinely new understanding of improvisation (that amongst other things seeks beyond the dichotomies of routine and plan on one side and improvisation on the other). A conceptual problem with their definition, however, concerns how an organization in itself might act without the involvement of its members? For this to be possible, must not Kamoche et al. presume an image of organization that is not a process of interaction between people, but an objectified entity? As will be argued in the following, Kamoche et al.’s argumentation

seems to contain a latent contradiction as on the one hand they explicitly criticize what they call “positivist assumptions” of improvisation, and on the other hand are themselves indicating a similar type of assumptions.

Another inconsistency in Kamoche et al.’s argumentation is traceable as referring to Miner et al. (1997) they hold that for improvisation to be triggered, a phenomenon must be perceived as unexpected *and* unplanned for; and following Ciborra (1996) they argue that the phenomenon must even be *cumulatively* unplanned for, meaning that there can exist no predefined script to handle the event. Moreover, based on Moorman and Miner (1995) and Argyris and Schön (1992) they argue that not only will improvisation be hindered if the event is highly familiar, but also if it is highly *unfamiliar*. Furthermore, Kamoche et al. argue that in order for improvisation to occur there must be a need for speedy action, in which case the event can be seen as either a problem or an opportunity, which is also a central issue in Moorman and Miner (1998). Is there not in all of these cases a tendency towards precisely the kind of rareness of improvisation that the authors crave to shake off? Are not Kamoche et al. (2002) close to enunciating precisely the kind of radical departure they are explicitly trying to avoid? For what about the typical practical situation, where unexpectedness and complexity come in smaller portions? What about routines that never stay exactly the same, and plans that are continually, contextually and creatively revised-in-action? If these are not instances of improvisation, what are they? “*In situations where an adequate routine does exist, then improvisation will be highly unlikely*”, Kamoche et al. (p. 118) argue. Seeing, as do Pentland and Reuter (1994), routines as grammars, Kamoche et al. continue with a claim that routines can be embellished and combined in countless possibilities (a point that is thoroughly elaborated later in the dissertation). But the authors do not go so far as to say that routines cannot be employed entirely technically, and that in practice, some element of spontaneity and improvisation is inevitable. Only if it is used in a somewhat artistic manner can a plan or a routine amalgamate with practice *as* improvisation, they induce. In all other instances, where the degree of creativity is far less obvious, improvisation will not occur. One might ask, then, to which extent do Kamoche et al. really differ from Weick and the other “third generation authors” (Kamoche et al. 2002)?

Yet another sign of the contradiction in Kamoche et al.'s argumentation can be found in their warnings about getting too involved with improvisation:

*. . . organizations that rely on improvisation to handle unexpected events may themselves create those events, falling in a never-ending spiral of complexity and deteriorating manageability, in a way close to what happens when a jazz musician cannot find a way to cohere an improvisation around the underlying score of a song. Over-reliance/addictiveness on improvisation can be another negative consequence of its practice. (Kamoche et al. 2002, p. 128.*

In the case of Kamoche et al., then, we can trace a taken for granted view of improvisation as a non-stopping quest for the genuinely new, the extraordinarily creative, which is hardly representative of all practical situations as such. In fact, it seems that this is yet another issue indicating these authors' somehow unsuccessful attempt to mould a more wide-reaching approach to improvisation than those of their predecessors. To point out that improvisation might have negative consequences is merely an implicit and trivial remark of how practice and sensemaking do not always succeed – that all theories do not work. What is worse, however, it indicates what is thoroughly explicated in Moorman and Miner's (1998a) work: that improvisation can be treated as an autonomous being; as a phenomenon in its own right that is *either present or not, either effective or not*, dependent on the presence of certain objective and quantifiable factors.

As an illustrative example, these authors in their objectivist jargon suggest a research approach that “*. . . could develop a more general framework of the antecedents and consequences of improvisation*” (Moorman and Miner 1998a, p. 14). Similarly, in Moorman and Miner (1998b) a dualistic attempt is made to explicate and quantify improvisation as a collective phenomenon (entity), and their only criterion for improvisation is *spontaneity* in the sense of little or non-existing (quantifiable and linear) time lag between thought and action. As a temporary conclusion with regard to both Kamoche et al. (2002) and Moorman and Miner (1998a, 1998b), what immediately strikes me as mind sparking and functional definitions are to some extent contradicted by the authors' succeeding discussions. More specifically, it seems that Kamoche et al. lapse into a perspective on improvisation as an autonomous feature that can be turned on and off, and when it is *on*, when it is objectively triggered, it involves exceptionally high degrees of spontaneity and/or genuine creativity.

However critical to, say, the positivist views on improvisation they purport to be, Kamoche et al. still end up with the following conclusion after a long, intricate and interesting discussion:

*[Improvisation] happens whenever an organization faces an occurrence it perceives as unexpected for which it does not possess any kind of preplanned course of action and which is perceived as requiring fast action, this occurrence is perceived as either a problem or an opportunity. (Kamoche et al. 2002, p. 115).*

Summarized, it is hard to see how the frameworks of Moorman and Miner (1998a, 1998b), Crossan and Sorrenti (1997), Hatch (1997) and Weick (1998) are in any considerable degree improved or significantly altered, which leads me to the following pertinent question: Is it possible to build up a discussion that is loyal to Kamoche et al.'s desire to *widen* the perception of improvisation, which can draw on the many fruitful definitions that are presented in this section in a creative manner, but which is more nuanced and far-reaching than the existing attempts? Is it possible to conceptualize improvisation in such a manner that it becomes more than exceptional (and radical) real time transformations-in-action and indeed different from the concept of improvisation as an objective phenomenon?

In the succeeding chapters I shall develop a concept of improvisation from key elements in practical and hermeneutical philosophy. As a key point of argument I am more taken with the inevitable position of improvisation in everyday life, and with the variety and nuances of improvisation in practice and in *good* improvisation, than with improvisation in its pure and exceptional forms. In particular, I propose in chapter four "The improvising man" as a practically applicable framework; a collection of philosophical assumptions; that concerns and reaches further into the emergent details of everyday life. This approach is comparable to that of Schön (1987, 1991), Ciborra (1999), Purser and Petranker (2005) and Petranker (2005), who build on the same philosophical foundation as I do (i.e. pragmatism, hermeneutics and phenomenology). As a consequence, I share many basic assumptions about improvisation with these authors, and many of my reflections are deeply inspired by them. For instance with regard to the general issues of improvisation and *time*, *problem definition*, and *the use of tools* there are strong connections between my study and theirs, and I would especially like to emphasize the common bond between us in regarding improvisation as a cornerstone of existence, and thus, of organizing practice.

I have, however, chosen to include and deepen many theoretical aspects that they have not, such as the role of spontaneity, emotionality, and tools in improvisation. Furthermore, I have made an in-depth study of improvisation related to organizational topics such as routine, structure, plan, and system, and reflected upon how functionality can be achieved through improvisation. All of these issues are treated somewhat differently from, but in the same spirit as, the approach of the previously mentioned authors. This is why I have chosen to incorporate them into my discussion, rather than to discuss the authors and their contributions in separate sections. In that sense they are used both as support and source of inspiration for the structure I would like to present. Finally, I would like to emphasize that unlike Schön (1987, 1991), Ciborra (1999) Purser and Petranker (2005), and Petranker (2005) mine is an empirical study, and that as a consequence I have been forced to anchor my theoretical reflections in practice. As a result of this fact, several new concepts of improvisation in everyday organizing have emerged (see chapter eight). Together with, and as part of, my empirical findings these new concepts comprise a bridge between the philosophical anchorage that I share with the aforementioned authors and improvisation as a practical, empirical and contextual phenomenon.



## Chapter 3. Practical philosophy: an epistemological backdrop for improvisation

### Introduction

This chapter provides a context for my take on organizing as improvisation, and is important as a backdrop for understanding why I end up with the specific elements of spontaneity, creativity, emotionality and sociality in my synthesis of improvisation (next chapter). My angle to improvisation emerges from an interest in practical philosophy. More specifically, I build upon the school of American pragmatism, most commonly associated with philosophers such as Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey and George H. Mead. In the following I will attempt to present a general overview of this school, particularly focusing on those aspects that are vital for developing a workable concept of improvisation. Finally, I will present some key aspects from Martin Heidegger's hermeneutics. It is my view that Heidegger's thoughts can provide an important supplement to the pragmatist school and thus enrich my conception of practical philosophy and, ultimately, of improvisation.

### Pragmatism and non-dualism

Unlike traditional Western philosophy American pragmatism is constructed upon an anti-Cartesian dogma of rejecting the possibility of uncovering ontologically objective truth. By many regarded as the founder of American pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce addresses these questions in the following way:

*We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us can be questioned. Hence this initial scepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not real doubt; and no one who follows the Cartesian method will ever be satisfied until he has formally recovered all those beliefs which in form he has taken up. It is, therefore, as useless a preliminary as going to the North Pole would be in order to get to Constantinople by coming down regularly upon a meridian. A person may, it is true, in the course of his studies, find reasons to doubt what he began by believing; but in that case he doubts because he has a positive reason for it, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim. Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts. (Peirce 1974a, pp. 156-157).*

A key point for Peirce is mistrust in Descartes' alleged path to universal truth (see chapter six for a detailed discussion of Descartes' "naïve rationalism"). Does this mean that Peirce lapses into "naïve empiricism" (Russell 1995)? Such objections have indeed been raised against the kind of anti-dualistic philosophy Peirce and the pragmatists represent. Discussing the impact of James's pragmatism, for instance, Bergson (1992) says the following:

*One may raise objections to [pragmatism] – and I myself should make certain reservations concerning it: but no one will challenge its depth and originality . . . . People have said that the pragmatism of James was only a form of scepticism, that it lowered truth, that it advised against and discouraged disinterested scientific research. Such an interpretation will never enter the heads of those who read his work attentively. (p. 218).*

By expanding more thoroughly on the school of pragmatism I shall seek an answer to these objections. Note, however, that as pragmatist thought spread in several directions, it is hard to identify the pragmatist school as one single philosophy. Still, the different versions of pragmatism share a general conception concerning an opposition to the Cartesian split between body and soul, subject and object (Joas 1993). Hence, the core of the pragmatist school may be labelled a *non-dualistic philosophy*, which implies a disintegration of Cartesian dualism, as the notion of transcendental or objective truth cannot be proven outside of human thought and action. This way of thinking recognizes the inevitability of embodiment in all human rationality, and that objective truth can never be reached by a creature incapable of rising above and objectively transcending its own body (Dewey 1929).

As a seemingly naïve statement the pragmatists claim that we cannot free ourselves of our bodies, but should look, rather, at the body as the natural starting point for philosophical investigations. In other words, it is impossible to accept Descartes' dualist argumentation as self-evident unless, perhaps, from a deeply held religious faith. Certainly, we can *talk* about what is outside, and even in a way *live* and participate on the outside (in the social and physical sphere), but only by using our insides. Our outsides can only be reached from within, thus collapsing the dichotomy between the two. In short, from the perspective of non-dualism nothing can be said to be objectively true, as the path to reality always goes through a corporal being.

## Mead's theory of "the self"

To learn more about how the pragmatists explain the human condition I will take as my point of departure pragmatist George Herbert Mead's (1967) conception of "the self". Mead encourages us to base our philosophical investigations on the living human body situated in complex and emergent surroundings, and it is because humans are equipped with the tool of consciousness that we are enabled to escape complexity and discover ourselves as individuals. More specifically we do this, Mead explains, through our capacity to take the role of others, and through communicating our intentions back to them. This is a reflexive process of exchanging *significant symbols*, implying any sign or gesture that communicates "the same" meaning to everyone involved. "The same" appears in quotation marks to signal a focus on intersubjectivity rather than objectivity, indicating meaning that *works* socially in a practical context (Peirce 1966b). We learn the meaning of significant symbols by experiencing them in real-life contexts, and as we grow older our vocabulary continues to expand. To be conscious of ourselves, then, implies a continuous process of self-creation; illustrating that consciousness does not exist in itself, but that it is seen, rather, as a continuous capacity to create objects – to objectify through "enactment" (Weick 1995). Hence, *self-consciousness* should be understood as the incessant creation and recreation of *oneself* as an object (Joas 1993).

Understanding consciousness is imperative in the pragmatist school, and strongly influenced by Mead's philosophy Berger and Luckmann (1991) say that consciousness is: ". . . *always intentional; it always intends or is directed towards objects. We can never apprehend some putative substratum of consciousness as such, only consciousness of something or other.*" (p. 34). As soon as consciousness is directed towards an object, the object is already gone and only exists as memory which must be reconstructed to once again come into sight (Mead 1967). This is another way of showing that objects exist as *temporary* constructions, since the future continues to arrive and cognitions are continually outdated (James 2007).

Reconstructions are not solid or 100% identical to each other, but always slightly unique since they are created as static representations by a body (of flesh and blood) in flux. Uniqueness is thus inevitable, and sometimes even massive, as is the case when we recognize something as genuinely original or new in practical life. In Bergson's (1944) words ceaseless ". . . *duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new*" (p. 28). According to Bergson the human condition is therefore one of *becoming*. As a

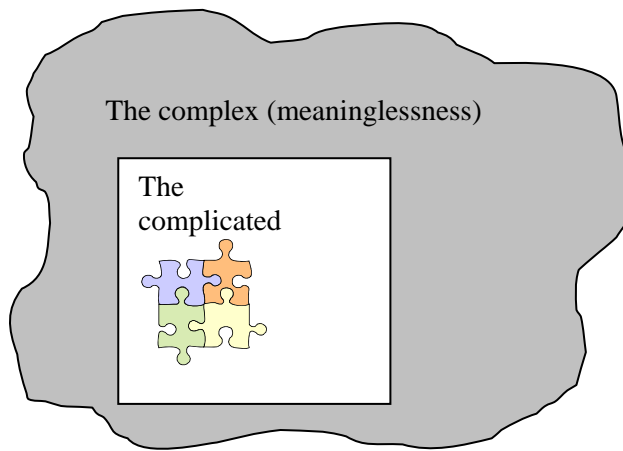
consequence, the present can be thought of as a *feeling* of momentary existence, of thrownness (Heidegger 1996), rather than, say, as a derivative of linear time. In Mead's vocabulary this is explained in the manner that the self is an emergent quality: a dialogical phenomenon between the "I" of the present and the objectified "me" of the past; and it does not exist in itself as an entity. This bears close resemblance to Heidegger's argument that *Being* should be seen as an emergent and practical property which only exists in the becoming as a capacity of *understanding* [Dasein] (Okrent 1988).

The "I" in Mead's (1967) view represents the capacity to continually construct and reconstruct oneself (and the world) as an object, a "me", and it can never be clutched as such. Thus, self-consciousness is a dynamic feature of reflexivity and involves *acting* towards one's own body and person. Thus, thinking or sensemaking is regarded as a form of *practice* or *action*. In this light "everyday practical life" can be understood as the creative processes of making sense and identity from which "existence" is constituted (Okrent 1988). Moreover, creativity is always directed towards something, and this something is regarded as a temporal object of creation based on contextual interpretation, not as a given (Berger and Luckmann 1991). As soon as the object is created it becomes part of the "me", which can be understood as *memory* in everyday speech. *Spontaneity*, then, is a vital property of the "I", as a capacity to think and act freely in situ and within context. Spontaneity is therefore an essential trait in improvisation; in the incessant punctuation of pure duration for the sake of creating form and identity (Bergson 1944; Purser and Petranker 2005).

### **Non-dualism and complexity**

Thinking, the pragmatists claim, is triggered when the self runs into problematic situations (Joas 1993, 1996). Similarly, existentialist philosophers argue that death anxiety is the most profound of all human problems, and an intriguing and elaborate treatise on existential death and anxiety is found in William Large's (2002) paper "Impersonal existence: a conceptual genealogy of the 'there is' from Heidegger to Blanchot and Levinas." Translated into a pragmatist perspective such existential anxiety can be seen as the driver of sensemaking due to the need to establish *identity* and reduce chaos whenever it is experienced by the human body – a weapon to preserve the self, so to speak (Weick 1995). In a way, then, meaning-making can be conceived as a process of creating problems, of recognizing within oneself that something is challenging and must be dealt with. Hence, if we did not think, we would not

experience problems. As soon as we do, though, we have an urge to find solutions: to balance the situation and re-establish peace and tranquillity (Joas 1996).



### ***Model 3.0 Complexity and the complicated***

Making sense is seen by the pragmatists as equivalent to (re-)creating order, coherence and predictability from complex or meaningless experiences: to create logic from complexity and chaos, to form knowing from not-knowing. Thinking is a way of projecting an image of the past and the future, and as we prefer understanding to chaos we try to create the future in advance to avoid problems. This is a way of ensuring continuity between the present and the future, to avoid surprises and produce predictable outcomes.

Experiencing complexity and non-sense means not being able to create meaning in a situation: Existence becomes meaningless. Philosophically the pragmatist would argue that meaning can never be disclosed objectively through technical measures (non-dualism). Thus, wrapped around any bracket of meaning there is always complexity in the sense of meaninglessness (see model 3.0), even though this may not be recognized except in situations of extreme uncertainty. Complexity in the non-dualistic sense therefore reflects the fundamental problem of not-knowing or being able to uncover philosophically objective truth (Joas 1996). Via sensemaking activities one is, however, capable of producing functional structures of reality. Such structures emerge in such a way that they are logical within their own parameters – they work as instruments with which to categorize reality in a logical and predictable manner, and the more sophisticated the logic the more *complicated* it becomes. Thus, as Kvaløy Setreng (2006) argues, one should be careful not to mix “the complicated” with “the complex”, as the

former emerges through activities designed to fill the void of not knowing. Complexity, however, points to circumstances where no meaning can be found or *trusted* to exist.

Complexity is what is experienced when for example there is perceived to be *no structure*, when *structures break down*, or *workability for some reason disintegrates*; when structures are changed into something that is *not yet defined*; or when different structures clash together erecting contradictions and paradox – incidents that severely challenge predictability, coherence and identity. Trust, then, is not solely a matter of clarity, but of (perceived) functionality: When someone says they do not know which structure to employ, they may possess clear images or ideas of feasible alternatives, but they do not know which ones will work; they have no trust in structural workability. And this is a matter of complexity. In other words, complexity concerns uncertainty and meaninglessness as it appears when structure itself is at stake, which, consequently, triggers structuring efforts.

Discussing complexity or meaninglessness in philosophical terms can easily turn into an abstract and alienating exercise. Meaninglessness, for instance, may have such strong connotations that it sets our minds to larger issues than we usually associate with everyday practice. And indeed, the way of the pragmatists can be non-intuitive and hard to grasp in an institutionalized reality of strong structures; a reality in which things and situations are on the whole quite easily interpreted and understood, as the degree of complexity is not too overwhelming. How often do we for instance address the deepest philosophical issues of identity, meaning and objectivity in practical work life?

However, meaninglessness and complexity is more than, or rather, less grandiose than, matters of life and death, of great anxiety, troubled minds, and chaotic bewilderment. To get a more practical hold of complexity in everyday management, for instance, I suggest reading chapter seven where I present several stories of complexity and explain how I see different forms of complexity characterising everyday situations for managers. A typical trait in most of these stories is that complexity is often more subtle and implicit than what can easily be captured in abstract philosophical terms. Typically, everyday complexity is found in dealing with open-ended problems with no given solutions. More specifically, I have in my empirical study found it in negotiations of intersubjectivity, in misunderstandings, linguistic ambiguity, emotional communication, and in different forms of unpredictability – matters that are deeply intertwined and connected. Furthermore, my study presents narratives on how complexity is

tied to sensemaking and improvisation, and the way this emerges on an *everyday level* through different language symbols.

## **Pragmatism is a practical philosophy**

What makes pragmatism a practical philosophy? In order to see this I return to Mead (1967) and a more general theoretical discussion on consciousness and complexity. As a key issue Mead claims that the human body makes sense by means of significant *symbols*, and that there are no limits to what these symbols may be. Anything that the brain uses as a meaningful property is regarded as significant, be it an odour, a sound, a written sign, a shape, or simply a hand-gesture (Joas 1993). Note that the significant symbol must be *used* to provide sense. It does not have meaning in itself. Its sense is rather *tied to a practical context* in which the individual has learnt to appreciate its value as a tool. A hammer becomes a hammer only as you imagine its use in a practical situation (Okrent 1988). This reflects a key element in pragmatist thought: that the individual through her body is inevitably tied to (practical) emergence. Even if one's thoughts wander off into the most abstract of landscapes, there is still your body of flesh and blood performing the thinking (Joas 1997). Hence, one cannot be sure of anything in a transcendent or absolute manner. You might crave for absolute or objective knowledge, but still you can only talk about the objective as it appears in your subjective mind (Blumer 1969).

From the point of view of the pragmatist the objective is fundamentally subjective, and any form of correspondence theory of truth, which is the main vessel in for example the positivist school, becomes futile. Searle (1995), however, argues in favour of a non-dualistic correspondence theory, but this is only possible if the concept of truth changes from one of objective ontology to one of practical epistemology. Instead of truth being approached through means to uncover the suprahuman and transcendental, practical epistemology implies that the closest one can come to truth is via practical trial and failure. Thus it is via practical experience that a concept of truth might emerge: something which takes form as theories about the world are continually constructed and refined (see chapter six). In a way, then, it is not so much a question of truth, as it is of *practical use*: “does this theory *work* as a signifier of reality?” A theory, then, does not have to be proven objectively – there is no requirement for such – but its *workability must be proven in practice*. With reference to science, Dewey (1929) says the following:

. . . in the practice of science, knowledge is an affair of making sure, not of grasping antecedently given surities. What is already known, what is accepted as truth, is of immense importance; inquiry could not proceed a step without it. But it is held subject to use, and is at the mercy of the discoveries which makes it possible. It has to be adjusted to the latter and not the latter to it. When things are defined as instruments, their value and validity reside in what proceeds from them; consequences not antecedents supply meaning and verity. Truths already possessed may have practical or moral certainty, but logically they never lose a hypothetical quality. (p. 154).

Establishing practically workable theories is equivalent to producing meaning or knowledge, and it is never accomplished on a permanent basis (Bergson 1944). This is, rather, a lifelong ongoing accomplishment (Weick 1995). Moreover, it is simultaneously a solitary and a social process, where the solitary part is also socially triggered and structured (Joas 1996). The notion of sociality as a precursor for meaning-making and identity is as Wenger (2004) puts it far from being trivially true. To see this we consult Mead (1967), who argues that the very process of creating meaning and identity begins as the infant at some point recognizes her mother as a person. The process continues as the infant recognizes herself as being capable of influencing the situation as a person – she has a will of her own. This is, of course, a speculative theory, but it provides a fruitful starting point for further thinking. The key point is that the process of identity-shaping is initially *social*, and continues to be so as the individual communicates with others as well as herself as an object (me). Meaning is therefore primarily to be perceived as a *social* property, and to the extent that (the stuff of) social interaction becomes meaningful for all the individuals involved, *intersubjective* meaning is established. Consequently, what becomes intersubjectively accepted is regarded as the social truth, which can be *any symbol that works* in the physical and social context at hand. In short, from this viewpoint objective truth is exchanged with intersubjective and practical functionality (Dewey 1929; Joas 1993).

As it is at the core of the pragmatist school and at the essence of building up an understanding of improvisation, I shall dwell some more upon “functionality”. What does it mean that a theory, a symbol, can be true only to the extent that it *works*? Does it imply ontological relativism or solipsism? No, but it implies epistemological relativism, simply meaning that *we cannot apprehend an object as such*, only as it appears to us (inter)subjectively (Blumer



1969). By epistemological relativity is implied that no questions are necessarily asked about the existence of ontologically objective truth, only about our ability to produce positive knowledge of reality. In the case of ontological relativism, however, *reality is categorically denied existence*, which is a most extreme point of view. It implies that individuals are the creators of everything as such – that the reality we know only exists in our imagination, which is far from the pragmatist’s epistemological relativism. It is also far from ontological objectivism. Ontological relativism and objectivism are both, however, within the same logic and thus rhetoric, only at different ends of the scale. Both are dualist conceptions, and whereas the one argues that reality exists objectively, the other claims the opposite. They are both part of an ensnaring rhetoric, of a language game (Wittgenstein 1992, 1994) which is potentially more deceiving and cunning than it is illuminating: one which I have labelled the ontology game (see model 3.1).



***Model 3.1 The ontology game***

Unlike the dualist the pragmatist does not address the basic ontological questions directly: he does not say that something IS or IS NOT, as this would amount to tautological nonsense. For example, when Heraclitus argues that everything is in flux and nothing exists, this reflects philosophical solipsism. When the pragmatist, however, says that meaning is made by a contextually bound subject, it means that everything might be in flux or it might be stable, but since comprehension of “everything” must come about *through* and *as* human cognition, ontological questions can never be addressed in an objectively truthful manner. Flux is for the pragmatist the result of non-dualism, as the body strives to create stability under circumstances of ceaseless duration (Bergson 1944; Purser and Petranker 2005; James 2007). Being unavoidably embodied, rationality is bound to a life in flux, making flux an epistemological experience rather than an ontological fact. Everything is in flux *because it seems so*, not because de facto it is so.

Once again, a pragmatist perspective entails that everything must be sensed (in both meanings of the term) through and from corporality, thus making the ontological objective a somewhat

unrewarding and futile construct. Perhaps there exists something “objective” outside of us or perhaps not: we cannot know anything about it, and about the things we cannot know anything about we should hold our tongues (Wittgenstein 2001, § 7). What we do know, however, is that something *seems* real, and that it continues to do so. Although we cannot be sure whether something exists objectively or not, we repeatedly have real experiences in everyday life. Reality is that which seems real, and for that reason it is *far from relative* in any given situation. But not everything seems real, all theories do not work: To be seated in an airplane 10000 feet above ground feels like a real experience of flying, and a theory claiming the opposite would prove itself wrong in context. For if one decided to jump out, one would probably face some rather unpleasant consequences.

Some theories work, others fail. I know this because I have tried, made errors and made sense of my experiences. I cannot say whether or not my theories are real in an objective sense, but *they work as real* for me in practical and social life, and most of them I seldom question. I could, though, if I had to, presumably without hard feelings, because I know that they are tentative in their constitution. After all they are only theories, temporary knowledge, produced as workable hypotheses. Theories have a function, and the function is inevitably tied to a practical context of which we can only talk through theories (Dewey 1929). This is why pragmatism is a practical philosophy. Pragmatism depicts that practical activity is the basic way of being (Okrent 1988), which implies that to be engaged in a practice (to act) means to be creative (Joas 1996).

To sum up, as theories are tied to practical contexts, and the body is the creator of theories, it follows that the pragmatist sees the body as contextually bound. The conscious thought is brought to life by a body communicating with itself and a (perceived) outside world, which the body is also part of. The body is simultaneously the “I” and the “me” evolving dynamically and dialogically creating the self (Mead 1967), and the self is thus essentially improspective, not retrospective or prospective. Choice reflects the capacity of the “I” to spontaneously change the course and create sense, but as it is restricted by the bodily memory, choice can only be made within contextual parameters (Joas 1996). Free will, the ability to make choices, is only free within the constraints of (contextual) memory. It is impossible to get rid of one’s memory and skills altogether, just as it is impossible to free oneself of one’s own corporality.

## Heidegger's pragmatism

To round off this chapter I would like to present some general reflections on Martin Heidegger and his work *Being and Time* (1996), which can be claimed to contain many of the same practical philosophical elements as the works of the pragmatists. This argument is particularly well explicated in Mark Okrent's book *Heidegger's Pragmatism* from 1988. As a first note it is intriguing to see how, concurrent with the pragmatist view, through his concept of "Dasein" Heidegger describes the transcendent qualities of existence as "corporeal situatedness". In Heidegger's view Dasein represents the true form of "being" which is constituted as "thrownness" into a world of complexity. Equipped with the tool of rationality Heidegger argues that Dasein, the ontological human condition, comes into existence as it makes sense of complexity from the grounds of certain fore-having. "Fore-having" bears close resemblance to memory, or "me" in Mead's (1967) vocabulary, as it is never static, but an emerging property changing and being changed by momentary experience. This reflexivity of changing whilst simultaneously being changed is seen by Heidegger (1996) as a circle of hermeneutics, which is not just a method of circular understanding to be turned on and off by will, but *the very way we exist in the world as sensible creatures*. Sensemaking cannot take place in a vacuum: rationality does not exist in itself as an objective transcendent character, only as a latent or practically realized human capacity: Dasein.

With *Being and Time* (1996) Heidegger claimed to have reinvented Western philosophy in that he proclaims a redefined approach to ontology. His is not a version of some transcendent outside. For Heidegger ontology concerns an unavoidable and incessant existential transcendence emerging from a capability to provide and shape context in a perceived outer landscape of "extants". Existence *is* transcendence, Heidegger says (Nicolaisen 2003). Rationality involves creating oneself as well as the encompassing outside as objects through the intellectual means of the individual body. The parallels to pragmatism are irreducible.

Somewhat ironically Heidegger's Dasein, the concept of existence as ontological transcendence, implies a rejection of the ontology game of dualists; ironical in the sense that it is an ontologically conceived language that provides the basis for both the dualist strand and Heidegger's somewhat contradictory ontological position. Heidegger's rejection and polemical redefinition of dualist ontology might be a minor challenge to the familiar and sophisticated reader of philosophy, but for everybody else the rhetorical grip of re-erecting

ontology as “non-ontology” is not self-evident but quite intricate and even to some extent paradoxical. In this regard the American pragmatists, who precede Heidegger historically, can be credited for making use of a more intuitive language: one that does not emerge from and within orthodox western philosophy as much as it opposes it. My claim is that with regard to comprehending the substance of non-dualism, “playing an epistemological game” is a more grounded and intuitive approach than “playing an ontological game”. The former does not emit the sense of philosophical struggle that can be sensed in Heidegger’s work as he appears to be trying to shake off an orthodox linguistic system whilst simultaneously remaining faithful to its pillars. And indeed it is the privilege of the outsider – in this case in the geographical, cultural and hence the philosophical sense – not to yield to the tradition which one opposes. Whereas Heidegger gives the impression of seeking to change the system from within and with the use of the conventional system, the Pragmatists’ privilege is to present a new system and new linguistics altogether. Even though the two canons concur philosophically in non-dualism, they do so from different frameworks: one ontological and the other epistemological.

From the philosophical perspectives of pragmatism and Heidegger’s hermeneutics I have attempted to give an overview of practical philosophy. The point of doing so has been to illuminate some traits of existence which are essential to understanding the role of improvisation in everyday practice. In the following I will build upon these traits and try to form a synthesis of improvisation as a philosophical phenomenon: “The improvising man”. My ambition with “The improvising” man is to show that practical philosophy implicitly places improvisation at the heart of practical life, and to point out some implications for the understanding of organizing and work practice.

## Chapter 4. The improvising man

*“Admittedly, some people wouldn’t be caught dead talking about souls and spirits. But even for those people who would explicitly reject the notion of a body-soul split, dualist assumptions still frame how these issues are thought about. You can see this when people appeal to science to answer the question “When does life begin?” as if this is an empirical question, and an objective answer would settle the moral debate once and for all.”*  
(Bloom 2004, p. 3).

### Introduction

My ambition with this chapter is to push the existing definitions of improvisation from chapter two further and to synthesize a new working definition based on the insights from practical philosophy. The heading of the chapter is a wordplay containing two central concepts throughout the history of organization theory: “economic man” (*homo economicus*) (Blaug 1992) and the somewhat refined successor “administrative man” (Simon 1968). Organization theory is the topic for chapter five, and for now these two doctrines merely provide inspiration for an alternative concept, “The improvising man”, which the forthcoming part is dedicated to enunciating. From the basis of practical philosophy, improvisation will be presented as the natural way of existing in life as a corporal and rational being. The insights generated from this chapter are next brought into the domain of organization theory (chapter five), and some important implications are sketched out, challenging previous literature.

I do not question that man behaves in a technically rational way for larger or smaller parts of his given time, thereby providing empirical foundation for simplistic models like “economic man” and “administrative man”, but in my view, generalizing these into universal theories of existence reflects an act of philosophical vulgarization. Players of the ontology game might not be aware of the determinism in philosophical dualism, but as dualism is taken for granted, man is somewhat deprived of abductive rationality which precedes and reaches beyond mere technical calculation (Feyerabend 2002). Of course there is an “evil” asymmetry subduing this discussion: ontology game players will refuse to change their stance as will the non-dualist, so which of the two reflects the more humble and scientific approach? In my view, it depends on

philosophical intention. The humble approach is the one which follows the open-endedness of creativity and rationality, and which criticizes and falsifies for the sake of genuine curiosity and progress. Non-dualist methodology is about precisely those things, and from this perspective, in which abduction is the root concept (Peirce 1966a, 1966b, 1974a, 1974b), not induction or deduction, all theories are welcomed; all other than those of absolutism. In Peirce's (1974a) words: "*Deduction proves that something must be; Induction shows that something actually is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something may be.*" (p. 106).

Basically, "The improvising man" represents a set of philosophical assumptions concerning how sense is abducted improspectively through external and irreversible action. It emerges from the non-dualist tradition of practical philosophy, and is not meant as an attempt to give all answers. Rather, "The improvising man" is meant to provide an alternative language and concept of improvisation that might contribute to genuine curiosity and progress within the organizational field. I will suggest from a conceptual analysis that improvisation can be defined as *spontaneous and hermeneutical sensemaking via external action*. All parts of this definition will be addressed under specific sections, with particular focus on spontaneity on one hand and the aspects of external sensemaking and creativity on the other. Next, I will attempt to show how both of these dimensions are connected to the practical philosophical ideas of corporality, emotionality and sociality and how these can be further expanded from a hermeneutical viewpoint. This conceptual analysis of improvisation will ultimately lead to the theoretical framework of "The improvising man".

Before I move on to exploring what I hold as crucial facets of improvisation and start constructing a working definition, I will repeat the basal insight from practical philosophy that reality is constructed on the basis of individual bodies (inter-)acting sensibly in more or less complex surroundings (Mead 1967). As reality is never 100% stable, given or predictable, and 100% equal reconstruction of action is impossible, *there will inevitably be some degree of complexity embedded in every lived context*. This non-dualistic complexity might be comprehended as ambiguity, uncertainty or even meaninglessness. With this as our basis, let the following idea be of guidance in the succeeding discussions: Striving for sense and identity under complex circumstances calls for an enduring capacity to improvise: to act spontaneously and creatively.

## Spontaneity

Simply put, for action to become improvisation it needs to be spontaneous: Spontaneity is a prerequisite for improvisation. To understand this, one must first get a deeper grasp of spontaneity, which I see as quite an intricate concept. Let us presume that spontaneity can be addressed in two interrelated ways:

- Version 1. As an inextricable feature of existence connected to the possession of a situated body.
- Version 2. As a qualitative measure of *the degree* to which the mind addresses a specific here-and-now.

However cryptic this might seem at first, the message is quite simple: even if practical philosophical non-dualism states that humans are always glued to a present in-the-becoming through the corporality of our being (version 1), the degree to which that present in-the-becoming is actually addressed consciously (version 2) varies between situations. I shall deal with both of these in greater detail and study their relevance to improvisation.

### **Version one: Spontaneity as a feature of existence (a philosophical argument)**

From a practical philosophical point of view consciousness is perceived as a continued reconstruction of objects in ever-passing surroundings (Bergson 1944; Weick 1995; Berger and Luckmann 1991; Purser and Petranker 2005). As a consequence, each situation in everyday life is somewhat unique, just as the body is dynamically unique – one might say that the body is *situated* (Gadamer 1975; Joas 1993), and that situatedness implies continual freshness through spontaneity. In other words, the body is spontaneous through its unbreakable tie to a present-in-the-becoming (Bergson 1944). From this perspective, spontaneity is not an occasional or rare event, but an inextricable feature of corporality: Having, or indeed being, a body of bones, flesh and blood (and emotions), presumes spontaneity in one way or the other. If only to a minimal extent in some situations, the body is a contextually bound and ever evolving phenomenon, and thus spontaneity is tied to existence as emotion to rationality and body to soul. As shall be argued, however, *the degree of* spontaneity varies between different everyday practical situations, but in order to claim this one must initially have accepted spontaneity as an inexorable feature of existence, perhaps as

the most central part of practical philosophy. In short: Spontaneity is always there, but to varying degrees.

**Version two: Spontaneity as a practical measure of situational focus (a practical argument)**

Much as I share the view of other authors that spontaneity is an important constituent of improvisation (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Miner et al. 1997), I argue that seeing spontaneity from different angles produces crucial insights. My suggestion is that the philosophical angle concerning spontaneity as situated corporality can serve as a fundament in this regard. From this fundament, however, emerges another and more practical angle, as we are able to contrast spontaneity with prospection: the ability to think logically in a-contextual metaphysical systems and to project scenarios upon an imagined past, present or future. Thus, in order to think spontaneously one needs to go the opposite way of, say, prospection, which focuses on the ability to abstract *from* the present. Spontaneous thinking is about improspection, and involves thinking *in* the present *on* the present (Purser and Petranker 2005). We learn from practical philosophy that as the inside of corporality is burdened with a perpetually constructed outside, spontaneity and difference are expected features of human action no matter how abstract the nature of the thinking in a given moment. But sometimes thought is sufficiently directed towards the present (the degree of improspection is substantial) so as to be qualitatively measured as spontaneous rather than abstract. To act spontaneously implies, then, to address and act upon what is becoming in the here and now (to “improspect”) rather than upon something in the near or distant future (prospect) or past (retrospect), or solely in abstract terms as in the case of formal science. One might for instance perceive mathematical rules either as givens or as creative points of departure, but in any case mathematical thinking is to a significant degree disconnected from the context at hand and in that regard more prospective than improspective.

My argument is simple: the shorter the interval in *perceived* time between cognition and external action, the more spontaneity stands out; and vice versa, the more thoughts wander into abstractness the less spontaneous any succeeding action (Miner et al. 1997). Unlike Miner et al., however, I have no intention of measuring such a hypothesis in quantitative terms, in linear time. In the words of Ciborra (1999): “. . . *improvisation defies measurement and method. It surfaces and vanishes ‘on the spur of the moment’*” (p. 86). What determines the degree of spontaneity according to this view is a qualitative and contextual evaluation.



With concern to a practical philosophical concept of improvisation spontaneity is of the utmost importance. In part, improvisation might be understood as subjected to the same logic as spontaneity: The less spontaneous conscious and intelligent action is, the less improvisatory it is. Note the important part played by “intelligent” here, for there can be no improvisation without the involvement of creative consciousness; a point that will be further substantiated in the next section. Without (self-)consciousness we are reduced to pure spontaneity, to corporality in the animalistic, biological sense (Stacey et al. 2000). This is the case with pure emotionality, as action is not “delayed” by cognition at all, and concerns, of course, all aspects of existence that escape consciousness at any given time. Hence, whenever cognitive capabilities are incapacitated action becomes mindless, and can sooner be defined as *behaviour* (Nyeng 2004). Mindless, automatic behaviour in one instance can, however, at any point become the object of attention in the next. In the case of facial expressions, for instance, they may be unconscious at one time but as we look at ourselves in the mirror we become attentive to our appearance with the potential to become aware of and to change it.

As human beings our focus of consciousness changes over time between objects in the outer and the inner sphere as does the degree of concentration within each aspect of attention, indicating that it is impossible to single out some naturally given limit to the scope of cognition and control. In that regard cognition is fluent and contextual. And with regard to improvisation the point is that trying to control our own body through conscious deliberations potentially creates a delay from thought to action, and the longer the delay the less improvisatory is action. Note, however, that no matter how long the delay is, corporality is involved in all thinking, thus making spontaneity (and therefore improvisation) an inevitable part of existence: a feature which is always there even if the degree of explicitness varies. This is in harmony with Ciborra’s (1999) argument that improvisation is “. . . *situated performance where thinking and action emerge simultaneously and on the spur of the moment*” (p. 78). In other words there is always an element of spontaneity in prospection (and retrospection), and thus, rather than being categorically separated, the two concepts (in practice) emerge together – in shades of grey if you will. This is a way of saying that sensemaking is essentially improspective, and is closely related to Purser and Petranker’s (2005) term “deep improvisation”. In my view it takes more than spontaneity and improspection to label something as improvisation. As indicated by Ciborra (1999) external action is needed, and this will be addressed in the succeeding sections.

## Improvisation as creative action

As I see improvisation as a sensemaking activity there is good reason as to why I should make some more reflections on *creativity*. It seems that creativity is one of the buzz-words of our time, as scientists, consultants and businesses are striving to understand its nature. The importance of creativity is rather obvious when we come to think of it, as a dominant societal trend today seems to evolve around entrepreneurship, innovation, knowledge development, growth and management, to name but a few (Styhre 2003). From a non-dualistic perspective no recipe can be given for the secrets of creativity. Such a recipe would reflect a dualist approach, as it would entail a search for ontologically objective truth. How can we think about creativity, then, in a way that catches the depths of existence while remaining useful as a practical concept? My attempt to answer emerges from practical philosophy. According to the pragmatist philosopher Hans Joas (1996) creativity is realized in practice as sensemaking. Put differently, creativity involves making sense in more or less complex situations, and the point I will be making is that *in practical life creativity is realized as improvisation*. Thus there can be no improvisation without the use of creative sensemaking capabilities; that is, of consciousness and imagination. Expanding on Dewey (1934) Joas (1996) says that:

*Imagination is creative because it recognizes the possibilities contained in the world and contributes towards their being made reality: 'The new vision does not arise out of nothing, but emerges through seeing, in terms of possibilities, that is of imagination, old things in new relations serving a new end which the new end aids in creating.'* (p. 143).

In Joas' portrait of pragmatism creativity flows from what I have defined as *improspection*, and involves such things as defining what is happening here and now; what is the smart thing to do; and how can the complexity of the present be overcome so as to (re-)establish sense and identity. Weick (1995) argues that to discover who you are and create identity at any given moment is at the core of creativity; consequently it is a property of all individuals. And as the capacity to create meaning evolves in physically (and socially) contextualized interaction between the spontaneous I and the Me of the past (i.e. *improspection*), it follows that creativity is not a static feature, but a dynamic and reflexive quality of punctuating pure duration (Bergson 1944). The way creativity unfolds can be seen as *enactment* (Weick 1995), indicating that the physical and social world is not discovered passively, but created actively. As a consequence people produce part of the environment they face, which signals the essential role of creativity as constitutive of reality.

In the same pragmatic vein, Joas (1996) proposes that unlike automatic behaviour, all *action* is creative to some extent; and the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim (2001) terms this the “irreducibility of meaning in action”. Creativity is in other words the essence of action. As a consequence, creativity becomes a cornerstone of human existence; an inevitable feature that continuously and contextually varies in quality as the individual deals with upcoming situations and problems of infinite difference:

*The original state is not reflection, and then we decide on action. The original state is action, and it happens that we have to reflect on our pre-reflective impulses. I would say that's the pragmatists' idea, and we can only find a way out of this situation by creatively producing solutions for this situation. . . . the "I" in Mead's model of the personality was intended to describe situations of creativity. (Hans Joas cited in an interview at Freie Universität Berlin, 21. of September 1999).*

So far I have argued that from a practical philosophical point of view human existence evolves in practice as spontaneous, creative action. One important insight from this is that creativity is always spontaneous and contextualized. Sensemaking is improspective. Secondly, the degree of spontaneity and creativity varies with the context: in a given practical situation an individual is more or less spontaneous and more or less creative. By the latter it is indicated that different situations are characterized by different *forms* of creativity, some more genuine, non-technical and in that sense demanding than others; a point which will later be discussed in detail in relation to the purity of improvisation. In the next section, however, another aspect indicated in these last two sections is addressed: for action to become improvisation some kind of practical manifestation in the external world is required, making its consequences final and irreversible.

### **Thinking is action – Improvisation is external, irreversible action**

An important aspect for Weick (1998) is that improvisation is *irreversible* by nature. Inspired by Weick I see irreversibility as an inevitable feature of the corporal perspective that practical philosophy suggests. External action cannot be taken back as soon as it is performed. You can always perform new acts, but former action is for ever manifested physically and in some settings socially. The understanding of improvisation that I pursue builds on a conception that acting spontaneously in the *external* world is somewhat different from “acting within the mind”. Both must be labelled action because they happen over time and are not static

representations that can be apprehended as such or stored in any way (Joas 1996): consciousness is a putative *stream* (Berger and Luckmann 1991). The only things that are static and which can be stored as entities are *the artefacts* of sensemaking, the externalizations of significant symbols, of abstractions. Needless to say a hand gesture can be stored on video tape, an articulated sound on audio tape, a written sign on paper and so on. None of these, however, are inherently meaningful: Symbols must be used as instruments in the process of knowing, communicating and sensemaking (Mead 1967). Note that “process” comes about as a result of viewing sensemaking as perpetual creative action (Weick et al. 2005) and not as a static entity of some kind. Process theory and practical philosophy are thus two sides of the same coin.

Not all action is irreversible in the practical sense, as for instance in the case of abstract reflection that never escapes the inside of the mind (“acting within the mind”). In the purest forms of abstraction (future or past) tentative scenarios can be tested out before they are potentially put into practice. Unlike abstract reflection, in order to become improvisation action must be manifested in the external world, and when this happens improvised action cannot be taken back or reversed in any way. In general, any action in(to) the external world has a character of irreversibility, which indicates that improvisation plays a crucial role in everyday practical life. The final and explicit facets of improvisation should be underlined, noting that improvisation always makes a difference in the social and physical settings at hand, whether one intends it to do so or not. This makes improvisation contextual in the sense that it involves tying bonds between the body’s outside and inside – it involves the risk of encountering (instant) physical and social resistance.

In some ways I would prefer, say, “The hermeneutic man” to “The improvising man”, but it is my impression that improvisation covers themes that are even more practically oriented. It is, however, important to note that the two, as they are explicated in this dissertation, do not in any way stand in conflict with each other. Rather, they work as mutual supplements in crucial ways, as the one helps the understanding of the other. The most important reasons for choosing “The improvising man” over “The hermeneutic man” stem from the creative potential inherent in “improvisation” *as a verb*. It is my opinion that “to improvise” is more easily assimilated into everyday speech than “to hermeneuticize”. In addition, improvisation brings with it an external and contextual focus which is emphasized through the concept of irreversibility. Improvisation is more than mere thinking; it implies thinking and making

sense through spontaneous *external action*. Hermeneutics, however, does not explicate such a strong focus on “the outside”, but is better thought of as a philosophical framework providing the grounds for improvisation as a theoretical concept.

Spontaneity, creativity and irreversibility: these words depict the three major constituents of improvisation the way I conceptualize it from a practical philosophical perspective. “The improvising man”, then, points to the inevitability of improvisation in human practice as it comes to life through spontaneous, creative, and external action. Just as these three dimensions are inextricably tied together, however, many other topics can be addressed to deepen this internal relationship and to understand the quality of improvisation in everyday life. In this regard I will in the following deal with the issues of emotionality, hermeneutical intuition, and sociality. Finally, in attempt to widen the scope of improvisation theory, I will address the topic of purity in improvisation.

## Emotionality

*We do not have a choice as to whether we are to be emotionally present or not . . . Nothing like a mood-less existence for the human being exists [my translation]. (Nyeng 2006, p. 125)*

Spontaneity and irreversibility describe important features of improvisation as the natural way of existing in the world as a corporal, physical being. A third and closely related issue is emotionality. Although they briefly mention the affective dimensions of improvisation, Kamoche et al. (2002) do not provide an elaborate account of the role of emotion and feeling in human practice. Neither does Weick (1989), who claims that “. . . *what [the organization depicted in the organizing model] is not, however, is a place where emotion is prominent and available as a guide to action and interpretation.*” Later, Weick (1995) merely links emotions to interrupted action in accordance with what can be interpreted from his view on improvisation as an either-or concept. Similarly when Weick et al. (2005), based on a critique by Magala (1997), re-address the aspect of sentiments in sensemaking, they link it to violation of expectancy and subsequent discrepancy and argue that “. . . *further exploration of emotion and sensemaking is crucial to clear up questions such as whether intraorganizational institutions are better portrayed as cold cognitive scripts built around rules, or as hot emotional attitudes built around values.*” (p. 419). Encouraged by Weick et al.’s invitation, I will in the following make an attempt to conduct such further exploration, and the point of departure is the exact opposite to that of Weick (1989), who denies the prominence of emotion in improvisation.

In an attempt to consolidate emotion in organizing as improvisation at a fundamental level, I would like to pursue an intriguing approach to emotionality which is inspired by Dewey (1929), Mead (1967), Strauss (1993), Fløistad (1993), Fineman (1993, 2000, 2005), Damasio (1994, 1999), Heidegger (1996) and Stacey (2001). I start with Stacey (2001), who based on the pragmatist Mead (1967) and the neuroscientist Damasio (1994 and 1999) develops an intriguing argument, claiming that: “*Feelings . . . are rhythmic patterns in a body . . .*” (p. 83). Feelings, then, can be seen as continuous physiological and non-significant processes which are unavoidable in, and thus colour, all human action (Dehlin 2005). A similar approach is offered by Heidegger (1996), who explains that there can be no form of human existence without it being *tuned* in a particular way. In an analysis of Heidegger’s way of thinking, the philosopher Guttorm Fløistad (1993) suggests that: “. . . *all perception, all understanding*

*inevitably emerge from a mood or a way of being situated, or if you will, from a state of mind.” (p. 196).*

Similar to the thought of Stacey (2001), which is heavily induced by pragmatist philosophy, I interpret Heidegger’s elements of tuning and mood as matters of emotionality. Dewey (1929) is particularly clear on the inevitability of seeing emotion as physiological processes below the level of awareness – processes which make cognition (and thus improvisation) possible to begin with:

*Apart from language, from imputes and inferred meaning, we continually engage in an immense multitude of immediate organic selections, rejections, welcomings, expulsions, appropriations, withdrawals, shrinkings, expansions, elations and dejections, attacks, wardings off, of the most minute, vibrantly delicate nature. We are not aware of the qualities of many or most of these acts; we do not objectively distinguish and identify them. Yet they exist as feeling qualities, and have an enormous directive effect on our behaviour. If for example, certain sensory qualities of which we are not cognitively aware cease to exist, we cannot stand or control our posture and movements. In a thoroughly normal organism, these “feelings” have an efficiency of operation which it is impossible for thought to match. Even our most highly intellectualized operations depend upon them as a “fringe” by which to guide our inferential movements. (Dewey 1929, p. 299).*

As a short summary of Dewey’s practical philosophy, my interpretation is that from his viewpoint, every cognition is wrapped in emotion. Thus, as improvisation is a cognitive activity, I regard improvisation as *inevitably emotional* rather than as a mere outcome or as a feature of some situations – an approach that is in fact indicated by Hatch (1999) in her conception of emotionality of structure. This view is also supported by Fineman’s (2000) claim that:

*. . . we may collapse the rational/emotional distinction. Rationality is no longer the ‘master’ process; nor is emotion. They both interpenetrate; they flow together in the same mould. From this perspective there is no such thing as a pure cognition; thinking and deciding is always brushed with emotion, however slight . . . We may be dimly aware of these [emotional] processes, or they may be unconscious. (p. 11).*

In accordance with this non-dualist view, my perspective falls within a tradition which Fineman (2005) labels “interpretive” and of which Barbalet (1995), Fineman (2003), Gergen

(1999), Harré and Parrott (1996), Hochschild (1983) and Solomon (2002) – who all have in common a focus on the outside as well as the inside of emotions – are viable examples.

Emotions might be portrayed as a source of complexity and unexpectedness. In theory there is no limit to the scope of cognition, but in practice one can only be conscious of one thing at a time, thus leaving major parts of the body “unmonitored” (Strauss 1993). Thus, emotions continuously create a sphere outside the range of cognition that nonetheless is communicated to other individuals, as argued in Stacey’s (2001) concept of emotions as rhythmic patterns that do not necessarily reach the conscious mind. Furthermore, Stacey claims that in social interaction non-significant gestures are communicated either attentively or inattentively, and to the extent that the latter is the case a process of protoconversation occurs; a reflexive phenomenon of pure emotionality. This view is similar to what Fineman (2000) refers to as emotional contagion, or the “catching” and passing-on of emotion (Doherty 1998; Verbeke 1997), and harmonises with Fineman’s (2006) observation that emotions are “everywhere”. Likewise, in Stacey’s elegant vocabulary, he explains how bodies unavoidably *resonate* with each other in an emotional way, a phenomenon which can never be apprehended or controlled by the conscious mind. It is as if there is an unaddressable world outside of our attention guiding and potentially creating obstacles for meaningful interaction and thus constraining predictability. These obstacles or problems should not automatically receive a negative connotation, however, as they are inevitable and natural parts of existence: they are amongst the very stuff that defines us as human beings.

*Rather than disturbances or intrusions, these emotions, and the passions in general, are the very core of our existence . . . (Solomon 1993, p. xvii).*

According to pragmatism we cannot grasp or address what is outside of attention at a given time, but it is a mistake to disregard it in hypothetical terms and in terms of the effects it might have on practice. Indeed, the stuff we actually *do* grasp cannot be apprehended *as such* (Blumer 1969). It cannot be neatly put into objective boxes or categories and proven outside of the individual mind. As a consequence, we can never grasp our emotions objectively, as paradoxically they are apprehended as and through processes of exchanging non-significant, and hence emotional, symbols themselves. This brings us to yet another crucial aspect of emotionality, for there is another way of understanding non-significant communication, namely as the kind of (hidden) interaction that makes interaction at all possible *on a*



*significant level* (Dewey 1929). For how is mutual understanding and sensemaking possible, if not through the emotional capacity to take the role of the other – to use the language of Mead (1967)? There is always a non-significant component, so to speak, in every significant symbol. And the latter emerges as and through the former, though at the same time seemingly different from it. Reflect upon the following: how might *empathy* be explained if not as a bodily emotional capability hidden from our deepest apprehension? It is perhaps impossible to grasp exactly what makes us capable of mutual understanding, but there is hardly any question that we *do* have this capability. It is my view that any form of ontological reductionism will not provide the answer here; rather the opposite. As we dig deeper and deeper into the perceived entities of nature, the scope only increases for discovering even smaller entities, for reductionism has no limits. Rather, we should concentrate on what seems real, which for all practical purposes is real *enough*: that we *are* able to communicate and understand each other.

Emotionality in the sense of corporal processes implies that 100% exact bodily reconstruction is impossible (Strauss 1993). Hence, from a practical philosophical view, the vital point is not to associate consciousness with a thing or a system, but rather with a bodily latent capacity to (re)discover oneself and the world. Consciousness is the product of a living, creative and emotional body, not something apart from it.

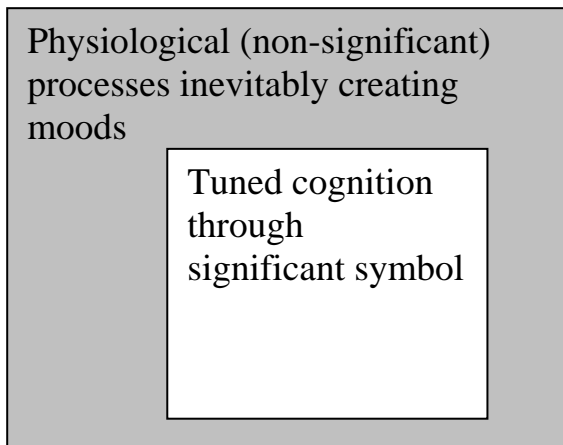
*If he says he knows what he is going to do, even there he may be mistaken. He starts out to do something and something happens to interfere. The resulting action is always a little different from anything which he could anticipate. This is true even if he is simply carrying out the process of walking. The very taking of his expected steps puts him in a certain situation which has a slightly different aspect from what is expected, which is in a certain sense novel. (Mead 1967, p. 177).*

But perhaps 100% consciousness-in-action is not an ideal we should strive for to begin with? The capacity to think while performing other actions unconsciously is a very important characteristic of the human body. Imagine, for example, driving a car without the capability to trust your automatic responses while simultaneously solving emerging problems with your mind. It is because of this capacity to learn by automating and internalizing behaviour that we are able to free our minds to do other things simultaneously – things which themselves may become automated over time (Molander 1996). Thus, the more you learn and the more skills you develop, the more tools are available to help you learn even more. Going in the opposite

direction of Simon (1968) who claims that “. . . *the individual is limited by those skills, habits, and reflexes which are no longer in the realm of the conscious*” (p. 40), I argue that the more tools you have incorporated into your automatic and bodily memory, the more capable you are of making sense and acting accordingly in new, complex situations: that is, of improvising.

*Indeed, it may not be going too far to say that the very possibility of mental development is based upon this temporal/spatial contour equivalence between inner physiologically based feeling dynamics and externally presented stimuli. (Stacey 2001, p. 103).*

To sum up, physiological processes can be classified and explicated as emotional processes, and since consciousness is a physiological process, cognition is fundamentally emotional, too (see model 4.0).



#### ***Model 4.0 Emotions***

In addition, a more specific type of emotions may be addressed, namely the kind of feelings that are given concrete labels in everyday life such as jealousy, happiness, anger and so forth. Feelings in this sense represent the body’s *explicit* perception and labelling of itself as a contextual being, and they can thus be termed “cognitive feelings”. They are practical expressions of how we experience our own body in a given moment.

*Emotional conditions do not occur as emotions, intrinsically defined as such; they occur as “tertiary” qualities of objects. Some cases of awareness or perception are designated “emotions” in retrospect or from without, as a child is instructed to term certain perceptual situations anger, fear, or love, by way of informing him as to their consequences. (Dewey 1929, p. 304)*

The phenomenon of cognitive feelings is outside the scope of this dissertation, however, and I suggest reading Dewey (1929), Damasio (1999), Dehlin (2005), and Nyeng (2006) for a fuller treatise.

Mead (1967, pp. 78-79) argues that interpretation is a physically facilitated process, and that consciousness involves becoming aware of the experiences of your own body. Consciousness may therefore be translated as the capacity to sense one's emotions and recognize them as one's own. This is an interesting theory of how the body is able to construct identity, and is analogous to Weick's (1995) interpretation of Mead (1967) that the body creates sense through sensory processes that are the resultants of motor processes. The difference is that Weick interprets this as a signifier of retrospectivity, whereas I follow a practical philosophical approach (i.e. Heidegger 1996; Gadamer 1975; Bergson 1944) and interpret Mead's theory as one of introspection (see chapter two). In any case, as physiology is seen as emotionality (Stacey 2001), there can be no cognitions without emotions, as the dualism of body and thought collapses, and the purest emotional state is consequently the unconscious one – pure in the sense that rationality, the conscious thought, is not involved.

*To make an analytic distinction between mind and body does not imply that mental activity is different than bodily activity, except that generally it is internal and therefore unobservable, although there may be external signs that this action is going on or has already occurred. (Strauss 1993, p. 113).*

The Cartesian dogma associates the cognitive with the human, and the emotional with the animalistic (see chapter six). This may be a fruitful dualism, but the point of the matter from the perspective of practical philosophy is to understand that the one *is* basically the other. As humans we have the ability to create ourselves as living identities; but we are still animalistic bodies doing it, except it seems that we are more advanced than, say, other mammals (Mead 1967). We may only be conscious of one object at a time, and everything else falls into the shadows of unawareness (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Our bodies are continually making gestures and carrying out complicated tasks. Some of them we may control, others not. For every thing we do control, there is a myriad of emotional and unconscious processes making it possible. (Therefore, control may be a poor choice of word. Perhaps we should talk of “influence” instead, as spontaneity and free will always depend on context?) Only the objects of our attention are real to us, and they are only real through the company of moods (Heidegger 1996). Everything else continues without mindful influence. To ask if “the rest” is

still there, if it exists, is to fall into the trap of dualistic rhetoric; the ontology game: We only know what we know, and we only exist through corporal and tuned situatedness (Gadamer 1975). It is thus futile and speculative to ask if the tree that falls in the woods without witnesses makes a sound or not. From experience the practitioner knows it does, even though it cannot be proven objectively.

From the preceding discussion I conclude that there can be no such thing as “cold” or un-affective improvisation, as there can be no cognition without emotion or mood. *How, then, does emotionality influence improvisation?* Emotionality not only influences improvisation, it facilitates it, or indeed, generates it:

- Firstly, it is the ability to sense one’s own emotions that makes conscious actions possible to begin with.
- Secondly, as will be further explicated in chapter four, improvisation rests upon the ability to internalize experiences as automatic behaviour or skills, which in turn frees the mind thus making room for creative action. As the body converts mindful actions into skills that can be performed unconsciously, the mind can redirect its focus onto new and different aspects in a lived context so as to increase the scope of improvisation.
- Thirdly, the emotional capacity to store and reproduce experiences as meaningful associations makes it possible to recognize a new situation as somewhat similar to historical events. Using memory as a tool an individual is capable of identifying characteristics or patterns in real life contexts that in some ways are similar to past experiences. This is the topic for the next section, where I encourage the view that it is from emotional dispositions that *intuition* might be conceived.

### **Hermeneutical movement and intuition**

In this section I will explore the dimensions of hermeneutics and intuition in improvisation, and see how they are internally connected. Just as emotions play an essential part in improvisation, I argue that intuition does, too, and that it does so in a hermeneutical manner. In a hermeneutic language foreknowledge establishes an embodied backdrop providing the grounds for new experience (Heidegger 1996). As an adverb hermeneutic describes a way of living and thinking, and as an adjective it describes a way of being – of existence. In both instances there is an accentuation of circularity between history, present and future from

which the rather vague but relevant term intuition can be understood. Parallel to hermeneutical philosophy Ludwig Wittgenstein (1994) describes the circularity of existence through the concept of “family resemblance”:

*I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. (Wittgenstein 1994, § 67).*

The strength in family resemblance as a metaphor is that it concerns a form of fluent similarity in appearance as opposed to identity in the technical-analytical sense. A key insight from Wittgenstein’s argument is that even though all situations are in essence new, they seem related or similar to each other as they are recognized through the lenses of the past. In that sense family resemblance represents meaning and coherence: it provides a fluent structure that binds past, present and future together. Furthermore, family resemblance is constituted hermeneutically, not only because the past (Mead’s “me”) shapes the present (Mead’s “I”), but because the present shapes the past. From this one might say that memory is given its structure from the lenses of spontaneous contextuality (improsppection), and vice versa, that *intuition is the power to establish memory-as-family-resemblance* in the present. Accordingly, basing his writings upon improvisation in jazz music, Berliner (1994) argues that one should not put too much emphasis on spontaneity thus risking to neglect the importance of history as is depicted in hermeneutical emergence. In this regard intuition provides an essential premise for improvisation as illustrated in the famous statement by the legendary bassist Charles Mingus: “*You can’t improvise on nothing, you must improvise on something.*” (Kernfeld 1995, p. 40).

Without collapsing into a retrospective view on sensemaking and improvisation, intuition provides a link to understanding how the past enters the present. In Mead’s (1967) words, intuition can be thought of as the capacity to use “me” in dialogue with “I”. And as a last comment on intuition: it highlights the fundamental role of emotions as the initiator and catalyst of improvisational sensemaking (Dewey 1929). How come? Because without the emotional apparatus to develop intuition (and automate behaviour), improvisation can never come about. As indicated, learning and developing experience is a physiological/mental process of enabling future intuition, and thus improvisation is only possible within the emerging parameters set by our (intuitive) bodies.

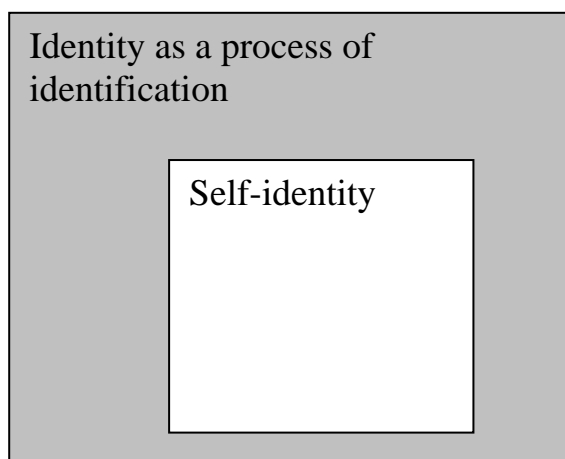
## Social complexity and improvisation

*Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others.  
(Weick 1995, p. 40)*

The subject of sociality and its connection to improvisation remains to be sufficiently explicated. Having constituted an implicit theme throughout these last sections I suggest that sociality be addressed through a discussion of identity-as-identification, equivalent to Mead's (1967) concept of "the self". The rationale for this is that *improvisation can be seen as a social and externally oriented activity of creating sense and constructing identity* (Weick 1995; Weick et al. 2005): of *identification*. Understanding the impact of sociality on improvisation implies understanding how improvisation involves dialogical construction of identity and the role of social complexity in identification.

*Who we are lies importantly in the hands of others, which means our categories for sensemaking lie in their hands (Weick et al. 2005, p. 416).*

Underpinning this approach is a perception that identity emerges through a social process of sensemaking within and between individual minds (Mead 1967, p. 178). Take for instance Blumer (1969) who borrows from Mead in suggesting that the self is constituted as interaction with oneself as it "*. . . is social – a form of communication, with the person addressing himself as a person and responding thereto*" (p. 13). Similarly, also from the conception that identity is synonymous to "the self", Weick (1995) suggests that identity can be seen as a process of identification, of making the world manageable and understandable through the enactment of meaning-patterns which emerge as social and internal dialogues. Following Giddens (1991) and Chappell et al. (2003), such a perspective encourages a separation between Mead's concept of *identification as a self* (as a continuous effort to create meaning patterns) on one hand, and the modern and more specific phenomenon of *self-identity* (the process of constructing a conscious self-image) on the other (see model 4.1).



#### ***Model 4.1 Identity as Mead's "self"***

In the latter sense identity is always an explicit and reflexive projection of self in relation to, or rather as something different from, someone or something else. It involves creating dualisms; me-you, that-this, etc. so as to consolidate the self as a familiar and reliable entity over time. Hence self-identity reflects a reflexive dialogue around the explicit topic of oneself as a being, and the central question in self-identity is "who am I?".

Expanding on Giddens (1991), people do not always put themselves at the centre of their own attention – they do not always pursue self-identity. Rather, they tend to get absorbed in outer structures, in paintings, in girlfriends, in music, in mathematical calculation, in the eyes of others; in which case there need not be an explicit dualism between "me" and "that". Rather, the subtle dualisms produced in meaning-making processes (except from those involving self-identity) are of an implicit kind, a kind that reflects the dualistic nature of language games: that one thing derives its meaning through being the opposite of that which it is not. What is meant by such a cryptic sentence; how can non-dualism imply making dualisms? The answer is that identity involves creating and recreating mental objects, and any object is implicitly defined through its antagonism. Something can only exist as opposed to something else. If an object is claimed to exist, it inevitably has a diametric counterpart in non-existence – what the object is not. For example if I say I am something, in this case a student of organization theory, this implicates that I am not the opposite, namely not a student of organization theory or anything else that falls into this category. Of course I could be something else in another context, but this merely shows that a statement is meaningful only to the extent that it is so in

context (Dewey 1929). It seems, then, that thinking and talking necessarily involves using dichotomies, as existence is always defined as the opposite of non-existence. Ergo, as an example, one meaning of “individual” could be “something different from a group”, but this requires the existence of a group, at least abstractly, that offsets the individual as such.

As indicated, rather than focusing on the more narrow form of self-identity, I pursue in this section a notion of identity as a *generic phenomenon*, to use Giddens’ (1991) words, implying that identity is a process of meaning-making for the sake of preserving a self (Mead 1967; Weick 1995). And as we expand on the notion that identity is constructed *through* and *as* the ongoing dialogue between the “I” of the present and the “me” of the past, identity is a bodily process and not a static entity. Furthermore, we are reminded of the poet John Donne’s famous words that no man is an island, entire of itself; and so we are encouraged to consider the social aspects of identity-making and improvisation. On an everyday level the significance of sociality is obvious, as we spend much of the day participating in joint processes of sensemaking (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2004), in social language games (Wittgenstein 1992, 1994). Underpinning and governing these games are certain rules that must be internalized convincingly if one is to be capacitated to take part (Hardy and Clegg 1996; Clegg 1975). Social rules are not deterministic and controlling in the analytical sense, however, but providers of social knowledge and signifiers of appropriate conduct (Mølbjerg Jørgensen and Dehlin 2006).

In everyday life we take with us social rules and experiences into the private domain, continuing some of the discussions on an abstract, imagined level. For example, we may re-picture a certain scenario from earlier and imagine different outcomes; we may negotiate internally the validity of certain societal imperatives; or we may simply continue abstract dialogues with friends or family whom we know so well that we are able to predict their responses and uphold an imagined conversation. As I see improvisation as a sense- and identity-making process (Weick 1995; Weick et al. 2005), there is no exception: Just as we improvise in situations where we are alone, we improvise in social situations. Indeed, taking part in social processes highlights the aspect of irreversibility in communicative actions, as the body is under close observation by others and its actions are prone to have social implications (Mead 1967). Moreover, under social influence, rather than in solitariness, improvisation might stand out more clearly as someone wittingly or unwittingly calls for your attention prompting you to act. This indicates an important point; that social situations



continually encourage the individual to react. And to the extent that the actions of others appear unexpectedly, producing complex situations in need of immediate resolution, improvisation can become increasingly spontaneous and pure.

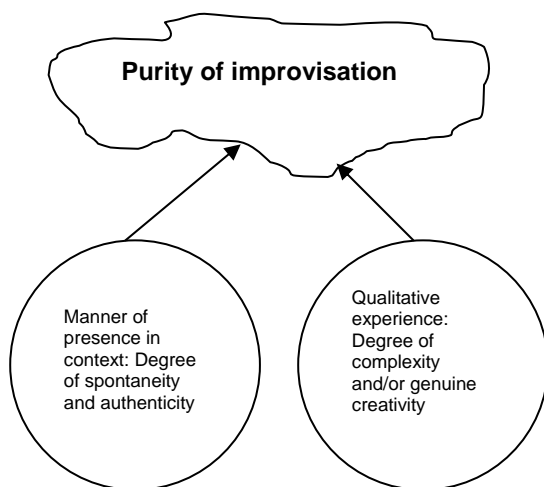
In everyday conversation there are a number of factors indicating that social complexity could be just around the corner. Take the case of misunderstandings, for example. Participating in social life is hardly a linear exercise; rather, it is permeated with vagueness. Under such circumstances it would not be strange if some meanings came out or were interpreted differently from what was intended. In this way misunderstandings reflect the fallibility of intersubjectivity (Mead 1967; Joas 1997). If you should misunderstand me, then both of us have failed in creating mutual agreement on meaning. Maybe it is more my fault than yours, or the other way around, but we do both play a role. Inescapably all parties involved in social interaction have a responsibility in creating mutual understanding, and every time we fail we are forced to *improvise new understanding*. In fact, considering the amount of vagueness in the terms we use, the variety of cultural backgrounds, the complexity of the human body, not to mention the myriad of language-games that can be played out, it might seem a wonder that we do indeed understand each other at all. This point can be reinforced by bringing in what I regard as the wonder of intersubjectivity itself, as it is impossible to universally prove how we are actually capable of taking each other's roles (i.e. Mead 1967). This is, however, a rather speculative point of argument if taken too far: we certainly do understand each other and any speculation beyond this is not necessarily fruitful. My intention here is simply to direct focus towards the complexity of interaction rather than towards the orderly and taken-for-grantedness of it in order to highlight the role of improvisation in everyday social life. And following the pragmatist thought, my thesis is that social complexity triggers improvisation for the sake of preserving identity.

Misunderstandings are just one example of what initiates social complexity on a daily basis (Strauss 1993). One has only got to think of the many times one is having thoughts like the following: "Why did she do that?" "Do I care about this?" "What do I think of that?" "Does this make me angry, or does it make me sad?" "What could he possibly mean by that?" "Is she trying to make me laugh, or is she unwittingly funny?" "What will happen if I say that?" And so forth. The list could be made far longer but my point is simple: It can be argued that complexity is the very stuff that we struggle with most of the time in social situations, and not only in rare instances. A point of my empirical study is to direct attention towards such

everyday problematic issues that people run into all the time at work, and as a preview of the findings it seems that sociality is not a clear-cut matter with a few ambiguities, but a vague and ambiguous affair with moments of varying clarity (see chapter seven).

## **Pure improvisation and flow**

As was argued in chapter two a lot of the literature on organizational improvisation seems to be centred on the phenomenon in its purest forms (for example Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Weick 1998, 2001). My interest, however, is not primarily in purity as such. On the contrary, the preceding discussion has dealt with practical life on the whole – including all its colours and nuances – and indicated the role of improvisation in practice as an emergent and contextual phenomenon. In this section I intend to weave together some of the most the central aspects from the preceding discussion and investigate their role in pure improvisation. A discussion on purity is of interest because this seems to be a recurrent topic in the existing literature and because it might display more clearly how my approach can provide a supplement.



### ***Model 4.2 Purity of improvisation***

Following a practical philosophical view I have through the previous sections identified several aspects that together constitute improvisation as a practical phenomenon. The current section concerns three of them in particular: spontaneity, creativity and intuition. As earlier indicated, spontaneity and creativity can be seen as qualitative parameters of improvisational purity: External action is typically more or less spontaneous and more or less creative, and

regarding the latter I have indicated that the purity of creativity is related to contextuality. Thus, I agree with Crossan and Sorrenti (1997) and Hatch (1997), that sheer spontaneity is in itself not enough to make improvisation pure. One might indeed achieve high degrees of spontaneity in action and in that sense be improvising, but this alone does not depict the degree of purity. For this, one must also consider the amount of certainty, familiarity and novelty in a given situation; in other words the degree of genuine creativity going into the sensemaking process. *To perform context-sensitive and spontaneous action is indeed improvisation, but for it to become pure, the creative efforts involved must be considerable.* Similar to, and greatly inspired by, Crossan and Sorrenti and Hatch, I take a dual approach to depicting the purity of improvisation (see model 4.2). Like these authors I hold spontaneity to be one of the two dimensions for measuring purity, but unlike Crossan and Sorrenti and Hatch who propose “intuition” as the other, I suggest “genuine creativity”. Let me explain why.

Holding that intuition is related to contextuality and genuine creativity, to “giving something a stylistic mark”, Hatch (1997) argues that the higher the degree of intuition, the more improvisatory the action (provided there is a sufficient level of spontaneity). Thus, she implies that intuition and genuine creativity are synonymous expressions – to score high on intuition implicates to be genuinely creative. But how can this add up? In my view, Hatch is mixing pure improvisation with good improvisation. For instance, it is possible to come up with examples of situations where one is highly intuitive, but in which there is little genuine creativity involved. Take the example of driving a car, which typically draws heavily on intuition, but not necessarily on genuine creativity. One might have travelled a certain distance many times, and in situ experience little out of the ordinary. In this situation intuition is to a great extent “. . . *guiding action upon something in a spontaneous and historically contextualized way*” (Hatch 1997, p. 183), but there is not much complexity involved and hence there is little genuine creativity. Doing the right thing under such circumstances might be *good* improvisation, but not very pure. Suddenly, however, an accident may seize your attention requiring the capacity to come up with genuinely new and unfamiliar solutions. In such a situation intuition would be of the essence, but used and challenged in another way than the moment before. Ergo, purity of improvisation is perhaps not so much a question of intuition or not, but of *how* intuition is utilized, which seems to be quite a different approach to the one proposed by Hatch.

I argue that it is in those situations where pure spontaneity is merged with genuine creativity that improvisation reaches its highest peaks (see model 4.2). In these situations, intuition plays an important role as practical guidance, as a source of wisdom, as a power to establish sense, as a thermostat of social situations; but unlike Hatch I claim that it is not merely the case that “the more” intuition is involved in spontaneous situations, the purer the improvisation becomes. I see sensemaking as part of a hermeneutical movement between bodily memory (“me”), from which flows intuition, and spontaneous action (“I”). This implies that the less the intuition involved, the less the sensemaking taking place: Intuition is inevitably part of the sensemaking process; it is always present. Furthermore I argue that with regard to purity of improvisation, intuition must be utilized in a *certain manner* for it to increase. It is not enough, as Hatch argues, that spontaneous action is highly intuitive. For improvisation to become pure, intuition must be challenged and potentially reformed radically. Pure improvisation involves great struggle and/or creative transcendence, and might be both pleasant and unpleasant. As a consequence, pure improvisation involves spontaneity and high levels of intuition, but conversely, spontaneity and high levels of intuition do not presume creative ability in terms of handling or creating the genuine new. Thus, intuition can be related to practical wisdom, to good improvisation (see chapter eight); and only in rare instances involving great creative challenge does intuition play a certain role so as to comprise pure improvisation. The two most important qualities for qualifying something as improvisation, then, are from my point of view creativity and spontaneity; and intuition is conceptually subordinated the former: Different forms of creativity *make use of* intuition in different ways.

I see a connection between my conception of “pure improvisation” and a phenomenon referred to as “flow”. Some authors have written about occasions on which we experience extreme intersubjectivity: a combination of genuine novelty and extreme clarity, on the borderline to transcendence. These are moments of remarkable social creativity and interaction, where the individual mind experiences being paradoxically both driven by and creator of the social, which is often categorized as flow, the zone, or peak performance (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). What can be said about this remarkable sort of experience?

Devoted to creativity as a phenomenon, complexity theorists, for instance, use the term “edge of chaos” to describe a kind of situation where systems reach a state of spontaneous self-organization from which the “genuine new” emerges (Prigogine and Stengers 1984; Stacey

1996; Brown and Eisenhardt 1998). Notice the difference in use of spontaneity here compared to in my practical philosophical approach, as complexity theorists seems to define it as a systemic character. According to their view, a system can be spontaneous, but in my view this is only possible for human beings. Complexity theorists imagine flow as a condition where forces of stability and forces of chaos balance each other optimally, thus making grounds for *ontological* (re)creation. Such thinking, I fear, contributes to complicate rather than clarify situations of pure spontaneous creativity, as they have a ring of objectivity; if interpreted analogically, that is. If interpreted metaphorically, however, “the edge of chaos” might be seen in the same manner as a horizon: as an ideal condition that cannot be reached or apprehended as such, but which is still visible and meaningful to us on an epistemological level (Gadamer 1975). Then again, “the edge of chaos” potentially undermines the essence of flow if it is seen as a state that can be reached in practice through controllable parameters. Flow, however, cannot through non-dualist lenses be apprehended as such, and it cannot be turned on and off by will. Flow occurs spontaneously as an emotional, social event, and whilst in flow there is a feeling of control – one which may disappear as soon as it arose. And it is exactly *the feeling of transcendence and control* which is important, not some form of dualistic ontological transcendence. Somewhat paradoxically explained there is no given or controllable pathway to flow, but when flow occurs it produces *a sense of control* that lasts as long as the circumstances permit. Flow is not totally governed by external forces nor by internal will – it is a genuinely reflexive and in that regard unpredictable phenomenon. And from an improvisational vocabulary, it is the sense of being lifted up from one’s body whilst at the same time controlling it perfectly that is interesting; a vivacious feeling of being in a new and unfamiliar, but still entirely controllable, place (Eisenberg 1990). Flow is improvisation in its purest.

In this way, flow lucidly illustrates the significance of all the important aspects of improvisation highlighted in this conceptual analysis so far: irreversibility, emotionality, sociality, creativity, and of course spontaneity. But where does spontaneity fit in here; in what way is it characteristic in flow? One way to go about it is to regard the feeling of transcendence not as some mind-out-of-body experience, but quite the opposite, to realize in practice *a perfect merger* between mind and body – to experience in present terms what goes on in the present. Flow could be seen as a condition of being highly conscious of what is going on here and now on the inside as well as the outside; a bodily state of momentary perception taken to the extreme. In flow one is not thinking of what is to become of the future,

but is fully absorbed in the present. The body is somehow inside-out *and* outside-in, and attention, the capability to make momentary sense, is working on high speed transmission. Flow is a feeling of one's mind being freed as the body continues on its own automatically; whilst in essence it is a simultaneous convergence of automatic and mindful action, of thinking *in* action *on* action rather than on future action. Resulting from flow is an “over-consciousness”, not objective transcendence; one *feels* uplifted.

Flow is a vivid metaphor for pointing out a typical though often misunderstood aspect of improvisation: that improvisation is about logging on to the present rather than rising above situations. By some, improvisation is merely regarded as a last solution, as a second-rate and somewhat downgraded activity of coping with unplanned events (Alterhaug 2004), as if all things could be accounted for in advance. Improvisation is what dim-witted practitioners do as they lack the superior mind of intellectuals to predict, analyse and plan, some might argue. It is something that happens ad hoc in the dualist sense; as if anything can occur in another way than somehow unpredictably. And conversely, leaning too heavily on art forms like experimental theatre and free jazz improvisation might achieve an attribute of rareness; the impression that improvisation is something reserved for the few; something extraordinary and magical. Indeed, these are all important aspects of improvisation: to improvise meaning in acute situations, to improvise artistic brilliancy, but from “The improvising man” perspective they are merely aspects of a more profound and unavoidable phenomenon. As creative and corporal beings we cannot help but being more or less logged on (Gadamer 1975; Joas 1993), and the fact that we are sometimes more than usually logged on simply points to practical variation between everyday situations. Life happens only in the present tense. “The improvising man” points this out: that individuals (spontaneously) pour themselves into everyday matters out of which ongoing narratives are constructed (Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005).

## Tools of improvisation

As we move on we will explore more of the inner characteristics of improvisation. An important premise is that to improvise is always to improvise *upon something*, which points out that sensemaking does not appear in vacuum. As Weick (2001) says: “*The important point is that improvisation does not materialize out of thin air*” (p. 290). If you are to improvise you need some tools to get you started. “Tools” represent means or instruments to accomplish certain ends, which in this setting means sensemaking and improvisation (Dewey 1929; Schön 1991). In accordance with Dewey (1929) I see *language* as the most fundamental tool of all, and all tools essentially as tools of language:

*Language is always a form of action and in its instrumental use is always a means of concerted action for an end, while at the same time it finds in itself all the goods of its possible consequences . . . . The invention and use of tools have played a large part in consolidating meanings, because a tool is a thing used as means to consequences, instead of being taken directly and physically . . . . As to be a tool, or to be used as a means for consequences, is to have and to endow with meaning, language, being the tool of tools, is the cherishing mother of all significance. (pp. 184-186).*

As a process, improvisation is *nothing but* the intelligent employment of available tools. The nature of improvisation, however, is restricted by the way such tools are perceived in practice. If they are seen as control instruments, the degree of improvisation may be low and action will become more technical rational. If they are seen as creative points of departure, as more or less usable instruments, improvisation is likely to appear more explicitly.

## Examples of tools in improvisation

*“Improvisation is prepared spontaneity”.*  
*(Norwegian jazz trumpeter Tore Johansen in 2005)*

In improvisation, tools can be any form of significant symbols that function as carriers of meaning (Mead 1967). Tools represent hermeneutic forehaving (Heidegger 1996); they are the images or symbols in memory that unavoidably become part of and indeed define context as they are perpetually produced by the human body. Some of these symbols are associated with artefacts and can be stored as such, as is the case with written words and musical notes. Symbols of language such as these are not identical or objective in any sense. One might say

that they provide basis for meaning (both subjective and intersubjective) through “sufficient similarity”. According to philosophical non-dualism, the symbol does not stand alone; if it did it could not be spoken of (Blumer 1969). Rather, meaning is attached to the symbol as it comes to the individual mind (Joas 1993). The symbol and its meaning are inseparable, and thus the symbol always appears in new light. For example, Mead’s (1967) “mind” is the individualized focus of the communicational process – it is language behaviour on the part of the individual. In Mead’s (1967) terms “. . . *there neither can be nor could have been any mind or thought without language*” (p. 192) and language, the content of mind “. . . *is only a development and product of social interaction*” (p. 191). From this view language signs *equal* significant symbols, and when these are objectified in linguistic systems, they are expressed *as* and *through* linguistic symbols. Similarly, in the works of Dewey (1929), Peirce (1966a), Foucault (1981, 1989), Barthes (1991), and Merleau-Ponty (1996) language is seen as a living process of meaning-making in which linguistic signs provide tools (structures) of language to be used in communicative interaction. From a practical philosophical perspective, signs of language form the fundament for the expression of meaning, and it is the *function* of (linguistic) signs which is accentuated.

*Language, signs and significance, come into existence not by intent and mind, but by overflow, by-products, in gestures and sound. The story of language is the story of the use made of these occurrences; a use that is eventual, as well as eventful. (Dewey 1929, p. 175).*

Finally, in Stacey’s (2001) vocabulary, which builds on Mead (1967), language is also seen as expressed through significant symbols, and when these take the form of artefacts that are arranged in abstract systems, Stacey does not call them linguistic symbols but *reified* symbols. As I have a different take on the phenomenon of reification, and understand this as the *taken for granted* (Berger and Luckmann 1991), I prefer the term “linguistic sign”.

Even the most familiar, the most threadbare and exhausted language symbol is drawn towards the context of its utilization. Any object needs a subject. Words must be uttered; they must be used as tools in language games (Wittgenstein 1992, 1994). There can be no sensemaking and no improvisation without tools. Significant symbols and artefacts do not mirror objective reality but are used as vessels for meaning (Dewey 1929). As an improvisatory rule, the more tools are available in your corporal and mental bag, the more prepared you are for real life encounters.



*Misperceptions may be beneficial if they enable managers to overcome inertial tendencies and propel them to pursue goals that might look unattainable in environments assessed in utter objectivity. Because environments aren't seen accurately, managers may undertake potentially difficult courses of action with the enthusiasm, effort, and self-confidence necessary to bring about success. Having an accurate environmental map may be less important than having some map that brings order to the world and prompts action (Sutcliffe 1994, p. 1374).*

Notice how Sutcliffe (1994) emphasises the importance of having a map, a tool, which does not have to correspond to some external milieu. Her point is rather that *something* is needed to bring order to the world, and that this something can be *anything* that proves useful, even misperceptions. This prompts the question of “what kind of tools can be pointed to as particularly relevant and useful in improvisation?” The answer is all kinds of tools: anything that can be objectified by the conscious mind, as any significant symbol can serve as instruments for creativity: an odour, a sound, a word, a feeling, but also structures, rules, routines and plans (Ciborra 1999; Weick 2001). Ideally, in theory, improvisation treats nothing as holy (Hatch 1999), though in practice it may be, due to contextual considerations. For example, bending the rules of society too much might not be understood as creative; rather, it would more easily be seen as immoral or even criminal. Having said this, however, it could be interesting to illuminate a few examples of tools that may or may not commonly be perceived as such.

### **Experience & memory**

In “The improvising man” objects are treated as temporary constructions, including all imaginable theories of past, present or future scenarios (Berger and Luckmann 1991). The context at hand immediately becomes the context of memory, and has to be reconstructed as a theory to maintain its validity. Any theme of conversation is reconstructed continually through conversation, and always carries with it the potential of novelty (Stacey 2001). Given that the initial ambition is to maximize this potential, the mind can use conversational themes spontaneously to alter the setting. It is impossible to know how the mind does this. Abduction is in many ways a mystery, but on the other hand it is the most natural thing of all, as it is the source of reality (Peirce 1966a, 1966b, 1974a, 1974b; Joas 1996). Again, we are reminded that objects of the mind could easily be seen as givens (dualism), which by a long way deprives them of their instrumental character. And when this happens there is little room for imagination, besides uncovering some pre-ordered reality. Open and explorative imagination, however, is the very heart of “The improvising man”. Without it, it would be impossible to

create theories of our lived contexts – to be able to spontaneously sense what can be done to make things better (or as good as possible).

## **Skills**

*Travis: “Do you want me to drive?”*

*Travis’ brother: “Sure, think you remember how?”*

*Travis: “My body remembers.”*

*(20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Paris, Texas by Wim Wenders 1984)*

What is a skill? How is skill different from, say, experience? The question is rhetorical and misleading; skills are from a practical philosophical perspective products of experience and come to life as experience expands. A skill is the bodily capacity to master a task without having to use energy to focus on the skill itself (Schön 1987, 1991; Molander 1996).

Following Dewey (1929), skills are habitualized patterns of action in the subconscious.

Reading is a brilliant example. As the little boy learns how to see beyond the linguistic signs, beyond the letters, words and sentences, and immediately discovers the meaning that permeates them, he has developed the skill of reading.

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

A capacity becomes a skill in the moment it does not need attentive control to be performed, which typically requires countless repetitions and trial and error. As the individual grows more skilful the embodied vocabulary is expanded and more activities can be performed without needing conscious guidance.

*These habitual effects become in turn spontaneous, natural, “instinctive;” they form the platform of development and apprehension of further meanings, affecting every subsequent phase and social life. (Dewey 1929, p. 302).*

This point must not be misunderstood, though, as if taken to imply that skills cannot be reached by the mind at all. Two things need to be pointed out:

1. *Skills are bodily capacities that can be realized in practice as automatic patterns of action.*

2. *Skills can be utilized in unique settings by the conscious mind, but need no conscious supervision as such.*

Without skills life would appear quite differently. One would have to learn and do every sequence of action from scratch every time it was to be performed, and the human body would be neither a particularly efficient nor effective creature. In this view efficiency comes from not having to use energy on similar activities, and effectivity from the contextual utilization (and refinement) of efficient skills, and without skills they are both invalidated (Molander 1996). In skills, then, lies the secret to technical rational behaviour, to the efficient performance of particular sequences of action (Dewey 1929). And furthermore, without skills there are no available capacities to be used in more complex processes of sensemaking. Skills capacitate the body to act creatively and improvise, but in themselves they are merely repetitive bodily readiness.

On the basis of this one might think that the execution of skills would emerge as a technical and systematic routine. However, from the perspective of “The improvising man” this is not the case. Even if the performance of skills does not need conscious guidance, skills are not necessarily completely technical in the sense of being insensitive to context. Mead (1967) uses walking as an example: one might wander around in crowded streets thinking about what or where to have lunch, whilst coordinating partly unconsciously one’s actions to those of others to avoid collisions and simultaneously adapting every step to the contextual texture of the pavement under one’s feet. No two steps would be analytically identical even though automatically produced. Skills in the form of automatic behaviour implies adjusting to the present: balancing, coordinating and feeling. It is as if the body knows what to do without needing directions. A skill is very much like an autopilot in that sense, except that it is far more intricate through embodied contextuality. It is a skill to be able to hold a scalpel, but the scenario in which a scalpel is held is always different, and hence the skill must be developed and executed in a way that allows for variation. Often, however, variation is so tremendous that it cannot be coped with without conscious attention, and in those instances new experience is generated and hopefully assimilated by the body so that next time around the improved skill will be contextually functional (Dewey 1929). As a practical example, the following discussion between two surgeons at InSitu Hospital is quite illustrative of the relationship between practicing skills and the ability to perform well in context:

*Geir, surgeon: - Making diagnoses in this line of surgery is quite a manageable task. Often the diagnosis is straightforward. But there is quite a lot happening at the same time here. Here we are braver than regular dentists because we do more of the same kind of operations. We make the operation area more visible by removing bone structure and folding out mucous membranes. We have a lower threshold for doing this kind of things.*

*Anders, surgeon apprentice: - But making diagnoses is not always like this, straightforward I mean, in which case it is far more exciting. It is certainly not as if seeing one tonsil means seeing them all! Work by the volume is always better paid, but far less exciting. It pays better exactly because it is less exciting and monotonous. There are two things people go for: work conditions and professional challenges.*

*Geir: - The same thing concerns jaws, wisdom-teeth etc. as for tonsils. For example in the case of inflammation and an enlarged tongue, surgery is made far more difficult. Anyway, the goal is to create an atmosphere of safety and confidence. This is half the work. And it is easy to become irritable if one doesn't succeed. Then one has to learn techniques in order to hide it. The chief surgeon may easily stress the assistant physician, and it is important to be aware of the signals one sends out. Moreover, what matters above all is to create an understanding of the unique patient at hand. And there are large variations. Learning from experience is the most important, but experience must be adapted and adjusted to the unique patient. And having such scarce resources as we do here, it demands more of our skills as surgeons. Fumbling and irritation will be easily intercepted by patients and relations.*

Following the logic from the section on emotion in improvisation, no matter how much an individual thinks about his actions there are inevitably automatic patterns underpinning them. There can be no “pure” conscious action in the sense that it does not involve some inattentive emotional process (Dewey 1929). With skill the mind is freed to concentrate on other issues than the actual skill itself. As soon as you know how to read, for instance, you might read without having to pay attention to *how* to read. Still you are aware of the fact that you can read, and can therefore employ that skill whenever you wish. Moreover, you can direct attention towards the reading process itself and even internalize a new way of reading; perhaps through changing some bad habit, some ineffective way of consuming sentences and so forth.

To sum up: In improvisation skills can be seen both as *corporal, emotional facilitators* of and as *tools* for creating new sense. Improvisation involves using whatever capacity lies readily at hand to find functional solutions and in the process widening further the vocabulary of skills (Ciborra 1999). In a sense, through improvisation one gets better at improvising. A set of skills is like a toolbox, a repertoire that the body brings with it, and the toolbox is maintained

and even further equipped through practical experience and usage (Dewey 1929; Schön 1991). In the opposite case the toolbox diminishes, which makes the body less capacitated to perform automatic action *and* improvisation. In any case practical effectivity or know-how can only be accomplished through improvisation, which presumes the potential to perform tasks efficiently.

In a given moment one might be attentive or largely inattentive. If attentive, one might direct focus towards the context at hand and consider how it can be understood and dealt with (i.e. improvisation). One might, however, as one initiates action start questioning the skill itself: is it sufficient or well enough developed for its intended application (Schön 1991)? In that case what could have been a mere automatic employment of skills might become a troublesome and somewhat sluggish execution of skills; a process less refined than was implied by the original bodily potential: thought might interrupt spontaneity, as it were. In the opposite case one might choose to trust one's bodily capacities and recognize the sense of security they provide. This illuminates another crucial character of skills: they might provide grounds for self-confidence, risk taking and good improvisation (Molander 1996), and in that regard, skills are perhaps our most important tools.

### **Contextual factors**

In the social sense context emerges as patterns of meaning changing as well as being changed by people participating in interaction (Mead 1967). With regard to improvisation, social patterns can be improvised upon infinitely. The ability to understand each other increases as sophisticated forehaving in terms of experience, skills and memory is developed. One must engage in social interaction in order to learn how people think and act (Dewey 1929; Blumer 1969). And the more experienced one becomes, the more tools one has to work with and the better capable one becomes of reducing complexity in practical situations and creating understanding and even the genuinely new (Molander 1996). But context is more than social patterns of meaning. To the extent that physical attributes are associated with contexts of meaning, they can provide valuable sources of inspiration.

Stated simply: if it can be thought of (be it social, abstract or physical), it can be used as a tool (Dewey 1929). Thus, physical objects should be viewed in the same manner as for example written artefacts. From the perspective of practical philosophy a word on a piece of paper is fundamentally no different from a bottle on the table. Both of them provide meaning as

images that are part of larger abstract systems. They are externalizations of memory; physical expressions of inner frameworks. Meaning is not inherent in either the written word or in the bottle, but is given to them through learning and practical usage (Dewey 1929; Heidegger 1996). A word is meaningful only in the context of other words and linguistic rules. Language is arranged in a systematic way so that it may be explicated and provide meaning in real life contexts. Due to our ability to communicate with significant symbols (Mead 1967), we can express meaning through any kind of physical matter, which shows that language is much more than written or spoken words. Language is everything that can be used as carriers of meaning or vehicles of intention; any object that is associated with certain experiences; anything of social significance.

*Pragmatism proposes that we are incapable of thinking without signs. The principle 'is, that, whenever we think, we have present to the consciousness some feeling, image, conception, or other representation, which serves as a sign'. (Joas 1993, p. 61).*

The more spontaneously tools are used in practice, the more temporary is their meaning, and of course the purer the improvisation. Worth noticing is that physical entities can be exceptionally powerful tools, and that they may spark the mind in remarkably spontaneous ways. They can be manipulated, changed and rearranged, so as to create associations or trigger new patterns. In contrast, the more things are understood literally and taken for granted, the smaller the potential for spontaneous creativity (Schön 1991). Maybe the extraordinary power of physical manifestations has to do with their potential for being sensed by the whole body, and not only by the brain? This way physical entities are capable of being strongly associated with experience (by memory), so as to create a robust and diverse foreknowledge. And as foreknowledge expands dynamically, intuition is developed thus increasing the capability to see family resemblances (Wittgenstein 1994).

If the ambition is to make improvements and create new knowledge, one could start with the substance of everyday life and see what can be made of it; much like a bricoleur that walks into the garage looking for gadgets and artefacts that can be put together to create novelty:

*The French word bricolage (which has no precise equivalent in English) means to use whatever resources and repertoire one has to perform whatever task one faces . . . The defining characteristics of a bricoleur is that this person makes do with whatever tools and materials are at hand. (Weick 2001, p. 62).*

Learning from the bricoleur we realize that improvisers must make do with what they have. As improvisers we can always get more, and we should, even, in order to expand our toolbox, but obviously contextual innovation must be based in what is at hand, be it of abstract or concrete nature. Bringing these tools to their best possible utilization implies purifying creativity, as is the way of the bricoleur. Weick (2001) urges us to understand that the bricoleur should not be understood as some “odd job man”: “. . . *because considerably more knowledge about materials is assumed in the case of the bricoleur*” (p. 62). In other words, the bricoleur is more like an expert, a highly creative practitioner, who twists and turns on ideas, functions and materials to make something new. But the image of the bricoleur should not be taken too far, Kamoche et al. (2002) warn us. Arguing that Weick (1993, 1999) makes improvisation synonymous to bricolage, they claim that he oversees the importance of spontaneity. Still, the *attitude* of the bricoleur is what is important here: to make do with whatever lies at hand in order to make sense and act in context; to improvise.

#### **Technical rationality and improvisation: Tools - guiding or controlling?**

To round off this section on the significance of tools in improvisation, I have chosen to include a short discussion on how different models of thinking lead to different ways of conducting practice. The models of thinking I am referring to are improvisation on one hand and “technical rationality” (Schön 1987, 1991) on the other. According to Schön (1991) the essence of technical rationality is to create a model for action first, and apply this model on a real-world problem afterwards. In Schön’s treatise of technical rationality he is occupied with how technical rational thinking has formed a paradigm that has become our predominant way of thinking about research, education and practice. His discussion is thus to a large extent on a philosophical level, as his message is to warn against technical rationality as a *taken for granted societal paradigm* in which there exists no concept of language as tools. If technical rationality becomes dominant as a paradigm, language, according to Schön (1991), follows the logic of Positivism, which implies that symbols of language are seen as objectively laden with meaning. In other words, in *reified* technical rationality, such as in Positivism, language is made autonomous, and it is argued that meaning is found in a transcendent and objective universe (see chapter six).

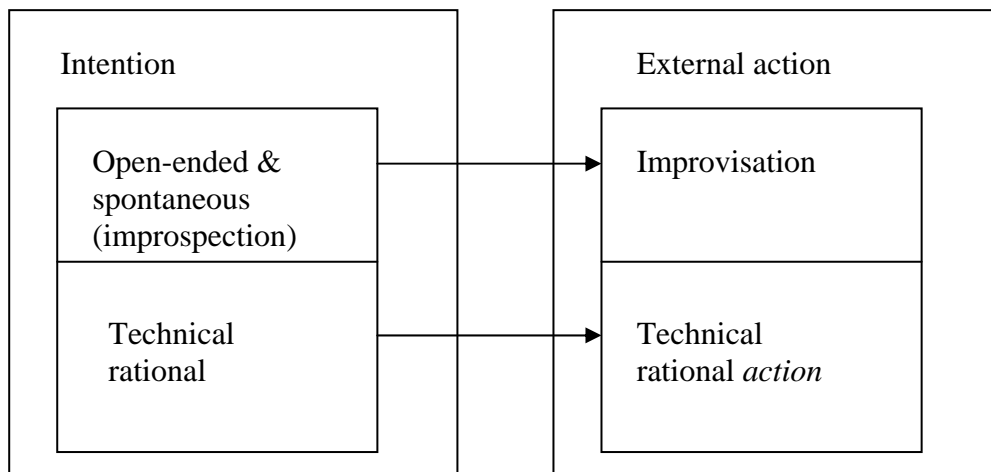
As opposed to taking for granted technical rationality as a model for all practice, Schön follows a line of thought similar to Dewey’s (1929) in claiming that there can be no dominant

rigorous model for practice. Both of these authors see science, for example, more like an art form, in which theories and models are shaped in an ongoing and open-ended manner based on emerging contexts. Science from their perspective thus takes the diametrically opposite form of taken for granted technical rationality, and becomes a process of improvisation. At this point one might be led to think that I see improvisation and technical rationality as antagonists, but this is only true on a conceptual and abstract level, a point which this section is dedicated to enunciate. As such this section serves as a backdrop for chapters five, eight and ten, where I from a *practical* perspective attempt to argue that improvisation and technical rationality can be woven together. The clue lies in separating between technical rationality as a *dominant, taken for granted, model for action* and as a *contextual measure*. Doing this I will hopefully be able to show that under certain circumstances improvisation may *involve* following formal models, in which case the model of technical rationality becomes an instrument rather than a paradigmatic restraint jacket. The question for now, however, is: “How is technical rationality *conceptually different from* improvisation?” In order to provide an answer I will expand on Schön’s seminal work by using his generic concept of technical rationality and blend in the insights from the two earlier sections of this chapter which dealt with spontaneity and creativity. The point is to show that the conceptual difference between improvisation and technical rationality concerns *intention* and *attitude* with regard to spontaneity and creativity. The discussion is similar to Purser and Petranker (2005) who operate with improvisation both as a philosophical framework and as an art form (i.e. “deep improvisation”) which uses improvisation consciously as a tool for contextual action such as organizing.

Following Schön (1987, 1991) technical rational action is categorically different from an intention of acting spontaneously (see version 2 of spontaneity, pp. 59-60). In other words, on a conceptual level technical rationality involves disregarding the present from an intention to explore abstract inner images. Moreover, in the physical, external sense technical rationality reflects an intention of non-spontaneity and non-contextuality, as it involves first addressing a model for action, and then seeking to apply this model onto the external world (Schön 1991). With regard to creativity technical rationality involves a specific type of *prospection* which focuses on abstract existing *ideas, systems* and *models* rather than on free and open imagination. If we put these two aspects together technical rationality involves *the intention of non-spontaneous prospection that is closed and analytical as opposed to open-ended and imaginative*, and when put into action the analytical model controls succeeding action (Schön



1987, 1991). In other words, to follow a rule in a technical rational manner implicates rigid restrictions flowing from prospection on how to behave, and to the extent that these restrictions are actually pursued external action becomes technical-rational (see model 4.3). *In principle*, technical rationality implies that the rule works as a severely restricting tool, one that is *obeyed* and *followed* a-contextually rather than used creatively and spontaneously. Thus, if technical rational action is intended, the tool becomes more like a restraint-jacket than a creative instrument for open-ended, contextual action.



***Model 4.3 A conceptual model of technical rationality***

In order to understand more about the conceptual nature of technical rational action, I will provide a few examples. Picture, for instance, the breakdown of some critical routine or system, a situation commonly associated with emergencies (which require immediate attention and intelligent action). A vital point here is that when systems fail the error must lie somewhere within the system; there must be a clearly defined fault. After all, ideally, a system is a web of interrelated functions that are all designed purposely, and system error means that one or more of these functions have failed. We must presume that the intention is to preserve and reconstruct the system, in which case the system governs and controls the process. For example, if an internal error occurs in an atomic plant the system cannot be simply wished away. Rather, it will provide a rigid frame for the chosen action and in that way control the problem solving process, which will consequently follow the logic and rules of technical rationality. This presumes, of course, that there is in fact an ambition to repair and maintain systemic operations, for example as is the case with so-called “heedful action”

(Weick 2001). Since there is a system providing very clear and dominating frames and guidelines within which action must be chosen, the degree of complexity is likely to be low. No matter how complicated it appears, the error can be trusted to be found within the system.

On the other hand, one reacts there and then to the emergency at hand and rapidly finds a solution, which basically requires at least *some* context-sensitivity and thus some degree of improvisation. But the degree of complexity involved is associated with experience and trust, with whether one feels on top of the situation or not. Having much experience means having access to a rich array of tools, thus creating an intricate rather than complex situation. Familiarity is a key word – the more familiar the less improvisatory. But if the system is not trusted to perform, functionality will have to be improved with no guarantee of success. Hence: The less trust, the more complexity (see chapter three). The experienced technician, however, knows where to look and he knows what works and what does not. He can be certain that rather than it primarily being a matter of meaninglessness underpinning the situation, a systemic intricacy needs to be uncovered via technical analysis and repaired.

In practice, complexity stands out as a highly dynamical and fluid phenomenon – complexity for me is not necessarily complexity for you. Learning how to understand, compute and act in complicated systems, then, is initially to some extent a complex process, and continues to be so until the functions are so readily at hand that answers can merely be calculated. For a well-trained practitioner a system breakdown is no more of an emergency than missing the bus. After all, a technical-analytical problem is not totally arbitrary, and solutions to the problem will always be found by following the rules; indeed they are *defined by* the rules.

Ideally, and conceptually, technical rationality involves solving a problem through rule-based calculation and later to implement the solution in a context (Schön 1991); and I would like to emphasize that in practice this can be a very efficient way to act (i.e. “good practice”) – a matter which seems somewhat under-communicated by Schön. Say, if the engine of your car breaks down, you (hopefully) know that the error hides somewhere specific inside the engine, and knowing this limits the extent to which complexity can initially be involved. In many situations, rather than regard it as a chance to create something new, you would probably prefer to find and repair systemic errors. Alternatively, if in certain situations sense is made without pressure or guidance from a system or a cognitive structure (forehaving), the process becomes far more spontaneous and improvisatory. Here there is no final or defined goal for

creativity, which requires *a different kind of thinking*, one of using whatever is available as tools to create something new. Such an open attitude is closer to authenticity and artistic creativity than to mathematical analysis. Important key words here are *attitude* and *intention*, and the question concerns whether to *follow* a given set of rules or to *use* such rules as tools to create something new. To follow a rule or a routine *blindly* implies making little room for improvisation, and is very close to the ideal concept of technical rationality as explicated by Schön (1987, 1991). Conceptually, the technical rational terms “abstract” and “follow” can in the improvisational vocabulary be replaced by “contextual” and “create”. The ultimate aim of improvisation is not to uncover or maintain the existing, but to create the new: *reactively* because existing theories do not work (do not apply to the context), and there is no knowledge of any defined system or solution to turn to; and *proactively* because you try to make sure to be on top of whatever situation you are in. (The distinction between proactive and reactive improvisation is treated in detail in chapter eight.)

On a conceptual level, in improvisation there is high degree of openness and spontaneity, whereas in technical action there is not. A rule is an abstract idea, and if interpreted literally and put into action, the action is likely to become static and repetitive. This is an important aspect of technical rationality; there is always one “right” answer and it is found in the old and established. Contrary to this, from the perspective of “The improvising man” abstract ideas, rules or systems should not be taken for granted. Rather they comprise tools and creative points of departure, and in that sense they hold a temporary, not a given, status. From an improvisatory view the range of possible solutions is, in theory, infinite; the mentality for a dedicated improviser might even be to find out how far one can go; what one can get away with within contextual limitations (Hatch 1999). In conceptual terms technical rational action, however, involves asking: “How can I succeed in maintaining the established?”

I want to end this section by making two suggestions that will provide guidance for the succeeding discussions of this dissertation. Firstly, as argued by Schön (1991), technical rationality and improvisation as conceptual models of thinking and acting are antagonists. They are profoundly different frameworks for performing practice, and the purpose of this section has been to show this on a conceptual level. Secondly, however, *within* the framework of “The improvising man” and on a *practical level*, I will argue that technical rationality can be fitted in *as a tool* which is well suited for certain kinds of practice, and in this regard the two concepts are *not* antagonists. In this respect abstract models such as rules and structures,

which are essential for the execution of technical rational action, can be used in improvisation as tools (Ciborra 1999). I see great value in separating these two ways of thinking about improvisation and technical rationality. The distinction between the two is of the essence for the succeeding discussions of this dissertation, and will be expanded on in a number of ways.

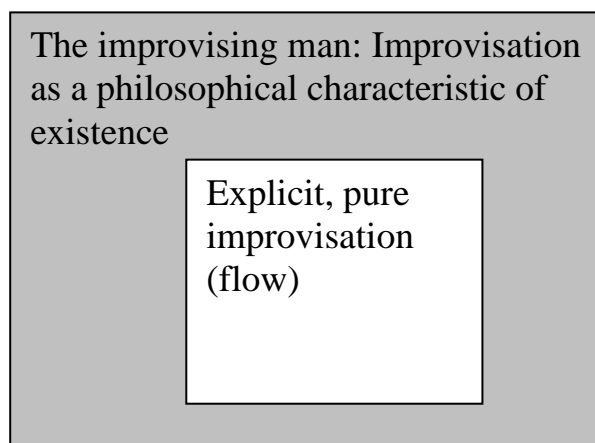
### **Suggesting a synthesis: The improvising man**

In this last section I will gather all the major insights from the different sections of this chapter, and merge them into a synthesis of improvisation. As argued in this chapter, improvisation can be used as a framework to understand the essential role of improvisation in all practice (Ciborra 1999), not only in those practices characterized by extraordinary creativity, spontaneity or both. How improvisation stands out as intended creativity and spontaneity, as explicit forms of improvisatory practices, is the topic for chapter eight. The synthesis of improvisation from practical philosophy (*The improvising man*), however, is more profound, and provides a set of assumptions from which improvisation can be understood as a “deep phenomenon” (Purser and Petranker 2005).

Hermeneutics is loaded with a wide selection of denotations: for example as a label for a philosophical tradition, as a patterning of thought processes, as a particular humanistic perspective, and as a research methodology (Nyeng 2004). An intriguing aspect of hermeneutics irrespective of the chosen denotation is the way it binds past, present and future together. Hermeneutics depicts life as movement through situatedness (Gadamer 1975; Joas 1993) in which past and future play significant roles as constituents (Heidegger 1996). It constitutes a break with linear time as a mathematical concept, but a continuance of linear time as an epistemological feature (Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005). And above all, hermeneutics points out that life can only be lived through living, through being logged on to the present; and that the endeavour of living in the physical and social sphere is improvisational. Unlike “hermeneutics”, “improvisation” gains strength from being a term used by many in everyday life, and although its many interpretations differ radically and to some extent even contradict each other, I argue that improvisation might be shaped into a fruitful and mind-sparking doctrine. Being a familiar if ever disputable concept it provides a starting point for contemplation for others than students of philosophy, and in the preceding discussion I have sought to erect improvisation as a somewhat autonomous doctrine; to show that “*The improvising man*” has deeper implications than the more popular everyday and academic denotations of improvisation. Hence “*The improvising man*” aims at and represents

the unavoidable characteristics of spontaneity, creativity, emotionality, irreversibility and sociality in practical existence. In short, in accordance with Ciborra (1999), “The improvising man” proposes that improvisation is a feature of normality; not of rareness.

As a synthesis of the preceding discussion improvisation might be defined as *spontaneous and hermeneutical sensemaking via external action*. In all of the other definitions that were presented in the beginning of this chapter spontaneity stood out – but mostly in the sense of *pure* spontaneity – as convergence between thought and action. But as I have tried to show, spontaneity can be seen as embodied contextuality: as an inextricable constituent of existence and not only as a somewhat rare feature. And this changes the perception of improvisation as it becomes something *natural rather than exceptional* in practical life-in-the-unfolding (see model 4.4).



#### ***Model 4.4 The improvising man***

Encouraged by Kamoche et al. (2002) I hold a functional concept of improvisation should stretch further than solely serving as a metaphor for phenomena such as jazz improvisation, and I argue “The improvising man” meets this requirement. The concept of “The improvising man” gets its strength from being philosophically grounded rather than merely an interesting feature of, say, one particular practice, or as a competence with special value for just a few. This differs significantly from the way improvisation is spoken of as a method of innovation (for example Bastien and Hostager 1988; Kamoche et al. 2002), a rare instance of and competence in (artistic) spontaneity, creativity or both (for example Miner et al. 1997; Moorman and Miner 1998; Weick 2001; Kamoche et al. 2002), and/or intuition (for example

Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997). I argue that improvisation is *more like a capacity-in-the-becoming than a competence*, and that it is an expected feature of everyday human activity which is never repeated exactly alike. In Strauss' (1993) words: “*Any specific situation in which action takes place will require some if only the smallest adjustment.*” (p. 194).

I *do* support speaking of improvisation as a competence, a method or an instrument, and I do recognize that improvisation in some instances may hold a pure and exceptional quality (see model 4.4), but from my perspective this is just *part of* the extent to which improvisation embraces practice. From the framework of “The improvising man”, improvisation can be identified as a general trait of practical situations, even to some extent under the most routine-like conditions. Thus it is implied that the definition of improvisation itself is less important than the philosophical framework it rests upon. I argue that in order to understand the elements in improvisation one needs a certain backdrop – that the different terms that comprise the concept must be unpacked and studied through philosophical lenses. Having made such an attempt it is my opinion that improvisation captures the very important features of *contextuality*, *spontaneity* and *external sensemaking* better than any other concept; and that by accentuating the hermeneutical element in improvisation, the importance of *corporality*, *emotion*, *sociality* and *intuition* is also explicated. Finally, I have built on the insights from pragmatism and shown how improvisation is a creative process of utilizing *tools* in context. Tools of improvisation can be anything found in our embodied forehaving which can be used as instruments to achieve certain ends (Dewey 1929; Schön 1991).

As a framework “The improvising man” can open up an alternative and fruitful perspective on human practice. The presented synthesis is not primarily a brand new invention, however; rather, it is the natural consequence of contrasting different theories and framing them from a particular philosophical strand. Hence, my thoughts represent a continuance and hopefully an embellishment of the writings of authors such as Karl E. Weick, Mary Jo Hatch, Kamoche et al., Jack Petranker, Ronald E. Purser and Claudio U. Ciborra. In that respect my project of synthesizing improvisation into a working definition has not been very different from tidying up loose ends and presenting a holistic image that is true to the tradition of practical philosophy. Thus I hope to have overcome some of the eclecticism that characterizes the field of organizational improvisation as well as to have widened the scope of improvisation as a

concept. I use many of the same words as those who have inspired me, but I have tried to give some of them a deeper and more philosophically grounded content.

In a nutshell, the view that “The improvising man” encourages is that the natural (and inevitable) course of human practice is constituted *as* embodied and contextualized spontaneity and creativity. These two phenomena are important constituents of human existence, thus making improvisation a cornerstone of being. From a practical philosophical perspective improvisation is carved out from a theory where action is per definition creative, and where creativity is persistently measured in terms of context and workability (Dewey 1929; Joas 1993, 1996). Thus, to the extent that man behaves rationally in a social and physical reality, improvisation becomes the rule and not the exception. This is precisely the meaning of “The improvising man”: that improvisation is inevitable in practical life.

In the next chapter I will deal explicitly with organization theory. The insights from practical philosophy and “The improvising man” are used to expand on previous concepts of organizational improvisation (see chapter two). Hence I will make use of Weick’s sensemaking perspective on organizing, blend in the insights from “The improvising man”, and build up an understanding of *organizing as improvisation*. Other influential and supplemental contributions to organizing and improvisation are also drawn into this discussion, so as to construct a robust concept of organizing as improvisation. For the sake of investigating theoretically the relationship between central elements in organization theory and improvisation, the discussion addresses the following topics: change, routines, structures, plans and systems. A key argument is that from a sensemaking perspective, as nouns these can be seen as tools of improvisation rather than as something separated from improvisation.

## Chapter 5. Organizing as improvisation

### Organizing – once more from the top

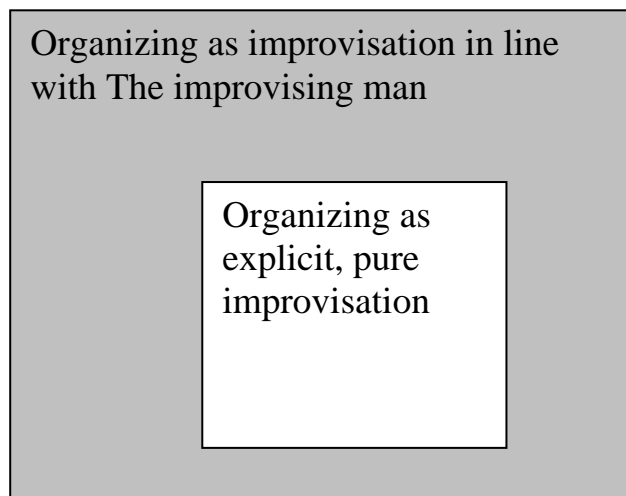
In this chapter I will bring in the concept of improvisation as it was explicated in chapter four (the improvising man), and carve out the implications for “organizing”. In chapter one I defined organizing as *externally oriented acts of sensemaking carried out in the private, social, and organizational sphere*, and I explained that my interest in this dissertation concerns organizing *in an organizational setting*. This is why this chapter deals with organization theory, and my ambition is to show how, on the basis of organization literature, a fruitful concept of organizing can be formed through a study of the connection between improvisation and technical rationality. More specifically this chapter shows how technical rationality can be related to a selection of fundamental administrative issues in the organization literature, which are then analysed and discussed under the concept of “The improvising man”. Ultimately this discussion leads out in a conceptualization of *organizing as improvisation*, a theoretical concept which is put to empirical scrutiny in chapters seven to ten (whereas chapter seven to nine deals with organizing in a general sense, chapter ten builds on the current chapter and is devoted to an empirical study of the role of technical rationality in organizing processes).

As an introduction to the discussion of organizing and technical rationality, I start with a theoretical analysis of “change”. Here I conclude that improvisation may be a more suitable metaphor than change for understanding the epistemological characteristics of organizing. Next I deal with the central administrative matters of “routines”, “organizational structure”, “plans and unpredictability”, before I finally turn to “systems”. A key issue is to substantiate that *organizing as improvisation* is not so much a universal question of routine, structure, plan, system, control *or not*: it is not a discussion of either-or; just as it is not a question of the objectively right way to conduct these matters. Rather, organizing as improvisation is a question of *how* structural elements are perceived and utilized in practice.

Recall the definition from chapter one: organizing implies *externally oriented acts of sensemaking carried out in the private, social and organizational sphere* (p. 16). Thus my take on organizing is not from a decision-making perspective, but from a *sensemaking perspective* in which *improvisation* – not retrospection or prospection – is the essence (see



chapter two). As a result, organizing is seen as spontaneous sensemaking activity for the sake of creating sense and identity. Another important distinction is that I follow Weick's (1989) and Weick et al.'s (2005) view on organizing as a process of imposing order on chaos; of making sense; but to narrow it down I choose to study organizing as it is constituted in everyday practice in the context of organizations (see chapter one, p. 17). As a natural consequence, my theoretical study of organizing is conducted in relation to central elements in organization theory, which is the topic for this chapter.



### ***Model 5.1 Organizing as improvisation***

In the preceding chapters I have tried to build up an argumentation that defines improvisation as spontaneous and hermeneutical sensemaking via external action. As a logical consequence of my sensemaking perspective I can now offer the following definition of organizing as “a process of improvisation”. The guiding thesis is that organizing follows the same logic as improvisation and involves the same qualities: firstly it is inevitably more or less improvisational (The improvising man); and secondly it is in some instances quite explicit and pure (see model 5.1). Thus, there is always an element of improvisation in organizing (Ciborra 1999), but in practice, the degree of purity will vary between the more technical rational on the one side and the more spontaneous and genuinely creative on the other. With this in mind, I take as my point of study what seems to be a severely intricate and exciting triadic relationship between organizing, improvisation and *change*.

## Organizing and change

As it is my opinion that there is still a need to write and further elaborate on organizing theory, my aim resembles that of Czarniawska and Sevón (1996):

*In particular, we hope to go beyond the characteristically modernist opposition of materialism and idealism and the dichotomies which follow from it: social/technical, intentional/deterministic, subjective/objective . . . .The modernist dichotomies mentioned above find their reflection in two dominating images of organizational change: as a planned innovation and as an environmental adaption. (pp. 13-14).*

Although I share the ambition of Czarniawska and Sevón to go beyond taken for granted dichotomies, I want to go one step further and discuss the very applicability of the term “change”. In the existing literature on improvisation numerous scholars have related improvisation to change (Orlikowski 1996; Orlikowski and Hofman 1997; Brown and Eisenhardt 1997; Weick and Quinn 1999; Weick 2001; Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Cunha and Cunha 2003; Purser and Petranker 2005). From a non-dualistic framework, however, change might be an inappropriate root metaphor for understanding organizing as improvisation. I will not in this section provide a review of the field of organizational change. This is brilliantly done in Tsoukas and Chia (2002). Rather, I want to give a short philosophical analysis of the very concept of change and the way it ties in with improvisation. In my view, this is a suitable introduction to organizing as improvisation, and it can teach us something about what an improvisational vocabulary is *not*; and if it can simultaneously contribute in any way to the intricate debate on organizational change, this is a fruitful side-effect. Let me already at this point reveal my leading argument: Change is a root metaphor of ontology, whereas improvisation with its basis in meaning-making is a root metaphor of epistemology; and herein lies the difficulty.

Change versus stability has been a recurrent theme of philosophy since the philosophers of ancient Greece. To see this we can recall the ontological debate between Parmenides and Heraclitus about the true nature of reality (Russel 1995). In order to prove the impossibility of change Parmenides claimed that what is *is*, and what is not *is not*, and that something cannot be and not be at the same time. Is this necessarily in conflict with Heraclitus’ “change is everything”? If change is possible it would mean that something must become what it is not, which clearly contradicts the first two axioms. As Heraclitus’ conception presupposes that nothing is in the first place (continuous change), how can nothing ever become something

other than nothing? At first glimpse it is only if one claims that something does or does not exist objectively to begin with, that change occurs as a problem. In short, if nothing *is*, then nothing changes, and if *something is* it cannot change, because then it would not exist to begin with. Thus, Parmenides is only in conflict with Heraclitus to the extent that ontological truth, stability, is clutched on to as a taken for granted axiom. But perhaps a deeper puzzle is whether continuous (Heraclitian) change is not just a disguised form of stability?

Going a bit further into the intriguing dualistic rhetoric of ontological change, I would argue that change as a concept is only interesting to the extent that something stable exists, for without it there is nothing to be changed. Consequently, with regard to the philosophical quest for the ontological objective, change might become an intricate problem. How come? Firstly, to say that something exists ontologically could imply that change remains unaccounted for. After all, the dualist philosophy is fundamentally a philosophy about the stable and (pre)given (Dewey 1929). Alternatively, change itself can be portrayed as ontologically given, as the fundamental element of stability: stability is found in continuous change (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). In both of these instances I would say there is little doubt that the rhetoric employed collapses the dichotomy of change and stability as meaningful concepts. In Orlikowski's (1996) article on organizing as improvisation, for instance, a dualistic rhetoric is used, producing oddly contradictive phrases like “. . . *stability is out, change is in*” (p. 63). The reasons why I see this as contradictive are firstly, that stability is only meaningful as the antagonist of change – stability implies not-change; and secondly, that if stability means objectively not-change, and if change does not exist, neither can stability as its antagonist. There seems to be no way out of this dilemma from the dualist approach. Apparently, the dualist creates his own problem, a fundamental paradox so to speak, and seems not to be able to get out of it by the means of his own rhetoric.

Confused as we may be by the polemics of dualism we should not neglect that the trust in ontological stability, in objective non-changing truth, has provided the fundament of much of modern organization theory, and technical rationality seems to continue as a prominent trend in social theory to this day (Schön 1991; Andersen 2000; Hagen 2000; Stacey et al. 2000; Stacey 2001). It would be strange if everyday practical life were not affected by this as well, especially through the way we typically think about organizing. Think of the words organization, structure and system, which clearly emphasize the static and ordered, and which if reified come to represent images of objective reality. It is possible that out of this a need has

emerged to find ways to alter the static and change it into new forms (Hatch 2004), such as for instance new organizational structures, new phases of systemic equilibrium etc. In other words, the need for change can be constituted by an excessive focus on the stable. But is it not impossible to rearrange what is already arranged objectively – can change and stability exist ontologically side by side; is change real? Can dualist philosophy show us a way out of this paradox?

If we take as our point of departure the commonly held assumption that organizing implies some kind of change (Purser and Petranker 2005), I would argue that the paradox of change is unavoidable. But what if change is possible, one might ask, for example within certain stable parameters; what if it is possible to change something within a certain frame? Though this has an immediate ring of sense, I feel compelled to discard it, as it only signifies another level of reduction. We cannot forget the words of Parmenides: either something is, or it is not. To overcome this problem from the dualist viewpoint, one must continue to transcend infinitely, which is basically the method of reductionism in reverse. But what if everything we know is solely a matter of social construction, as argued by radical constructivism (Dewey 1929)? Certainly this must allow for a concept of change? No, because as already explicated it is no use talking about change if nothing actually exists to be changed. As we take a closer look, both of these examples imply playing the ontology game (see p. 52).

So what *is* change; an epistemological feature brought about by impure human beings? Perhaps change is an illusion? If it is, then linear forms of organizing such as decision-making, planning, controlling and executing are also illusions. Contradictive to its purpose, then, it is therefore possible that the dualist conception of change contributes to confusion more than clarity. To repeat a very important point: one might speculate that the distinctive and substantial field of organizational change has in fact emerged from the need to shake off unrealistic assumptions of organizational stability (Hatch 2004). Confused by the dualistic self-inflicted controversy, I turn to non-dualistic practical philosophy for help to understanding what seems to be a deep mystery of organizing.

However elegant some of the elaborations on organizational change, on the basis of its dualistic origins I argue that the concept is permeated with contradictions, and the closest a non-dualistic perspective might come to change is a *perception or feeling of change*. Such a perception is only possible, however, to the extent that some facet of reality has become

reified as stable, which is an illusion since from this perspective reality only exists through perpetually (re)created objects (Bergson 1944). Let us consider a few examples: Say that you had a clod of clay formed as a ball in front of you, and expressed a wish to change it into a cube. Would that not be a valid perception of change? No, because then you would have taken for granted that the original ball stayed objectively the same as you kept thinking about it as well as through the moulding-process, but again, from the stance of practical philosophy it does not. Rather, it is continually reconstructed as a sufficiently similar visual and tactile image, so when in fact you say that you want to change the ball, it has already become a new ball many times over, and the only way to see it as the old ball is via a reconstruction of memory; of how it *used to be*.

*. . . in reality the body is changing form at every moment; or rather, there is no form, since form is immobile and the reality is movement. What is real is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of transition. (Bergson 1944, p. 23).*

An important point is that taking the role of “the old you” and your old relation to the old ball is a fundamentally inauthentic move, because it implies your artificially inhabiting (reifying) a space that no longer exists. In fact, in non-dualistic terms it never did exist as such, only through the active and temporary creation of spontaneous consciousness. The “old” ball of clay cannot change, because it is always new. And again, the feeling of change comes about as you are lured by yourself into believing that the ball was a stable entity. As a last objection, however, experience itself certainly changes, so at least there must be some sort of epistemological change? But from a practical philosophical perspective this is impossible as your experience is never yours to clutch onto. Recalling the message from Heidegger’s (1996) hermeneutics, experience is not a thing from the past that might or might not be altered. Past experience is a process of momentary *construction of the past*, and it is always constructed from the present, so it does not change; it is simply made anew and anew through a process of “I” using memory “me” as a tool (Mead 1967).

Through non-dualist lenses it should be possible to see that the paradox of change is no more than a restatement of the problem of meaning and truth, and that as a root metaphor *meaning* is closer to practical reality than is change. Change is in one sense a meaningless and misleading construct because experience can only be comprehended as meaning; a concept which by its very nature implies incessant novelty: in Weickian (1995) terms, for example, an

enacted bracket is per definition temporary, so how can it change? A potential, desire or intention to make changes can be seen as another way of formulating free will or the spontaneous “I”: the capacity to inhabit and influence the present – to improvise. One cannot speak of either change or stability as such, only of that which *seems* to be stable and not. I shall refrain from repeating the intricacy of the ontological game, and merely point out that change versus stability is no exception in that regard: The debate of Parmenides and Heraclitus is a game of ontology in which “change” and “stability” are the game pieces. The paradox is resolved quite easily as change and stability are nothing more than reified constructs. Perhaps we need another root language for organizing, then, than the vocabulary of change, or more generally, of technical rationality?

Contrary to Tsoukas and Chia (2002) I suggest that *change* might *not* be a fruitful starting point for a practically relevant discussion of organizing. It provides no solid ground on which to erect a theory of organizing. At worst, change might through an endless regress of reductionism create as many obstacles and controversies as it overcomes, and as indicated, the language of improvisation can contribute to clearing up many of these. As pointed out in chapters one to four, many authors have made such an attempt but they do not seem to bring to the table a sufficiently integrated and generic understanding. Through the concept of “The improvising man” I hope to contribute to both a philosophically grounded and practically realistic alternative. Once again to sum up: in practical philosophy meaning is always authentic, it is novel, and it has always passed. Reality does not change; it merely *becomes* (Bergson 1944). It is not completely random, and not completely rigid. Thus, improvisation is not fundamentally about making changes; it is about acting and making (new) sense.

In order to see how an improvisatory language might further open new windows into the domain of organizing, I shall in the remaining theoretical reflections use improvisation as a framework to discuss some of the most significant administrative topics in organizing theory. Hopefully, it will become clear how from an improvisatory angle these can be rephrased and rearranged. More specifically, the concepts of routine, structure, plan and system will be analysed. A key insight is that practical organizing goes beyond either-or dichotomies (i.e. improvisation *or* plan, improvisation *or* structure, improvisation *or* routine, and improvisation *or* system). As organizing is seen as a process of improvisation, organizing might indeed involve high degrees of, say, structure and routine (see chapters eight to ten). For instance, routine is not seen as categorically different from improvisation, but as a sensemaking tool to

be utilized in context through improvisation. As another example of the following discussion, “blind routinization” is understood as a contra-improvisatory process of reconstructing the old for its own sake. But as action evolves through bodily gestures I argue that not even blind routinization manages to escape the emotional and spontaneous aspects of existence as explicated in “The improvising man”.

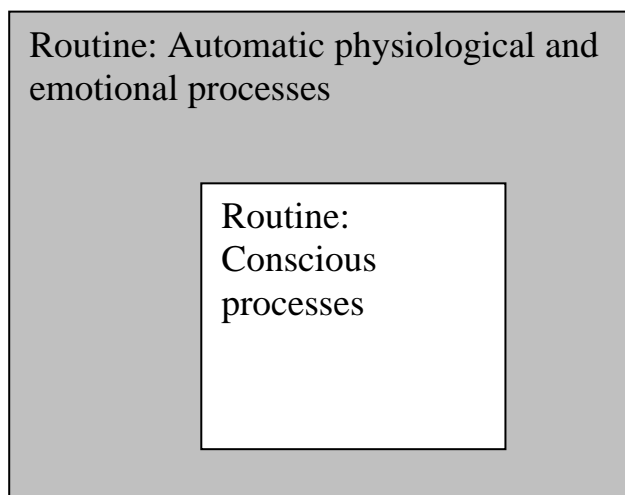
## Routines

One way of looking at organizations as processes is as ongoing routines (March and Simon 1993). How to understand routines, however, is not as clear-cut as it might seem, as pointed out by Pentland and Rueter (1994). Arguing that organizational routines “. . . occupy a critical position in organization theory” (p. 484), they end up defining routines as “. . . a set of functionally similar patterns” (p. 484). Four phrases are important in Pentland and Rueter’s ground-breaking definition: Firstly, “a set of” implies that routines come in plural; it is difficult to identify *one* routine. Rather, routines are understood as multiple, intertwined processes. Secondly, “functionally” would implicate that routines are not random, but rather instruments to accomplish some purpose. This separates Pentland and Rueter’s (1994) understanding from Nelson and Winter (1982), who are mainly occupied with the automatic and unconscious:

*The importance of the concept of organizational routine in our discussion and the parallel with individual skill have already been noted. We use “routine” in a highly flexible way, much as “program” (or, indeed, “routine”) is used in discussion of computer programming. It may refer to a repetitive pattern of activity in an entire organization, to an individual skill, or as an adjective, to the smooth uneventful effectiveness of such an organizational or individual performance. (Nelson and Winter 1982, p. 97).*

The portrayal of organizations as routines makes Nelson and Winter’s view both innovative and mind-sparking. Still, as explicitly pointed out by Pentland and Rueter (1994), they seem to bring to the table a rather narrow and vague understanding of the concept, as “. . . routines are essentially automatic, executed without explicit deliberation or choice” (p. 488). Imagine that the everyday patterns of brushing your teeth, driving to work, and having lunch, to name a few, should not be seen as routines, only because they might involve consciousness. Unlike Nelson and Winter (1982), Giddens (1996) underscores the importance of functionality and mindfulness, and argues that: “*Routine activities, as Wittgenstein made clear, are never just carried out in an automatic way*” (p. 39). As a consequence, in order to understand routines,

one has to understand their practical applicability in everyday situations, which hardly emerges on an unconscious level alone. Still, there is something puzzling in Giddens' statement, as he seems to have understood Wittgenstein in such a way that routines *cannot* be accomplished automatically. In other words, Giddens seems to have formulated something like an antagonism to Nelson and Winter (1982). A question emerges, then, as to how we should understand routines; as automatic patterns of behaviour or as highly conscious and repetitive action? Turning to practical philosophy for help, we soon realize that such an either-or dichotomy can be avoided. Routines must not be either automatic or conscious, but can be performed both consciously *and* automatically. Recall from the perspective of "The improvising man" that there is an emotional component in all cognitions, elucidating automatic behaviour as an inevitable element of any routine (see model 5.2). Automatic behaviour depicts the kind of existence which slips the mind, including the physiological capacity itself to make sense and act mindfully (see chapter four).



### ***Model 5.2 Routine***

In the way Pentland and Rueter (1994) define routines, *functionality* is of the greatest importance, though they do not explicitly preclude automatic behaviour from their definition. Still, one might ask what they mean by functionality. Does their view accord with Giddens', who claims that routines are never just automatic, but always epistemological and intentional undertakings? Or even more profoundly, is functionality meant to signify that routines play a role in providing identity and safety, as they are perceived to be some kind of catalysts of confidence? In order for this to be a fruitful theoretical point of departure, it is important to



note that sensemaking and *routinization* are not synonymous terms: sensemaking seen as a quest for identity (chapter four) is far more complex than merely the (blind) reconstruction of patterns. Had it not been so we would have been trapped in some sort of a Kafka-universe moving towards the future like a dumb machine or program. In short, meaning-making is more than routinization, as identity is more than reconstructed patterns of action. My point is that organizing involves routine behaviour, but there can be other ways of making the future predictable and the present comprehensible than creating and performing routines.

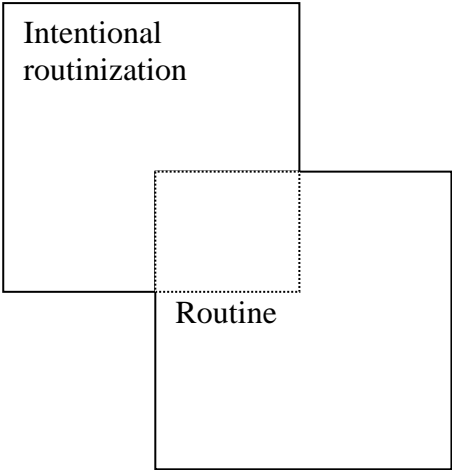
The two last words of Pentland and Rueter's (1994) definition have to some extent already been touched upon, but remain to be thoroughly explained, namely "similar" and "patterns". To understand what constitute similar patterns, just imagine an industrial machine producing repetitive motions, or a conveyor belt crowded with people repeating more or less the same movements continuously. As we imagine these scenarios it is hard to see how action can become routine before it is *actually and irreversibly performed* repeatedly. Furthermore, the process of mastering and performing routines can be perceived as learning, and once learned, the routine inhabits the individual body as a *potential for action*. Following Wittgenstein (1992, 1994), this kind of learning involves internalizing and trusting a rule and is inevitably part of everyday life.

In my view, to be generally applicable a definition of routines should be capable of capturing the individual as well as the social, the automatic as well as the attentive aspects of existence. Pentland and Rueter's (1994) definition goes a long way towards doing this, but does it go far enough? If seen as repetitive or similar patterns providing some contextual or philosophical (identity-preserving) function, we understand that to some extent routines must be automatic as they presuppose a human body as an agent performing them. Furthermore, routines can be learned and performed attentively, but can also be exclusively automatic, in which case "automatic processes" may be a better word (see model 5.2). Is routine understood as automatic behaviour captured by Pentland and Rueter's definition? If so, functionality must be interpreted on a philosophical level, for example as a bodily instrument to maintain life, through eating, breathing, sensemaking and so forth, somewhat in line with Dewey's (1929) portrait of "habit". When habits are interrupted, Dewey argues, consciousness is triggered as a capacity to solve problems – something which creates new habits through a continual process of learning. Consciousness, then, becomes the bodily, and consequently emotional, capacity

to embellish routine behaviour by solving the problem at hand; and as much as it alters the routine, it simultaneously grows from, and is made possible, by it:

*Organic and psycho-physical activities with their qualities are conditions which have to come into existence before mind, the presence and operation of meanings, ideas, is possible. They supply mind with its footing and connection in nature; they provide meanings with their existential stuff. (Dewey 1929, p. 290).*

From Dewey’s perspective, “routine-as-habit” has a fundamental function in human life, which he argues is inextricably tied to consciousness and its function of altering routine-as-habit when disrupted – a function that is crucial in ensuring the survival of the human organism in its environment. This is a speculative theory, however, as it implicates applying functions on nature: i.e. the body is born with a function to survive and even unconscious processes take part in this function. Searle (1995) provides a critique of such teleological philosophy, and argues that we cannot say anything objectively about the function of automatic bodily processes. Still, one can make speculations, and in Dewey’s (1929) case he merely seems to propose a theory of how and why people make theories (i. e. abduction).



**Model 5.3 Routinization**

If routine behaviour is sought after and performed intentionally I propose that *intentional routinization* can be a more specific term. (see model 5.3) This concept of routinization is inspired by Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, and captures the intention-in-action whether the outcome is accomplished or unaccomplished routine behaviour. For example, one

could want to routinize some process, but not succeed in doing so, or at least experience temporary problems in routinizing, in which case routinization describes the intent though not the actual outcome. Adversely, the intention can be successfully implemented in action, in which case routinization becomes routine. Needless to say, what is seen as successful routinization lies in the eyes of the beholder(s). Note that if the intention is *not* to routinize, routine behaviour might appear anyway, in which case there is an observed routine but no intentional routinization (see model 5.3).

In the further exploration of organizing as improvisation I bring with me an understanding that routines and intentional routinization mean different things. In order to create as sharp a linguistic tool as possible I separate the two, but as shown in model 5.3 I still recognize and uphold their mutual connection. Furthermore, I suggest that routines can be both attentive and inattentive, and in the first case there is inevitably an inattentive, emotional component. Another notation I make is that routines do not exist as such outside of action, only as temporary ideas or *rules* potentially governing (routinizing) behaviour (i.e. Bergson 1944). If rules are seen as internalized automatic behaviour, they only become real if acted out; alternatively they remain as a bodily unleashed potential. Finally, I recognize that routines can be largely social, and when they are, they take the form of institutionalized behaviour, which is also partly automatic and partly conscious/automatic, depending on the situation. This is of course the case with organizational routines. But I do not regard organizational routines as mathematically identical patterns, since routines (or any form of action) are never repeated in an exact manner (Mead 1967). Pentland and Rueter (1994) offer the following explanation: “*Rules are not deterministic, but they constraint the set of possibilities . . . . Routines are like ruts in a well-travelled road. They do not exactly determine where the next wagon will go, but neither do they merely describe where past wagons have gone*” (pp. 507-508).

Organizational routines, then, can be comprehended as reconstructed patterns of social (inter)action. In a way they are what can be recognized from one situation to another as organizational identity. As Scott (2001) puts it on the basis of neo-institutional theory: “*Routines are carriers that rely on patterned actions that reflect the tacit knowledge of actors: deeply ingrained habits and procedures based on inarticulated knowledge and beliefs*” (p. 80). I have already discussed in detail the aspect of consciousness in routines, so let us focus on the word *carriers* in Scott’s definition. Carrier is a word that is intriguing irrespective of whether routines are conceived as unconscious patterns or not. The word emphasizes that

something is brought on from one moment to another, that something is reconstructed *sufficiently similarly* to be recognized. This brings to mind the “me” in Mead’s (1967) vocabulary and “foreknowledge” in the hermeneutic language (Heidegger 1996).

Consequently, routines can be seen as reconstructed actions carrying the memory of organizational themes; or even more simple: Routines constitute the memory of organizations. I do not claim that an organization has a memory as such, but what we *associate with* an organization over time is to a significant degree found in its routines. This is, however, only a valid comprehension if actions are interpreted widely, in the pragmatist sense, to include thoughts, values and beliefs. Thus, routines would include “culture”, which is a far more comprehensive understanding than for example routines as technical work processes.

Some might argue that to include culture in routines is taking the concept too far. However, the point here is not to present a closed definition of routines or culture, but to highlight the understanding of routines as part of organizational memory, continuously shaping and being shaped by social (inter)action. Secondly, I want to suggest that directing attention to a routine will merely provide old knowledge. Organizations are far more than their routines, and by focusing on “organizing” as a verb we might come closer to capturing the nature of continuous organization-making, in which routines are amongst the stuff guiding and creating everyday organizational (inter)actions. Routines are in one sense conversational themes, and they do not exist unless they are thought of, talked about, acted upon; in short, unless life is breathed into them. In Ciborra’s (1999) words: “*At a sufficient level of granularity in the study of organizations, [improvisation] appears to be the very stuff market processes and hierarchical routines are made of.*” (p. 80).

Following Ciborra, as soon as routines are brought to life, they need to be reconstructed continually in an ongoing process of improvisation to continue existing, just like individual memory is nothing in itself but reconstructed ideas and associations brought to life in (unique) contexts (Mead 1967). Routines-in-practice are constructed and reconstructed through individual and social action in a present here-and-now. Thus, routines are inextricably tied to context. As bodies are never the same, routines can never be the same (Feldman 2000). Hence, I would argue there is much to be learned from how routines come to life in practice, and how they become associated with organizations. This, however, entails a much larger scope on organizing than only as routines. A routine will inevitably be old news, whereas organizing inevitably happens in real-time as a reflexive social process of improvisation. Thus, for

routinization to be effective it requires a context which emerges in a relatively predictable manner.

Intentional routinization is a *technical rational* form of action in which the aim is to reconstruct the old as scrupulously as possible. Routinization involves already having made up your mind as to what is the correct form of action: the next step is rigidly defined by the previous step, and if this sort of action is taken for granted, blind Routinization occurs. From an improvisational perspective, however, routines should never be taken for granted as they can be improved upon infinitely. To improvise on a routine means to continually evaluate it in light of the perceived best way of action taking context into consideration. *This means that even if action seems routine-like, the actual thought processes preceding or taking place in action can be improvisatory.* A change from blind routinization to organizing as improvisation requires the ongoing careful and attentive look of a practitioner reflecting in-action-on-action. It requires an improspective, investigative and diagnostic eye.

Generally, if you feel spontaneous you are spontaneous. The fact that some routine to the outsider seems relatively unchanged and non-impulsive has little to do with any lack of subjective novelty actually involved. As argued in chapter two, novelty might be seen as a feature of continually evolving time. It resides in every moment, in the fresh experience of individuals. Hence, if old ways of doing things are continually chosen as still relevant, not to say the best way of acting, the process, however routine-like in form, is initiated and realized as improvisation. Routines could, of course, be reconstructed unwittingly, in which case improvisation does not occur. Improvised organizing, however, involves realizing that routines must be chosen anew again and again and adapted intelligently to emerging contexts: they must be *made* to work (Orlikowski 1996; Ciborra 1999; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). Improvisation presupposes regarding routine as temporal, as something to use and reflect upon and that can (and will inevitably) always be altered.

In organizing processes routines can provide a sense of security (Molander 1996). Possessing a toolbox of routines means being prepared, and knowing that a routine lies readily at hand can contribute to pushing the practitioner forward onto new terrain (Czarniawska 1999); not to mention if something unexpected occurs, in which case routines can be rapidly mobilized to help clear the situation. Again, the improviser does not simply apply the routine acontextually, but reconstructs and acts it out intelligently. For example, she might start acting

out the routine if only to see how far it can go, to see if it works or if it needs modification. In that way the routine works as a tool, as a grammar (Pentland and Reuter 1994). Using routine as a grammar implies learning from the resistance of physical and social factors, adjusting behaviour (and routine) accordingly, and finding appropriate ways to act.

In sum, I regard routines as part of what we recognize as an organization over time; routines translate the past into future. *As a noun a routine can be a temporary mental structure (a tool; a rule) potentially guiding future action, and as a verb it can be the practical realization of such structure in a context, in which case there is an inevitable component of improvisation.* Organizational routines subsist as much in the spine as in the mind, as the body can remember in other ways than what is necessarily verbalized. But to concentrate on routine patterns alone (thus seeing routines as analytical entities) as the main constituent to organizing, is to neglect the spontaneous “I” of the present which continually makes routines come to life.

<b>A. Intention</b>	<b>B. Activity</b>	<b>C. Practical consequence</b>
1. Contextual sensemaking and action, which might imply 2. (below)	Improvisational organizing	Varying degrees of repetitiveness (routine), but always some degree of spontaneity.
2. Reconstructing the old from contextual grounds	Improvisational, intentional routinization	
3. Reconstructing the old without considering context	Reified/blind routinization	

**Table 5.0 Routine in practice**

In line with Pentland and Rueter (1994) I hold that routines in the strict technical sense do not exist in practice; routines are the practical realization of memorized action and are subjected to hermeneutical processes of *becoming* (see column C in table 5.0). Organizing emerges as a process of mindful action, as improvisation, and to the extent that actions are reconstructed similarly organizing becomes routine (see row 1 in table 5.0). And if organizing in some situation involves some intention of reconstructing the old, we might talk about Routinization. In that sense Row 2 in table 5.0 *is part of row 1* to the extent that Routinization is intended in a particular situation of improvisatory considerations. Row 3, however, is very different from the first two as in this case routinizing is followed blindly, reflecting an act of reification.

## Organizational structure

Structure is a recurrent theme in organization theory, and to its students structure is often presented as the skeleton upon which an organization is built or as a map of formal relationships (Daft 2001). Structure in this sense can be studied in artefacts such as organization charts and diagrams, and much like a freezing-up of the famous image of Xenon's arrow in flux, structure reflects a snapshot of the organization (Weisbord 1988) as it is (descriptively) or as it should be (normatively). *Descriptively*, for example, structure can be used to communicate the different functions making up the organization, and as functions are tied together they create systems. Consequently, there is strict logic behind the way structure is built up, which is again related to the different tasks the organization performs at any time. *Normatively*, as it projects an image of the functions that should be fulfilled and how these relate to each other, structure can be seen as an administrative instrument or as a design of systems to ensure effective communication.

As a background and inspiration for how structure can be conceptualized from an improvisatory view, I propose borrowing from Scott (1981), who categorizes two ways of seeing structure: one behavioural and one normative. In the behavioural model structure is seen as patterns of behaviour, which resembles Grennes' (1999) view on structure as frozen channels of communication and coordination. In Scott's normative model structure represents a value or incentive to act in a certain manner. As a practical example of the two denotations we might picture a set of interconnected organizational functions that encourage people to interact (normative structure), from which social systems of communication and action might emerge (behavioural structure). What is important in Scott's argumentation is what I spot as an accentuation of structure as process in the sense that structure emerges through human practice, as opposed to the normative model where structure is merely an idea guiding action. Consequently, for a structure to become practically real, people must realize their systemic roles and act accordingly, and as will be shown, this is at the core of how structure can be related to improvisation.

Scott's point of departure bears close resemblance to Hatch (1999) and to Bosworth and Kreps (1986), who offer some very intriguing insights into structure-as-process versus structure-as-a-noun. As a noun, structure can provide an overview of the systemic character of organization, but it cannot reflect the organization as such. Hatch's (1999) and Bosworth and

Kreps's (1986) process view entails that the organization cannot be pointed out as a thing, as it is continuously moving on. Consequently, Hatch argues that structure-in-practice is never 100% mathematically accurate, but *ambiguous, temporary* and *emotional*. As a noun, structure may be stored as an organizational artefact, say, as a chart or a flow diagram, but it exists in practice only to the degree that it is realized through human action in the becoming. Pursuing this line of thought structure as a noun can prove itself useful as a sensemaking instrument via its power to facilitate an intersubjective image of the organization, but it cannot ensure total control. Hence we see a close connection between structure and routines, as the former in the prescriptive sense can be seen as an unleashed potential of the latter; as an idea, or in the vocabulary of Pentland and Rueter (1994), a rule: "*Routines occupy the crucial nexus between structure and action, between organization as an object and organizing as a process.*" (p. 484). A rule may guide and govern activity (routinization), and the more so, the more visible the routines. Likewise, in the descriptive sense structure can be seen as a snapshot of organization and its routines.

An implication from practical philosophy is that a rule cannot be perfectly reconstructed, either in mind or in action; which inevitably makes practice somewhat different from theory. No objectified structure can capture the richness of actual practice, though it can provide sufficiently adequate images. An objectified structure is an abstract and temporal idea, whilst an organization evolves through organizing processes. Organizing as improvisation may therefore be seen as *structuring efforts*, and as such it may vary from the fairly precise fulfilment of some formal structure to the utmost chaos. In practical organizing there might not even be a structure to begin with, at least not a formal one. From this we can derive an important non-dualistic message: structure should not be seen as an *ontologically objective* entity. Although it might be seen as a thing, it cannot be proven to exist in itself. It is, rather, a guiding label, one that can be used to communicate an intention. Structure is only a restraint-jacket to the extent that it is allowed to be so by practitioners. Structure is a tool of improvisation.

The improviser does not look for the ideal organizational structure, Hatch (1999) argues. Instead, structure is thought of as a process, as a verb; or if seen as a noun, it comprises a tool, a point of departure (Weick 2001). As follows, the improviser asks herself how she can use the structure at hand to solve problems and create novelty. As such the improviser is taken up with finding out what she can get away with or how structure can aid a problematic situation,



more than with how structure limits and controls action. Structure is not sacred in any way, it is not some taken for granted power that should be obeyed, but an instrument to play with in continuously evolving context, something which indicates that no universally *right* or ideal structure can be singled out. The only conceivable Right structure is the one that is chosen continuously, which cannot be technically identical from situation to situation.

If structure is thought of as either process (verb) or entity (noun) it cannot be taken out of context and studied objectively. Hence, from a practical philosophical point of view structure cannot be proven to possess immanent or ontological characteristics. Rather, as suggested by Hatch (1999), it is an ambiguous and temporal phenomenon which through interaction can both enable and limit further action. Consider a metaphorical example from jazz music: Weick (2001) states that some melodies are more open to interpretation and elaboration than others, as if there were certain features intrinsic to some melodies that objectively define them as more or less open to embellishment. Applied to organizations, this could imply that some structures, for example flat or organic structures, per se are more flexible than others. Similarly, as argued by Thompson (2005), some structures can be thought of as seeding while others as controlling. I trace, however, in both Weick and Thompson a sense of determinism, as a possibility of structures having objective characteristics seems to be taken for granted. Needless to say, this collides with the improvisational theoretical frame, as structure cannot be singled out as more or less *anything* per se. It only comes to life in a dyadic and reflexive relationship: not as an autonomous entity, but as a constructed and temporary object. The extent to which structure nurtures knowledge creation; to which it provides a seeding mechanism; to which it opens up frozen dialogue, is decided and negotiated on an ongoing basis between an agent and her fore-knowledge on the one hand, and the structure as it appears in her mind in a situated here-and-now on the other. Whether a structure allows for more elaborate creativity than others depends on the context at hand. A seemingly fertile structure may prove to be controlling in practice if it is perceived a certain way. Hence, the clue in improvisation is *how* structure is looked upon, *how* it is perceived.

As an opponent to the ontology game (see p. 52) I suggest talking about epistemological rather than ontological structural characteristics. This way the perceived difference between different things in real life is taken seriously, but with less danger of reification. This may, of course, be the point Weick (2001) makes – that some melodies are so rigidly *culturally defined* that it seems impossible to alter them. Expanding further on the jazz metaphor, there

might be certain cultural traits deeply engrained in the way music is commonly perceived, in the sense that Wittgensteinian (1992, 1994) language game rules bind the number of feasible ways of interpretation. Having become used to a certain system of musical rules and structures, of musical scales, harmonies and even rhythmical patterns, the perimeters of what is considered suitable and appropriate are to a large extent predetermined. For example, I would argue that some harmonies and rhythms seem more natural to the Western ear than others. An explanation for this could be that certain musical underpinnings work as somewhat invisible parameters controlling musical composing, execution and listening. It could be that in parts of our culture there is an emphasis on the 1st and 3rd in a 4/4 beat, whereas in other cultures the emphasis is on the 2nd and the 4th beat. Such differences may not seem all that important, but then again, one might argue that they comprise quite a significant difference between two cultures. Such musical structures do not even have to be recognized wittingly by cultural members, but might emerge largely unconsciously as bodily engraved patterns guiding musical perception. Given this, perhaps it is not so strange that some melodies seem more open to interpretation than others. The tools for deciding what are viable perceptions are already deeply imprinted in the individual body (Dewey 1929). Thus, possible ways of interpretation are both limited and enabled by structural tools.

Imagine taking a picture of a family holiday moment. By taking the picture you try to freeze the situation, but as soon as you do, the moment is gone. It can be re-experienced, however, through looking at the picture, but the genuine moment is forever lost only to be continually replaced by new ones (Bergson 1944). Likewise, formal structures as they appear on charts and diagrams are like pictures of an ideal reality: One can wish for them to be similar to the “actual” structure of some organization at a given time, but as the actual structure only exists in the becoming (Bergson 1944, Hatch 1999) the chance is less than minimal. The real structure of an organization fades away immediately just like the holiday moment. Structure can to some extent be captured through thorough mapping, but as soon as this is done, the organization has already moved on. Consequently, one might ask how such mapping can be of any value. Firstly, mapping and pinning down structures can be valuable as they provide some intersubjective image of organizational reality, thus forming a basis for creating a sense of mutual identity (Weick 2001). Secondly, mapping structures can be seen as a way of striving for contextual understanding: Looking for structure is a way to be improspective and context-sensitive, thus creating tools for the further process of making sense of the organization. Some organizational characteristics can be recognizable from one situation to

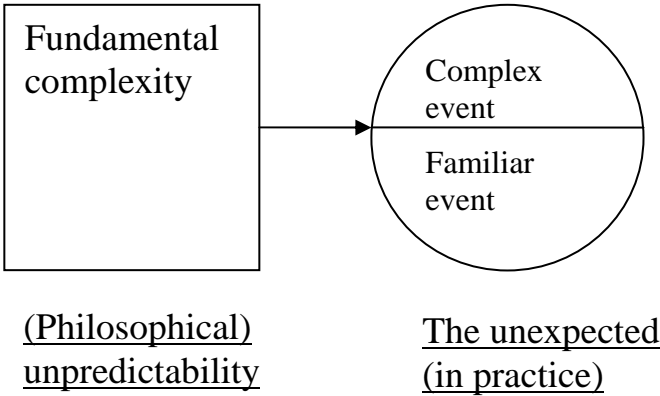
another, and knowing about these can be crucial. Once structure is constructed it can provide guidance in the further process of improvisation. However, there is a long way from providing guidance to becoming objectively stable or even untouchable and sacred. Structure (as a noun) is something to take seriously in organizing, but not for granted. There is no such thing as the right structure, just as there is no such thing as The Context. Structures are more or less useful; they are tools of improvised organizing (Ciborra 1999).

### **(Un)predictability and plans**

As it is a key factor in theories of organizing (for example predictions, plans and analyses), I want to give the issue of time special concern. More specifically “The improvising man” implies seeing unpredictability as a natural and inevitable aspect of everyday organizing. Whereas momentarily experienced complexity indicates the limits of control and structure in the *present*, unpredictability indicates the limits of planning and *future* analyses (Weick 1995). Nobody knows what the future holds: the future is unpredictable. The keyword is “knowledge”, as not knowing is equivalent to complexity. Not to know what *will* happen is closely related to not knowing what *is* happening, however, since I view sensemaking as essentially improspective. Hence, unpredictability can be thought of as a form of complexity (the less predictable the more complex). It is important to realize that as a phenomenon unpredictability creates real time complexity, but it is just as important to see how real time complexity produces unpredictability. This is non-dualism in a new wrapping; since meaninglessness knows no boundaries in either space or time, complexity and unpredictability concern one and the same phenomenon. Actually, space and time can be seen as enacted products of meaninglessness, so to speak. In Purser and Petranker’s (2005) words, “*Organizing does not occur in time but is time*” (p. 195). In that sense, time and space are labels employed for the purpose of making the unpredictable predictable. They are constructs that align with our experience of reality, but this does not mean that they should be perceived as constants (Ciborra 1999). In practical philosophy space and time are *root concepts*, not ontological reflections.

I see unpredictability and *the unexpected* as closely related phenomena. Unpredictability is about standing in the here-and-now thinking about the future and realizing the limitations to foretelling. It is a philosophical expression used for labelling unique characteristics of life and the way it typically unfolds. In a practitioner’s context foretelling could be anything from plain everyday anticipation via planning to market analyses. But what about the unexpected,

then, what does it stand for? The approach followed here is that the unexpected depicts something that *actually happens* in the here-and-now that was not (and maybe could not be) foreseen or anticipated; much like a surprise (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). Just about anything might happen in the future, and there is no way to be 100 % prepared. Thus, the unexpected is a logical consequence of unpredictability, but whereas the latter is inevitably a deeply complex matter, the former might actually be quite easy to handle. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) do not, however, separate between different shades of complexity in surprises. For example, when something unexpected happens (emerges), one might experience being quite well prepared. When a friend decides to pay you a visit it may come as a surprise, but at the same time it can be a delightful and largely non-complex experience. And if a glass falls down from a counter unexpectedly and shatters, it is hardly a very mentally challenging event (unless, of course, the glass was a symbol of something meaningful which has now metaphorically fallen to pieces). Studying more closely the quality of the unexpected it is my point that only when a surprise is *concurrently vague or meaningless* does it produce complexity. Then again, on the basis of practical philosophy every episode of unexpectedness represents an *indication* of fundamental unpredictability and complexity, even if the episode itself turns out to be quite familiar and simple (model 5.4).



**Model 5.4 Unpredictability and the unexpected**

One cannot prepare specifically for what one does not know will happen, and thus theory differs from practice. The practical *how* to go about a task is always to some extent unknown and undefined (Ciborra 1999). There may be a *what* or a *that*, stating a theoretical aim or ambition (a plan), but these can only become real as an authentic *how*, which is never 100% predictable (Mead 1967).

*For sure, plans and procedures matter, but they just constitute the tip of the iceberg. Even more relevant is the drifting mass at the bottom, which provides the raw materials, the leftovers out of which plans are put together, particular problem definitions are selected and means-ends chains assembled. The improvised component embedded in structured decision-making comes from the highly circumstantial fashion in which the bottom of the iceberg is brought to bear the situation at hand, the relevant problem formulation, the solution chosen and **the way** [my italics] it gets implemented. (Ciborra 1999, p. 85).*

One might project upon the future an image, an intention, a plan or a design stating *what to do*, thereby consolidating that it is actually to be done. Still, from an improvisatory strand, plans are merely tools; they must be worked with, adapted, elaborated on, renewed and put into contextual action. In this sense, plans are sources of inspirations and not restraint jackets (Orlikowski and Hofman 1997; Ciborra 1999; Hatch 1999).

Much like structure, *plan* is amongst the most prominent of the organizing tools in linear theory. Indeed, a plan might be seen as a form of structure, except that it is directed towards the future rather than the present. A structure may be, for instance, an organizational skeleton; a plan is a projection of *future* organization. Following Schütz's (1967) concept of the future perfect, a plan is a projection of an activity ". . . as if it were already over and done with and lying in the past" (Schütz 1967, p. 61). Making plans is part of the process of creating linearity and predictability in everyday organizational life, and as a sensemaking activity it contributes to establishing intersubjective coherence and identity. Also inspired by Schütz (1967), Weick (1995) sums up beautifully the relations between sensemaking, planning and action:

*Strategic plans are a lot like maps. They animate and orient people. Once people begin to act (enactment), they generate tangible outcomes (cues) in some context (social), and this helps them discover (retrospect) what is occurring (ongoing), what needs to be explained (plausibility), and what should be done next (identity enhancement). Managers keep forgetting that it is what they do, not what they plan, that explains their success. They keep giving credit to the wrong thing – namely, the plan – and having made this error, they spend more time planning and less time acting. (p. 55).*

Being strongly guided by Weick (1995), my improvisational perspective entails regarding plans as creative points of departure rather than as control instruments. To have a plan is

synonymous to being prepared for the future, but no preparation is final. Rather, to prepare for future scenarios solely by making plans is a way of showing up somehow empty-handed. In some cases, however, the future might turn out almost exactly as planned, and to the extent that this can be accounted for in advance, planning is of utmost importance. Moreover, plans comprise a most effective way to signal an intention for the future. There is, however, a danger of *over-planning* for future events. One might, for example, be dazzled by and somehow get stuck in the beauty of a detailed plan, and start seeing it as a given. Or one might be seduced by the process of planning to such an extent that details are carved out on a level that is more abstract than probable. When this happens one is cast into practical blindness, in which case there is less chance for the plan to actually work (Kotter 1986): If the plan is not adapted to the context at hand, but is sooner implemented and forced onto it, its practical workability is threatened. One can never plan for the unexpected, but a good plan is an important back-up (tool).

When a plan is produced it becomes a tool of improvisation. A plan can be continually revised. It can be edited and re-edited infinitely, without this necessarily influencing practice. Hence it would seem that planning as an organizing activity differs strongly from improvisation, which is irreversible in character. Planning as a practically detached activity does not change the world; improvisation does. A rather intricate theoretical point is indicated here, namely that planning as a social undertaking *is* an act of improvisation (Ciborra 1999), but its “irreversible” effects can be reversed. This is not as paradoxical as it sounds, for social planning is a way of thinking out loud. It is about improvisation, prospection and retrospection, but even if it happens in abstract terms, it is rooted in the actions of interacting individuals, and thus it comes about as local improvisation. Likewise, thinking must be acted out to become real; to become organizing. But planning entails improvisation in somewhat artificial circumstances: The process itself is improvisation, but the effects can be revised through further improvisation as one is not doomed to act as one thinks. Different scenarios can be tested out before they are presented to the outside world, and in organizing terms “outside” means the world outside of the planning arena. And with regard to the outside world, the more short term the planning, the purer the improvisation. Herein lays another interesting aspect: if organizing is genuinely improvised, planning may come about as a *result*. This is merely a restatement of saying that improvisation means to do what the situation demands, and if planning is possible and desirable from an improvisational perspective, it should be done to the greatest extent possible. According to Shütz (1967), the only future that can be

mentally projected is an abstract one, but still, as one possesses functional theories about emerging contexts, a lot can be said about what is to happen. The following implications can thus close this discussion on planning and improvisation: Firstly, in the process of planning, recall that reality is unpredictable, and be observant as to when to draw the line. Secondly, a plan is a tool of improvised organizing; philosophically speaking it is a temporary structure not a restraint-jacket.

### **The system: A metaphor or an analogy for organization?**

As systems thinking has had tremendous influence on organization theory, organizations have become associated with various kinds of systems and networks (Andersen 2000; Fauske 2000; Stacey 2001, 2003; Griffin 2002; Czarniawska 2005). Although systems can be powerful metaphors, can they be said to reflect objective reality? Is it not so that as static expressions they run the danger of being outdated? My point is that often when we think of a system, we think of it as a given; and when we talk about networks, we might over time begin to see them as connected pieces of an objective structure. Using systemic metaphors extensively might over time contribute to an overly rigid conception of organizational reality: We might start seeing the system as a real thing transcending organizational members. To facilitate further expansion of this argument, however, I want to take a small detour and make a brief study of the concept of “metaphor”. My reason for this stems from a belief that the great impact from systems thinking on organization theory has to do with the way reification can turn metaphors into analogies.

I start with Hatch (1999), who, on the basis of Morgan (1986), explains that a metaphor:

*. . . engages and involves a broader experience base than do other approaches to theorizing, in that metaphor works with the total imagination of the theorist. That is, metaphor does not simply operate within the analytical range of imagination (where Giddens and his followers focus), but calls on emotional and aesthetic capacities as well. (Hatch 1999, p. 76).*

As implied, metaphors might over time change into something more like an analogy, or indeed, an ideology (Morgan 1986). For example, one might start out describing organizations as systems in order to explain certain aspects of what one perceives as “structures-on-the-move”, so to speak. In the beginning, such a comparison between systems and organizations may spark many new thoughts, but after a while these thoughts might change in character. Initially, there is perhaps a creative and open process of making new

models to understand and organize the world, but soon the process may become more like a reified technical rational one of taking the metaphor for granted as objective reality. What has happened is that the original sense-sparking tool has been turned into an objective parallel to nature.

Earlier I talked about the phenomenon of frozen metaphors under the label *reification*. In short, reification means that the objects of sensemaking, the brackets of consciousness, are made absolute (Dewey 1929). Berger and Luckmann (1991) argue that this is a tendency latent in the process of creating identity and meaning. Practical philosophy, however, induces that no significant symbol can ever become more than a tool for communication, but as reification draws a veil over our eyes we are apt to believe that objects are mere reflections of a given universe. Seen as tools, objects work as metaphors: they potentially open up new perspectives and alter perceptions (Czarniawska 2005). But if seen as ontological correspondents or reflections they *close* the universe, making us believe that they are analogies to the world as such.

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) an analogy is different from a metaphor in that it is more structured and emphasizes what is similar between two phenomena, whereas a metaphor is used to describe something as different and somewhat new from something else; to shed new light on an object (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). In both cases there is an element of comparison; but in the first the comparison is closed and technical rational, whereas in the latter it is open and mind-sparking. With regard to practical philosophy, we are now implicitly addressing the most basic traits of human sensemaking: using something as an instrument to create and understand something else. Without metaphors the world would become a repetitive and machine-like place, and without analogies it could potentially become chaotic and equivocal.

With reference to organization theory, some theorists have according to Griffin (2002), Morgan (1986) and Andersen (2000) taken the metaphor of organizations as systems to the extreme, not seeing it as a metaphor but as a mere reflection of biological reality. As examples of this Griffin (2002) names Wheatley (1999), Lewin and Regine (2000), and Pascale et al. (2000). What might happen, then, is a subtle change from using the organic systems metaphor as a tool to reifying it and making it a normative standard for organizational action: i.e. since the organization *is* a biological mechanism, we *should* do this and that for



ideological purposes. Behind an ideology can be revealed a rigid belief system. Consequently, an ideology is more likely to govern and control thoughts and actions than to open up new perspectives. Mead (1967) refers to this phenomenon as “cult values”, arguing that socially negotiated values might become reified as unquestioned rules of conduct. Building on Mead, Griffin (2002) offers the following explanation: “. . . *when organizations are said to be caring, or to have a soul, then the organization is being idealized as a cult.*” (p. 117).

If metaphors transform into analogies there is good reason for taking a critical position towards them, Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) argue. Conversely, to stop asking questions, to take metaphors for granted, is to create fixed and uncritical impressions of the composition of the world. In a metaphorically laden conversation fantasy and play define the game, but if the opposite is the case, as is the case of cult values, the rules must be obeyed, leaving little room for creative elaboration. In that regard it is easy to see how cult values may produce action that stands out as appalling in retrospect (Clegg et al. 2006; Griffin 2002). If cult values are perceived to transcend the individual, a strong cohesive feeling of belonging can emerge, in which case the ideology both justifies and implicitly takes responsibility for action that would otherwise be unthinkable. A typical example from history concerns the Nazi dominion (Clegg et al. 2006). Other, and more recent, examples are organizations dumping barrels of poison or committing fraud (Griffin 2002; Ferrell et al. 2008).

Transcending cult values into an (unquestioned) ideology is similar to reifying the organization into an autonomous system or whole, and they both imply moulding metaphor into analogy. I identify severe contradictions in this. Take, for instance, the case of autonomy: Griffin (2002) points out that an autonomous system cannot be reduced into equally autonomous bits and pieces. Recalling the discussion about change earlier in this chapter, autonomy in the dualist sense can either exist or not exist. If a system is perceived to have autonomy, the parts making up the system, the individuals, must inevitably be un-autonomous and in this regard un-free because they are *subordinates* of the system. In extreme systems thinking, Griffin argues, individuals answer to a transcendent system and are subjected to its all-encompassing power; and following Griffin’s argument it is now possible to tie the discussion on freedom, systems thinking and autonomy together into a synthesis: Reified systems thinking implies a logic of superiority that deprives the individual of her autonomy and positive freedom. In this sense systems thinking implies an either-or approach to organizing, i.e. *either* autonomy and freedom *or* not. However, reification of this kind can be

balanced from the point of view of “The improvising man”, as this involves taking a metaphorical rather than an analogical stance. “The improvising man” indicates that autonomy, along with freedom, is merely a metaphorical tool to describe the sensation of free will (i.e. Mead’s “I”) and the ability to make a difference. In this light organization portrayed as system is brought back to its presumed point of origin – as a metaphor rather than as a facet of some objectively given entity. Organizing as improvisation might make use of systems as a tool for some purpose, and might take the form of systemizing, but philosophically speaking a system is nothing more than a temporal image; a metaphor.

In the closing stages of these reflections on organizing as improvisation I would like to end with some reflections in same domain as I started; namely change. There is one point which is particularly easy to understand when it is contrasted with systems thinking. It regards so-called “re-organizing”, a concept that has much in common with a reified systems perspective. Consider how something can ever be re-organized if it is not perceived as static or stable to begin with. I must be careful not to exaggerate the tendency to understand organizations as objective entities in everyday life, but nonetheless, talking about re-organizing on a daily basis might catalyze precisely such a tendency. From the stance of practical philosophy organizing is a *continuous* process of improvisation and involves creating and re-creating objects, and only to the extent that such objects are clutched on to can there be talk of re-organizing. Otherwise, re-organizing might contribute to uphold a view on systems as something stable and predictable whilst paradoxically encouraging instability and change. Organizing as improvisation, however, is not about ontological change; it is about practical sensemaking and contextual wisdom in the becoming (Bergson 1944).

### **Organizing and management – the impact from systems thinking**

Who can be pointed out as responsible for the ongoing organizing processes in everyday organizational life? The answer to this rather broad question is of course everybody; to the degree that one takes part in organizational processes, one is responsible for organizing. But if the question is slightly rephrased it obtains a somewhat different edge: Who are those put in charge of and held responsible for organizing processes and for making them work on a generic level? Answering this question touches upon the aspect of authority and leadership. Not just any form of leadership, but leadership of the formal and official kind. The role of formally being in charge of organizing is traditionally thought of as management, a role that entails using and utilizing the instruments of organizing to achieve efficiency and success. In

other words, managers can in systemic terms be thought of as a hierarchical and formally superior class with special tasks including prediction, planning and strategizing, control and evaluation: in short, attending to systemic considerations and roles (Urwick 1934).

The perspective I pursue in this discussion implies seeing the manager as a defined part of a formal system or structure. A manager is an abstract conception; a formalized role or responsibility. The manager is responsible for making the system work; for reporting and fixing aberrations. Note how decisive the systems metaphor is here: this has to do with the accentuation of formality which is caused by the objectivation of a system. Picking up the discussion from chapter one, systems thinking can be seen as providing a link between management and a linear view on organizing: organizations are systems in which management is performed through linear actions. From a systems perspective, talking about organizing becomes a way of talking about management, because traditionally, the instruments of organizing are assigned to managers.

In the early perspectives on management, systems thinking is taken to the extreme. Historically, the principles of management emerge from a philosophical tradition favouring normative and acontextual approaches. Fredrick W. Taylor's (1967) *The Principles of Scientific Management* is a vivid example of this, where the references to modern natural science are obvious.

*The period from 1890 to 1920 has been called the Progressive Era precisely because of the belief that progress was itself a natural law. The progress of an individual through the jungles of capitalistic competition reflected an underlying biological truth as surely as the progress of technology reflected new discoveries in engineering, physics, and chemistry. It was into this context, characterized by a new romance with science, a profound belief in progress, an urgent demand for coordination and efficiency in increasingly complex and large-scale organizations, and a growing professionalization of the managerial class, that Fredrick Taylor's scientific management approach was born. (Zuboff 1988, pp. 229-230).*

In the Progressive Era the role of management became one of identifying the hidden truth – the one best way to satisfy strict criteria of efficiency (Zuboff 1988). And although Taylor's management principles were somewhat nuanced through Elton Mayo's (1945) research on psychological and social dynamics, managers were still to employ cool, rational thought to manipulate workers and obtain efficiency:

*An understanding of human relations could be transmitted in codified technical language and as such should become an important part of business education, along with other technical matters like finance and production. (Zuboff 1988, p. 234).*

Systems thinking is predominant in the kind of technical rationality employed by Taylor and Mayo, and it constitutes the core around which linear organization theory is built.

Characteristic in early theory is the way technical rationality is elevated as the supreme form of knowledge reserved for the few: the managers. From this point of view organizing becomes an undertaking of a superior class. Using rational thought managers are supposed to analyse, calculate and predict and then decide upon the correct way of action. Systems thinking therefore encourages a conception of organizing not as sensemaking, but as decision-making. The actual turning of thoughts into action is assigned to subordinates.

Imagine, as was discussed in the previous section, that systems thinking is exaggerated, in which case the manager is not only superior with regard to higher rank but also in a transcendent manner. The system is no longer just a tool, but an elevated structure. Formality is more than the official way of doing things; it is taken for granted. In this ideal systemic world complete control and prediction is possible and desirable. In other words, the systems metaphor has become an analogy, making organizing synonymous to management. Some have described such a conceptual move as *Managerialism* (Carter and Mueller 2002; Mueller and Carter 2005, 2007). In Managerialism there is no room for leaders other than formal managers, for they are the only ones capable of uncovering the ontological objective. From a managerialist perspective the ideal manager is very similar to the natural scientist who seeks a distance from his research subject in order to study and manipulate it objectively. It is in this light I see Schön's (1991) notes on technical rationality and management science and their massive dissemination in the modern world:

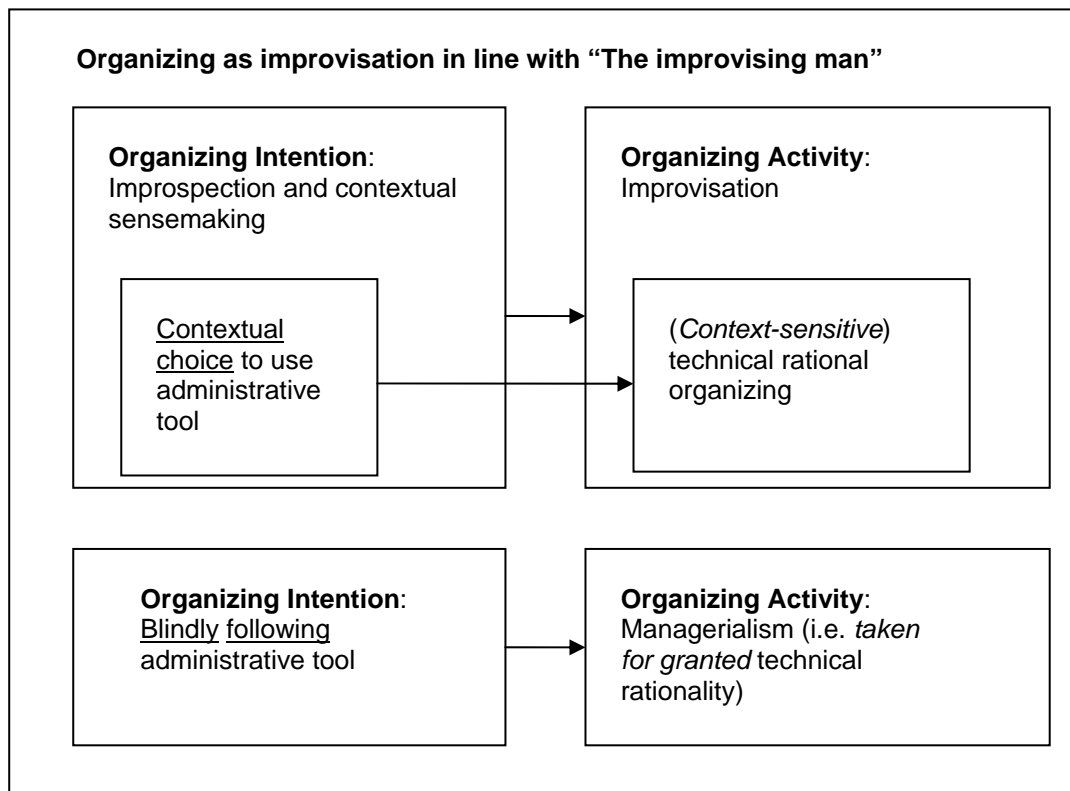
*What was once true only of industrial production has now become true of sales, personnel selection and training, budgeting and financial control, marketing, business policy, and strategic planning. Technical panaceas have appeared on the scene with clocklike regularity, old ones making way for new. Value analysis, management by objectives, planning programming and budgeting, and zero-based budgeting are only a few of the better-known examples. Even the human relations movement, which had originated as a reaction against Taylorism, has tended increasingly to present itself as a body of techniques. Yet in spite of the increasingly powerful status of management science and technique, managers have remained*

*persistently aware of important areas of practice which fall outside the bounds of technical rationality. (pp. 238-239).*

To this day management and systems thinking have clung to each other, and as pointed out earlier, theoreticians have projected organizations as systems in a broad set of ways. It seems that we are easily seduced by systems images, and we need only point to the best-selling success of Peter Senge's (1990) *The fifth discipline* to realize this. Quite a few assumptions in Senge's book are worth questioning, for example the presumed ability of leaders to predict and control organizational reality. In Senge's view, the most important quality of management is to identify magical leverage points, which makes the manager capable of controlling the system (organization), to predict its future movements and steer its direction. I am, however, struck by the many contradictions here; for how can one predict a given future whilst still having a real option of making future changes? Secondly, how can a manager be (magically) capable of taking an objective role and in the way of the natural scientist control what she herself is part of? Thirdly, how come only the manager has got such capacities, and not other organizational members? And finally, how can a manager presumably have the ability to switch between autonomous and unautonomous roles, a gesture that even Parmenides pointed out as impossible?

I shall not dwell upon Senge's magical archetypes, only point out that systems thinking seems to encourage myths of prediction and control. Even though there are areas in organizational life where control is appreciated, it can be exaggerated, and systems thinking might cause such exaggeration when taken from metaphor to analogy. From an improvisatory view a system is a predefined pattern of functions that can be appropriate in some regards and less appropriate in others. And the danger lies in believing that systemic principles can be applied to organizing as such, as if organizing were a management science rather than a creative art (Schön 1991; Petranker 2005) – in which case systems thinking would be taken for granted and organizing would lapse into Managerialism, leaving little room for improvisation. As a normative mindset, then, improvisation and Managerialism are mutually exclusive. Organizing practice as improvisation does not categorically exclude the use of, say, management models, but rather than being taken for granted, these should be subjected to contextual scrutiny.

## Organizing as improvisation – some implications



### *Model 5.5 Organizing as improvisation in practice*

In this chapter I have built my argumentation on the premise that organizing can be seen as a process of improvisation conducted in organizational settings (see model 5.5). Improvisation is thus inevitably a part of organizing; it is in a sense the process in which organizing comes alive; but the degree of improvisational purity will vary between contexts – sometimes it will be more explicit, other times less so, and as an example of the latter is the case of (context-sensitive) technical rational organizing where the degree of spontaneity is high, but the genuineness of creativity is low (see model 5.5). In other words organizing has not been found to be a question of *either* improvisation *or* technical rationality, but a question of how different forms of technical rationality are perceived and utilized – as something temporary or as something solid. More specifically, from their status as nouns, I have shown how on the basis of “The improvising man” routines, structures, plans, and systems in philosophical terms have a temporal status and do not exist objectively as givens. As a result of their temporal status they can be used as tools of improvisation and brought to life through

different forms of organizing processes (e.g. routinizing, structuring, and systemizing). This harmonizes with the following observation by Ciborra (1999):

*We would suggest, if anything, a “small” Copernican revolution: improvisation is fundamental, while structured methods and procedures possess a derived and de-rooted character. A formalized procedure embeds a set of explicit in-order-to’s, but the way these are actually interpreted and put to work strictly depends upon the actor’s in-order-to’s and because-of motives, his/her way of being in the world ‘next’ to the procedure, the rule or the plan . . . . Procedure and method are just ‘dead objects’: they get situated in the flow of organizational life only thanks to a melange of human motives and actions. (pp. 85-86).*

Organizing happens in context, and in epistemological terms, context has always passed (Weisbord 1988). It cannot be clutched onto as such. Rather, it is continually redefined through the actions of the spontaneous “I” (Mead 1967). No language and no model can cage in context, simply because context cannot be grasped in an ontological manner. Context is simply what is counted in as context on an ongoing basis – the stuff that makes sense here and now and over time. Context is experience-in-the-becoming (Bergson 1944). Thus, in a conception of *organizing as improvisation* context in itself is less important than *how* context is (perpetually) defined: as something closed and objective or as something open and dynamic.

“The improvising man” is built on the premise that reality is profoundly complex and unpredictable (i. e. non-dualism). As a consequence valuable knowledge can come from keeping an open mind and to make the best of situations *as they emerge*, and with regard to organizing I suggest that this can be taken as an incentive to preserve curiosity and humility and to never stop looking for signs, for differences. And if, as pointed out, routines, structures, plans and systems are dead objects that must be given life through improvisation, one should be careful not to view them as restraint-jackets in practical organizing. This chapter has indicated that good (effective) organizing can be found in a form of “deep improvisation” (Purser and Petranker 2005), which implies acting according to a situation’s demands as they appear to the subjective mind (Ciborra 1999); creating functional solutions and establishing identity and coherence. In decision-making terms, James March demonstrates (1994) a similar view when he talks about “. . . *matching appropriate behaviour to situations*” (p. 103). This matter of improvisation as *acting in context* will be further expanded on in chapters eight to ten of my empirical analysis.

As pointed out “The improvising man” implies that organizing is not a question of either improvisation or technical rationality, but of how different forms of technical rationality are treated – as temporary tools or as objective entities. Philosophically I argue that technical rationality is subordinated improvisation, which, fundamentally, gives the former a temporary status. In practice, however, it is up to the practitioner how technical rational models shall be perceived and utilized. More specifically it is up to the practitioner if technical rational models shall be made absolute or solid, or if they should be subjected to contextual and spontaneous organizing (see model 5.5). In the case of the former I have suggested that a form of organizing occurs that can be labelled Managerialism, which represents a form of reified technical rationality that isolates context through acts of absolutism (see model 5.5). In other words Managerialism implies disregarding context, and acting from a *blind* conviction in some administrative model. This is the opposite of making an ongoing effort to deal with matters as they appear in the evolving here-and-now, and as such it is a way of not addressing complexity-in-the-becoming. Managerialism is thus a matter of blindly following, rather than contextually utilizing technical rational models.

I would like to end this chapter with making some general philosophical comments which I believe sum up the essence of organizing from the lenses of “The improvising man”, and which can give an indication of the normative value in the concept of organizing as improvisation. First of all, organizing as improvisation is a meaning-making process. Secondly, from a non-dualist perspective “meaning” is the same as “quest for meaning”. Consider the alternative: Why would anyone create meaning if not *in order to* create meaning. When we speak of the world, we simultaneously speak of a world we want to or need to see; in other words, in reality there is always *intention of* reality (Heidegger 1996; Skjervheim 2001). As a result, any description of organizational reality unavoidably becomes normative, which in effect collapses any dichotomy between the two. Still, it can be fruitful to maintain a dualism between the descriptive, theoretical and philosophical on one hand, and the normative, instrumental and value-laden on the other. In the deepest sense, such a dualism is merely an epistemological grip, but it can be a fertile one. Thus, there is a concrete and contextual intention behind and in every object of the creative mind produced in moments of real life experience, which is captured by Mead’s (1967) concept of the spontaneous “I”. I have argued that improvisation is an inevitable trait of practical life, but spontaneous intention (i.e. “I”) might in-context work against improvisation or it might pursue it. With regard to organizing, the point is that the spontaneous “I” might in any given situation strive to suppress



the amount of spontaneity in organizing (Managerialism); or it might want to pursue it (improvisation); but as argued in the current chapter, it will always be there to some extent (The improvising man).

As opposed to Managerialism which is a way of “doing things right”, seeing administration as a form or consequence of improvisation implies a maxim of “doing the right thing”. In other words, on the basis of “The improvising man”, “the right thing” cannot be captured in a model, but must continually be worked out in context. From this perspective there is no such thing as the best way, only the temporarily better way, which means that there is always a potential for improvement in every administrative routine, rule, structure, plan, and system. Different ways to fulfil and improve certain functions can always be found, as well as new functions all together. Normatively and personally I therefore suggest along the lines of Petranker (2005) and Ciborra (1999) that a normative conception of organizing that does not contain an ambition to embrace the contextual is more apt to fail than one that does.

Realizing and “accepting” practical philosophy, and performing organizing accordingly, reflects *an intention to improvise* - in the sense that all imaginable elements in the organizational context are seen as temporary objects rather than given entities. One might of course work against or deny the importance of improvisation and things can nonetheless work out nicely. Another alternative is to acknowledge the importance of improvisation, but to still disregard it in everyday practice. A third alternative might be to show no interest for philosophical contemplations on improvisation altogether, but yet to value and practice improvised organizing in organizational life. This dissertation is an attempt to explicate a theory of organizing as improvisation that aligns with authentic work practice, which can, in turn, contribute to a deeper understanding of such practice and offer normative implications. But I do not seek to provide an a-contextual model for organizing, for it is my view that just as the normative can hardly be avoided in-context, it also cannot be properly addressed out of context. For this reason I have found it natural to produce a fuller elaboration of the potentially normative value in “organizing as improvisation” in my empirical analysis (chapters eight to ten). In chapter eight, for instance, I propose that much can be learned through separating “pure improvisation” from “good improvisation”, something which also has been of great help in finalizing and presenting sound reflections on the relation between improvisation and technical rationality in the current chapter as well as in chapter four.

## Chapter 6. Methodology

*“What is needed . . . are descriptive cases focused on improvisation or situations full of opportunities to improvise, so that descriptions of the relevant processes can be developed and theory grounded in empirical data can be built. For my tastes this would involve participant observation so that the subjective side of this issue can be explored in depth.”*  
(Hatch 1997, p. 187).

### Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology driving the empirical and theoretical research process of this dissertation. Empirically, my study is conducted as a shadowing venture of a selection of hospital department managers over five months combined with in-depth interviews with each manager. McDonald (2005) argues that shadowing as a management research practice can be traced back to Mintzberg’s (1970, 1973) seminal studies of the management role; and later in the work of Snyder and Glueck (1980), which is a replica of Mintzberg’s studies; in Noël’s (1989) studies on the nature of management work; and in Perlow’s studies of how engineers spend their time at work (1999) and how this is controlled by the organization (1998). What is lacking in the majority of shadowing studies, McDonald (2005) claims, is a discussion of how shadowing can be grounded in the wider literature, as well as an explicit account of the epistemological standpoint underpinning the research designs. As my thesis is founded upon non-dualist philosophy holding that methodology implies a reflection upon methodology, it is merely natural for me to oblige with McDonald’s requests. But in order to understand non-dualism, one must understand the framework that it opposes, namely dualism. In order to provide a background and a rationale for the chosen methodology I therefore start with a historical presentation of some of the most significant subjects in dualistic philosophy of science. The discussion ends up in a presentation of the epistemological assumptions in non-dualism. Next, as the research design is presented, *I show methodologically how shadowing is a natural prolongation of non-dualistic philosophy* given my research objectives. Lastly, I present the different steps of the research process, and accentuate how the empirical and theoretical processes have emerged through a hermeneutical spiral, feeding on and developing each other.

## Against dualism

### The ontological objective – a trajectory through western philosophy

Any canon of research emerges from specific philosophical grounds, or as Svendsen (2003) argues: “. . . *all professions and sciences have an opening towards philosophy*” (Nyeng 2004, p. 53). Based on this it is my view that methodological approaches to studies of organizing should be founded on a philosophy of science, and in this chapter I will present and discuss my anchorage in the non-dualistic paradigm. Philosophy of science is a systematic reflection upon scientific methodology (Gilje and Grimen 1993); it is meta-science (Nyeng 2004); and from a non-dualistic perspective where complexity and unpredictability rule, methodology itself would imply reflection upon the choice of methods so as to keep up with the emergent flow of reality. For instance, Blumer (1969) argues that “*It is particularly important in exploratory research for the scholar to be constantly alert to the need of testing and revising his images, beliefs and conceptions of the area of life he is studying.*” (p. 41). Or as put by Næss (1984): “[*the researcher’s*] *duties concern his way to seek: his openness and persistency*” [my translation] (p. 186). If methodology, however, is not associated with somewhat continual critical refinement it amounts to what Kuhn (1996) refers to as a historical tradition of *normal science*: an activity of reproducing taken for granted technical measures; of “. . . *forcing nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies*” (p. 24). Kuhn’s statement is similar to Feyerabend’s (2002) critique of justifying quantification of human behaviour on the basis of the success of “science”: “*Quantification works in some cases, fails in others*” (p. 2). With these statements in mind I argue that methodology which does not involve reflection on the research objectives, the research-context and the method’s philosophical underpinning might become a technical exercise of following preset rules and dogmas. This reflects an approach that can be associated with philosophical dualism; a dominant trajectory through Western philosophy which has been severely questioned by such philosophers as the American pragmatists, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger.

Taking Martin Heidegger as our starting point, he made a radical break with the Western tradition of philosophy with his dissertation *Being and Time* (1996). We are encouraged to ask what could possibly be of such great philosophical importance, something that had supposedly been neglected throughout some two and a half thousand years of thinking. To get

a grasp on Heidegger's claim, I propose we take a glance at what might be identified as the major strands of thought throughout the history of Western philosophy. We might then be able to understand in greater depth how these dominant philosophical views have influenced, or maybe even shaped, the modern way of thinking about science and research practice, as well as work practice and everyday life in general.

In *Being and Time* (1996) Heidegger stresses the importance of grounding a philosophy in human existence as praxis. As a cornerstone of his writings he introduces the term Dasein, which stands for a condition of being thrown into existence, into being. Thus, Heidegger rewrites the traditional Western view on ontology as representing the object in itself, and substitutes it with ontology as a *capacity of creating* oneself and the world as objects (Dasein). Hence, when Heidegger talks about objects in the outside world he views them as extants – objects that are constructed by Dasein on a continual level. As a consequence, for Heidegger meaning is tied to understanding in specific practical contexts, and cannot exist in itself outside of a Dasein. And as indicated, this is a point of departure which to a significant degree had been lacking up until then. Mark Okrent (1988) puts it this way: “*The analysis of Dasein in general and understanding in particular, which starts out as a radical new foundation for ontology and metaphysics, ultimately becomes, in Heidegger's thought, a radical undercutting of the entire metaphysical enterprise and suggests a new, nonmetaphysical question for thinking.*” (p. 155).

Heidegger was not alone in this matter. For almost half – a century other philosophers, such as the American pragmatists, had shared his concern, also pointing out the necessity of creating an alternative to the orthodox strands of philosophy. What was it, then, that aroused such a yearning, almost simultaneously in Europe and in America, for rewriting, or rather reintroducing, philosophy as an important domain of humanity? In order to answer this we must try to get an overview of some of the most central issues in the history of Western philosophy that were of special concern to Heidegger, the pragmatists and others. In short, these central issues evolve around so-called “dualist thinking”: a preoccupation with the universally true, hereafter labelled “the ontologically objective”<sup>1</sup>, and in the following referred to as orthodox Western philosophy.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Audi (1995) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, where ontology is said to be commonly understood as the “logic of existence” (Onto – existence). “Logy” refers to Logos, meaning speech or reason.

Although Descartes might be held responsible for moulding dualist thinking into a systematic method in the modern age, the split between the ontologically objective and the subjective can be traced back to the very origins of Western philosophy. For example, ontology made up the frame in which Heraclitus and Parmenides argued over the status of change versus stability (Russell 1995). Questions about the ontologically objective, often labelled the transcendent, the universal or the absolute, were also of primary concern for the tremendously important philosophers of ancient Greece, as reflected in Socrates' Orphism<sup>2</sup>. The ontologically objective is also visible in Plato's concept of utopia and ideals, and as an example, Plato thought he could prove that his ideal Republic was universally good (Russell 1995). Moreover, we find the ontologically objective in Aristotle's doctrine of universals; quite an intricate concept, as indicated by the following quote from Russell (1995): ". . . *a universal cannot exist by itself, but only in particular things*" (p. 176). Despite the intricacies, Aristotle has an explicit concern with the ontologically objective, with the universal and eternal as opposed to the transient – something which signifies a dualistic approach.

During the dark ages and in the early renaissance, St Aurelius Augustinus (b 354 - d 430) and St Thomas Aquinas (b 1225 or 1226 – d 1274), respectively, continued the debate from ancient Greece and adapted it to their time (Russell 1995). Thus, when René Descartes (b 1596 - d 1650) as one of the most influential philosophers of modern times established Pure Rationality (divine Being) as something ontologically separated from the subjective (body), this must not be conceived of as something brand new, or in any way disconnected from the history of philosophy. Descartes (1996) merely defined the ontologically objective as distinct from the ontologically subjective in a more explicit manner, as it would seem in retrospect, thereby giving rise to what has become widely known as the Cartesian split or dualism. Descartes is commonly regarded as the (fore)father of the dualist conception in modern philosophy, a view shared both by the pragmatists and by Heidegger (Russell 1995; Joas 1996). This is why, before we move on, it would be particularly interesting to dwell upon the Cartesian split for a while – to try to establish a deep understanding of its meaning, so that we may understand its rigorous impact on modern Western philosophy and science.

How did Descartes arrive at his famous dualist understanding? What is the logic in and behind his arguments? Firstly, Descartes was a profoundly religious man, and even the

---

<sup>2</sup> According to Russell (1995), Socrates was not an orthodox Orphic, and he only accepted Orphism's fundamental doctrines.

thought of not including God in philosophy would be preposterous to him (Descartes 1996). Consequently, before Descartes has even started on his logical journey to absolute truth, he has already taken one premise for granted – the existence of a transcendent God, a God who is universally good in all that He is and through all that He does. God is a Being that can and should be *fully trusted* in his goodness and truthfulness. Given His existence, the answer to the riddle of life is already given, which merely makes the human project one of discovering the right method of unveiling Him. After all God exists. We can relax and put our minds at ease, because God is an undisputed fact. But if life has meaning (God), what is this right method of discovery that can prove such superhuman Divinity? What can humans do to find proof for the ontological objectivity of God?

Descartes is initially sceptical towards the practical (and empirical) sphere we inhabit as human bodies. The physical world in which we touch and smell, see and listen, is smudged by human frailness and is essentially unholy, as he sees it. Given such a less worthy world of physical objects, Descartes compels us to consider how we can know that we are not being fooled by our senses. How can we establish for certain that our senses do not play tricks on us, perhaps out of some evil purpose? Do we really hear what we hear, see what we see? There is no way of knowing this for certain, Descartes argues, but if we cannot trust what we experience, then what might we trust? Descartes proposes that in order to find universal truth, the ontologically objective (God), we should employ what he calls categorical doubt: we should doubt everything we see and know in a consequent and strict manner.

Categorical doubt, however, leaves us with no natural starting point, no direction in which to move, no certainties to give us comfort. It is at this point that Descartes (turns to God, and) arrives at an astonishing argument: We cannot doubt our own doubt. Doubt as a transcendent phenomenon is pure. Categorical doubt is clean. Conceptually it is not smudged by the impurity of human senses, but divine in its abstract intellectuality. This can be explained in the following intricate rhetoric: If you doubt that you doubt, can it concurrently be possible that you do *not* doubt? No, because then you could not have doubted in the first place, thus contradicting your original doubt. Three points can be drawn from this: Firstly, Descartes understands doubt as a *cognitive phenomenon*, erecting rationality as an equivalent to doubt; or rather, doubt is a type of cognition. Secondly, the lack of logic inherent in denying doubt reflects the divine abstractness of God, thus establishing God as a universal objective fact, understood by Descartes as Pure Rationality. Logic is impeccable, he claims somewhat

tautologically, for in the opposite case it would not be logic. Pure Rationality is what constitutes the Soul of human beings, a perfect merger of philosophy and religion. Doubt in the shape of an ontological import, as a noun, is thus a key to transcendence. In its divine abstractness doubt has an immanent character of universal validity. Categorical doubt is beyond doubt. Thirdly, if there is doubt, there must be a doubter. Thus, Descartes has revealed “the subjective doubter” also on an ontological level – I doubt (think), therefore I exist: “Cogito ergo sum”. The subjective and corporal thinker must consequently exist, but not as a perfect being. Even if doubt in itself is a feature of divinity, the actual realization of practical doubt is not perfect; rather, it is imperfect. The fact that one cannot doubt doubt proves the existence of divinity, but the superhuman can never be touched through human flesh. Man is capable of nothing more than doubting, and thus he is not perfect. Doubt as a course of action is merely an instrument to prove *that* God exists as an objective fact, not itself divine. Absoluteness is by Descartes preferred to doubt even if doubt is good.

If doubt is both possible and logical, there must be a being that does not doubt: Pure Rationality, a Divine Being transcending the doubter. And hence the Cartesian split is reified, on the one side the doubter who doubts, which in itself makes him imperfect; and who on the other side uncovers the existence of a divine Being, since he clearly cannot doubt his own doubt. It all depends, of course, on the notion that doubt cannot be doubted, which is true because otherwise it would annihilate *the perceived given meaning* of doubt. To prove his point, then, Descartes presupposes the goodness of God. Whereas the empirical stuff of nature cannot be trusted, the divine element of rational thought (doubt) is self-evident. As the human body is equipped with a soul, thought has the capacity to follow a transcendent method: doubt. However infused with the stench of flesh and blood, thought through its divine component ranks higher than nature, as soul ranks higher than body and object higher than subject. What counts is one’s ability to follow logical arguments, because logic reflects a place hardly attainable for human beings due to the imperfection of the body. We are, however, capable of transcending the body, to discover our own existence, but only to become aware of our own inferiority compared to the divine ontological objective.

In its purest form, the logic of Descartes’ argument is generally labelled “naïve rationalism”, which simply states that the journey to absolute truth can be discovered through rational thought. In the development of modern philosophy the doctrine of naïve rationalism has not been left undisputed. On the contrary, it has been amended, reformulated and even refuted

many times over. This is, however, not the time and place to introduce and cite every significant philosopher in history dealing with the Cartesian split in one way or the other. Still, it would be interesting to understand more about the impact of the dualist philosophy, mainly for two reasons: firstly, to get a picture of the notable and dominant focus towards ontological objectivity among modern scientists, and, secondly, to comprehend the philosophical counter-reaction to this by Heidegger, the pragmatists and others.

In the school of Positivism, founded by philosopher August Comte (b 1798 - d 1857), condemnation of Descartes' rationalism is central. In sharp opposition to Descartes, Comte argued that rationalism (metaphysics) cannot bring us closer to absolute truth. Rather, we should try to minimize the use of rational thought, and maximize the method of empirical proof (Schön 1991). Consequently, the more rationality and language mirror or correspond to empirical findings, the more valid they are. Though this would seem like a rather harsh critique of Descartes' rationalism, at least with regard to methodological demands, the similarity in final objective is evident: to discover or prove universal truth, the ontologically objective. Comte's proposition was simply that truth is found in nature, whereas Descartes swore to the validity of rational thought. In both cases Reality is out there, independent of frail human existence. From both perspectives epistemology is reduced to a question of how to establish objectively true knowledge, either from logical thinking, as in the case of Naïve Rationalism; or from empirical objectivism, as in the case of Positivism.

Positivism, a theory of correspondence between knowledge and empirical experience/data, has become one of the most powerful canons of modern science (Schön 1991; Andersen 2000; Fauske 2000). We need only to look to the Vienna Circle during the inter-war period and what has been named the project of Logical Empiricism (also called Logical Positivism) to spot its influence. Building upon Comte's original doctrine, the primary objective of the Vienna Circle was to eliminate all metaphysical speculation and to create a language corresponding to natural phenomena.<sup>3</sup> Traces of Logical Empiricism are still visible today; a fact that is often attributed to Karl Popper, a philosopher who although somehow emerging from the Vienna Circle, found himself deeply critical to the central thesis of Logical Positivism and the Principle of Verification.

---

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Feyerabend (2000) pp. 118-119 for an overview of Rudolph Carnap's theory of language.



Verification may in simplistic terms be explained as a doctrine holding objective *proof* as the final objective for the scientific method. One should as a scientist seek to prove or verify the laws of nature by empirical trial and error. True science, from Popper's perspective, is however not to be found in the attempts to prove the existence of the ontologically objective. He felt compelled to reformulate the methodology of verification. As a consequence, Popper arrived at the Principle of Falsification, which contrary to verification admits that: "*Scientific knowledge always has a temporary character, has the shape of guessing/hypotheses that can never be proved. The objective is therefore to put forward bold hypotheses and expose them to scrupulous tests of rejection.* [My translation]" (Nyeng 2004, p. 209).

At first glance it might seem that Popper marks out a totally different course from Descartes and Comte, as he underlines the impossibility of *proving* ontologically objective truth. With regard to Popper's ultimate objective, however, it is obvious that he does not deviate from the two in any significant way:

*. . . it is ironic that the most pervasive adaption of Positivism has been Popper's own reformulation which seems to have only substituted logical positivism's principle that it was possible to verify and prove theories with the principle that it was only possible to falsify them. (Johnson and Duberley 2000, p. 11).*

As do Descartes and Comte, Popper has but one goal: to find a universal scientific method for bringing us closer to the ontologically objective (Popper 1981), thus approving and consolidating the dualist position. Epistemology becomes science: a tool for uncovering the given. Being grounded in caution, frugality and logical thinking, it is of course quite a humble and careful tool, but all the same a perceived pathway to Absolute Truth. As such, Popper's critical rationalism is somehow a merger of Descartes' naïve rationalism and Comte's naïve empiricism, as it makes use of rational thought in developing theories, and in employing empirical testing as objectively as possible to counter-prove the theories. And thus Popper provides the grounds for perhaps the most influential scientific method of today: the hypothetic-deductive method, from which scientists are supposed to propose bold hypotheses, test and revise or reject these through careful empirical research, and thereby create more and more robust theories. By gathering information or testing theories in particular situations scientists may induce law-like hypotheses (induction), and building on these theories, they are able to deduct the outcome in particular circumstances. There are, however, some very problematic aspects to such a method, a few of which will be dealt with in closer detail below.

Firstly, how does one start out with such a method? Clearly, for every sensual experience, one needs a theoretical language to make it explicit, and consequently there is inevitably a theory a priori to empirical discovery. Take the classical case of counting swans to prove that they are all white: How can you count swans unless you know what a swan is in theory? And vice versa, for a hypothesis to be expressed an a priori conception of reality is needed; it cannot appear out of thin air. Again with reference to the swans: To talk about swans in theory presupposes an empirical experience of something like swans in reality. If not, the conception of swans becomes meaningless and speculative. Secondly, there is a problem with how the falsification principle applies to itself. Surely, such a harsh principle must satisfy its own demands? But it is hard to see how it can. A theory about everything cannot be verified or falsified, because it would literary take Forever to counter-prove it; and also, at some point it would require definite objective proof, which Popper himself claimed was impossible. The principle of *falsification is not falsifiable*. It is just another theory, stunning as such in its beauty and functionality, but still a theory. In the same manner as Descartes' theory, the falsification criterion can never be invalidated transcendent to itself.

From the preceding reflections it is fairly safe to claim that any ontologically based theory about Everything cannot be (in)validated once and for all. Does this imply the rejection of truth altogether? Indeed, some theorists argue that it does. As they lapse into a dualist antagonism to naïve and sophisticated rationalism and empiricism, they take an ontological constructivist stand, arguing that nothing exists and that reality is mere fantasy (Dewey 1929; Hellesnes 2001). This form of extremist constructivism is, however, sharply at odds with the mild (epistemological) constructivism of non-dualism as explicated by Heidegger and the American pragmatists, who instead of basing a philosophy in the static conception of ontological existence refute Cartesianism from an epistemological position.

### **Some shortcomings of dualism in organizational research**

Initially we can ask: What is the alternative to the dualist position, and why should such an alternative philosophical position be pursued? One feasible line of argument is that dualist philosophy reflects a *limited view* on existence and thus on organizational research. Take the critical rationalist, for example, by Feyerabend (2002) dubbed the “falsificationist”: From his perspective organizational thinking is more about finding universal truths than about creating workable ideas. Organizational thinking is for him a journey towards unchanging ideas that

can be applicable to all organizations; it is a quest for the acontextual and not the emerging and often vague details of the contextual. For instance, with regard to organizing the critical rationalist would embrace the linear kind of thinking reflected in Weick's (2001) architectural model, amongst which a good example is found in the early ideas of *Organizations* (March and Simon 1993). Instead of exploring human creativity in all its depths and widths, March and Simon lapse into a closed technical-logical perspective: The strong focus on logical analytical thinking and objective truth displays a technical view on rationality, thus overlooking other, and perhaps more profound, aspects of human creativity and corporality. In *Organizations* the somewhat impure human condition is made synonymous to *bounded* rationality, which is only natural, considering that critical rationalism places its faith in a technical rational ideal, in the rigid methodology of induction and deduction, implicitly ranking logical calculation and rigorous action above the impulsivity and contextuality of emotional and spontaneous behaviour. Actually, spontaneity and emotionality would become potential threats from the point of view of someone who seeks the ontologically objective, as they are examples of irrational behaviour capable of producing dangerous ambiguity and complexity (Simon 1968). Rather, the ability to perform technical analytical thinking is preferred, as this is assumed to be the human reflection of the ontologically transcendent, the pre-given and pre-ordered reality (Schön 1991).

This displays another interesting characteristic of technical rationality, namely that it presupposes only one correct answer to any given question, as it involves uncovering what is already hidden or encrypted. In technical-rational problem-solving the answer is found implicitly in the question, as the question allows only one answer. For example:  $2 + 2$  must be 4. Metaphorically, then, if "4" reflects reality, the human task is to uncover  $2 + 2$  and its bounded relation to 4. Clearly, if reality already exists as law-like structures, the technical-rational capability to analyze and act according to the lines of such structures is preferred. Note how the seeker of ontologically objective truth takes for granted technical intellectual activity as an imperative value, implicitly stressing that knowledge should be made equivalent to technical scientific research. In short, as the ultimate objective is *true* knowledge, knowledge in general is mainly interesting as a pathway to truth. Thus, organizational research becomes more a matter of following rules than genuine creativity: It is the method for unveiling non-shifting truths about organizations which is at the centre of scientific attention.

But how does, say, the critical rationalist, explain where ideas and knowledge come from to begin with? Where does abduction (Peirce 1966a, 1966b, 1974a, 1974b), the capability to conceive new meaning, appear in his vocabulary? Following Feyerabend's (2002) lines of reasoning, it might be argued that science which follows a fixed idea of method or rationality rests on too naïve a view of man and thus says little about how ideas come about in practice in favour of emphasizing methodological rigor and technical thinking. For example, in the case of the critical rationalist, induction and deduction take the place of abduction, but in an organizational research context these say little about the complexity of everyday organizational life, the emergent qualities of human interaction and the emotional aspects involved in this – aspects that can be of great scientific interest in the pursuit of understanding how organizing works in different contexts. This is why I hold that technical rationality reflects a limited view on organizational reality.

There is no doubt in my mind that technical rationality plays a very important role in a variety of research practices just as it does in many everyday situations. But by reifying logic into a Divine Rational Being transcending humanity, one risks creating an unrealistic image of reality, as is the case of the dualist philosophy. It is at this point imperative to remember that it is the scientific conviction of higher powers, either in the shape of natural laws or given structures, perhaps even in the shape of a God, or a combinations of these, which carries the burden of proof. In essence, these ideals reflect the possibility of ontological objectivity – a concept which if left unproven remains merely a belief. And, of course, as a belief it earns the greatest respect. If, however, the belief becomes reified, a shift occurs from saying that something *might be*, into saying that something *Is*, which is a far less humble approach. At this point, therefore, we might start to question the position of technical rational thinking as an ideal for all science in general, and for organizational science in particular.

### **Non-dualism: a practical philosophy**

In the following only the aspects of non-dualism that affect philosophy of science and methodology are discussed. Other central elements of non-dualism have already been dealt with in chapter three, and as they will not be repeated here it is imperative that they be kept in mind in order to get a fuller picture.

Non-dualism is a form of practical philosophy and is typically associated with American pragmatism, but also with Heidegger's (1996) existential philosophy and Wittgenstein's

(1992, 1994) analytical philosophy. Traces of a philosophy of praxis can be found, however, all the way back to ancient Greece, as represented by Protagoras and his doctrine of “*homos mensura*”. Protagoras held that man should be “. . . *the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not*” (Russell 1995, p. 94), thus expressing a dismissal of objective truth. F. C. S Schiller, a philosopher associated by Russell with pragmatism, was actually “. . . *in the habit of calling himself a disciple of Protagoras*” (p. 94). There is little doubt, however, that Protagoras’ doctrine has ended up in the shadow of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In fact, Russell argues, Protagoras was somewhat ridiculed and his discussions twisted by Plato, evidently because of Plato’s hostility to the Sophists, a group of professional rhetoricians Protagoras participated in.

Some two thousand years later non-dualism was explicated as a response to Descartes’ naïve rationalism by the American pragmatists, who as a core thesis held that rationality cannot reach beyond its own constituting powers. There might be laws governing the becoming of things or there might not. But as long as thinking is facilitated and restricted by the human body, philosophies of universalism and ontological objectivism can only amount to mere speculation. Soul and flesh, subject and object are constructs of an exploring mind in the attempt at creating identity and coherence, the non-dualist argues. The more workable a construct is in practice – which is determined by trial and error – the more it can be relied on.

Inspired by Mead (1967), (rational) thinking can be described as being performed by a self in the process of substituting chaos with predictability. Thinking is an act of sensemaking and is performed by a spontaneous “I” in dialogue with an objectified “me”. Human existence and sensemaking is a dialogue in which the self acts towards things from the basis of the specific meaning those things give (Blumer 1969). It follows that from a non-dualistic perspective science cannot have an ultimate goal of disclosing the ontologically objective. As science is a human project it cannot violate the principles of existence that non-dualism erects. Thus, there is no singular and defined scientific method that transcends all others, there is no common structure; rather, as history demonstrates, science shows signs of multiplicity. There are many approaches to science (Feyerabend 2002). The overarching goal is for the non-dualistic science to perform *rigorous* and *systematic* exploration of the resistance and obduracy of physical and social nature (Blumer 1969). Contrary to *normal science*, where “. . . *those [phenomena] that will not fit the box are often not seen at all*” (Kuhn 1996, p. 24), the non-dualist holds that no scientific rule, method or idea can be clutched onto for its own sake, but

must be subjected to contextual evaluation and validation. Methodology implies reflection on methodology. From a non-dualistic perspective, scientific progress comes from developing epistemological apparatuses out of earlier versions, and as will be explained in detail later in this chapter, I have followed this approach of expanding on and forming an epistemological apparatus. More concretely, I have tested the fruitfulness of “The improvising man” as a framework for understanding an empirical case of organizing. In the process I came up with new ideas and was compelled to elaborate on some of the *philosophical* premises in “The improvising man”, and expand some aspects that were initially of a more implicit nature. The role of emotions is a good example. On a more *practical* level, I conceived new sub-concepts to make “The improvising man” work as a lens through which to understand organizing as improvisation (see chapter eight).

Theories become sharper from practical testing and revising in the sense that they acquire higher degrees of practical predictability and robustness, and thus from a non-dualistic perspective, scientific rules and methods are tools, temporary objects, to be employed with caution and practical wisdom and to be put to continual scrutiny and (potentially) continuous improvement. This implies that science is about language construction, and that the more persistent language grows from a practical workability point of view, the more scientifically grounded it becomes.

*. . . scientific successes cannot be explained in a simple way . . . the success of ‘science’ cannot be used as an argument for treating as yet unsolved problems in a standardized way. (Feyerabend 2002, pp. 1-2).*

Again I emphasize the importance of “practical”, as the non-dualist will not look for objectivity but for *practical functionality*: A theory is not a tool for uncovering the given, but a more or less functional instrument to understand and learn about the complexities of nature and sociality. The non-dualist does not categorically oppose, say, critical rationalism in its pursuit of testing dogmas and axioms, but embraces it to the extent that the process of testing gives practical value. In Dewey’s (1929) words: “*If we could free ourselves from a somewhat abject emotion, it would be clear enough that what makes any proposition scientific is its power to yield understanding, insight, intellectual at-homeness, in connection with any existential state of affairs, by filling events with coherent and tested meanings.*” (p. 163).

The non-dualist is indeed absorbed by truth and realism, but in the form of practical rigor and not in the form of the ontologically objective. Non-dualism is *epistemologically* relative, but by no means *ontologically* relative. Wittgenstein (2001), for instance, warns us not to speak of what cannot be spoken of, but he does not categorically reject truth; only the scientific possibility to disclose it independently.

From a non-dualistic perspective there can be no ontology outside of epistemology: “*There is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like ‘really there’*”. (Kuhn 1996, p. 206). Even if science in the social domain is different from natural science, as the latter is more observational and the former more participatory (Skjervheim 1996), the principles of non-dualism apply to both. Whereas *participation* is fairly clearly biased, even *observation* cannot be objectively clean. No science can avoid being smudged by the flesh and blood of the scientist(s). In the social sciences, and more specifically in the organizational domain, this has clear implications, and one might ask if objectivity should be the ideal, or perhaps the ideal should be participation? In an attempt to answer I refer to what Feyerabend (2002) says about the multiplicity of methodology and Blumer (1969) about the obduracy of nature. From those standpoints the answer is none of the two; neither participation nor objectivity are ideals for non-dualistic social research. Objectivity simply cannot be an ideal because of the non-dualistic premise, and the degree of participation should be evaluated in light of the research context. The “scientific boxes” of methodology should not be defined ahead of research but in light of research ambitions, and even then only as temporary theories and not as objective measures.

Closing in on the social sciences which this dissertation is part of, the non-dualist would argue that observation involves participation. As will be explained later, this is particularly evident in the method of “shadowing” (McDonald 2005), which I have used in my study. And like epistemology outranks ontology, participation outranks observation: Observation can only come about via participation. Moreover, given that participation involves efforts of sensemaking – that it is more than the non-significant exchange of symbols – participation and observation are inseparable. In practical science, however, the (perceived) extent to which they work as methodological ideals depends on the research context. Thus the ideal of non-dualist research is intersubjective rather than objective substantiation (Winch 1959).

Furthermore, the social researcher should not try to achieve objectivity by escaping his forehaving, as this cannot be done (Schwandt 2000). Rather, he should engage those aspects

of forehaving that significantly influence the process of scientific investigation, and communicate them to the reader for the sake of facilitating alternative theories.

### **Non-dualism and choice of design**

Thomas Schwandt (2000) makes an important observation in his reflections on interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructionism when he claims that these perspectives differ more with regard to questions of knowing and being than methodology. Implicitly, this can be understood as methodology itself being less important than the way in which it is used and interpreted. In a wider sense, if Schwandt's argument were to apply to all existing domains of science, all scientific perspectives differ more with regard to epistemological and ontological foundations than in terms of sheer methodology. Thus, methodology as such is somehow outweighed by the way in which methods are utilized in practice, and no specific method contains any particular epistemological or ontological presuppositions. A structured interview, for instance, does not in itself have a specific anchorage in terms of the philosophy of science, but *the way it is used* and *the way findings are interpreted*, inextricably tie the method to particular epistemological and ontological assumptions. Two points can be taken from Schwandt's (1996) non-dualistic reasoning: Firstly, no single method carries certain epistemological or ontological assumptions, even if they originate from particular philosophical strands in history. Secondly, as method is merely an instrument to be employed in research practice, no method can be used in science without particular epistemological and ontological perspectives being attached to it by the scientist. Methodological design, then, is just as much a matter of *how to approach* a particular method as it is of choosing *which* method to use. This insight is at the core of my study, as it is epistemologically anchored in philosophical non-dualism; a perspective which builds on the premise that method is nothing in itself, but a contextual device of sensemaking. Given the assumption that there is no text without context, method must be seen in light of its pragmatic purpose. Thus, from non-dualism, method is inevitably biased by the foreknowledge and research ambition of the scientist.



## Research objectives and research question

### Research objectives

A general ambition with this dissertation is to contribute to an understanding of improvisation in organizing practice. In the spirit of non-dualism, I seek to contribute to a research in progress and try not to freeze metaphors, so that even if the reader disagrees with the analyses and theories presented, the analysis as such could still be of value to the extent that it sparks fresh thinking. I do not claim that improvisation is the only way to understand organizing practice, that it covers all aspect of that practice, or that it applies equally to all contexts. My objective, rather, is to investigate *some vital aspects of how* improvisation relates to organizing practice, and to contribute to *constructing a language* that is suitable for making sense of improvisation in an everyday setting. I have assembled these aspirations in the following two research objectives:

1. To achieve and verbalize an understanding of the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice and of how this relates to complexity and context.
2. To achieve and verbalize an understanding of the nature of technical rationality in everyday organizing practice and of how this relates to improvisation.

In order to accomplish these goals I made a preliminary literature study and later conducted an empirical study of managers at a major Norwegian hospital called InSitu. The literature study was necessary as a basis for the empirical study, and involves a treatise on the domain of practical philosophy as well as influential theories of sensemaking, improvisation, and organizing. It was from these bases that ideas emerged, allowing for a fresh take on organizing as improvisation which I have gathered under the concept of “The improvising man”. Although in a preliminary manner, these ideas provided a fundament for a unique and innovative empirical study of improvisation in authentic organizing practice, where I follow Argyris and Schön (1974, 1996) in making a comparison between “theory-in-use” and “espoused theory”. This means that I juxtapose observations of authentic practice with how managers theorize about the role of improvisation in their everyday work life.

I want to accentuate that the research process has emerged hermeneutically: The empirical study could not have been accomplished without an initial philosophical and theoretical study

of improvisation. In other words, I needed a solid theoretical platform in order to know how to conduct my empirical study and to know what to look for in the analysis. Vice versa, in the process of accomplishing the empirical study, important insights emerged which contributed to a deeper understanding of practical philosophy and the sensemaking perspective. As a consequence, “The improvising man” was embellished through the conception of new ideas which made the framework more practical.

### **Research question**

From an initial thesis that everyday organizing is improvisation, I have formulated the following research question:

*What is the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice and how does improvisation relate to technical rationality?*

### **Empirical design**

#### **A qualitative study of organizing as improvisation amongst hospital managers**

Similar to the way Latour (1987) is interested in what researchers really do, I am from a general point of view interested in authentic organizing practice. In order to feed this interest I chose to make an empirical study of hospital department managers, and in this section I will explain why. It started with a desire to investigate the relationship between administration and improvisation, and to investigate the nature of improvisation in organizing as a sensemaking process (Weick 1989; Weick et al. 2005). As a consequence, I had to find an empirical context that would allow such investigations, and it had to fulfil two needs: *Firstly*, it had to involve *administrative work practice* where plans, routines, structures and systems were of great concern; and *secondly*, it should be the kind of workplace where radical transformation and/or innovation were *not* the primary objectives. As a consequence my study would differ substantially from earlier empirical research on improvisation, and be more focused on everyday life than on exceptional instances of improvisation.

My scholarship stipulated that I had to relate my research to management in the health sector, and through my research network I was allowed admittance to a large Norwegian hospital. Instead of choosing only one particular department or sub-department, I soon realized the advantage of spreading my studies so as to ensure *variety* as well as *similarity*. This is why I

primarily ended up studying several top-level hospital managers/administrators (department managers). I also chose to include one section manager. As my focus is on processes of gesture and response (Mead 1967) rather than entity, it is difficult to pin down something like a “unit” of analysis. Improvisation is a social process, just as the self is dialogical (see chapter three and four). The closest I can define my unit of analysis is thus that it consists of the individual manager and the dialogical process of organizing that he/she performs in everyday practice, and in that sense the unit of analysis varies between *individual*, *group* and *individual in group*, dependent on whether the manager is alone or participates in social interaction. In short, I have observed both individual managers and the groups they interacted with, and studied how improvisation evolves in these settings.

I also spent a few days observing individual practitioners in two medical practices for the sake of getting a feel of the hospital context. Another reason for doing this was that at the time of study I had not yet decided on the scope of the study, or whether or not studying department managers would provide sufficient data. As the study evolved, however, I realized that a study of a group of eight department managers (DMs) and one section manager (SM) from the same hospital would be sufficient. As these have similar formal responsibilities and role structures, they would give rich, varied and comparable data on the relation between administration and improvisation in everyday work practice. *Variety* would flow from the fact that different DMs would have different professional focuses related to the medical area of their respective departments. An equally important concern, however, was to ensure sufficient *similarity* between the informants with regard to administrative responsibility and role structures. All of them being part of the hospital director’s joint management group, I suspected that the DMs would share important general administrative concerns with regard to the hospital as a whole as well as their respective departments. Studying a selection of DMs would therefore provide important contextual correspondence, and in that regard strengthen the validity of my findings about the managers as a “group”.

From an initial three-hour long conversation with the hospital director, I had high expectations that technical rational aspects of organization theory, such as the use of structures, plans, routines and systems played a significant role in the work of DMs. I would therefore have the chance to challenge the commonly held perception that improvisation and administration are separate traits, and more generally, I would have an exceptional opportunity to study improvisation in authentic organizing practice. Initially, I expected that

the further up in the organization I looked, the purer administration would stand out as an autonomous profession and the more the perception of administration and improvisation as opposites would be put to the test. This was another reason why I considered the highest level of management possible, the department level, a fruitful point of departure for studying improvisation in administrative practice.

A reason for not choosing other professional groups such as nurses or doctors on lower levels of hierarchy was to avoid to the largest extent possible the intricacies of and problems related to patient anonymity. In addition I saw initially a significant risk in not being allowed to be present during patient treatments to observe. For that reason, studying DMs appeared to be a more logical and cost-efficient approach with lesser risk of being denied access. I also wanted to exploit the fact that I had considerable personal experience with administrative practice and theory, and suspected that I had valuable foreknowledge about the administrative language in use amongst DMs. Having to learn in detail a range of unfamiliar contexts of medical practice seemed unnecessarily difficult and incommodious considering that I had the opportunity to follow DMs, who to a great extent have administration as a central part of their jobs. Even at the department level, however, I soon discovered that operational medicine comprised a major part of everyday life, as many of the DMs to some extent continued to work as clinical physicians.

I ended up with the nine particular managers for the following reasons:

1. Looking at the massive bulk of organizing literature there are very few empirical studies of improvisation (Kamoche et al. 2002) and little has been written on improvisation in everyday organizing practice. Amongst the literature that does exist, much is of an indirect and skewed nature, as it is mostly focused on certain aspects of improvisation rather than on how it typically intervenes with actual organizing practice; that is, with the concurrently dull and exciting stuff of everyday life.
2. Contractual inscriptions in my Ph.D. scholarship stated that my research somehow had to be related to management in the health sector.
3. Through a study of a selection of InSitu Hospital department managers I believed I would get a rich and diverse image of organizing as improvisation. The manner in which the nine particular managers were chosen happened as a “snowball-effect” starting with two in-depth interviews. The first of these was with a member of the director’s staff, and the second with a representative from the personnel section of the

administrative staff. In these interviews I was advised to contact four particular DMs, and via these four DMs I was led to a further three DMs. For example, one of the original DMs (A) would compare himself and his department to another department (B), and use B as an example of what he (A) was not like. Thus I decided to try to get admittance to B so as to ensure a richer foundation of data.

4. The last of the department managers was chosen because I had met her early on in the process, and was interested in the stories she told me about her everyday life. In this case I simply followed up on an invitation.
5. The section manager was chosen because during a visit to his medical clinic, I stumbled across quite a chaotic OD-project in which he played a central role.

To sum up, the rationale for choosing the nine managers included in my study is a mixture of pursuing my curiosity about a possible contrast between administration and management on the one side and improvisation on the other; of contractual inscriptions in my scholarship; of using available social resources; of taking external advice; and finally, some degree of coincidence and chance was also involved. In that regard, the process of finding informants has emerged as a continual evaluation of contextual factors from an initial ambition to study improvisation in organizing practice. And following Denzin and Lincoln (2000) I could not have determined a sample in advance. Only in retrospect could I decide that my sample of managers was sufficient in the interest of providing “. . . *an analysis uniquely adequate for that particular phenomenon*” (Psathas 1995 in Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 371); the “particular phenomenon” in my case being, of course, improvisation in everyday organizing.

### **The empirical research context and the participants**

The empirical study was conducted at a major Norwegian hospital which for purposes of confidentiality I have chosen to call “InSitu”, and it addresses a selection of those managers that are formally appointed to run hospital departments, of which there were 17 in the somatic division at the time of study. The department manager (DM) is hierarchically situated directly below the hospital director. As part of a temporary organization, there was only one departmental manager – called division manager – in the psychiatric branch at the time of study. Below the division manager there were a range of sub-departments that equalled the somatic departments with regard to autonomy in professional services, budgets and number of employees. My study covers a total number of eight DMs and one section manager (SM) taken from both the somatic and the psychiatric division. A detailed presentation of the

managers can be found on pages 177 to 185, but as said by Christians (2000): “*Confidentiality must be assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity.*” (p. 139). In my case this ethical aspect was particularly important as I had to promise the participants full anonymity in order to gain admittance. I have therefore changed the managers’ names and held the name of their specific departments confidential. To be able to present important details without violating ethical boundaries have produced many dilemmas and challenges, and I hope I have managed to find a functional balance between context and confidentiality.

It is impossible to pinpoint one single image that is characteristic of and representative for all of the hospital’s departments as they vary vastly in important regards such as professional area, the work methods and technology related to this, budget size and number of employees. At the time of study some of the sub-departments were in many ways larger than some of the departments; some departments were located far away from the central building, others within; some dealt with a significant amount of acute cases, and others not. Still, a lot can be said about the typical role of a departmental manager. First of all, he is typically medically responsible for those services covered by the department. Secondly, he has financial and budget responsibility for major parts of the department, even though much of the departmental activity is typically governed by external factors. The number of patients, the price of external services such as laboratory analyses and x-ray photos, the price of medicine and operational gear, political directives and patient rights movements, labour unions, implementation of expensive computer systems, and of course established cross-departmental routines, are viable examples.

### **Choosing design: Narrative ethnography**

My research objectives imply studying improvisation as a qualitative phenomenon, which speaks in favour of a qualitative study. Quantification is not categorically precluded in non-dualistic science (Schwandt 2000), but in this particular research context it seemed to be of little use. Mere counting and quantification would not enable me to grasp the meaning of emerging situations. Bringing together my non-dualistic philosophical underpinning and research objectives, the design of my study would naturally emerge from what Vidich and Lyman (2000) label qualitative ethnographic social research. This is a research strategy, they argue, that “. . . *permits the sociologist to observe the conduct of self and others, to*

*understand the mechanisms of social processes, and to comprehend and explain why both actors and processes are as they are”* (p. 38). More specifically, I have conducted my study within the genre of “narrative ethnography” (Tedlock 2000), which implies making notes both of dialogues between others as well as including personal experiences and evaluations of emerging episodes. As part of this genre I have produced lengthy narratives, including observations, dialogues and personal reflections, from which quotes are selected and presented in the empirical analysis. I have done this for two reasons: firstly, in order to allow the reader to make up his/her own opinions about the narratives; and secondly, to be as clear as possible about what my interpretations are:

*Researchers cannot hide behind a bureaucratic methodological procedure and dominant conventions for writing, but must take responsibility for their texts and also make it obvious in the texts that they have done so . . . . The researcher may also encourage a dialogue with the reader, by indicating pertinent problems and imperfections in the text . . . . The author is made visible and the reader is compelled to become involved. (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008, p. 192).*

Another way of looking at my research strategy is to see it as a case study, where improvisation is the “general phenomenon” under study (Stake 2000). Following Stake, my case would somehow fall between what he labels intrinsic and instrumental, as I am primarily interested in organizing as improvisation as a general phenomenon, thus giving the InSitu managers an instrumental character, and have a secondary interest in the particular case of InSitu managers (intrinsic).

### **Choosing a method: Qualitative shadowing**

The way my case study has evolved is in line with qualitative ethnography as described by Vidich and Lyman (2000). And concerning the choice of method, some kind of *practice observation* stood out as logical and suitable as it would allow insight into work practice. As my objective was to compare authentic practice with practitioners’ reflections on that practice, the method of *in-depth interviews* was an equally logical choice.

I landed on a sort of practice observation called *qualitative shadowing*, defined by McDonald (2005) as “. . . a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time” (p. 456). Thus, to the extent that research is focused on observation of organizational practice in the becoming (Bergson 1944),

qualitative shadowing as a means of understanding roles or perspectives (McDonald 2005) is a rational and pragmatic methodological alternative. This view is supported by Fineman (2000), who argues in favour of an “. . . ‘engaged’, critical, style of ethnographic organizational research” (p. 14) in the pursuit of learning about the phenomenology of emotions, which is part of my study. Qualitative shadowing therefore falls within the kind of research described by Fineman, who concludes that “. . . contextually rich, ‘real time’ emotion studies of organizational life are still relatively rare. . .” (p. 14).

In many ways qualitative shadowing is similar to participant observation (Spradley 1980). Still, as McDonald (2005) argues:

*The itinerant nature of the shadowing method lies at the heart of a more subtle difference between shadowing and participant observation. By following one person through the organization, the shadower obtains insight into a focused and specific experience which is relevant to a particular expert role. The commentary provided is the opinion and perspective of an expert rather than a novice. In other words, a shadower can follow where it would be impossible for a participant observer to go themselves. (p. 457).*

This does not make shadowing a better technique than participant observation, McDonald quickly asseverates; it only provides different insights. In my case I did not want to risk not taking good notes as a result of having to concentrate on participating in and learning the nature of everyday organizing as performed by the DMs. Rather, as McDonald indicates, I wanted to exploit the expertise already incorporated by the practitioner (i.e. the DM) and focus all my energy into observation and writing. As a consequence, I expected shadowing to provide me with insights concurrent with my research objectives and thus saw it as a natural choice of method.

McDonald (2005) argues that there is great lack of shadowing research that is both grounded in the wider literature and which explicitly accounts for its epistemological standpoint.

Moreover, she argues that the majority of the current shadowing research is eclectic:

*Sometimes the qualitative data is a backdrop to the quantitative results (e.g. Mintzberg, 1970, 1973) and sometimes it is the other way around (e.g. Fenton et al., 1997). As a result, a great deal of what is termed shadowing is neither truly qualitative (why questions coded into time logs [Snyder and Glueck, 1980]) nor truly quantitative (inductive approaches to surfacing activity categories [Mintzberg, 1970, 1973]). This wide and unexamined use of mixed methods*



*in shadowing studies makes explicit and critical debate about the methodological and epistemological implications or research design even more vital. (p. 468).*

As I have elucidated in this chapter my methodological and epistemological basis is in philosophical non-dualism. Inspired by Weick (1995), I brought with me a paradigm of *sensemaking* into the study, and it was those characteristics related to improvisation that initially interested me. As I had taken interest in improvisation and its relation to organizing practice, I anticipated (potentially) being able to bring in something new and useful to the field. But I knew little about *how* or *to which extent*, which are the factors that ultimately determined the fruitfulness of the concept. How improvisation applied to the research context, the quality of spontaneity and creativity in action, the typical traits of specific practices, the temporality and quality of action – these were all secrets to me before the empirical study. I did not make quantifiable representations of improvisation beforehand, as this would be outside my goal of authentic qualitative insight. Unlike authors of managerial behaviour (for example Carlson 1951; Stewart 1967, Mintzberg 1973; Kotter 1986; Tengblad 2006) I had no ambition of counting decisions or phone-calls, or of measuring the length of meetings or the like, but rather, of *studying the quality* of organizing practice and its relation to improvisation. Related to this I want to see the extent to which improvisation provides *a higher level of abstraction of the quality of everyday organizing*, thus permitting a practice-close communication about it.

Following the premise of non-dualism in science as discussed earlier in this chapter, I believe that scientific findings should be subjected to continual scrutiny and embellishment; that they are mere tools in an ongoing sensemaking process. The rationale for my investigations has therefore been one of opening up horizons of understanding before proposing perspectives and theories. In short, I have tried to avoid forcing closed perspectives upon the reader. In the language of Kuhn (1996) I did not seal my boxes before I made my study. My theoretical elaborations in “The improvising man” are in themselves attempts to present practical and useful hypotheses in the interest of opening up a field of research. From a basis of non-dualism it has been my purpose to present fruitful interpretations, useful theories and concepts of improvisation resulting from empirical analyses based on an initial improvisatory framework. Developing a framework that aids communication about organizing as improvisation was a crucial part of the process, and the framework emerged in a hermeneutical manner. As the research process evolved, some aspects were toned down,

others up, and there was a continual and genuine explorative undertaking of empirical and theoretical analyses for the sake of developing a practice-close language of organizing as improvisation. In short, *“The improvising man” is not a sealed framework inserted beforehand, but a “product” in progress which evolved gradually.*

I will in the following describe the process of my shadowing venture – how it emerged in practice as a hermeneutical and qualitative empirical study – and how the framework of improvisation as presented in chapter four and chapters seven to ten is the result of emergent reflections from the basis of empirical data *and* theory.

### **About the shadowing venture**

During the period of empirical research I was permitted to spend at least two days with each manager and join him/her in as many of the daily activities as possible and ethically responsible. Except for the occasional visit to the bathroom, a few confidential meetings and one particular surgical operation I was admitted into all situations as they evolved. I thus observed negotiation meetings, administrative meetings, informal meetings, paperwork, phone calls, surgery, fights and conflicts, patient tragedies and psychiatric treatment - to name a few. My laptop was with me in most of these scenarios but in some instances I exchanged it with a hardback notebook. As pointed out by McDonald (2005) tape recorders are not practical for shadowing, which also applied to my situation: Being on the run for much of the day, and meeting a lot of people who were not immediately aware of my role as a researcher made it both impractical and unethical to use a recorder. In large groups and with many unknown participants, getting permission to use a recorder was difficult, and would in any case introduced the additional complication of having to transcribe the recordings as well. Most important, however, was the explicit dismay the managers articulated at my suggestion of using a recorder. Although not generally using a tape-recorder, however, I was able to note down conversations in great detail by means of abbreviations and key-words, and whenever I had the chance I “wrote out” my observations as complete texts with the episodes fresh in mind. Likewise, after each day of observation, I spent the night making my field notes complete and coherent in terms of dialogue and other contextual details. (The notes were continually translated from Norwegian to English.) In that sense my work bears close resemblance to the methodological approach of William Foote Whyte who in 1943 published the study “Street corner society”, which later has become a sociological branch standard. Without the use of tape-recorder Whyte sometimes made notes in short breaks between

observations, but ended up with a method of writing narratives and dialogues at night whilst the experience of previous encounters were still fresh in mind.

How accurate are my observations and especially the dialogues? As I seldom used a recording device I have had to rely on my notes, keywords, abbreviations and recollection of the observed occurrences when “completing” the field notes. The notes were expanded shortly after the actual occurrences, but I have no illusions about their accuracy or objectiveness. First of all, even if I had used a tape-recorder, I would still have had to rely on my instincts as to what was going on, what the emotional atmosphere was like etc., and some degree of inaccuracy would have been unavoidable. From a sensemaking perspective I believe that my ability as a researcher to read social situations and their meaning is the most important factor. Words in themselves give little meaning outside of the social and emotional context (Dewey 1929). Secondly, some detail and accuracy would inevitably have been lost when translating the dialogues from Norwegian to English. This is no excuse for the apparent flaws of my note-making method, of which I am aware, but I believe that the dialogues are sufficiently authentic even if they are not accurately cited word by word. When presenting data in chapters seven, nine and ten I find the dialogue-form important in order to show authentic emergence of social processes, and in that sense it is a weakness that the dialogues are not quoted accurately. But I still believe that my recreation of the episodes on the basis of detailed notes holds sufficient quality to counter much of this weakness. The trustworthiness of my method is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Even if many harmless jokes were made at my and the managers’ expense in the beginning, I soon became a natural element of the context. I was accepted and blended in. The irony of things is that amongst those occurrences that made the strongest impression on me emotionally were two particular experiences that I have not been able to fit into the final draft of my dissertation. These experiences include confrontations and conversations I had whilst shadowing a variety of nurses and doctors in a psychiatric ward and some rather intimidating episodes that occurred while I was shadowing doctors and nurses in a surgical ward. But even if these are not explicitly utilized in the thesis I still see these experiences as central to my understanding of InSitu Hospital as a sensemaking arena and the way it affects those participating in it.

In line with the way Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) describe observation research, my personal experience of the research process is a tale of emotionality. There were many moments where I wished myself out of the situation, mostly because I felt that my presence bordered on the inappropriate, or I was frightened by the patient treatment taking place, or because at times, those around me at times suspected me of being a spy from central management (which was of course cleared up the next minute). Indeed, simply to contact the managers in the first place trying to make an appointment was exciting and a bit intimidating. Getting their attention and convincing them that my work could be valuable was quite a delicate and somewhat awkward matter. Generally, I would say that much of the empirical phase of my dissertation was centred around legitimating, building trust and gaining admittance. It takes quite a lot of convincing and arguing to be let onto someone's private turf as a stranger, but in the end it worked out as intended.

In the beginning, shadowing the managers took some getting used to, both for me and for the individual manager. But in none of the cases did it take long before it felt like the most natural thing in the world. Indeed, some of the managers were right out flattered by all the attention and the fact that I was interested in *them*. It is my impression that it helped matters that I explained that my mission was not to evaluate the quality of their work, but simply to study how everyday life went along.

## **Interviews**

According to McDonald (2005) and Fontana and Frey (2000) it is a common approach to combine ethnographic studies with in-depth interviews as well as a form of informal and continual interviews to sort out the researcher's observations and clear up misunderstandings. In my study I made both kinds of interviews. I conducted a total of nine in-depth interviews: one with each participant. The goal of these was to get to know how the managers reflected upon their everyday life so as to gain insight into their espoused theory (Argyris and Schön 1974, 1996). The interviews lasted between one and two hours and on the whole, the exchange concerned practically relevant issues, but as I was pursuing their typical understanding of improvisation in everyday organizing, issues of specific theoretical interest were addressed as well. I had prepared an interview guide covering these theoretical issues in advance, and as a consequence the interviews are a mixture of what Fontana and Frey (2000) call structured and unstructured. The interview guide was divided into two parts concurrent with my research goals. Around these generic topics conversations emerged in an open-ended

manner, and the informants were allowed to elaborate freely on those topics (King 1994). Concretely, using the interview guide, I asked the managers the following questions:

### **Concerning research goal 1**

1. How does your everyday work life play out in terms of
  - the nature of problems you encounter – vague and diffuse or clear and technical?
  - unpredictability?

The analysis of the responses I received to these questions is found in chapters seven and nine.

2. What is the significance of being able to
  - be empathetic with the social context, and sensitive to the physical context, you act in?
  - act spontaneously and rapidly?

The analysis of the responses I received to these questions is found in chapter nine.

### **Concerning research goal 2**

1. What is the role of rules, routines, structures, systems and plans in everyday organizing?
2. How do you think about and deal with these issues in practice?

The analysis of the responses I received to these questions is found in chapter ten.

As indicated earlier, a different kind of interview was also conducted on a more or less continual basis. Through the shadowing experiences I often posed questions in order to validate my interpretations and to get a sense of how the informants saw the situations (McDonald 2005). From this I hope to have achieved a greater understanding of contextuality and of the manner in which the manager categorizes his experiences of that contextuality.

I used a recording device only in a few of the interviews, as I soon discovered that in many cases the tape recorder made the manager sceptical with regard to anonymity, and thus that it inhibited the natural flow of conversation. In addition, several managers expressed a general distaste for mechanical monitoring of any kind, and made it clear that they would prefer my

not using such a device. To compensate for the lack of recording equipment I repeatedly informed the managers about my notes and interpretations and asked them to confirm my understanding of them.

## **The analysis**

During the data-gathering phase I tried to avoid thinking about theory, prioritizing instead the endeavour to capture the richness of contextuality in my notes. In the succeeding phase of analysis I was guided by an ethnographic aim “. . . *to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller and more meaningful context*” (Tedlock 2000). Thus, after the data recording phase I drew on theory as a sensemaking tool for analysis, a process that was initiated by an iterative exercise of qualitative data analysis, QDA software coding, and categorization (Weitzman 2000). Importing the narratives into N-VIVO I worked hard to structure and categorize my findings with relevance to the initial framework of improvisation, but also with regard to any upcoming topic that seemed interesting. As a result, I came out with some 200 categories and subcategories, many of which overlapped and covered the same occurrences: Just as no context was easily captured in a single category, the categories naturally fitted several contexts as they were of a higher level of abstraction than the text.

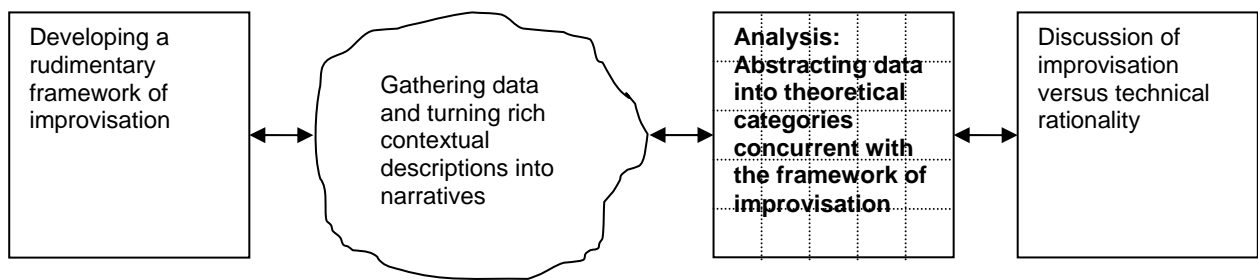
After the process of initial structuration I started looking for similarities and dissimilarities in the stories. Having the initial rudimentary framework of improvisation in mind, I tried to sort out characteristics in the narratives that could be of special interest – because they surprised me and/or because they highlighted traits of special relevance to the understanding of organizing as improvisation. Of special interest were topics such as complexity in different shapes, unpredictability and interruption, use of language, planning, and systems thinking.

Much can be said about the initial analysis phase of using N-VIVO. First of all, this was a very thorough and scrupulous process compelling me to re-experience the incidents in detail and to see them as a whole. For this alone the N-VIVO process was worthwhile undertaking, as I paradoxically obtained both greater proximity *and* greater distance to the data. This might represent an interesting angle in relation to the current debate on how QDA-software influences closeness to data (Weitzman 2000). Secondly, using N-VIVO has left me with several ideas for new papers that could not be integrated in the thesis. Thirdly, and less pleasantly, after having spent a considerable amount of time using N-VIVO I almost began seeing words instead of contexts; an emerging tendency which took a lot of effort to avert. I

do not, however, suspect this to be a feature of the QDA-tool, but rather a necessary part of the qualitative analysis as such. And fourthly, having some 200 categories at my disposal created something of a luxury problem in choosing, not to say *not* choosing, amongst them. Indeed, writing the analysis was as much a matter of choosing the appropriate codes and citations (invisible work) as of structuring the draft. In that sense the continual and exhausting sensemaking efforts in many ways overshadow the final text. On the basis of the 200 categories there was no *one apparent* history to be told, and no given order of sequence in which to tell it. Finding (creating) the right story was indeed a great challenge, and looking back I would have tried to minimize the number of initial categories and put somewhat less emphasis on letting the text speak for itself in all its diversity. In other words, when writing my first drafts it was hard to exclude any of the categories, as I wanted a dense and interesting basis for further analysis and embellishment, but in retrospect I realize that some effort could have been saved by limiting the amount of data to be analyzed (Silverman 2000).

The next phase was to choose the most interesting of the N-VIVO categories, those which seemed especially illustrative in light of the generic concept of improvisation, and use them in the moulding of another draft. But as this draft, too, was found to be too wide and unfocused, I soon started working on yet another. And then another – and so forth. In the end, I ended up abandoning most of the 200 categories in favour of new, more relevant and specific headings. In that sense the original categories worked together with the initial (and evolving) concept of improvisation as dynamic forehaving, as sensemaking tools, guiding an increasingly specific and contextual analysis. And as indicated, the ideal behind this process was to find a workable balance between theoretical abstraction and contextual relevance.

To sum up, my goal was to study how improvisation evolves in everyday organizing practice amongst managers at InSitu Hospital, which implies moulding analytical categories from the contextual data. These categories must necessarily be of a *higher* level of abstraction than the data and *within* the practical philosophical framework of improvisation but still contextually relevant. The path towards the final draft can be outlined as illustrated in model 6.0:



### ***Model 6.0 The analytical process***

The proposed analytical categories reflect attempts to gather some of the observed regularities in improvisational behaviour as indicated by the data, and by describing these regularities I aim to contribute to a language that is more empirically specific and in that sense contextual than the generic and initial hypotheses of organizing as improvisation from the theory chapters. Whereas the data themselves present a rich portrait of everyday contextuality and improvisation, the analytical categories reflect typicalities in those data concurrent with the improvisational frame: the particular meets the general (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). In other words, I have tried to point out some distinctive traits of everyday organizing practice that seem to be of special importance for the quality of improvisation. Thus, I could not have determined beforehand which contextual factors to focus on in the analytical phase; rather, I have had to see if in retrospect I could find viable categories of practical context and improvisation that covered recurrences in my findings. The main reasons for this approach have been the following:

1. The aim of having as much as possible an open and curious mind as to what may emerge as significant findings, concurrent with *using* and *building* theory rather than following it. And as a consequence:
2. Possibly to open some new and practically relevant perspectives on everyday improvisation in organizing based on the empirical material. This point is in line with the hermeneutical message that theories and hypotheses function as forehaving, thus guiding further analysis, from which new theory emerges.
3. To increase the transferability of my findings from the InSitu Hospital context to other relevant organizational contexts from an aspiration to reach high levels of abstraction.



Inspired by Argyris and Schön (1992) a final step of the analysis was to juxtapose my findings on organizing practice with the way managers talked: both as reflected in the interviews and in the everyday conversations that were logged during the shadowing. This analysis leads up to a final discussion which is linked to dominant strands in organization theory so as to point out the relevance and need for the line of research implied by the improvisation framework (see chapter ten).

### **Trustworthiness & credibility**

There have inevitably been some instances of the Hawthorne effect due to my mere presence in the manager's context. After all, a central point in philosophical non-dualism is that I am as a researcher part of the context I am studying. In Weick's (1995) words, through enactment I partly create the context in which I act. There were, especially in the very beginning of my observation periods, instances where I felt that my presence influenced the manager's choice of words and actions. In my view, however, as I started to blend in as a natural element of the context the Hawthorne effect seemed to gradually wear off.

To secure a high level of credibility in my analysis I have drawn heavily on member-check and participant validation (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2000). As an explicit attempt to counter research *bias* I have regularly asked for the informants' view on whether the particular situation at hand and the general flow of that day were normal compared to everyday life:

*... the constant shuttling between hard data gathering and interaction with the subjects was essential in order to go beyond the level of observing mere behaviour and grasp the meaning the observed actions had. (Bonazzi 1998, p. 223).*

Furthermore, I have continually strived for rich description in my research notes so as to facilitate rich interpretation (Denzin 1989), and the goal has been to ensure that analysis and interpretation balance description (Janesick 2000). As far as practically possible I have tried to log occurrences-in-the-becoming (Bergson 1944), as well as the informants' views on what was going on. Writing from the genre of "narrative ethnography" (Tedlock 2000), I have tried to keep a time-log of events as they occurred as well, but often, when situations emerged with great intensity or density I chose to focus more on qualitative aspects. Having "a passion for detail" (McDonald 2005), I have noted down odours, colours, shapes, moods, emotional

atmospheres, gesticulations and conversations as I have observed them. Even if (or precisely because) I realize there is no one truth to be uncovered, it is my hope that the narratives presented are consistent and credible (Janesick 2000). To my knowledge my field notes hold high quality in that they reflect episodes and dialogues in sufficient and authentic detail; and in addition the notes contain personal experiences which, again, is part of the narrative ethnographic genre to which I subscribe (Tedlock 2000). More about the field notes and their utilization in data presentation is found in the introductory section of chapter seven.

As described in an earlier section of this chapter I mostly did not use a tape recorder, but through continual note writing, making use of key words and abbreviations I was able to follow the episodes as they evolved. Earlier I argued that the ultimate measure of trustworthiness from a sensemaking perspective is the ability to observe and understand the meaning of social situations. Weick et al. (2005) state the following:

*Sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right. Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism . . . . People may get better stories, but they will never get the story . . . . A focus on perceptual accuracy is grounded in models of rational decision making. (p. 415).*

Interpreted into a research context this is the ideal I have followed, as following a sensemaking perspective I have tried to log on to emerging stories, grasp their meaning and write them down as plausible narratives. Recreating these stories in retrospect has therefore been dependent on my initial interpretation of what was going on, and my field notes have greatly aided this process of reconstruction. As explained earlier in this chapter my objective has not been objectivity, but intersubjectivity (Mead 1967). As I did not use a recording device dialogues included in the narratives are not accurate word by word; a point which is reinforced by the fact that the original field notes have been translated into English. I still hope that the final result as presented in the succeeding chapters is sufficiently detailed, and that the narratives are presented in such a manner that I might gain trust as an observer, researcher and writer.

Schwandt (2000) argues that in any social sensemaking activity intersubjectivity is at stake – some form of bias is inevitable because interpretative research assumes an understanding of understanding. From the non-dualist position it is impossible to make sure that you grasp

exactly what is on another person's mind. Throughout the research process I have followed authenticity and contextuality as measures of validity (Lincoln & Guba 2000) and practical wisdom has been my guiding rule (Schwandt 1996). But even if I have validated my interpretations with participants, I cannot know whether I covered all aspects of importance. I did, however, address those aspects that I saw as important features of authenticity, and in the end I hope that I have created sufficient understanding of those social meetings which most participants can agree with. An interesting and potential next step in this process may be to bring the dissertation back to the participants and discuss its usefulness in terms of achieving better organizing practice.

As encouraged by McDonald (2005), I have tried as best as I could to be prepared for the events to come and to know something about the participants in advance. Actually, this is a matter that came along quite naturally as the managers usually prepared me in advance by volunteering information about themselves and their work. Furthermore, as a rule the managers introduced me to important others when it was natural to do so, and they gave me instructive information about the meetings we attended. For instance, they would typically show me meeting agendas, inform me about the purpose of the meeting and about other participants, and in some instances give accounts of the preceding history leading up to the meeting.

In addition to writing notes continuously and meticulously, I have kept a *private* log throughout the entire research process. This has enabled me to go back and see which thoughts emerged when, and to consider my expectations, worries and general reflections. Confronting what I wrote down and anticipated before events took place has proved to be quite fruitful with regard to validation and enlightenment and to avoid the pitfalls of "going native" (McDonald 2005; Nielsen 1996).

With regard to the observations and the interviews I cannot be certain that I have understood the informants correctly in all aspects, even though I double-checked my interpretations. But it is my opinion that throughout the data gathering, a genuine intersubjective sphere emerged, and that empathic understanding was achieved. Needless to say, difficult words and expressions, both medical and administrative, were thoroughly discussed as they occurred.

As a measure of validity Lincoln & Guba (2000) ask: “*Can our cocreated constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?*” (p. 179). The “human phenomenon” in my case is improvisation in everyday organizing, and in order to provide a trustworthy construction of this phenomenon I have strived for fruitful dialogues with myself as well as with others. An important point has been to be critical towards my preliminary expectations. My log contains some of my essential expectations, and I have tried to surface these as best I can wherever it has seemed important. An essential part of this, as earlier explained, has been to test out my interpretations continuously with the participants in order to eradicate potential misunderstandings, exaggerations or the like. Likewise, I have used colleagues and advisors as a source of validation by having them comment on my beliefs and anticipations. The point has not been to achieve a condition of “tabula rasa”, but to bring to the surface important factors that might influence my analysis. Four phases can be singled out in which social validation has been especially important:

1. Theory development. Discussing with colleagues, family and friends.
2. Data collection. Conferring with the participants about by interpretations.
3. Data transcription. Conferring with my logbook and advisor about the style of writing.
4. Data analysis. Conferring with all sources available to maintain an open but concrete view.

As a last comment on credibility I refer to the advantages pointed out by McDonald (2005) regarding shadowing as a method: Being more like an observer than a participant might reduce the chances of “going native”. Thus, even if as a researcher I have been part of the social processes, I have focused on seeing them from the outside.

### **The hermeneutics of the research process**

This thesis has come about through a challenging hermeneutical process of sensemaking. Starting with an initial interest in improvisation as a concept for organizing, the succeeding process has been a continuous effort to confront deeply held personal mindsets and develop new insights.

*This forehaving might in the dialogue with the text transcend and lead up to new understanding. The concept of understanding is to be seen as a radical act - it is about renewal, transformation and new insights for the researcher rather than reproductions of old conceptions [my translation]. (Ödman 1979 in Norén 1995, p. 34).*

In that sense, putting together this dissertation has implied “science around the clock”, with seemingly non-stopping reflection, frustration and evolving enlightenment. Working with non-dualist theory has in itself been a challenge to such an extent that some of my most profound private identity-structures and expectations have been put to the test. As my ideal has been grounded in the practical and contextual, the process has been genuine in the sense of opposing reification and taken for granted beliefs. It has been lonely, uncertain and exhausting. I have taken on the most complex philosophical questions of existence and attempted to mould these into workable concepts for organizing praxis. As a result, I have been working on my research during weekends, at night, at concerts, while driving to work and while reading books or magazines. Whenever a theoretical problem has surfaced in my head, I have attempted to solve it and place it within a larger philosophical frame, from a desire to develop workable and internally consistent hypotheses of improvisation.

Equal to philosophical non-dualism such as mine, Schwandt (2000) argues that theory-free research is an impossible ideal in hermeneutical epistemology. Indeed, as Schwandt points out, to strive for a “tabula rasa” approach to empirical studies is not even desirable, as “. . . *tradition is ‘a living force that enters into all understanding’*” (Gallagher 1992 in Schwandt 2000, p. 194). In the spirit of ethnography and qualitative shadowing I have tried, rather, to *engage* my biases (Schwandt 2000), to note down events in the becoming and to provide rich descriptions that could later be interpreted somewhat independently by others.

*Ethnography presumes that the researcher should have an open mind vis-à-vis the object of study. Naturally some theory or frame of reference must direct the work, but the purpose of this is to give some direction and system to the task, rather than get in the way of crucial observation and analysis. (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2008, p. 46).*

During the data gathering process, and especially in the interviews, I tried to be as explicit as possible about my theoretical suspicions, expectations and interpretations, in order to avoid and challenge possible bias and prejudice. Not to mention the number of times I was surprised by what I found. For instance, I often had thoughts in the mornings before meeting the manager about what to expect during the day, and when I did, I wrote them down. It could be that I feared that the day would be wasted on observing paperwork or, as in the case of the clinical observations, that the odours, sounds and images would be so horrific that they would prohibit effective note writing. In some instances, I even dreaded meeting the manager in

question, as the preceding phone conversation had not been too promising with regard to obtaining good communication. In most of these cases, however, my apprehensions were proven to be unfounded. Particularly what I feared would be uninteresting and unusable for my thesis proved to be quite the opposite. Indeed, as a general comment, the richness of evolving contexts always surpassed the simplicity of my prospectations.

As to the findings a lot of occurrences surprised me, for instance the extent to which interruption enters the organizing context. Of course I had my suspicions, but the variety, multitude and complexity brought about by interruptions in typical everyday life took me somewhat by surprise. Likewise, the essential role of emotion, through implicit and explicit moods and affections, and the ways these tune and colour everyday life were quite a revelation. Again, I suspected that emotion plays an important role, but precisely how and to which extent, I had to experience in order to realize. Being a shadow rather than a participant let me see social processes from a perspective not commonly reachable. After all, monitoring conversations as a civilian is seldom considered acceptable, nor is it very respectful or indeed interesting. But shadowing implies admittance into the complexity of real time interaction, thus facilitating in varying degrees a range of perspectives not usually accessible.

### **Non-dualism and transferability**

As argued by Janesick (2000), traditional ways of thinking about generalizations are inadequate in interpretative, non-dualistic research such as mine. Implicit in the non-dualist approach to shadowing is an appetite for details, but as they are not seen as objective features, details can never provide grounds for quantitative generalizations: An inductive approach to shadowing can from a non-dualist point of view never lead to hypotheses from which future events can be *deducted*. Rather, as a non-dualist I have pursued a methodology of hermeneutical *abduction*: of authentic sensemaking in evolving context.

*Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis. (Peirce 1974a, p. 106).*

Instead of generalization transferability might be a better term. And indeed, I would argue that this dissertation might have value outside of the specific case of InSitu Hospital; that my findings might be translated and in that sense transferred to other contexts (Czarniawska and

Sevón 1996). My empirical findings and analysis cannot be applied *analogically* to other contexts, but to the extent that they seem plausible and illustrative, they provide grounds for future understanding of similar situations elsewhere. Thus, my aim is to provide a sensemaking instrument; to give rich illustrations and narratives (Geertz 1973) and a theoretical apparatus of improvisation that lends itself to the possibility of being translated *metaphorically* into new situations.

From a non-dualistic point of view, improvisation, communication and sensemaking are intertwined and general phenomena found anywhere where people meet, although to varying degrees. They are traits of what Blumer (1969) labels “the common”. This is in accordance with Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who argue that “. . . *after Sartre (1981, p.ix) . . . no individual case is ever just an individual or a case . . . . Thus to study the particular is to study the general*” (p. 370). Furthermore, the narratives from the InSitu context might in themselves be of a familiar kind that allows for understanding and learning: It is likely that other managers in different organizations would recognize many of the typical situations described in the analysis. As beautifully summed up by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), I take the role of the researcher who “. . . *assumes that the readers will be able . . . to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences*” (p. 370).

The theoretical framework of improvisation as it is developed in this dissertation is not meant to be a conclusive contribution to the field. Many other concepts, such as learning, group dynamics and complexity theory overlap and provide interesting views, and even improvisation itself can be portrayed in other ways than has been done in this thesis. Still, I hope the empirical and theoretical insights can provide some openings into improvisation in organizing practice as it evolves on an everyday level. And even if future contexts should differ considerably from the conditions at InSitu Hospital, this dissertation can at least provide some points of departure for creative discussions. At the very least I hope that it can be a contribution to *a way of talking* about organizing that is practically realistic.

## Concluding remarks

This dissertation is a study of improvisation in organizing processes, and I go about this study by means of a two-step strategy: the first strategy is a theoretical elaboration of organizing as improvisation, and the second an empirical study of improvisation in everyday organizing practice amongst nine managers in a large Norwegian hospital called InSitu. From a hermeneutical, practical philosophical point of view I have derived the following research question for this study: “What is the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice and how does improvisation relate to technical rationality?”

My choice of empirical research design is a logical consequence of the non-dualistic philosophy that underpins both the theoretical and empirical study, and I have found “qualitative ethnographic social research” (Vidich and Lyman 2000) to be an appropriate research strategy. From this strategy I use a method of qualitative shadowing (McDonald 2005), and in accordance with this my field notes are written within a genre of “narrative ethnography” (Tedlock 2000). In order to obtain a good grasp on the managers’ organizing reality in terms of both “theory-in-use” and “espoused theory” (Argyris and Schön 1974, 1996), I compare my observations with in-depth interviews. Using an interview-guide, the interviews are a mixture of what Fontana and Frey (2000) call structured and unstructured, in which each of the managers engages in exchanges about their typical everyday practice. Following McDonald’s (2005) and Fontana and Frey’s (2000) notes on ethnographic research, I also conduct frequent informal interviews so as to obtain continual intersubjectivity between myself and the managers. Hopefully, the results are exciting reading.

Penetrating, preceding and succeeding the empirical study is a process of hermeneutics from which a challenging and rewarding knowledge growth has emerged. The empirical analysis would have been of little worth without the preceding and rudimentary theoretical framework, but at the same time this framework has been significantly improved by the empirical study. Moreover, “hermeneutics” describes the crucial way in which theoretical forehaving has guided my perception in the research context and how empirical reflections have refined forehaving. For instance, I do not have any illusions that my empirical notes have been, or could have been, made in complete isolation. On the contrary, I see the value in having a sophisticated forehaving if possible, as long as it is used in an open and explicit manner,



which involves continuously striving for scrutiny and seeing it in a critical light (Schwandt 2000).

The most challenging part of the empirical analysis process has been to determine a functional level of abstraction: to balance the right amount of abstraction with contextual validation. More specifically, as I see the two as inseparable, the challenge has been to find workable categories that display epistemological features of improvisation as a general phenomenon and at the same time the way improvisation emerges in practice amongst InSitu managers. Not only do I recognize that a sharper linguistic apparatus has come out of this; the focus on which dimensions of improvisation constitute the most crucial ones has also been provoked and renovated as a result. For example, seeing in practice the importance of everyday emotion has inspired me to place a much stronger emphasis on corporality and emotion in “The improvising man” than originally intended. Likewise, the significance of everyday unpredictability has come out as a more important feature, and in a different shape, than I expected beforehand: Whereas before the empirical study I regarded unpredictability as a somewhat abstract topic, I have now become far more attentive to the smaller facets of unpredictability in everyday life, such as a sudden phone call, a hasty movement or a knock on the door. As a last example, the theoretical categories of “positive improvisation” and “negative improvisation”, the separation between “pure improvisation” and “sufficiently pure improvisation”, and the separation between “pure” and “good improvisation” came about as a direct result of the empirical analysis (see chapter eight). Hence, “The improvising man” has never been a ready-made concept that has merely been put to use in an empirical setting. Rather, “The improvising man” has been, and still is, a concept under development, and hopefully it can be further embellished through further empirical and theoretical studies. To sum up, I think it is safe to say that in my research process theory and empirical data have mutually shaped each other.

Working with this thesis has indeed brought afflictions. Mostly because of the solitude associated with being very specialized in a deeply complex matter. Along the way I sometimes lost faith in whether my work would be of any interest or use, or whether it would offer something new to the field. After all, I could not possibly know the result until the work was completed. Furthermore, the risk involved in setting out to create an original but still coherent and understandable framework of organizing as improvisation has indeed caused some sleepless nights and offered many obstacles. These obstacles can be difficult to see

when reading the final draft, but the pile of yellow tags, notes on envelopes, in books, on the computer, on concert tickets, on the back of supermarket receipts etc. are living proof.

Dealing with these obstacles has at times made me lose my conception; the meaning of words has evaporated and created confusion. And to my astonishment I realize that it is often the same sort of problems that recur over and over again: the basic philosophical issues of dualism and technical rationality that originally spurred this dissertation.

## Chapter 7. Introduction to the InSitu manager's context

### Introduction

As the first of the empirical chapters, the current chapter gives an introduction to the managers included in the study and to the context in which they perform organizing. More specifically the study concerns an observation of eight department managers and one section manager in everyday practice at a large Norwegian hospital, which I, for purposes of anonymity, have called "InSitu". Before introducing the managers in the next section, however, I would like to start off with some theoretical comments which provide grounds for the structure I have chosen for the empirical analysis.

Every so often we have the need to make simple models of organizations in order to facilitate communication and coordination. For example, we might talk about organizations as if they were actual entities without necessarily believing that they are so in the literal sense. To some extent we might even become accustomed to over-simplified contemplations on a taken-for-granted level so that we come to think of organizations as autonomous wholes. Authors like Chia (1996) and Weick (2001), however, remind us that organizations are better explained through verbs than nouns, implicating that neat categories and simple formulas per definition cannot keep up with the flow of everyday organizational events.

Following in Weick's footsteps, I do not see InSitu Hospital as *one* organization and I do not intend to treat it as one. Neither is it many organizations in one. InSitu can only *superficially* be spoken of in terms of nouns, structures or any other form of entity. It is a living process upheld by interacting individuals, each with different needs and wants; individuals who are clustered in groups and united around different functions, routines and services, and who every day make an effort to make them work. It is from these considerations that chapters seven to ten look into those organizing *processes* that concern InSitu Hospital managers, study how they *typically evolve* in real time, and, later, how this can be related to the concept of improvisation. As argued in chapter four, however, improvisation happens in context, and for that reason the current chapter is devoted to a study of the actual situation that the manager experiences and the way it continuously evolves into new situations. Implicitly, this is a way of studying how practical problems typically occur and what their typical nature is like. But although it is a study of contextuality, it is a study of verbs rather than nouns.

Knowing more about the typical nature of everyday situations for managers can be valuable per se, and is the topic for this chapter. In the next instance such knowledge is crucial as a basis for understanding how managers typically *respond* to and enact situations via improvisation (chapters eight and nine). For the time being, I shall concentrate on the uniqueness of practical contextuality – on how contexts typically emerge into new contexts and how this is perceived from the point of view of the manager. Ultimately I hope to be able to present an image of typical characteristics of the work situation of an InSitu department manager and the challenges associated with it. Such an image is important as a backdrop for understanding the nature of the improvisatory processes that take place: As improvisation always happens in context, it is my opinion that an empirical study of improvisation should build on a rich and colourful representation of that context. It is easier to see why InSitu Hospital managers improvise when one knows something about the milieu in which they operate.

The structure for my empirical analysis was chosen partly as a didactic device, and it is to some extent inspired by Mintzberg's (1973) "basic distinction" between *characteristics* and *content* in his classic study of the nature of managerial work. My interpretation of Mintzberg is along the same lines as Weick's (1974), where "characteristics" concerns context and typical work flow and "content" concerns what managers actually *do*. Broadly speaking, then, chapter seven is primarily devoted to work characteristics and the three succeeding chapters to work content. I would like to emphasize, however, that there is an inextricable tie between characteristics and content, as I see them as mutually constitutive aspects of a lived organizing experience. Indeed, to use Mintzberg's vocabulary, from a non-dualistic perspective characteristics are created and shaped by content and vice versa. It is therefore my opinion that the real value of a study such as mine lies in bringing the two together, which is the reason why characteristics of context is thoroughly accentuated in the last three chapters on content. Finally, I hold that it is via such a non-dualistic epistemological grip that Mintzberg's seminal work can be challenged and carried further, hopefully providing new insights.

As a last point before moving on to empirical observations and analyses, I would like to comment on the form of data presentation I have chosen. As explained in the chapter on methodology, I want to give the reader a chance to form his/her own opinions about my observations in order to open up for alternative conclusions. Therefore I have chosen to

include lengthy narratives in the form of block quotes. The narratives are written from my point of view as a shadow of the observed occurrences (McDonald 2005), and I have taken the following statement by Tedlock (2000) as my guide to the way they are presented as quotes: ". . . *an ethnographer can allow both self and other to appear together within a single narrative that carries a multiplicity of dialoguing voices.*" (p. 471).

In that sense the narratives are in a way pre-analysed, as I could only focus on what I had focused on *in situ*. The details presented are the details *I saw* as important in my personal observations and continual interviews with the participants: From a non-dualistic viewpoint, making observations is inevitably a process of analysis, of grasping the meaning of a situation (Schwandt 2000), and thus I have included in the narratives both emerging dialogues and personal views on the emerging episodes (Tedlock 2000; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008). The difference between the pre-analyses presented in block quotes, which I prefer to call observations, and the succeeding theoretical analyses is the time at which they were produced. More specifically, almost two years passed between the writing of the data in the block quotes and the creation of the succeeding analyses, and by that time I had managed to acquire more of an outsider's perspective. As this time lapse have provided some distance to the data, it has, in my view, helped in making me capable of conducting good analyses; a process which was further facilitated by an extensive N'VIVO analysis conducted in the period between the observation phase and the final analysis.

The block quotes are a result of my trying to write down occurrences as they happened, minimizing the use of theoretical abstractions to the greatest extent possible. The succeeding (post-)analysis represents a diametrically opposite approach. It is an attempt to find recurrences in the data in terms of the emerging framework of improvisation. And through analysing the data, of which only a selection ended up in the dissertation as block quotes, "The improvising man" took form in a much deeper and more contextualized way than before. So why have I chosen to include those particular block quotes that are found in the succeeding chapters? As explained in chapter six on methodology, the empirical analysis emerged as an iterative process of identifying topics that seemed to be of interest from an improvisatory angle. Keeping complexity and improvisation in mind, I looked for recurrent issues that could deepen the framework of "The improvising man" and enlighten me about the typical form taken by complexity as improvisation in the practical context of InSitu managers. In this process of reflecting on and analysing the data the following phenomena came to the

surface: Problem definition, ambiguity, vagueness, clustering of events, unpredictability, emotionality and emergence (presented in this chapter). I also arrived at the insight that I should separate between *positive* and *negative* improvisation, between *pure* and *good* improvisation, and between *pure* and *sufficiently pure* improvisation, so as to facilitate communication about the essence of improvisation in the everyday setting of InSitu managers (chapters eight and nine). Finally, I gained some intriguing insights about the *functionality* of technical rationality in organizing practice. Above all, I found good examples of how technical rationality and improvisation can be *woven together* and *involve each other* in organizing processes, and of how *functionality is a matter of perspective* (chapter ten). The block quotes presented in the following chapters are included because I see them as *central to my developing these findings*, and because *they are representative of these findings*.

As explained, many new concepts and insights emerged from the empirical analysis and were integrated into the framework of “The improvising man”. Many of these aspects are missing in the original literature on improvisation, as well as in my early reflections upon this literature. These new aspects, concepts and insights are therefore of a very different character from those in the block quotes, just as the analysis made some two years after the observation phase is of a very different character from the pre-analyses included in the block quotes. Although developed from empirical analyses, they are consistent with the emerging framework of “The improvising man” and have contributed to a deepening and specification of this theoretical framework for practical purposes. In that sense they are explicit bonds between theory and empirical data: they are categories and phenomena that have hermeneutically come out of both theoretical studies and empirical analyses and which tie these together (see model 6.0).

## Getting to know the managers

### Confidentiality

In order to get admittance to the managers included in the study I have had to promise them full confidentiality. In the following presentations the names of the particular departments are therefore kept anonymous and the names of the managers are changed. The rest of the details listed are correct, including the managers' gender. In general I have tried to give as much detail as possible without violating the important ethical contract that was negotiated between myself and the managers.

### Camilla

Camilla runs a [Confidential] department, and had years of experience from nursing before becoming departmental manager. She is a highly alert and attentive woman; one of professional commitment and dedication. Her ambition is to develop the ward and improve its services on a continual basis. In her own words:

*With regard to personnel, we are still growing. But we need to grow even more. Both with regard to the number of heads and...yes. We shall grow in every way; specialists, research, general competence . . . . Now we have the equivalent of one hundred full time positions, but we shall continue to grow until we reach a total number of 120, at which point we are as big as Ward 2. But still we will probably be smaller than most departments within the somatic division.*

On several occasions during my stay with her, Camilla expressed a genuine will to develop her organization and continue to raise the level of professionalism. In general, she displays an active and inquisitive behaviour, and seems to be constantly searching for ways to improve the way things are done. She expresses a sense of hardly ever being utterly satisfied, and tries to change routines and structures whenever she feels that it is necessary to do so. And even if such is out of her immediate and formal jurisdiction, she is not afraid to let colleagues and superiors know her point of view.

As a general observation, Camilla gives me the impression that she is not very subtle in her daily contact with colleagues. She does not keep her frustrations to herself, but addresses difficult issues directly and confronts colleagues when she considers it appropriate. Her need to change routines has little to do with making changes for the sake of making changes, however, but are attempts to improve and secure functionality so as to make things work as

they are supposed to or even better. In the process of improving departmental services, Camilla feels very isolated from the other department managers, both within the psychiatric and the somatic division. This issue is a cause of much frustration for her, and it seems that the lack of positive attention from central authorities makes her feel somewhat unimportant. She does not feel that she belongs to a functional community of practice, and sees great potential in bringing DMs together by integrating the somatic and psychiatric services, thus facilitating mutual learning and development.

### **George**

George is one of the most experienced department managers at InSitu Hospital. George is specialized within [Confidential] and runs the Department of [Confidential], which covers a wide range of different services.

*I am definitely not an expert in all the different disciplines that I am responsible for as manager, but still I have (at least) touched upon all the different areas of expertise. I know very well what is going on and where. I have a good general understanding and I am capable at laying hold of the right things.*

George became a departmental manager four and a half years ago after years of working as a clinical physician. While holding down his position as departmental manager, however, he also continues to practice medicine. This is important to George, in order not to lose contact with his profession and to maintain his medical skills. Being very experienced, he recognizes a lot of recurrences in the way the hospital has been and is currently organized, and he is not afraid to speak his mind about how things could be handled differently. Amongst his biggest worries is the more or less constant overbooking, which results in his department's corridors filling up with patients. He finds this unworthy and disturbing, and sees it as a consequence of bad financial prioritizing from the central authorities.

On the whole, many of George's comments about his work situation are of a political nature, and he is often explicit in his criticism of central authorities and the way reforms seem to be forced upon the organization. In his criticisms he sometimes seems tired and bitter, as if the managerial part of his work is a non-stop process of dealing with stupidities, unrealistic pressure from central authorities and financial impossibilities. Behind the critically reflective and grave surface, however, I have found a subtle humorous side; a sense of irony that somehow sets him apart from the gravity of everyday challenges.



## **John**

John is the manager of InSitu's [Confidential] Clinic. Having a background in paediatrics, one of the first things that stands out about John is his kindness and concern. He seems almost completely at ease; there is a certain calmness surrounding his presence. John is the kind of person who is both sharing and interested in others. As he is a rather outgoing person, what you see is what you get. This makes it easy to relax around him. He often speaks about not letting the demands of everyday work get to him, as if he is continually walking around telling himself: Do not worry; it is only work, why become agitated?

*Why do I come to work in the morning? Because I'd like to contribute to giving patients the best possible treatment in the country within our budgets. In addition research is important, of course, given the money we have at our disposal. My staff come in as a second priority. First priority is the patient . . . The staff are merely a tool. But I must treat them well, as badly oiled equipment tends not to work too well.*

John does not seem particularly stressed, but he sometimes complains about lacking time to do what is on his agenda. He speaks vividly of his pragmatist heart and the importance of not letting systemic reality get to you. Judging by the relaxed and positive atmosphere in his department, as well as his distinctive way of behaving, this pragmatist idea amounts to more than words. It seems to be the way John is. He finds loopholes and solves problems, and stretches far to get what he wants. Although being very determined in his quest to build his organization, he does not seem ruthless or insensitive to others. His concern for his colleagues, however, has a ring of professionalism, and it is hard to determine how deep it goes.

## **Howard**

Howard is the manager of InSitu's Department of [Confidential]. Like Camilla, George and John, Howard is a deeply devoted manager professionally. His everyday style is, however, slightly more authoritative without being insensitive. He, too, is pragmatic and creative in solving problems.

*I am not a very bureaucratic person. Rather, I am motivated by achieving results, which is not always an easy undertaking. I am not concerned with which rule or method I am going to follow in order to get things done. But it all depends on what kind of boss I have got, and our present director is certainly not very preoccupied with bureaucratic thinking. Before last summer I just got the key to the office and the words: "The job is yours". No job description or anything. In that way it was all very informal. Either you manage or you don't. And if you don't*

*you should find something else to do. I certainly did not take this job because I so wanted to become a manager, to put it that way. The most important thing is to get the best possible result from the financial means we have got for patient treatment - the best possible treatment. And to make this predictable in terms of finances. But also to create as good a working environment as possible in order to make people want to stay here.*

According to his own account, Howard is concerned about the wellbeing of his employees, but is not afraid of taking a strict line if he deems it necessary. Likewise, he is not afraid to confront central management or whoever threatens his department's interests. Howard strikes me as a bold and open-minded man. He is willing to try things out before he makes a decision. And he is a man of professional pride. During my stay, the professional pride was particularly evident, and I had the impression that it sometimes gets in the way of caring and empathy. There were a few running conflicts at the time of study, related to an ongoing restructuring of his department, and some employees had quite explicit emotional reactions to this process and to Howard's somewhat strict management style. These reactions, however, seemed to matter less to Howard than his professional focus on organizing.

### **Chris**

Before I came to visit Chris, the manager of the Department of [Confidential], the signals from central authorities were that he runs one of the best organized departments. The word was that Chris was one of the most successful department managers in terms of planning and efficiency, as if his department was a well-oiled machinery with highly predictable patterns. To see Chris in action, then, as a brilliant on-the-spot improviser, as someone who puts action before plan, initially came as a surprise. I expected someone calmer, perhaps a bit slower, someone who emphasises thinking before acting, but what I saw was a manager who acted on the spot, and made plans work in context. According to central management the result is a well-run department, but the way this comes about seems to me to be different from the signals I was given initially.

Chris gives the impression that he is a highly structured, reserved and down-to-earth type of person, with a high level of commitment to his work. But his speed is tremendous. His way of talking is efficient, swift and to the point. No time for beating around the bush. Chris' movements are rapid and goal-directed, and quite often he saves time by talking while doing something else. Things that can be done today are not postponed until tomorrow. Time should be used wisely, not wasted. Every second is exploited for something productive. Every action

has a thought-through purpose, or at least so it may seem. To an outsider this gives the impression that Chris is stressed and chaotic, but Chris seems to worship the high speed and variation:

*I am truly a skilled juggler, and this is exactly what makes this job interesting. The variation is tremendous between intense drama in one moment and hectic meeting in the next.*

Chris is indeed a busy guy. He is constantly “switched on” so to speak, and together with his concentration on whatever object craves his attention, this might create a somewhat humorous image. For example, at one point during my visit Chris’ swift movements and shifting focus, combined with a high-pitched voice, invoked laughter from one of his secretaries observing him from a distance.

According to him, Chris is dedicated to the moment – to making the best of it, to exploiting it in terms of higher achievements and improved quality. He rarely seems to miss an opportunity to make things better, to increase understanding or to simply get in touch with reality and provide care for his employees. Although he is not the kind of person who wastes his words, he does not use them so scarcely that he fails to be understood either. All that needs to be said is said, and sometimes even more. In addition, he has a strong loyalty to his department and his employees. Chris and his head nurse make a good team, and they put a lot of effort into making the department autonomous and self-reliant. During my stay, interference from central authorities was met with scepticism, and it was clear that Chris does not want to be disturbed by unnecessary bureaucracy or by central attempts at control.

### **Elisabeth**

Elisabeth is the head of a [Confidential] department. She lacks, however, [Confidential] medical training as she is a qualified radiologist. Her job as a department manager is temporary and related to a major departmental restructuring-process: it is her responsibility to survey and facilitate this process. Therefore, Elisabeth does not think that her medical background is of significance to the same extent as her personal capacities and general leadership qualities. Elisabeth immediately strikes me as a strong and ambitious woman. She is dedicated to her work and genuinely interested in finding ways to improve herself. Moreover, she is a highly outgoing person. What you see is what you get, and she takes pride in calling herself an extrovert. She holds that the ability to communicate with other people is at the very heart of being a leader. Indeed, the split between extrovert and introvert is one she

uses extensively herself to make sense of social relations: of why they work and why they do not always work.

*My knowledge about people is based on the way they handle practical cases, on the way they behave. I read a lot from what other people do. I form an impression of people from spending time with them.*

The first time you meet Elisabeth chances are high that you will be met with a firm handshake and a large genuine smile. You can tell that she loves working with people, and that she strives for the down-to-earth genuine in her inter-human relations. In addition, she is quite a supporter of structure, and she does not tolerate much disarray in her administration. Structures are supposed to be simple and predictable, so as to make systems work. This is reflected in the way she talks and in her choice of language. She seems to spend a lot of energy on making herself understood in simple ways. There is certainly no attempt at snobbery or pretentiousness in Elisabeth's dealing with the surrounding world. On the flip side, however, Elisabeth can at times appear quite blunt, and her strong extroversion sometimes leaves me with a sense that she feels insecure. As a consequence, it seems to me that her desire to be understood is at times outweighed by somewhat insensitive gestures seeking to confirm her capability as a leader; insensitive in the sense that her actions are sometimes more about proving her own competence than connecting to others. As a last observation it also seems to me that her obsession with extroversion and its social significance is partly a way of affirming her own personality and partly her leadership qualities – both in relation to me as a researcher and in relation to her employees. I do not know to what degree this is a consequence of her temporary role as a “restructuringer”, or of a more permanent character trait.

During my stay I sensed a lot of conflict between Elisabeth and her closest subordinates, and she revealed early on that she did not know how to connect with her introvert office manager. What made her job especially difficult was the fact that she was only temporarily hired to fill the position of DM for two years, until the restructuring was finished. She expressed a fear that this temporary role made her unpopular from the start, but she was determined to do her job and in her own mind she was a perfect candidate for it.

## **Karina**

Karina manages the Department of [Confidential]. Like Chris, Karina seems to be constantly “switched on”. She says that she is dependent upon this; on maintaining a “hands on approach” and on understanding what is going on in her organization.

*. . . it is very useful to get down there and see where the shoe pinches. Then I am able to see in practice how things relate to each other. I see it as free contact with the staff. I am very much the visible manager, and I like to be so. This is important to me, because it enables me to hear what people would not tell me otherwise . . . . In general, though, I haven't got enough time . . . . But I want to be present, want to be where it happens.*

It is important for Karina to maintain and improve her medical skills, and she has not given up working as a physician even if she has become department manager. Seeing that she can make a difference for patients seems to be a significant motivator to her, and she is determined not to let her managerial position weaken her medical skills. From her reflections on her own work situation I am left with an impression that Karina sees herself in an impossible situation of being both a good doctor *and* a good leader, and that she does not have the conscience to perform either role half-heartedly. In addition it seems to be important to her to get recognition and respect from others as to her medical and managerial capabilities.

On some occasions Karina seems to speak more than she listens, but her deeply felt devotedness to the wellbeing of her employees is evident. Karina's movements are on the whole swift and sometimes even a bit clumsy. On several occasions during my visit she dropped things on the floor, spilled coffee and the like. She does not seem to be nervous, though, but quite stressed and tense. Instead of walking leisurely, she has a style of half-running, which sometimes strikes me as involuntarily comical. My impression is that her intention of logging on to social situations, of being improspective and empathetic, is somewhat contradicted by her impatient body language. It is as if she constantly wants to do more than is practically possible, and be in many places at once.

## **Peter**

Peter runs the Department of [Confidential]. He seems to be very close to a real life counterpart of Donald Schön's (1991) notion of “reflective practitioner”. Through the way he talks about his work it is obvious that he has put down a lot of energy in finding out what works and what does not.

*I have been here since 198x, and when I took this position I knew the organization well. I knew a lot about where the shoe was pinching, and it soon became clear to me how this could be organized differently. Then I decided on a solution. And as I have little formal education within management, I based it on things I have learned and observed along the way.*

Peter has clear opinions which he communicates out to colleagues, and with a calm and pragmatic attitude he puts his opinions into practice. In his own words he regards structures as tools more than as control mechanisms. Peter is a man of vision, and is regarded as being ahead of many of the challenges that InSitu is facing. Another feature that strikes me about Peter is a certain “coolness” in his attitude towards work. It is as if he makes it a point to enjoy work, and to not let harsh realities get close enough to become emotionally intolerable.

Peter is explicit in his worries that he may not be very popular amongst his subordinates. For example, he has stopped having lunch with his colleagues, as he clearly remembers what used to be the topic around the lunch-table before he became head of [Confidential]: the DM. This does not seem to bother him much, however, as he realizes that an important part of his job is to make decisions that are not always popular. He has an ongoing project of making his section managers more financially responsible, and as in some ways this contradicts medical concerns, the process has not been a smooth or easy one so far. Still, he is determined to succeed, and willing to meet the resistance that comes with it.

### **Thomas**

As the manager of a [Confidential] section, Thomas is the only section level manager included in the study. (The section level is positioned beneath the department level.) As is true for most of the managers in the study, Thomas is a pragmatist. Furthermore, he is not afraid to admit any faults that he makes, and he is deeply caring and devoted to the task of creating a well-functioning as well as content organization. In addition to learning from others, Thomas has a predilection for making the organization learn from itself.

*It isn't possible to think through in advance every single detail of how something will work in an organization. Things will always appear that expand our experience, after which we can make an assessment. Continual assessment provides a potential for improvement.*

Even in chaotic times Thomas manages to keep a cool head and to focus on the goal, but not without consideration for the wellbeing of his employees. The way he sees his role as a

section manager, however, is not as a clear-cut matter, but rather as a continual negotiation between contradicting demands. Working in a psychiatric milieu, surrounded by nurses and doctors who are all professionally concerned with psychiatric issues, is something Thomas sees as a great challenge. Amongst his colleagues there is much focus on emotions and caring, and in that regard he sometimes feels that it is difficult to operate as a manager. This is why he is determined not to pursue a career of hierarchical climbing:

*I could not imagine being higher up in the hierarchy than this. But, of course, to be here is very much a conflict in itself: I am dependent on information from my staff, but simultaneously I take orders from above.*

## Characteristics of the InSitu Hospital management context

### Stories of complexity - an introduction

In the following we will become acquainted with a number of characteristic traits of everyday contextuality for InSitu managers. The identification of these traits is the result of an extensive analysis of my empirical data, and what they all have in common is that they highlight everyday features through the lenses of improvisational organizing theory as I have presented it in chapters four and five. The traits are not meant as an attempt to provide an exhaustive list, but are chosen on the basis of the relatively large space they occupy in everyday practice. As such they stand out as especially important features of a complex everyday tale of InSitu managers that it is impossible to relate in full detail. At the end of each section follows a short analysis discussing major features of each trait. Towards the end of the chapter the traits are summarized, analysed and discussed on a higher level of abstraction, and here the phenomenon of “emergence” provides an essential analytical instrument. In the following, my point is to do the opposite of whatever managers do when they struggle to *eliminate* everyday complexity; namely to *illuminate* the complexity of everyday practice.

### Trait # 1: Open-ended problems

This opening section is meant as an introduction to the different forms of complexity which I have found in the InSitu context. This section deals with a phenomenon that characterizes most of my observations of InSitu managers – that on a deep level, organizing is about identifying and making sense of problems with no given solution. It is more about *defining* problems than *solving* technical problems (Schön 1991; Weick et al. 2005; Purser and Petranker 2005). I start with the question: What is a typical workday like for a department manager at InSitu Hospital? Is it largely predictable and ordered or quite the opposite, or perhaps somewhere in between? Can one in simplified terms sort out categories that still match the myriad of evolving events and the details of practical contextuality? In an attempt to give an answer, the following extract from my observations of George provides an appropriate introduction. As a background for this story, George is talking on the phone when I knock on his office-door at 0935 in the morning. Still he welcomes me in, and ends his conversation as I hang up my jacket and take out my laptop. I overhear, however, that George has just had to let one of his section nurses go; something that was discussed in a closed meeting the day before to which George denied me access for the sake of confidentiality.



Unfortunately, I do not have many details about this particular case, only what George tells me in the following quote.

*[The remaining part of the day, George is scheduled for operation duty. He calls the ward to find out if they are ready, which they are. As George is putting on his coat, I ask him if he sees any similarities between the two jobs or roles that he occupies; the medical and the managerial.]*

*- There are no objective answers in the managerial area, George says.*

*[He is interrupted by someone knocking on his door. A physician enters.]*

*- Can you participate in a meeting later this afternoon? the physician asks.*

*- Yes, I can, says George.*

*[They go through some of the urgent matters that are up for discussion: how the laboratory should be organized.]*

*- We need to reconsider how to do this. But I guess this is a lost case. The director said it would be reconsidered as soon as the laboratory centre is ready, George explains to him.*

*[The two of them continue discussing this issue for a little while, and soon they agree on a status for the matter. And being as it is, they decide to postpone the meeting that was supposed to take place later this afternoon. They agree that there is no purpose in having a planning session as long as the matter to be planned for is not yet settled. Then the physician leaves and George picks up where he left off earlier.]*

*- There are objective criteria, international guidelines, for what is wrong and right within medicine. You always risk making the wrong diagnosis. This is certainly not the case in leadership. When, for instance, I had to let one of my employees go earlier today, I wonder: did I do the right thing? I certainly created problems for myself. I could easily have let the issue flow, but then the ward would slowly have degraded out of discontent, lack of professional development etc. And it is up to history alone to decide if I have done the right thing or made the right decision.*

*[George takes a deep breath and continues.]*

*- The similarity is that I often have to make up my mind on impulse. And I always have people I can ask for input. I never make decisions from a basis solely of my own making. So, I guess both of them are somewhat improvisatory. I can't walk around thinking about things for weeks. Then I risk going nuts myself as well as making the social environment surrounding me go nuts. The problem occurs when an illness is diagnosed, but the patient is still in pain. One does not always find a workable diagnosis, for example when there are mental issues involved.*

*[George is interrupted by his pager going off. It is a signal saying his patient is ready.]*

The episode starts off with George sharing with us some reflections based on his own experience. Notice that he is talking about the lack of objectivity in leadership as he is suddenly interrupted by a colleague who comes by to ask if George will attend a meeting later,

which he confirms that he will. After a short conversation, however, they decide to postpone the meeting altogether. In this relatively short amount of time, then, a great many possible futures have been singled out, only to be discarded the next moment. How much of this could have been predicted? How much could have been disclosed by objective analysis?

“There are no objective answers in the managerial area . . . it is up to history alone to decide if I have done the right thing or made the right decision”, George says, indicating the fundamental complexity he experiences as a manager. George’s arguments are strongly supported by practical philosophy. According to “The improvising man” there are no objective answers in organizing, and organizational contexts always differ from each other in some respect. There are no objectively clear paths to walk down, and no certainty as such guiding management practice. Even in George’s medical practice, though being strongly guided by tools of diagnosis, it happens every so often that a patient is still in pain after having been diagnosed. The key word here is certainty; there is none. Or is there?

From a non-dualist standpoint this dissertation argues that there is a difference between *objective* certainty and *practical* certainty. Whereas the former might be a somewhat mythical and non-realistic concept, we shall in the following devote our attention to the latter. More specifically, we shall see how practical certainty comes about as a continual achievement, and that getting there is sometimes more and sometimes less troublesome. It all depends on the degree of complexity in the situation at hand, and the manner in which this appears is the topic for this chapter. In the following, special attention should therefore be paid to the genuine open-endedness of the problems that occur: Rather than choosing between alternatives, picking from given solutions and making decisions, it seems that everyday complexity manifests itself in terms of the many different occasions of *defining* problems – of *establishing* sense and predictability (Weick 1995).

## **Trait # 2: Ambiguity and vagueness**

Department managers at InSitu Hospital spend most of their working hours interacting with other people. The process of social interaction implies a pursuit of mutual understanding and is permeated by obstacles and difficulties, ambiguity and vagueness. My analysis of ambiguity borrows from Weick’s (1995) elaborate account, where he defines ambiguity as “. . . an ongoing stream that supports several different interpretations at the same time” (pp. 91-92). “Vagueness” is understood along the lines of uncertainty, of confusion and ignorance as to what a situation means (Weick 1995). In the following, however, ambiguity and

vagueness will be seen as mutually complementary and at times united terms under the heading: “what does this situation mean?”

Miscommunication happens and it happens a lot more than is generally appreciated. And as to an increasing degree InSitu is for example becoming multicultural, effort must be invested in securing intersubjectivity. The challenges of making oneself understood are illustrated by the following episode where we meet department manager Peter in a conversation with Yin, a visiting professor and colleague from China. Leading up to the meeting are recent circumstances that have forced both Yin and his wife, who works together with him, to give up their research positions in Howard’s department. As a consequence, Yin and his wife are now looking for new solutions to how they might continue with their research at InSitu Hospital, and in particular, they are looking for a new laboratory. It is a priority for Yin and his wife to stay close to clinical practice and to contribute to that practice if possible, and they are eager to find a way to continue their work at InSitu Hospital. Peter thinks he might be able to work something out that will enable them to do so, and has invited Yin over for a meeting to see if they might come to an agreement about joining Peter’s department, and thus turn this into a situation that can be solved to the advantage of both parties. From the very beginning of the meeting, however, Yin and Peter seem to be pursuing different conversational topics. For example, Yin is eager to explain his ambitions and to justify the practical value of his research, whereas Peter is equally eager to get right down to business and find a practical way to organize for future collaboration. The result is a somewhat incoherent and strange conversation in which miscommunication seems to play a central role, although it is not always easy to see exactly *why* they misunderstand each other. One reason may be that they have different native languages, Yin being a native Chinese speaker and Peter Norwegian. The conversation is conducted in English, however, a language both seem to master very well.

*[Yin and Peter sit down around the coffee table and Yin starts to explain the background for today’s situation with him and his wife having to leave Howard’s department. Yin emphasizes how his work makes a positive contribution to the hospital’s clinical operation and that his primary goal is precisely to make such a contribution. Having explained this, Yin seems to notice that Peter does not quite catch his point: He simply stares at Yin with wondering eyes, as if he does not understand where Yin is going with this. But instead of moving on to more practical details, Yin repeats more or less the same message all over again; and then again, only to be followed by a moment of silence where none of the two says anything. They merely stare at each other, seemingly anticipating what the other will say or do.]*

*[As the conversation moves on there seems to be quite a communicational barrier between the two, and the conversation is repeatedly interrupted by misunderstandings.]*

*- I think one should make a distinction here, between geographical laboratory for research and a position for you and your wife, Peter says. - I think the university should find a laboratory for you, and that it is actually their responsibility to do so.*

*- Yes, I agree, Yin says.*

*- I, however, do not have the funding to pay for your research.*

*[Yin seems again to be misunderstanding Peter's message, and appears to become a bit impatient.]*

*- What do you mean? Yin asks bluntly.*

*- I do not have available space, Peter explains.*

*- OK, but the crucial point here is to maintain close contact with the hospital. Money and space can always be arranged externally. What is important to me is to maintain close contact with clinicians. My ambition is to contribute to the hospital's positive development, Yin explains for the fourth time.*

*- Yes, and I totally agree with your philosophy on upholding cooperation between researchers and clinicians. So how can we assist your research group until the new hospital is ready?*

*Peter asks, but continues without waiting for an answer: - I could offer you a position as a part time physicist at the department?*

*- I am grateful for that, but there is also my wife to consider, you know.*

*[Without going into the details of the possibility of a position in Peter's department, Yin repeats for the fifth time that his goal is to contribute to the hospital's progress.]*

*- I want to give something back to the hospital, he explains.*

*[. . . Peter turns to Yin again]*

*- But if we do this I expect you to help us bringing forward Ph.D. students.*

*- Oh, but this merely makes me feel at home here, Yin says, obviously relieved.*

*- Excellent, but don't forget what I said about the importance of learning how to speak Norwegian in everyday conversations. Yin nods his head to signal his approval. Then they repeat the details of their settlement once more. And as soon as they have arrived at a solution they are both happy with, they repeat how they agree with each other with regard to the philosophy of keeping research and praxis close to each other.*

*- But I fear that the hospital's central management is not at all interested in my research group, Yin utters.*

*- No, you have got it all the wrong way, Peter explains. – This is more like a principle ruling stating that the hospital cannot hire full time researchers. And concerning your wife, you should try to find a position at the university, and to pay her salary via the university.*

*- The university college has also shown interest, Yin informs.*

*- Yes, but the university is better!*

This episode indicates that misunderstanding can be a vibrant indicator of the ambiguity and vagueness accompanying some sensemaking processes. Peter and Yin brought with them different perspectives into the conversation and as a consequence they saw different problems. The one could not understand where the other was going, and this seemed to cause a spiral of miscommunication. Firstly, as Yin felt that his work was not appreciated by the hospital's management, he repeatedly justified the importance of his work to Peter; but as it were, Peter was already convinced. Instead of getting right down to practicalities, which seemed to be what Peter wanted, then, much time was spent at finding out *what* they were in fact discussing. Likewise, when Peter told Yin that he had neither the space nor the funding to support his research, Yin had a problem seeing what Peter really wanted. Still, after quite a bit of negotiation over meaning, they understood each other sufficiently so as to come up with a solution that both of them could live with and hopefully thrive on. In this case, then, the degree of miscommunication seemed to accompany the problem's degree of complexity: Since a shared definition of a problem had to be defined, and this problem had to be identified outside of predefined parameters, neither of the two had a clear vision of what it was going to be. Both Peter and Yin had their own perspectives, needs and resources, and until they were able to find some common ground they were less able to communicate well.

One way to see misunderstanding is that it amounts to missing the intention of another human being, either directly in a social situation or through the (mis)interpretation of linguistic artefacts (Strauss 1993). As a consequence, meaning is lost. Directly or indirectly to misunderstand implies being unable to comprehend another person's actions, and it often brings about a process of recreating intersubjective sense. When misunderstanding occurs it becomes difficult to build up a sphere of intersubjectivity in which to make sense of each other's gestures. And as meaning is lost, complexity takes its place. The following episode involving Thomas (section manager) is quite instructive in that regard. As it happens, an OD process his section is currently undergoing has just been brought to a halt, and as a consequence a general meeting is summoned. Lack of information and vague communication has been hampering the OD process for a long time, and as a triggering incident leading up to the general meeting Thomas recently made a clumsy remark which was taken up the wrong way by his section. Thomas had thought that his role was to come up with ideas for the future and suggest new organizational structures, but he did not realize that his suggestions could be understood literally – as if his ideas were *orders* to be followed rather than creative points of departure for further discussions. When presenting his ideas to his section, however, the

section believed that a decision had been made to close down for good the outdoors group, a central part of the section. What the section saw as an insensitive top-down order with major consequences for the organization resulted in much commotion which ultimately reached Thomas and his fellow members of the management group. Consequently, they decided to hold a general meeting a few days later. In the extract below, Thomas reflects on the latest occurrences in an interview conducted three days after the general meeting.

*Thomas, SM: - In the beginning it is hard to grasp that you are misunderstood. Then it is hard to grasp that what I said could actually be misunderstood. I am sorry if something is perceived incorrectly, but for me it is important to move on with things. There is always something to be learned, especially here where we work with reactions and emotions.*

The consequences of this specific misunderstanding were quite serious. The whole section was more or less in chaos after Thomas's inept utterance. And Thomas was taken by surprise by the gravity of it all: how could a few innocent words have such large and devastating implications? However self-critical Thomas appears to be, though, he is not the only manager to be guilty of having produced ambiguous signals at some time or other. In fact, it might be an advantage for Thomas that he gained the knowledge that *he can in fact be vague* on occasions.

As explained, the misunderstanding Thomas caused occurred in the middle of a hectic OD process. And perhaps due to the fact that the process produced exceptional circumstances with a relative lack of structure, issues of profound vagueness and ambiguity became more visible than they might have been under normal circumstances. In a situation where people sought predictability they got the opposite, and it was not all because of Thomas. Rather, the staff complained about the process having been somewhat secretive and vague all along, upon which Thomas's misunderstood statement came as a triggering factor. As a consequence, the general meeting was summoned in order to re-create trust and order, and for the management group Thomas was part of, a major point was to give an account of their original intentions. The multiple misunderstandings and bad communication had to be corrected. The report below is from the general meeting. Sharon, a psychiatrist and a management group member, is trying her best to sort things out but is met with severe criticism.

*Sharon: - Our intention is crystal clear: The outdoors group is to remain. But I am afraid this will sound like some conspiracy theory, because some things have to be put on ice.*

*Thomas: - I didn't have the outdoors group in mind at all. I certainly did not close down the outdoors group or anything. This is clearly a misunderstanding of what I said. My aim was merely to inform about the new groups.*

*Woman A: - We didn't understand whether it was put on ice or not. It was very vague and incredibly difficult. And the answers were many and disperse. We did not know where to refer patients. An immense ambiguity!*

*Woman D: - I think this is a highly radical re-organizing process. Surely we need to use a lot of time to digest this and do things right. I don't think the staff have suspicions of some conspiracy or anything, but we do miss good leadership. We miss a place to consult about our issues, someone to talk to. And we would like a clear plan with concrete measures and a time-schedule to go with it.*

The point here is not to focus on the chaos or the apparent lack of structure that seem to have characterized this OD process in particular; rather, it is to notice how Sharon's and the management group's intention, which according to her are "crystal clear", still ended up being perceived differently in practice. A lot may have to do with the words used at the time, and indeed, the episode indicates that words in themselves are not enough to communicate meaning, but the interpretations that manifested themselves in the organization were probably a function of expectations, fear, body language and other situational factors. From the perspective of "The improvising man" these factors are not mere variables in a given equation, but probable aspects of social interaction emerging on both conscious and subliminal levels. It is interesting, however, to see how decisive Sharon is in claiming to have had a clear intention, and how this intention still was received differently. We cannot hope to be able to disclose exactly why this happened, and neither is this the point. We can, however, view this episode as an example of the ambiguity that dwells in verbal interaction.

The following is an excerpt from a staff meeting in Camilla's department, in which confusion soon arises concerning the meaning of government terminology used in a newly arrived directive.

*[Two minutes later Camilla formally opens the meeting. She raises her voice and takes a somewhat authoritative role. Everybody listens as Camilla goes through the agenda. As anticipated, today's main topic concerns the very same document the attendants have already spent some 20 minutes discussing. The document is a decree from the Department of Health, and instructs Camilla's organization to change some of their routines. And for today's meeting amongst the most important posts on the agenda (to be discussed) is precisely how to define and understand the decree. The orders that are given by the Department do not seem to be*

*self-evident with regard to their meaning and intention, since Camilla has decided that they must sit down and discuss what the decree means to them in their situation; how they should interpret its different parts; and how it should affect their everyday routines.*

*As the meeting proceeds, people alternate between negotiating, proposing, bickering with and informing each other. Whereas some emphasize points of vagueness in the decree, others, trying to make sense of those ambiguities, propose viable interpretations. In this process, there is one way of beginning sentences that stands out as frequently used: "I think".]*

This meeting is representative of all of the managers and the multiplicity of meetings that took place during the research period in that it signifies the typical unpredictability and ambiguity of unfolding social interaction. Furthermore, this episode shows how lack of textual clarity can cause quite intense processes of interpretation and clarification. Most of everyday practice depends on the use of language signs, and this episode indicates the vagueness in which language is embedded and the danger of treating language as self-explanatory. There is always some degree of ambiguity underpinning linguistic systems, and typically, much effort goes into interpreting and making sense of these ambiguities.

The managers at InSitu are not constantly involved in real time interactive processes. Administration and paperwork comprise a significant part of everyday work. However simple and routine-like this kind of work may sound, it may not always be without its problems or challenges of some kind. Theory does not always follow practice and thus perhaps administration is not all that straightforward after all? In the next episode we find Karina in her office working on a report to the Research Council. As there is some ambiguity in a form that is to be included in the report, Karina is having a hard time interpreting it and deciding what to do.

*[After 15 minutes' intensive work, Leslie, Karina's secretary, walks out to do the last finish. As Leslie leaves, Karina has to make a phone call to sort out some vagueness in one of the forms she has received, which is supposed to be included in the final report to the Research Council. But before she comes as far as to actually making the call, someone knocks on the door. It turns out to be one of the head nurses (HN), who frowns and looks a bit frustrated.]*

*- Did you know that not a single physician has registered for the "the news group day"? HN asks.*

*- No, I did not, but I anticipate that some two thirds will come anyway. They always do. They're just a bit slow, and until now it has been difficult for them to register due to the rosters and so forth.*



*[The HN seems content with the answer. She nods and turns around to leave as an “OK” slips through her lips. Then Karina picks up the phone again and calls a fellow physician to clear up some ambiguities in the research report form he has handed in. They talk for a couple of minutes, trying to sort out what should and what should not be included in the form. As soon as they agree on an interpretation, Karina hangs up and walks into Leslie’s office and informs her on their decision in a very instructive and direct way. Karina returns to her office with a question about who is regarded as responsible for the project in a Ph.D. context: the student or the supervisor? She needs to know, because she is required to enter it into the Research Council report. She decides to call Berit, the hospital research coordinator. She finds her number from her organizer and dials the number. But Berit does not answer, so she leaves a message.]*

*[Berit calls back only minutes later, and after a short informal chat they agree that the supervisor is regarded as responsible. But there is another issue that is supposed to be included in the report which not even Berit knows how to go about. Berit needs some time to sort it out and they agree that Karina should call back later. Karina hangs up and explains that she has to go find a guy who does not answer his pager. She knows where he is, she says. Karina leaves and returns 3 minutes later, and makes a comment about the beautiful Christmas carols sung by the children outside. Then she sits down and complains about the lack of knowledge about what is supposed to be reported and not in the research report.]*

*- Not even the local research coordinator knows. You go figure it out! So now I have to call Berit again, she says with a raised voice as she picks up the phone.*

*[The details seem to be more complicated than can be sorted out there and then, and soon they agree that Berit should come to Karina’s department and hold an information meeting on the Research Council report. That being settled, Karina hangs up and steps outside her office to tick off the meeting on a calendar hanging on the corridor wall. Then she returns and writes a notice about the meeting on her computer to send out to her physicians. When she has e-mailed the physicians Karina turns her chair away from the computer and thinks out loud.]*

*- Just now on the phone Berit asked which efforts can be made in order to increase the attraction of applying for research positions. Personally, I propose increasing the wages, because today’s researchers are paid up to two thirds less than clinicians. This is why I have supported research in my department. But I need more support to finance much needed research apparatus. I do not want to farm out research, because the goal is to integrate it into everyday practice. And support personnel surrounding the researchers are also important, even though I am aware that there is a demand to make cuts in non-clinical positions.*

What I want to call attention to in this episode is how a seemingly straightforward case of administration can in effect be quite challenging. Karina has sent out forms to be filled out by the physicians in her department in order to be included in a report to the Research Council, but as one of them is returned to her she discovers that it is filled out incorrectly. Thus Karina

calls up the responsible physician to clarify and put things right, and they agree on an interpretation. Consider what would be the consequence if Karina had not recognized the ambiguity? What would be the consequence if a misunderstanding had occurred but never surfaced? Would the ambiguity and thus the misunderstanding still be there?

Yes, from a practical point of view I think it would. We cannot possibly hope to know of every time we misunderstand others or are misunderstood ourselves. We cannot know if we have read something or heard something whether we have understood it according to its intention (Strauss 1993). Thus, as Karina's final report to the Research Council is produced by the aggregation of many partial reports, its functional value is dependent on the extent to which each of those preliminary reports has succeeded in creating intersubjectivity. If they have *not* succeeded in creating intersubjectivity, and the respondents as well as the recipients (in this case the Research Council) are unaware of the problem, the report would be deprived of its practical value, and the consequences could be quite unpleasant. The report would project the wrong image, without anybody knowing about it. Thus, it was of the essence that the ambiguities were disclosed and resolved.

The previous selection of episodes suggests that everyday challenges for managers are more about creating sense and understanding in an evolving and complex milieu than about making technical rational decisions and choices (Weick 1995; Weick et al. 2005). Situations of choice (and their outcomes) have not presented themselves in a technical manner that would have enabled the manager to merely calculate the right direction ahead. From my view "decision making" does not catch the essence of these everyday incidents, and neither does "rational choice" or "control". The recurrent question for the manager throughout these excerpts has *not* been: "Which solution should I pick?" or "What weight should be put on each alternative?" Rather, situations have been enacted and reacted to through efforts of reducing ambiguity and vagueness (Weick 1995). Typically, the questions that have been posed are: "What does this mean?" "What is going on?" and "What should I do?"

*To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, "what's the story?" Plausible stories animate and gain their validity from subsequent activity. The language of sensemaking captures the realities of agency, flow, equivocality, transience, reaccomplishment, unfolding, and emergence, realities that are often obscured by the language of variables, nouns, quantities, and structures. (Weick et al. 2005, p. 410).*

In the situations described above problems have been *defined* to a greater extent than they have been solved (Schön 1991), and as a general feature of contextuality there has been a sense of continual novelty – a novelty that is genuine in that it keeps evolving into new and *ambiguous* scenarios (Petranker 2005; Purser and Petranker 2005). Still, not all situations have been equally vague and ambiguous. The everyday contextuality of InSitu Hospital managers seems to vary quite intensely with regard to clarity of meaning. But even if misunderstandings are not the rule, *pursuing* understanding is, and in chapter nine I will attempt to show how this comes about through improvisation.

### **Trait # 3: Clustering of events**

*John, DM: - . . . in everyday work there is a continual change of problems. I constantly have to change my focus. I never have much time to deal with a single problem. It is gone after just 5 minutes. Then I have to reactivate my brains for the next issue. I guess most people have similar experiences.*

The tendency for events to crop up in a turbulent and dynamic fashion is a matter that stood out clearly in my empirical material. A typical trait of the InSitu managers' everyday work is that it is often quite messy, turbulent and stressful; a point which is manifested through the somewhat simultaneous upcoming of different events. Inspired by Berger and Luckmann (1991) and Purser and Petranker (2005) this section is built on the premise that attention can only be directed to one item at a time, something which would make the speed of focus change and the number of issues to which attention is refocused of the essence. Camilla has the following comment:

*Camilla, DM: - Everyday work life is distinguished by the great number of different cases. A great pile of different issues. So I guess this is why I consume such a large number of yellow tags.*

Camilla's description is to the point. In a couple of sentences she illustrates the task variety and diversity that characterises her work life. Working as a manager involves all kinds of problems and activities which often bear little or no resemblance to each other, and which are quite often (at least initially) unstructured and even chaotic. Camilla's statement is general and conclusive; it is her personal report of her own work situation. We could take her word for it, but let us rather follow up with an everyday episode from which unfolding task

variation and complexity stand out as distinctive traits. As we join in, Camilla has just ended a coordination meeting with her local management group, but she has not yet left the conference room.

*[The meeting is formally over but Camilla, a psychiatrist and one of the section managers, remains in the conference room to discuss another issue: A new therapist is to be hired, and they need to find a way to utilize the new form of treatment that he offers. After quite a bit of hefty discussion and bickering they finally agree on offering the therapist a 50% position. And finally, at 1115 hrs, after more than two hours of continuous discussion, brainstorming and negotiation, Camilla can return to her office. On her way back she talks about the meeting.]*  
- Truly a turbulent and action-packed meeting, she says with an incipient smile.

*[She walks into her office and takes a seat.]*

- Generally agitated and impatient people, I think, Camilla continues.

*[She is interrupted by someone knocking on the door. It is her financial advisor. He needs to clarify a few matters in the budget. No sooner has he left than one of the women from the administrative staff comes by to inform Camilla about some patients ready for discharge in one of the wards out in the district. The information is quickly handed over, and Camilla makes a phone call to check up on some details concerning a meeting she is scheduled to attend after lunch. The meeting is on "quality" and is scheduled to last the rest of the day, she explains. As Camilla is closing down the computer and getting ready to leave, another woman from her administrative staff comes by to ask questions about some office routine. She has been told that new directions have been issued, and now she does not know what she is supposed to do.]*

As Camilla moves from one meeting to another the topic of discussion changes. From what she says about the previous meeting it seems to have been somewhat turbulent and exhausting. Hence, not only has she just come out of a challenging process of finding practical solutions to open ended problems and arrived in yet another challenge of the same kind, but along the way she has dealt with agitated and emotional people – indeed a complex matter in itself. And no sooner has she returned to her office than another task is handed to her, this time a financial matter; then yet another one immediately after, concerning some patient's discharge. Next, her mind is set on a meeting on quality which she is supposed to attend right after lunch, and minutes later another unexpected issue is thrown into her lap. Listing the events like this, it is almost as if the invisible becomes visible: The small details of some 10 minutes of everyday organizing indicate clearly the more or less continuous change of focus that is needed in order to cope.

On any given day a large variety of occurrences typically appear to emerge somewhat surprisingly and require a refocusing (and reaction) on the part of the InSitu Hospital manager. In the next extract, where Chris has the leading role, the aspect of refocusing the mind is conspicuous.

*[After a highly concentrated and factual meeting with Brit, Chris has planned to go somewhere, but he has to postpone it, whatever it is, as he is called upon to attend another organizing meeting taking place in one of the wards upstairs. He runs towards the lift, pushes the button, and seconds later the door opens and a guy from the transport section walks out. Chris gives him a hand with some stuff he is carrying and takes the time for a small chat. In the lift on his way up, Chris confirms that his days are normally very hectic.]*

*- They are diverse and turbulent; a lot of different topics demand my attention, he says.*

*[The lift door opens, and Chris walks just a short distance before arriving at the meeting, which is taking place in the hallway. Quite a large number of people (physicians and nurses) are stowed together in an untidy manner, engaged in going through a range of specific patient details. Chris only stays for about five minutes before moving on to a new meeting.]*

*[. . . Chris is more or less running up the hallway stairs.]*

*- Do you think of me as a busy man? he exclaims, short on breath.*

*- Yes, I answer almost too quickly.*

*- Do you think I am juggling a lot of issues simultaneously?*

*- Yes! I confirm, trying to keep up as he spurts upwards; - It seems to me that you are indeed a skilled juggler.*

*- Yes, I think so too, I must say. I am truly a skilled juggler, and this is exactly what makes this job interesting. The variation is tremendous between intense drama in one moment and hectic meeting in the next. But there is little doubt as to what is my second priority: management.*

*- So, do you strictly separate the two roles from each other? I ask, using what little oxygen is left in my lungs. I am not sure if he heard me as he continues explaining:*

*- The core enterprise is my main priority. Therefore it happens every now and then that I don't attend all management meetings and so forth. We are only 4 physicians responsible for 800 operations a year. I guess that would amount to almost an operation a day for each of us, he says gravely as he enters through a massive door into an operation theatre.*

*[A patient undergoing a general anaesthetic is situated on a table with a variety of tubes connected to him. The tubes are transparent and from the shocking red colour I can tell that they are transporting blood. A small group of people in white coats are gathered close to the patient talking to each other. Some are attending to the patient, others are engaged in general everyday conversation. They look up as they see Chris coming. He walks up to the gathering and has a small chat about the patient before he suddenly remembers that he has a meeting downstairs. Chris excuses himself as he leaves the room even quicker than he entered, and runs down the stairs into his office where he picks up a recording device. Evidently in a hurry,*

*he dictates some patient details into it, and puts it down again. Then he grabs his notebook and heads for the meeting room a few metres down the hall.]*

In Chris's case many different tasks are succeeding each other, but somehow the incidents that occur do not seem excessively repetitive or automatic. The contexts that emerge seem to be more than, and indeed different from, strict routines. In the course of a relatively short amount of time Chris interacts with a lot of people, all of whom claim to be heard and understood, a process which even in isolation can be seen as an achievement.

There is no way of knowing whether changing focus in itself categorically produces complexity. The different themes demanding attention might after all be quite structured and straightforward. Variation is not in itself enough to comprise a complex reality, as intricacy is different from complexity (see chapter three). For example, alternating between performing routine surgery, reading patient journals and preparing for routine meetings does not necessarily produce complexity. As long as variation is expected, and to a significant degree pre-determinable, it merely produces an exercise of focus change on the manager's behalf – as to some extent seems to be the case for Chris. Still, whenever everyday challenges are inherently unpredictable and complex as is often the case in everyday interaction, variation adds to the convolution. Moreover, as demonstrated by both Camilla's and Chris' case it is a great effort simply to change the focus of the mind, and doing so may frequently arouse confusion and bewilderment. Thus, given a sufficient number of different events, this might in itself produce stress. However prosaic and redundant it might sound, I believe that the simplest things might become difficult if the mind is exhausted, which may result both from changing focus and from concentrating hard within each area of focus.

#### **Trait # 4: The emotional challenge**

Department managers at InSitu spend time alone for only minor parts of a typical workday, typically doing administrative office work, reading up on medical issues or preparing for the future. None of these are non-emotional activities, however; no more than they are non-bodily experiences (see chapter four). Thus, emotional complexity constantly impinges on the manager's context through moods and emotional states. Emotional complexity is especially visible and explicit in processes of social interaction. Social emotionality concerns an aspect of everyday reality-in-the-becoming which is prone to affect managers on a daily basis as they interact with people made of flesh and blood.

Emotionality is an issue that has been a factor in all of the episodes presented, most often implicitly but at times even explicitly. In the following reports emotionality stands out.

*[It is quiet in Camilla's office and the atmosphere is relaxed. Only the monotone whistling of the air-conditioner can be heard as a backdrop to the sound of papers being flipped softly. Camilla is sitting down, bent over her desk in deep concentration. Reading. Every now and then she stops and looks up, apparently reflecting over the contents. After a while she turns on her PC, but as she is about to log on she discovers that she is denied access to her account. "My god", she utters in despair and immediately gets up to leave her office. Before reaching the door, however, the phone rings, and in a flash she has returned to her desk and answered it.*

*The conversation soon becomes tensed up, and the pitch of Camilla's voice rises. There has been a mishap in a routine case involving four patients. Camilla responds to something the other person just said and asks, "What does this mean?" Having got the contents of the other person's message, Camilla hangs up and immediately leaves her office. She explains that she is heading towards one of her sections (S) because of what was said in the telephone conversation. Camilla tells me that the phone call was rather disturbing, and as a consequence she is immediately forced to confront some of her employees at S. She says that the problem at hand is related to a long history of conflict and disagreement between S, herself and some person in the central administration (CA).*

*On our way down Camilla explains that she is very upset, and in a raised voice she immediately on arrival tells a group of employees gathered in the lunchroom that she is tired of this kind of calls from central management. She moves on to explain how the CA has grown tired of complaining to the hospital director about so called conscription meetings not being held, and Camilla wants to know why on earth this has once again been neglected? The responsibility clearly lies within S, doesn't it? Camilla looks around as she apparently awaits an answer.*

*With a remorseful look on her face, a woman from the group immediately responds and starts explaining: they didn't know, they thought otherwise and so forth. Camilla repeats how the process is formally supposed to work, only to be met with more of the same kind of explanations from another staff member. The conversation continues like this for quite a while, as a somewhat redundant continuance of arguments, until most of them have said something, or more accurately, they have all repeated more or less the same thing. After a while everyone goes quiet. They all seem to have got a say and to be happy with that. Camilla closes the conversation by explaining once more that it is precisely this section, not the CA, that is supposed to initiate conscription meetings. And if they did not know this before, they (certainly)*

*know it now, Camilla concludes firmly before she turns around and rapidly walks out of the lunchroom.]*

In this everyday episode does Camilla seem at all emotionally distant? Might she possibly be overreacting? Who is to say? Is she not allowed to be upset when things do not work? Is she displaying bad leadership, and if so, from whose perspective? All of these questions might be asked, but what I would like to direct attention to is how deeply emotionally involved Camilla is, and the fact that her feelings seem to be a major driver of the way she acts. Notice how Camilla's explicitly *emotional behaviour triggers spontaneous responses* from her employees. Is it not precisely Camilla's frustration that provokes the elaborate and superfluous explanations? Is it not of key importance for the employees' correct interpretation of Camilla in order to catch her point; to realize that Camilla has had enough of that type of complaint? Is it even possible for the group not to notice Camilla's frustration (and the way it produces a tension that can hardly be understood without empathy)? As this is an emotional context, it is complex and non-technical by nature. One thing is the words that Camilla uses; a completely different thing is the emotional gestures, the facial expressions, her tone of voice: all of those are matters not easily caught on paper, but, as I see it, which make up the emotional framework within which Camilla's words are understood and responded to.

In the next episode Howard receives an unexpected visit from the department head nurse (HN). Howard is currently restructuring a part of his organization, and this seems to have stirred up some of his employees. HN comes to him with some reflections about one of them, Heidi, who does not seem to be coping too well at the time. The following discussion is a direct consequence of an earlier meeting between Howard and Heidi in which emotionality was displayed to such an extent that Howard simply did not know what to do or how to deal with Heidi.

*[HN closes the door and starts talking about a woman called Heidi.]*

*- She has a problem, she says.*

*- Yes, I do not seem to be able to figure her out, Howard says. - She is not a very communicative person. She uses a lot of time and energy asking about small and insignificant matters. And she seems to tense up a lot when I see her. Can I make use of her, you think, or do I have to do without her? The last time she was here she actually burst into tears for no apparent reason. She strictly and somewhat unnaturally kept to her agenda, and then she left just like that. Can you explain to me why?*



- *Because there is a lot of tension and uncertainty related to EKF. They know nothing about what is happening in relation to the downsizing.*
- [Howard makes it clear that he does not intend to destroy what has been built up among the nurses, but that one must be able to make revisions to organizations on occasions.]*
- *OK, of course, HN comments, but what about my position, then?*
- *I cannot answer that until I know whether Hilde (another department employee) is resigning.*
- *Yes, I can see that, HN states brusquely.*
- *Anyway, I have to leave now for another meeting, Howard says as he gets up from his office chair.*
- *OK, talk to you later, HN says.*
- [She produces what seems like a formal smile and walks out.]*

This episode ends quite explicitly in an emotional manner as HN shows discontent with Howard's unwillingness to disclose anything about her future in the department. But even as this particular episode of emotionality ends quite easily and orderly as far as Howard is concerned, the problem concerning what to do with Heidi seems to have provoked more trouble for him. Howard does not know how to interpret Heidi, he explains to HN. She acts in ways that are a mystery to him. And he has actually reached the point where he does not know whether or not he can make use of her. Emotional reactions such as tensing up and crying make it difficult for Howard to make sense of what is happening to her and between the two of them. He does not know how to deal with this kind of explicitly emotional behaviour. As a consequence, he is left with feelings of doubt, uncertainty and bafflement. Being as it is an intense case of emotionality, the situation with Heidi might not be very representative of the usual character of everyday organizing as such. Then again, similar although less explicit situations are perhaps not as uncommon as we might think. For what do we really know about how often people in a workplace are troubled by difficult feelings or how this affects their work? How can we ever dream of revealing the inner sphere of privacy where thoughts and feelings towards our nearest colleagues and managers are stored? What about the emotional experiences people bring with them from non-work related contexts? How do they influence everyday interaction?

Emotion is at the centre of the following episode where Peter meets one of his physicians, Julie. The conversation that follows shows aspects of conversation that seem unexplainable by means of a technical rational framework: it is lively, tense and in that way representative of many of the social meetings I attended during the empirical study.

*[On Peter's request Julie takes a seat.]*

*- So, Julie utters, who has summoned this meeting, then?*

*- You know, that's a good question, Peter responds and continues: - I wonder why we are here at all? Don't you know? I was hoping you would.*

*[It turns out that none of them knows the circumstances for the meeting, but Julie decides to make the most of the fact that she is actually there, and says that she wants to discuss some issues concerning the construction of the new hospital. In particular, a hearing is being held that she wants to know more about.]*

*[Julie sounds a bit snarly as she explains her worries about the new hospital to Peter, and her negative tone of voice appears to make Peter lose some of his normal tranquillity. Soon they both seem a bit resigned and tired, even though it is not evident exactly what has triggered this. Their voices have changed character since the beginning of the meeting, and it sounds as if they are now dragging their words along more than uttering them spontaneously. Then Peter changes the topic.]*

*- So, how is the yearly agenda working out for you and the ward? Peter asks.*

*- But we have been over this so many times before, Julie responds, still in the same negative tone of voice. - But of course I can explain it again, she says and is interrupted by Peter's phone ringing.*

*[He answers it and speaks English to the guy at the other end, who turns out to be Yin, a Chinese colleague currently working at InSitu hospital. Yin is calling to make an appointment with Peter later this afternoon. Having arranged a meeting they hang up and Peter once again turns his attention to Julie, who resumes her explanation. Peter is evidently impressed with what she is saying, and there is a modest smile on his face.]*

*- In that case you are really very close to an actual yearly plan of action, aren't you?*

*- But I have nothing to gain from designing a yearly plan of action. It is not like there is money to save or anything.*

*- No, but what you can do is to obtain a little more predictability, right?*

*- Yes, maybe, but the sick leaves...*

*- ... come anyway, yes I know, Peter says resignedly.*

The manner in which this conversation emerges is difficult to comprehend (and analyse) without taking emotion into account. Whether Julie intends to sound negative, whether she is nervous or maybe just trying to be formal and professional is hard to say. No matter what the reason may be, however, Peter seems to be a bit annoyed, and the situation appears to send him into a somewhat impatient and irritated mood. From that moment onwards, emotional gestures and responses showing annoyance and frustration follow upon each other and the situation emerges as complex and emotionally draining.

In the next quotation we shall revisit Thomas's psychiatric section and the general meeting held as a consequence of the turbulent restructuring process. As we join in, the meeting has just been dissolved and the staff are going home for the day. The last topic before the meeting ended concerned whether they should go ahead as anticipated or slow down the process, and the general attitude amongst the staff seems to be that they want to continue, as they have come quite far in finding new ways of organizing the section. The staff leaving, Brit, Maddy, Sharon and Thomas from the management group remain in the room to continue their discussions.

*[Sharon restates that it is her firm belief that the process of reorganizing should be postponed until they are sure they have the support of all the employees involved in the process, but Thomas fears that this will destroy the motivation that most of the staff have worked up. Thomas's view seems to upset Sharon considerably and her voice has become louder than the others'. At the same time Brit is becoming impatient, looking frequently at her wristwatch.]*  
*Brit: - We should also think about how to make this work with regard to the rotation etc. OK, I have to leave.*

*[She gets up in a hurry, says goodbye and walks out. The remaining three continue the discussion, and Maddy speaks next.]*

*- Many of the staff members are not participating in any group.*

*[Thomas does not seem to notice what Maddy just said. He turns to Sharon.]*

*Thomas: - This is the way we need to think: I can work every other week. I'm not worried about the eventuality that something bad might happen. What I do worry about is how this process is managed on our part.*

*Sharon: - I understand the way you are thinking, but you are wrong!*

*[Sharon punches the table with clenched fists, and receives odd, almost detached looks from Maddy and Thomas.]:*

*Sharon continues, still in a loud voice: - It is wrong that the good things that have been accomplished so far should be used as an argument for not taking more time. I do not think this is just a piece of cake.*

*Thomas: - Me neither. He is interrupted by Sharon, who is now repeatedly hitting the table in front of her, as well as hitting herself in the chest like a gorilla. With a thunderous voice she continues:*

*- I have no confidence that this will all work out before the end of Easter. No confidence at all!*

*[Thomas and Maddy are still sitting calmly in their chairs hearing Sharon out. It is hard to say whether they are agitated or not, as they are both keeping a straight face and a calm, steady posture. A moment of silence follows, and Sharon finally calms down. Thomas speaks.]*

*- The fact that this process ended up as it has, is not something I can take much responsibility for. That it happened rapidly is something I was caught up in, but now, when it actually has happened, it is vital that we don't slam the door in their faces again.*

*Sharon: - What is the difference? (She is still calm and her voice normal).*

*Thomas: - This time we have actually asked them about their opinion, and they have given us an answer. This is their opinion, not something we have forced down their necks. There are some leadership aspects in this process which are not good, and we have to work on them. This implicates myself and my position, and I have to deal with that. There is something about human relations in all of this that does not work. But what is happening is something that is happening here and now in this particular staff, and we should bring that energy with us. I have no difficulty seeing the problems here. I am not certain I actually want to see them, however. But I do.*

*Sharon: - OK, then we agree on that. We have to let the dialogue continue, but we need someone to take charge of the process.*

Sharon's behaviour made me very uncomfortable at the time of observation. Her extreme emotional reactions seemed somehow detached from the context, and exaggerated in an unpleasant way. Seeing an adult pounding on her own chest was new to me, and I could not understand how Sharon could get so agitated so fast. Sharon's reaction was, however, very much at odds with the calmness displayed by Thomas and Maddy. It did not seem to affect them much. Thomas had earlier spoken to me about being used to dealing with explicit emotionality at work, so it is likely that his experience from similar situations helped him deal with this case too.

According to Thomas, working in a psychiatric milieu involves dealing with reactions and emotions, but what about the somatic branch? I would argue that InSitu hospital *as a whole* is a special arena in terms of emotionality. Illnesses, injuries and matters of life and death are natural parts of everyday life, and for departmental managers these issues very often make up the framework within which they conduct their organizing. Emotional aspects are often distant from the matters at hand, such as in financial and structural concerns, but the following report from a routine meeting to exchange updates on patients' progress in John's department gives an illustration of the opposite:

*[The atmosphere is calm and informal, and the conversation is very relaxed and open. As the meeting progresses it is remarkable how it seems to organize itself. John's voice is seldom heard, and the participants are simply talking, taking the lead so to speak, in turns in a natural way. No hands are raised, and there is no authoritative direction, merely a conversation between professionals about matters of unquestioned importance and relevance. The physicians coming off night shift are presenting updated patient records, and those who have*

*something to contribute to the case histories currently discussed volunteer their input. The rest observe and listen.]*

*[John is sitting back in his chair listening to the different cases, when a special case becomes the focus of attention.]*

*- How did things go with patient X? Did he get to go home or what? John suddenly bursts out. [A sudden silence follows. It is broken after a while by a female physician from the night shift. She hesitates. Then, in a calm but somewhat uneasy tone she explains that the patient never made it that far. Unfortunately, he died during the night. His family seemingly took it well enough, she continues, but she herself was devastated. She did not know what to say, and she broke down and cried in front of them, she explains, staring at the desk in front of her.]*

*[Her words resonate between the walls for a while, giving room for reflection. Nobody attempts to comment on her nightly experiences; they just sit and wait. After a while, she receives looks of understanding from all directions, especially from John. Moments later John asks the doctors to continue the update on other patient cases, which they do. But the atmosphere has changed, and the conversation is even calmer than before and somewhat hesitant . . . . When they have gone through the whole list of patients half an hour later the meeting ends.]*

The death of a patient is sometimes inevitable, and doctors and nurses simply have to find a way to deal with it. There is little doubt that working in certain parts of a hospital may involve more of this kind of complexity than most other jobs. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily make death an easy affair. The physician on duty in the passage quoted above, for instance, seemed to be quite involved in the patient, and to be having difficulties detaching herself from the incident. The silence in the conference room that followed her report was a social indicator of the gravity of the situation, and was followed by emotional gestures of concern and sympathy. As John had taken a special interest in this particular patient's case, learning about its outcome seemed to affect him even though this was communicated in a subtle way. Still, he had to ensure that the meeting continued so that the last cases could be addressed, irrespective of his personal feelings.

Portrayed as bodily processes, emotion brings complexity into everyday interaction, and it is often a form of complexity that is not explicitly addressed. The less explicit the exchange of emotional signals that occurs when people make sense together, the less it is noticed. From the extracts that are presented in this section it seems that coping with emotionality is a significant part of a DM's job. With regard to social interaction it is perhaps one of the most important parts? After all, a DM is not responsible for system, structure or technology alone.

From a sensemaking perspective, a hospital manager's organizing is above all a social enterprise. Technology must be fitted into this social enterprise; not the other way around. My argument here is simply that emotions assert a major influence on management practice on many levels, and that dealing with emotions is a normal feature of everyday challenges. Emotion colours reality, sometimes explicitly and at other times not, but emotion is always there. Moreover, it affects the flow of everyday events and spurs organizing, which then often takes unexpected and complex directions. The challenging part of this is that somehow, emotions must be met by the manager in order for sensemaking to continue (Weick 1995; Weick et al. 2005). In chapter nine I attempt to show how this can be accomplished through improvisation.

### **Trait # 5: Unpredictability: complexity-in-the-becoming**

*How can you know what you think  
before you hear what I say?*

Analysing the preceding empirical reports it seems that however simple or straightforward some situations might appear, their meaning is never static or given. Verbal statements, for instance, are contextually bound to evolving situations – to living bodies of flesh, blood and emotion.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the contents of conversations are always to some extent unpredictable, and when gestures are put into words they inevitably trigger new ideas which are interpreted by people with unique backgrounds and perspectives. The processes of gestures and responses that we have witnessed indicate that one can never tell what the future will look like, what it will feel like, how it will change and be changed by perceptions. In that sense, the stories we have been presented with – which reflect authentic instances of real-life situations for InSitu managers – represent a long chain of events that are to some extent unforeseen and complex.

The aim of this section is to provide a few examples as well as an analysis of the role of the unforeseeable in organizing practice for the purpose of relating it to the role of improvisation in the succeeding chapters. Consider first an episode featuring Howard dropping in on one of his departmental staff meetings. The meeting is nearly over, and the second last topic of discussion is the process of constructing and moving into new premises. Howard is far from

---

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Latour (1986), and Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) on “the translation of ideas”.

content with the way they have cooperated with the architects, and he has made plans to notify the director of what he thinks are intolerable conditions.

*[Howard continues stressing that the process has been very messy, unpredictable, over-complex and stressful.]*

*- Do you all agree with me in using such heavy artillery, he asks the attendants.*

*- Yes, they all confirm.*

*[They assure Howard that he has their full support. Some of the crucial arguments from the discussion are then repeated, before the meeting is formally concluded. But as they are about to leave the room, yet another problem is raised by one of the staff members. An important external collaborating partner has just resigned his position, Howard is told. It is unexpected news that the contact has resigned, and Howard says that this is not good news. Not good at all. He frowns and looks worried.]*

*- Now we have to start from scratch teaching a new person about the specific conditions of our department, he says.*

Initially, Howard gives explicit expression to his discontent with the process of relocating. And no sooner has he commented upon what he claims has been an unpredictable and complex process, and received the support from his staff, than is he surprised by even more bad news. In one instant, then, Howard is talking about the unpredictable, and in the next he is put out by the *unexpected* news that their point of contact has quit.<sup>5</sup> I will stay with Howard and present another episode where interruption is central. Here we find Howard in his office just as he has brought a meeting to a close. As his guests are leaving the departmental head nurse (HN) enters:

*[HN spontaneously asks about the meeting with the director yesterday. Howard says it went fine, but that everything seems to be a bit ambiguous for the time being. He gives her a summary of what he knows so far. HN asks him what he wants for the future. Howard says he wants everything gathered in the same building – Building X – but unfortunately, he fears, this is a utopia. Howard asks HN which issues she wants to discuss with him. She says she has some concerns about the management structure, an issue that was initially raised with her by two of the nurses.]*

*- Exactly what do you have in mind? Howard asks.*

*- The wage structure amongst the nurses in the department no longer adds up, HN argues.*

*[Howard says he understands her point of view, but at the same time he emphasizes that he is not interested in yielding too easily when it comes to increasing wages.]*

---

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 5 for more about unpredictability and the unexpected.

- Rather, we are talking about symbolic effects, he says. Round about 1000-3000 NOK in annual difference. I encourage you to find a functional solution that you believe in, but within reasonable financial limits. But obviously, this is a matter for negotiation.

[. . . Howard is interrupted as HN's phone rings. Seconds later, the mediator from yesterday's construction meeting appears in the door, asking for an update from Howard's meeting with the director. No sooner has Howard told her they must talk later, than his pager goes off. He does not return the call. In the meantime the mediator has left, and Howard can once again return to HN and their conversation about wages. Howard is quick to emphasize that he definitely will listen to the nurses.]

- That's the least I can do, he says.

[HN then says she wants to be part of the operations meetings every now and then].

- But I need to feel that I have got a reason to be there. And it is important that I feel I have a direct and open line to you, Howard, HN says.

- But clearly, you do not need to go through me unless it concerns money, Howard argues.

- Yes, this is my understanding, too, but then again, a lot of things are indeed about money.

[Her argument remains uncommented upon by Howard, who suddenly leaves his office carrying some letters. Returning a few minutes later he explains that he had to run to get the mail out on time. He apologizes to HN for the interruption. HN says it really does not matter, and once again starts explaining her case. But only a few words into her explanation, Howard's phone rings. He picks it up and answers. A quiet sigh passes through HN's lips as she frowns at Howard. And the atmosphere suddenly tenses up a little. They are both interrupted by a woman popping her head in Howard's door.]

- When can I come in? the person asks.

- Sorry? Do we have a meeting? Howard asks, lowering the phone from his ear.

- No, I just thought I could do the cleaning, says the woman cheerfully: she turns out to be the cleaning woman!

[All three laugh.]

To close this section on unpredictability I have chosen an episode from my observations of George. The background for this episode is that George has scheduled a meeting with his section managers (chief physicians) for 1230, and is now waiting for them to arrive.

[The time is 1230 and the meeting is about to commence. Not too many have shown up for the start of the meeting, but people keep arriving as the meeting progresses. George starts out by informing about the new personnel administration system, which will be launched in two months' time. It will require the weekly filling-in and submission of paper forms, so that "Mary" can put the data into the system. (By the time he has said this, two pagers have already gone off with loud disruptive alarms. Three minutes later two doctors have left the meeting, and one



*of them has returned. Another two minutes pass, and the second one returns. Then the first pager goes off again. The face of its owner takes on an annoyed and impatient look.))]*

Although there was a set time for the meeting, few people arrived on time, and some left during the meeting as well. This behaviour may be attributed primarily to the unexpectedness and urgency accompanying hospital work. It is a trivial remark to say that pagers going off is a recurrent affair in a hospital setting. As such, the frequent beeping of pagers are reminders of the great extent to which the unpredictable defines the hospital management context. And as witnessed in the previous episode, this can produce an atmosphere of annoyance and unrest. The point is that small and continual interruptions in everyday work life might make a work environment seem disordered, which again can spur sensemaking and organizing efforts (Weick et al. 2005). In that sense, the lack of predictability and the unexpected pose something of a challenge for the practitioner to work out and resolve – a challenge which often causes irritation and general unpleasantness (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). I am not trying to argue, however, that hospital managers are constantly interrupted or that all they ever do is deal with unexpected events. Interruption is not a universal rule, but neither is predictability. Based on what we have seen of the managers' work situation, setting up a fixed dichotomy between plan on one hand and action on the other would be to commit a grave mistake. Even though everyday practice is utterly unpredictable, in practice, predictability is *achieved to a sufficient degree* most of the time. So there is indeed plan *and* action, interruption and continuity, side by side. And conceptually, the one is as important as the other. Such a dichotomy can indeed be useful, but only if used as an instrument for categorizing practice and not as a measure of the ontologically objective. From the point of view of practical philosophy, predictability is an achievement, as is practical certainty. Interruption, or unexpectedness of any kind, is a (philosophical and practical) reminder of that.

## **An analysis of everyday contextuality amongst InSitu managers**

### **Everyday contextuality as emergence**

The concept of emergence can serve as a fruitful tool for analysing the occurrences presented in this chapter. As a lens of investigation and understanding emergence speaks about that which is in between and behind situations – the process from which situations are shaped. For example, Stacey et al. (2000) build on Mead (1967) and elements of complexity theory, and speak about emergence as transformative teleology, meaning that processes of reality “. . . arise in patterns that display both continuity and potential transformation” (p. 174). Similar

to Stacey's approach, I suggest merging Mead's (1967) notion of emergence as novelty-in-the-becoming through continual reorganization with Wittgenstein's (1994) concept of "family resemblance". In this light, emergence can be understood as a continual accomplishment of using the past to understand the present. Thus, emergence is the process in which the present is continually created as context. Emergence is context-in-the-becoming (Bergson 1944), as it represents a developing chain of events following each other in a profoundly unpredictable way (Stacey et al. 2000; Stacey 2001, 2003). Emergence depicts how something grows out of the past and into the future; metaphorically speaking, it glues situations together. A way to see emergence, then, is as the hermeneutical movement accompanying gesture and response, both in the internal (bodily) and the external (social) sense. From this point of view, emergence is inextricably tied to improvisation – a central topic of discussion in chapter nine.

As emergence grows from a familiar past, it might often be quite predictable in practice, but this is only to a limited extent the case for the InSitu Hospital managers. Even if emergence varies between unfolding situations of lesser and greater clarity, a general impression of contextuality amongst the InSitu managers is that it is complex and unstructured; not only in the sense of a profound philosophical complexity, but also in the sense that typically, many of the situations these managers experience are rather vague and ambiguous. On a deep level, problems seem to be open-ended, not technical and closed. Even when there are agendas, plans and structures, these do not provide 100 per cent clarity, but often require considerable interpretative efforts. In addition, there are usually a lot of concurrent issues, clusters of events, all of which demand the manager's attention; some of them more structured and technical than others, but on the whole the amount of complexity overshadows the degree of familiarity. Furthermore, as bundles of familiar issues are mixed with complex experiences, situations often become messy and difficult to follow. As a consequence, high tempo and turbulence typically underpin real time experience – a trait of the job described by the managers as a source of both tension and excitement. And as I will be arguing in the succeeding chapters, all of these factors are important triggers of improvisation.

Emotions and feelings play a decisive role in complexifying both private and social situations for the InSitu managers. In essence, they prohibit everyday organizing from ever becoming completely technical and analytical. Perhaps more interestingly, though, emotions often play an explicit role, creating spirals of *complex emotional emergence*, where emotional gestures create emotional responses in a perpetual manner. A remarkable trait, however, is that

whenever emotions define the frame of reference, they are seldom addressed verbally by the participants. The manager seldom speaks explicitly about emotional agitation, for instance, even if this is an essential driving force of ongoing interaction. During the period of the research there was very little explicit communication about emotion, even in situations where people were sobbing or showing aggression and frustration. Instead emotion was mostly ignored as a topic of verbal communication. There are many possible explanations for this. Often, it seemed, emotions remained unaddressed for the sake of calming down the situation. More interestingly, however, people's emotions were in some instances not taken into considerations at all in situations where the opposite could have led to greater understanding and goal-accomplishment. Especially in matters of great uncertainty, such as in Howard's re-organization process and Thomas' OD-process, emotional lenses could have uncovered a reality that might possibly have challenged and even shifted the managers' view. It is also my view that the impact of rumours and misunderstandings could have been lessened if emotional factors had been taken seriously and addressed explicitly by the manager.

### **Unpredictability produces complexity**

My study strongly suggests that as an InSitu Hospital manager, one should expect the occasional surprise or interruption; sometimes caused by familiar events, sometimes by more complex ones. Nevertheless, I have an impression that managers are not sufficiently conscious about the fundamental position occupied by the unexpected in their everyday life. They lack a sharp linguistic apparatus to explain and make sense of the somewhat unpredictable way events usually emerge. Rather they tend to use imprecise expressions like "ad hoc" and "on-the-heals" as if an ideal world exists of stable equilibrium where unpredictability could in fact be avoided:

*[Before leaving, Chris complains to Brit about being "on-the-heals" in relation to a range of issues. And as he walks out he says with a light, almost humorous, voice, that last Friday was so busy that they just barely managed to work it out.]*

Having spent some time with Chris, and seen him move swiftly between everyday situations, it is actually hard to see that he is usually anything other *than* "on-the-heals". Being somewhat behind schedule seems for him to be normal practice rather than the exception. Quite literally, the Norwegian expression "being on-the-heals", can be translated as being out of balance, possibly implying that balance is the desired state (much like the concept of punctuated equilibrium). Simultaneously, however, Chris has in other instances emphasized

that this kind of turbulent work situation is what makes everyday life exciting. Actually, it is possible to sense that “being behind” is somewhat romanticised by Chris and that having the capability to get things done effectively and efficiently despite high turbulence gives some kind of status. What follows is a selection of quotes which all illustrate a similar kind of vocabulary to the one used by Chris.

*Elisabeth, DM: - Predictability? Around 50 %, I would think. There is, of course, the yearly agenda and the continual following up, and a lot is already decided for the spring. I would say those things fill up half of my time. And then there are all the affairs that make everyday life work. And in addition to that there is a great deal of **ad hoc** business, personnel issues, irritating cases and new stuff.”*

*Camilla, DM: - There are always a lot of **ad hoc** occurrences, and I always have to stay longer than regular working hours. The important thing is that I am visible during the day, and that I always have two minutes to spare.*

*Howard, DM: - Half my day is process work; the other half is **ad hoc**.*

*Karina, DM: - Today, as always, the morning meeting resulted in a somewhat spontaneous discussion on practical issues and general clarifications and principles. After that I spent some 15 minutes taking x-ray photos. Next I had to attend an **ad hoc** crisis meeting with the operational nurses. You see, there is some kind of a crisis going on here at the moment.*

*George, DM: - Often I must make sense of things in a hurry – in seconds or minutes. I have to decide there and then, on the right method to stop bleeding and so forth. So I am pretty used to doing things **ad hoc**. Every now and then this gets wrong with regard to leadership, so that I have to reverse decisions. But on the other hand, having to do that is hardly much of a catastrophe anyway.*

“Ad hoc” is typically used as a common label for the unexpected (Mintzberg 1973; Crossan and Sorrenti 1997), and to put trust in the previous statements means to realize the large space occupied by unexpectedness in everyday practice. It means to take seriously all of those things that “just happen” and with which little can be done by means of prevention. Some worship these moments and see them as exciting events, while others detest them and would like to see them eliminated once and for all. In the literature “ad hoc” is typically defined in two ways: either as a tailor-made and non-generalizable solution to a specific problem (Webster 1994), or as an impromptu measure (Sinclair 1987). The DM’s seem to use the word

in the latter sense, but in a limited version; as if they are pointing to something that is not supposed to happen; as if the unexpected occurrence could, and maybe should, be avoided.

My observation is that there is an awareness of the unexpected amongst InSitu managers, and that it is a matter of the highest concern. Still, as implied, it seems that the unexpected is seen as something outside of the frame; as something threatening the normal (ideal) condition of equilibrium. For example, the managers use the expressions “on-the-heals” and “ad hoc” about crises, personnel issues, irritating stuff and non-process work. Alternatively, as this study shows, the unexpected could be seen as something connected to the unavoidable complexity of everyday emergence. It would merely be a rhetorical grip potentially facilitating a richer understanding of typical contextuality, but it could contribute to changing the agenda somehow with regard to the image of organizational ideals. Perhaps then stability would not be perceived as the fundamental condition of organizational reality, which would be seen, rather, as *a continual application of context in more or less complex surroundings; as a process of improvisation*. From this perspective the true creative endeavours of managers can be appreciated and not only, say, their decision making capacities. Weick et al. (2005) draw a similar conclusion:

*Students of sensemaking understand that the order in organizational life comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general and the sustained. To work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that smallness does not equate with insignificance. (p. 410).*

### **Emergence and some outlines of improvisation**

Throughout most of the excerpts presented in this chapter there is a red line of responses succeeding gestures in spontaneous and genuine ways, thus creating unpredictable emergence. I have presented portraits of typical everyday contextuality and pointed out how ambiguity and unexpectedness prevail, but we have also seen skilled and experienced managers going into complex situations with great inspiration and wisdom and finding viable solutions. And therein lies the nexus that ties this introductory empirical chapter on contextuality to the succeeding chapters, which explicitly address improvisation and its relation to emergence. As a key line of argument I suggest that organizing practice is unavoidably connected to the context from which it emerges, and as we have seen great amounts of complexity at play, improvisation might be a key element in this practice.

Judging by the descriptions provided in this chapter the unexpected is not necessarily equivalent to chaos or crisis, and the reasons for this have to do with the improvisational sensemaking efforts produced by managers as a counter-measure to complexity. We have seen some of the typical challenges encountered by the InSitu Hospital managers, and become quite familiar with their everyday context; and in the following we shall study how this challenge is countered. Complexity can be translated as “not-knowing” and since in general terms improvisation can be seen as an act of changing “not-knowing” into “knowing”, there is an apparent connection between complexity and improvisation. The following chapters will therefore provide a thorough theoretical and empirical analysis of how InSitu managers typically respond to, deal with and act in complex environments and turn not-knowing into knowing. From the need to tie empirical data and theoretical conceptualizations of improvisation together, and to facilitate a conversation on improvisation as everyday organizing, some new dimensions of improvisation will be introduced in the next chapter. These new dimensions are a result of aligning theoretical reflections with empirical findings; they represent an attempt to expand on and build theory from both philosophy (The improvising man) and practice (InSitu managers). In the end we will hopefully gain an elaborate overview of important facets of improvisation as an everyday phenomenon (chapter eight) and a grounded understanding of how InSitu managers improvise (chapters nine and ten).

## Chapter 8. A call for new concepts of improvisation in everyday organizing

### Introduction

The previous chapter provides an impression of the complexity faced by InSitu managers in their everyday settings. In that regard, the previous chapter aims to answer in concrete terms the following question: “What does complexity mean in the context of InSitu managers?” In other words, I have attempted to translate the abstract concept of complexity from chapter three into concrete and authentic categories applicable to InSitu managers; and in order to accomplish this I have in chapter seven undertaken an iterative process of analysis, connecting literature with empirical data. A more difficult and intricate task has been to do the same with improvisation, which until now has been quite an abstract theoretical concept. Firstly, “The improvising man” represents a set of philosophical assumptions which position improvisation as an inevitable trait of practical life. “The improvising man” does not say much about *how* improvisation emerges qualitatively in different contexts; it only asserts *that* it plays a role. For example, it does not suggest *how* theory relates to empirical data: *How* the theoretical aspects of improvising man relate to authentic organizing practice, or more specifically, *how* the role of improvisation unfolds qualitatively with regard to spontaneity, creativity, emotionality and sociality are intricate questions that should be addressed in context in order to flesh out the concept. Stating theoretically *that* improvisation is a fruitful conceptualisation of certain aspects of practice merely amounts to providing a framework from which empirically based theorizing may flow. Such analytic theorizing is the aim of this chapter; and on a more detailed level; of chapters nine and ten.

Secondly, the authors on improvisation referred to in chapter two are for the most part occupied with *certain contexts* in which improvisation stands out as exceptionally pure (i.e. jazz improvisation, radical change and innovation). And as I found that the data from the InSitu context differs significantly from those contexts of pure improvisation in the previous literature, I soon saw the need for other and more practical ways to conceptualize improvisation. In other words, seeking to conceptualize improvisation amongst InSitu managers has given me two fundamental reasons for honing the improvisatory vocabulary within the parameters of “The improvising man”. The first was the need to contextualize “The

improvising man”, the second was the need of different concepts than the ones provided by previous theoretical and empirical studies.

After having worked intensely with and reflected over the empirical observations, I finally came up with some new ways to categorize improvisation in everyday organizing practice. First of all, the data inspired the idea that improvisation does not have to be remarkably pure to be perceived as improvisation. It must be *sufficiently pure* to be recognized, but not exceptional or radical in terms of creativity and/or spontaneity. Secondly, I realized that the previous literature meshes together practical forms of improvisation that I have found in my study to be qualitatively different. For instance, I found artistic and innovative improvisation as in the case of idea storming processes and humour to be epistemically different from emergency action or any form of immediate improvisatory reaction. Thus the idea emerged to establish different categories for *positive* and *negative* improvisation, and to show that improvisation varies between the more voluntarily chosen action (positive) and the more forced upon *reaction* (negative).

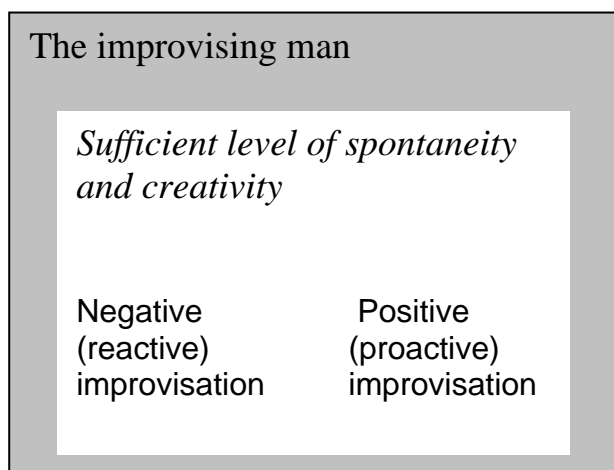
Thirdly, the data analysis consolidated an idea I have been working on for quite some time: that one should separate between *pure* and *good* improvisation. For instance, it might be good improvisation to employ impure improvisation, if this is what the practitioner perceives to be right and wise, contextual factors taken into consideration. This insight was not only of great inspiration for the understanding of organizing as improvisation amongst InSitu managers, but for the discussion in chapter five as well. To conclude: By establishing the three new dimensions of sufficiently pure versus exceptionally pure; positive versus negative; and pure versus good improvisation, I should have some fruitful theoretical tools to make sense of (analyse) the role of improvisation in everyday organizing amongst InSitu managers. In that sense they make a bridge from the abstract concepts of “The improvising man” to my empirical data, and they were conceived via a hermeneutical process where the one inspired the other. This chapter will deal with all of these three aspects theoretically, and the next chapter will show how they apply to the InSitu managers.

### **Introducing negative and positive improvisation**

Whereas “The improvising man” indicates improvisation as an inevitable trait of practice, improvisation is not always easily spotted as a practical phenomenon. I suggest that for it to be natural to label something as improvisation rather than, say, planning or routine, action



must be *sufficiently* spontaneous and creative. Situations may, however, be overseen and disregarded, as is the case when traditions are (desperately) held on to even if they do not work, or for instance when defensive routines are triggered (Moorman and Miner 1995). But if situations are addressed in the becoming, spontaneity and authenticity become dominant traits of practice, in which case improvisation is no longer only a theoretical concept, but a practical fact. In cases of improvisation in practice, high levels of context-sensitivity imply a state of being submerged in the here-and-now of the present. Improvisation in practice implies that using contextual and practically functional theories by far surpasses blind reconstruction or abstract reflection, and questions that might be asked are the likes of: What is going on here, what does it mean, what can I do, how can I make this work, how can I make success (Weick et al. 2005)?



***Model 8.0 Improvisation in practice***

We see, then, that as we take the perspective of the practitioner rather than the philosopher, improvisation can be thought of as an *attitude* or as a *method of practical thinking*, which in a given instance considers spontaneity and context superior to tradition and system.

Furthermore, a guiding message is that explicit improvisation, in the sense of it being *sufficiently* pure, can be found in a variety of practical situations containing adequate amounts of spontaneity and creativity so as to be recognized (by an observer) as explicit. And I propose two rough categories of *ideal* instances of such practically explicit improvisation: *negative/reactive* and *positive/proactive* improvisation. In other words, the general thesis is that improvisation – negative and positive – occurs explicitly at a stage where the degree of spontaneity and creativity is *amply distinct and recognizable*.

Secondly, as argued in chapter four, purity in both negative and positive improvisation depends on the degree of spontaneity *as well as* the degree of genuine creativity involved: The more spontaneous and genuinely creative the action becomes, the purer the improvisation, and the purest of all improvisational forms can be called flow. I emphasize, however, the difference between “pure” and “sufficiently pure”, a distinction that is easily missed if for example free improvisation as seen in theatre and jazz serves as the model (for example Zack 2000). Although pure improvisation is useful in a metaphorical sense, its form may be too exaggerated to serve as a model for organizing, since many instances of everyday improvisation are unlikely to meet the same criteria.

Another important distinction which is introduced in this chapter is the one between pure (flow) and good improvisation, and as a general thesis, the latter does not presume the former. Good improvisation has to do with practical wisdom, and much like the Aristotelian concept of phronesis (Vetlesen 2007; Wyller 1996), it entails pursuing spontaneity and context-sensitive action for the sake of *practical workability*, in which case the purity of improvisation varies infinitely between non-recognizable improvisation on one hand and flow on the other. And somewhere between those two extremes, improvisation becomes sufficiently pure so as to be depicted as either positive or negative improvisation. As this is a different and more nuanced approach to improvisation than any that I have found in the existing literature, which often seems to mix good and pure improvisation, I hope that my contribution will help open up new horizons in terms of knowledge about organizing.

### **Negative (reactive) improvisation**

Taylor (1985) describes negative freedom as a way of being free from external obstacles, barriers or constraints. The key is in the combination of the words “free from”, as negative freedom entails escaping something larger, maybe even something suppressive, threatening or controlling. An example is a government; one is free to the extent that one manages to escape the established and dominant structures of society. Inspired by Taylor’s concept of negative freedom, improvisation can be said to be negative when it involves *reaction* to external pressure: action that is initiated to free oneself *from* outer elements. Thus, negative improvisation is more of a reaction to upcoming events than something that is initially chosen. It depicts the kind of situations where acute complexity is thrown at you, sparking a felt and recognized desire to resolve this complexity and avoid chaos. This is the case for example

when *unexpected* occurrences interrupt a current activity, producing stress, anxiety or simply a need to overcome disruption for practical reasons (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). Improvisation due to unexpected occurrences involves using whatever is at hand as tools to construct meaning where it has apparently been lost. This latter point should be emphasized, as an experience of meaninglessness, a sense of uneasiness, must combine with the urge to put oneself and the situation together again in order for negative improvisation to occur. One way of dealing with such an urge, however, is to attempt to contain anxiety by denying the complexity at hand. With regard to authenticity, this is a way of not recognizing practical knowledge as vital, as the intention to create new sense is absent – it may thus effectively hinder improvisation (Petranker 2005).

It may be, of course, that rules, manuals or drills exist for dealing with unexpected problems, but access to such means that the situation is not *primarily* complex, but rather to some extent complicated (see chapter three). The difference is that complicated problems require technical-rational problem solving: the employment of defined rules to solve problems within a given system. In order to call a situation complex, however, no manual awaits readily at hand and no clear route can be chosen instrumentally. Unexpected events often require rapid action, but this does not necessarily make them complex. Complexity calls for new meaning, not the technical (re)employment of old knowledge. Philosophical non-dualism shows us that we are inevitably surrounded by complexity to some extent, but by the description reactive improvisation is indicated a connotation of “complex” as it is used in everyday lingo, pointing to circumstances that are *more than usually uncertain, vague, ambiguous* or even *meaningless* (Weick 1995). Unexpectedness in itself does not fulfil all these criteria, but comes in addition to them. What is important to understand in the forthcoming passages is that the more complex a situation – given that this complexity is perceived and experienced as unintended and somehow negative, and given that there is a need or a desire to *act* and not just think – the greater the need for context-sensitive, negative improvisational action. At this point it is natural to repeat the insight from chapter three that in non-dualism there is no such thing as complexity *as such*: complexity exists in the dynamic relation between the human body and its perceived surroundings.

## Positive (proactive) improvisation

The other ideal instance of improvisation I propose concerns creativity and knowledge “for its own sake”. Translating Charles Taylor (1985) into a pragmatist frame, the ambition to voluntarily express creativity can be labelled *positive*. In Taylor’s view positive freedom, as opposed to negative freedom, entails taking control of one’s own life: utilizing one’s capacity to translate intention into action. One is positively free to the extent that sensemaking capacities are used as instruments for personal growth, development or simply self-reflection. In the positive sense, there is less focus on external pressures and the manner in which they *compel* the individual to employ creative powers. There is less focus on being *free from* external forces than on being *free to* create meaning for private and voluntary reasons. Consequently, positive improvisation implies twisting and turning rules, systems or ideas, viewing them as temporary constructs that can be used as tools to craft something new. In this sense structures are not perceived as given, but as instruments to be used creatively in context. Why? Because the ambition is to create new meaning and achieve practical workability, not to preserve the old.

Whereas negative improvisation is triggered by unexpected complexity, positive improvisation implies actively making sense of and acting in your present situation out of an *ambition* to create knowledge. Thus, knowledge is sought voluntarily as a sovereign value, but always within context. There may be an element of external instrumentality governing the process, such as a desire to make money, to assure future growth or receive social status and applause; nonetheless, however, creativity is viewed as a quality in itself, as a capacity providing value; not merely as a reactive competence due to sudden complex circumstances, but as something to make the present or the future a better place in which to live. In other words, creativity-in-context becomes the explicit theme or concern of the present.

If you have an intention of improvising proactively, the question you ask yourself is: What does *novelty* mean *to me* in *my situation*? Even when there is a profound wish to create the new, this also has to be based in reality, in your social and physical here-and-now. In that sense, positive improvisation is closely related to “innovation”, although *not* in the orthodox or *commonplace* version, as Fonseca (2002) labels it:

*It has become commonplace to talk about innovation in terms of rational decision making based on foresight, where the main focus is the system for decision making and the outcome of those decisions, that is, on an innovation (p. 28).*

Unlike authors such as Zirger and Maidique (1990), Johne and Snelson (1990), Cooper and Kleinschmidt (1991), Gupta and Wilemon (1990) and Crawford (1991), who according to Fonseca (2002) represent a technical-rational perspective on innovation, I see positive improvisation as related more to an emergent form of innovation-in-context (e.g. Bastien and Hostager 1988). And I propose that it is in this light that Weick's (2001) perspective on improvisation can be understood. Note, however, that Weick (and Bastien and Hostager) seems to be concerned with only one specific occasion of positive improvisation, and less with the phenomenon as it changes between and within contexts (and certainly not with improvisation as a philosophical doctrine; i.e. "The improvising man"). As indicated in the following excerpt, Weick seems to be primarily concerned with the form of positive improvisation that sets out to reach the *highest possible purity and genuineness*.

*. . . there are good reasons why the idea of improvisation may have limited relevance for organizations. If organizations change incrementally – punctuations of an equilibrium seldom materialize out of thin air without prior anticipations – then those incremental changes are more like interpretation and embellishment than variation or improvisation. Thus even if organizations wanted to improvise, they would find it hard to do so, and probably unnecessary. (Weick 2001, p. 300).*

As opposed to this view of improvisation as a process of radical innovation, my concept of positive improvisation, which emerges from the framework of "The improvising man", suggests that creating novelty is not categorically limited to causing something to become structurally different, unknown or unfamiliar; to innovating and fabricating something you or others have not experienced before (an unfamiliar product, service or experience). Positive improvisation may simply entail acting wisely based on contextual considerations and a desire for positive knowledge. And contexts vary. Positive improvisation means something else in a hospital setting than on a theatre podium or a jazz stage. When *pure* improvisation is the explicit aim, however, there is an implicit intention to create the genuinely new and unfamiliar, which is a far more specific aspiration. Zack (2000) goes so far as to label the purest forms of positive improvisation *meta-improvisation*, implying that not only is structure altered, but even the very *understanding of* structure. From a non-dualistic perspective, however, Dehlin (2003) argues that meta-improvisation is not in essence different from

improvisation. Only if structure is viewed from a dualistic perspective can there be a difference between structure (ontology) and understanding of structure (epistemology). Structure never *is*; it only exists in the becoming as *evolving* understanding. Thus, any understanding of structure is always somewhat different from before; it is transitory and on the move, as argued in “The improvising man”. In free jazz, then, which Zack uses as an example of meta-improvisation, the setting is simply that more is allowed than in other forms of jazz. It may seem that Zack underrates that even in free jazz one cannot escape musical forehaving, the physical setting at hand, and so forth. *There may be less rules in free jazz, but it is not rule-less.*

**Positive improvisation:** Taken for granted ambition of creating the *contextually new*; recognizing inevitable variation between emerging contexts.

Taken for granted ambition of creating the *genuinely new*: a unique context of innovation.

### ***Model 8.1 Positive improvisation***

To sum up, I propose a separation between two categories of positive improvisation (see model 8.1), both of which have in common some kind of deeply held mind-set devoted to creating “the new”. Even if the one grows out of the other, the difference between the two categories is that they operate with different meanings of novelty. Whereas both categories are built upon a quest for meaning and *workability*, one of them considers the *purity* of improvisation superior to mere contextual workability. Thus in the pure and more narrow sense, improvisation is not only about continually finding functional theories and modes of action that fit with the novelty of the moment; it is about developing theories that are new in the sense that they are not found in established fore-having (individually or socially). This is improvisation in a more constricted and rare form, which is typically associated with

innovation and musical and artistic creativity. Both categories of positive improvisation may, however, reach very pure stages of improvisation, in which case improvisation as such is more explicitly recognized. Again, the only difference lies in the perception of novelty: In the general sense, positive improvisation applies to the ongoing struggle to make things work in the becoming, and can thus involve highly familiar and recognizable solutions. In the specialist sense, this is not enough, for as much as meaning must be contextually based it must *in addition* bring with it some sense of extraordinary freshness; of genuine innovation.

Because every situation is somewhat new and temporary (Bergson 1944), a characteristic feature of positive improvisation in both forms is that it involves an attitude of context-sensitivity, of being constantly alert (Petranker 2005; Purser and Petranker 2005). Positive improvisation involves *a voluntary intention of* “acting in a timely fashion” (Purser and Petranker 2005), which is similar to what Schön (1987) calls “knowing-in-action”, and also to March’s (1994) concept of “matching appropriate behaviour to situations”. Reversed, if a context is perceived as given, it would imply less need for continual sensitivity to emergence in favour of objective analysis and technical rationality. Context-sensitivity, however, involves judging, testing and determining what is needed here and now, a pursuit for spontaneity and perhaps even the genuinely new. Recall Schön’s (1987) definition of improvisation as “. . . *on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena*” (pp. 26-27). Socially, this can be aligned with pursuing empathy and introspection, the capability to understand others, what they mean, how they feel, what they need. And as you too are part of the context, improvisation involves bringing attention to your own feelings and needs and the way these shape reality. In the social regard, rules, norms, expectations, systems, routines, structures, laws, ethics and cultural elements may be of key importance, and they are consequently contextual factors that must be considered if present. Of course, the physical context, too, plays a decisive role; one can, for instance, hardly “think away” the forces of gravity.

Positive improvisation is not an easy undertaking and it does not always succeed. The mere ambition to create novelty, in either sense of the term, is not enough to comprise improvisation, but it is a precondition. *Attempting* to get as close to the organizational context as possible is not the same as positive improvisation, because such an attempt might fail: this merely signifies a proactive improvisatory attitude. Nervousness, lack of concentration, or the need to impose control ahead of time might prevent the mind from seizing the moment so that

pure spontaneity fails to appear. One might have a desire to be caught up in the moment and to become intimate with occurrences-in-their-making, and perhaps one has an attitude of seeing the world and everything in it as temporary, but unless this is translated *into action*, improvisation will remain somewhat unrealized. Many things cast the mind out of context and onto, say, linear paths, and it is difficult to perpetually keep an open eye towards one's physical and social surroundings (Petranker 2005).

### **Risk-in-context: Positive improvisation and provocative competence**

What if you have a profound intention to make the most of every lived moment (positive improvisation), how do you go about this in practice? Maybe it is a somewhat unrealistic ideal, but still an ambition you hold high and strive for; an ambition of improvising new meaning, creative development and authenticity. So, how would you go about fulfilling this ideal? The first message from a philosophy of praxis is to always remain sensitive to the context in which you are situated (Petranker 2005). This means that every development, every innovation, is based in the stuff of everyday life. Next, as this everyday stuff has a quality of temporality, positive improvisation implies continuously striving for new meaning. Of course, such an attitude involves huge amounts of risk-taking, and it does not combine with being too preoccupied with past experience (Weick 1989). Everyday routines and rules must not govern your life or control your movements like restraint jackets. Rather, to some extent these must be left behind, in the sense that they should not be taken for granted, but merely provide a starting point, a tool for breaking new ground. The very ability to take risks, then, may be perceived as an improvisatory tool (Barrett 1998). In a non-dualist language one has to construct the object of risk-taking as something meaningful and significant in order to become a real life improviser. Risk-taking will, to the extent that you succeed, work as a temporary construct enabling you to reach new goals. In chapter nine I will present some illustrative cases of positive improvisation in practice, and we shall see how hospital managers confirm in their own words the importance of proactive and creative action when it comes to succeeding in their work.

If rather than something you fear, risk is something you embrace, this opens up a variety of options. Given, of course, that you have an initial intention to move on and be innovative. Being willing to take risks implicates that you might provoke your own assumptions. Accordingly, you would not be a stranger to impressions from unfamiliar sources, or to breaking up everyday patterns. Actually, as an improviser you would seek such provocation,



with the result of finding yourself thrown into the unknown. Possessing the ability to bring the unknown onto oneself is what Barrett (1998) calls having *provocative competence*, a competence to invoke chaos and disorder. This is a way of invoking complexity for the purpose of reducing it and hopefully ending up as a more experienced and robust person equipped with new ideas. Such a risk-taking attitude may be traced all the way back to ancient Christianity, where it represented a moral ideal (Nicolaisen 2003). Furthermore, Heidegger (1996) ties risk-taking, spontaneity and enquiring behaviour to authenticity [Dasein], as does Taylor (1998). True living, they claim, lies in the capacity to spontaneously explore life in-the-becoming. As a critical remark, however, one might ask whether such risk-taking and knowledge-seeking should not be a matter of individual consideration rather than a philosophical pursuit of universal ideals.

Provocative competence implies invoking some degree of complexity in everyday situations. It is about not taking everyday structures, rules and routines for granted, but continually looking for ways to improve them. Provocative competence involves *acting first and making sense later*, and is in that sense a highly retrospective form of improvisation (Weick 1989, 1995). It involves taking a risk and gambling on the result. It involves trial and error. Of course, the aim is not to fail, but to succeed in the long run; in order to accomplish success, the context at hand must be experienced in a practical manner through the moulding and grounding of new ideas. One way of practicing provocative competence is to act in seemingly meaningless ways. Acting somewhat unwittingly can be useful just to get an idea, to find inspiration. As the patterns of everyday life tend to be internalized to the extent that they almost disappear, one way of making them visible can be to break them on purpose, even if there is no clear route or intention ahead.

In technical rationality there is only one right way ahead (Schön 1991). Deviations are undesired and errors can be fatal. In provocative improvisation, however, one can deliberately claim something out of context, play the wrong note, or make errors on purpose and then see where this leads (Barrett 1998; Weick 2001). Play and humour can be useful instruments for creating unexpected complexity. In short, anything that can more or less radically change the context, making it somewhat chaotic and vague, can serve as tools of provocative competence. Note, however, that this is not an invitation to act sloppily or carelessly. Errors, for example, should from an improvisatory perspective always be viewed in context, with due consideration to issues such as safety, ethics etc. (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001). Provocative

competence means creating openings in space and time especially designed for creative activities where the direct consequences of actions are relatively harmless.

### **Improvisation in practice**

From the perspective of “The improvising man” it is imperative to understand that everyday practical life to a varying degree is packed with more or less unexpected and complex events. Some of these we feel compelled to address in order to secure the continuance of everyday life, which signifies a basically reactive pattern. The process of negative improvising, though, is not different in essence from the positive type. Both types involve improvisation and context sensitivity. The only difference can be traced in the sense of negative urgency in reactive improvisation versus the positive knowledge-attitude and relatively urgency-free atmosphere in the positive (proactive) version. In practice, the difference between positive and negative improvisation is often vague, and the two should therefore only be perceived as ideal constructs. On a philosophical level, this can be explained through Mead’s (1967) idea that every reaction is simultaneously action, and vice versa, meaning that an agent responds to his own and others’ gestures, which in turn produce further gestures to be responded to. As an example, even in the most extreme form of positive improvisation, such as in the arts of free jazz and free theatre, one reacts to the gestures of others. Nevertheless, I think negative and positive improvisation form a dichotomy that can be useful by facilitating *empirical categorization* of everyday events: In some situations it makes sense to say that we actively and voluntarily sense the context and look for improvements; in others we feel that we have to create meaning reactively.

*Creative* action is essential as a *tool* in both positive and negative improvisation. Both typically concern situations where there is *an explicit side* to improvisation. Either there is a conscious positive knowledge-attitude guiding spontaneous action or there is an externally induced urge to make new sense. Thus, as we are apt to find these situations more than usually pure to the extent that creative desires and urges are realized, we would in everyday speech refer to them as improvisation and not as, say, planning, routine work, habit or technical action. Hypothetically, one could disregard the often urgent complexity of real life and care little about creating new knowledge (Petranker 2005); although doing so would make it hard to talk about improvisation as a tool, since there is no active or conscious intention to improvise. However, as argued in “The improvising man”, some degree of (everyday) improvisation is inevitable. From this perspective *improvisation and improvisation cannot be*

*turned on and off*, as they are profound aspects of sensemaking. Rather, improvisation emerges as a fluid and ongoing qualitative gradation, but only when it reaches a certain level of purity is it typically recognized as improvisation in practice: be it positive or negative. Improvisation in practice is thus sufficiently pure, not just radically pure, and it is within this perspective that the empirical analysis of everyday organizing amongst InSitu managers can make sense (chapters nine and ten).

### **Good improvisation is not necessarily pure**

In an attempt to mould a concept of organizing as improvisation that stretches further than "The improvising man", but which flows from the insights from it and uses its root concepts (i.e. spontaneity, creativity, emotionality and sociality), I hope to be able to specify the role of improvisation in everyday organizing practice amongst InSitu managers (next chapter). I suggest that a pathway to this can go through an understanding of practical wisdom, and that *good improvisatory practice presumes (contextual) improspection rather than a categorical pursuit of radical innovation*. I therefore end this chapter with a theoretical discussion of the difference between pure and good improvisation, and my thesis is that the latter does not have to involve the former.

I have two reasons for introducing the concept of "good improvisation". The first concerns giving explicit focus to the normative dimension of improvisation in practice (positive and negative), which is treated empirically in chapter nine. The second also concerns normative aspects of improvisation, but on a more subtle level, as I want to address a type of improvisatory processes that involve technical rationality. Here I argue that the term "good improvisation" facilitates the theorizing of improvisation as practical wisdom, as it concerns the challenge of how to make organizing effective: or in other words, how to make technical models – such as rules, routines, structures, plans and systems – *work*.

Improvising, be it positive or negative, implies evaluating the context at hand, to determine what is going on and then acting accordingly. In that sense improvisation is about creating and applying theories that work in context, which is a fundamentally open process of *abducting* sense. Whereas induction and deduction entail working systematically, abduction concerns the birth of meaning (Dewey 1929; Peirce 1966a, 1966b, 1974a, 1974b) within a dialogical self (Mead 1967). Abduction entails using tools pragmatically, not following a programme blindly:

*The process (of abduction) itself is not guided by a well defined programme, and cannot be guided by such a programme, for it contains the conditions for the realization of all possible programs. It is guided rather by a vague urge, by a passion (Kierkegaard). The passion gives rise to specific behaviour which in turn creates the circumstances and the ideas necessary for analysing and explaining the process, for making it rational. (Feyerabend 2002, p. 17).*

Expanding on Feyerabend, this is the way the mind works, as an open process of defining, of making theories and beliefs, rather than as a closed process of calculation guided by some programme. Technical rationality may, however, result from abduction and may at times be very useful. The point is that technical rationality is just one of the many possible ways in which one may use one's creative capacities, not *the* one. In some practical situations strict rules work and in others they do not, and the process of determining this is contextual and improvisatory. Thus, as suggested in chapter five, improvisation *could* in some instances involve employing technical-rational, rule-based action, simply because this is what the situation requires. And to the extent that this is actually done, technical-rational action comes about *as an effect*. In other words, as soon as it is established that a system could be implemented with luck and this is actually done, the subsequent actions will be technical-rational. In chapter, ten illustrative examples of such behaviour amongst InSitu Hospital managers are shown and discussed, and special attention is given to the way improvisation and technical rationality tend to amalgamate in organizing practice.

An implication from "The improvising man" is that as improvisation is unavoidable in practice *there is no natural or categorical separation between improvisation and technical rationality in practice*. In a given instance, the former might in fact entail the latter: *it may be good improvisation to employ impure improvisation*. Consequently, as argued in the beginning of this chapter, in instances of impure improvisation it is difficult to identify it as positive or negative because the spontaneity and creativity involved is of an implicit and subtle character. Then again, spontaneity and genuine creativity might be sufficiently present over time – one may decide to change systems and replace functions on the basis of spontaneous considerations, in which case the boundary between technical rationality and improvisation is blurred. In evolving practice, sensemaking processes may vary between being more or less improvisatory and, consequently, more or less technical-rational, something which is supported by my empirical study (see chapter 10). For instance, actions may start out as proactive improvisation, continue as technical-rational action, and perhaps

end up as reactive improvisation. Either way, the true improviser acknowledges the temporality of systems, and keeps asking (in a proactive manner) whether it should persist. If, however, rule-based technical-rational action is regarded as primary and somehow *taken for granted* as a script for action, as a paradigm or as an ideology, irrespective of the actual context at hand, this reflects an act of reification. (See for example Berger and Luckmann (1991) for an elaborate explanation of “reification”, and Goffman (1969) for a similar discussion of “idealization” and “maintenance of expressive control”.)

Reifying technical rationality is a way of following a rule for its own sake and taking it for granted, rather than employing it on the basis of improvisatory (contextual) considerations (for example “standardization” (Weick 2001)). In this case, not only is the rule *not* treated as a creative point of departure *or* as a governing tool; it is made absolute or solid. This kind of reified Technical Rationality mirrors the dualistic philosophical position, such as in the case of Positivism (Schön 1991), and stands in opposition to an improvisational framework. From the *practical* perspective of an improviser, however, technical-rational action can be chosen over and over again if considered contextually wise, but it is never taken for granted.

Good improvisation entails to minimize the delay between thought and action. Good improvisation means to improspect and get close to the context at hand, not to abstract from it; whereas to calculate means to go the opposite way. Wisdom in the improvisatory sense is similar to what Purser and Petranker (2005) call “deep improvisation”, which implies thinking and acting *in situ* as opposed to following some kind of rule or ideal blindly. *Good improvisation* thus implies *performing “deep improvisation” in practice*, and it implies striving for *authenticity and spontaneous creativity* through improspection. According to this view, theories are used as tools to understand the present. Hence, there can be no universal incitement to stop, reflect and then act in a linear order. An implication of “The improvising man” is that practical wisdom flows from good improvisation, as it is about meeting real-time problems with real-time measures, not about abstract reflection or technical calculation for its own sake, as in the case of Managerialism (see chapter five). Thus, wisdom often derives from trial and error, from prior experience, or from immediate reaction. It is not categorically wise to think before acting, however counter-intuitive this might sound. And more importantly, with regard to practical wisdom and good improvisation, rules are guiding tools and not measures of control.

## Some concluding comments

In this chapter I have expanded on the insights from “The improvising man” to facilitate an analysis of organizing as improvisation amongst InSitu managers. I have suggested three new dimensions that flow from the theoretical conceptualizations in chapter four *as well as from* the concrete findings in my empirical study that will be presented in the forthcoming chapters. More specifically, I have tried to provide “The improvising man” with more practical substance, and argued that even if improvisation is an inextricable feature of practical being, it is not always explicit as such. Rather, it takes on a *sufficient* degree of purity, of spontaneity and of genuine creativity to allow the empirical observation of improvisation. Sufficient does not necessarily imply flow, however. It points to circumstances where the degree of spontaneity and genuine creativity *overshadows* more technical and routine-like behaviour. In particular, I have suggested two typical instances of such improvisation in practice: negative and positive improvisation. By treating these as sensemaking apparatuses to be used in the categorization of emergent and fluent everyday experiences, I have encouraged the reflexive and mutually constitutive relationship they form. Thus I hope to have contributed towards overcoming a conception of improvisation as an either-or concept, as I focus on real-time flowing qualitative evaluation of improvisation rather than quantitative depiction. In the same manner, I have tried to soften the separation between technical-rational action and improvisation, arguing that in practice, the latter may include the former. Finally, as a non-dualistic counter-move against improvisation as *either* present *or* not, I have argued that *good* improvisation is not necessarily pure, and that emergent details of practical life, of contextuality in the becoming, can best be handled through improspection and context sensitivity. This entails a view on practical wisdom as an improvisational assessment of the present, and implies a fundamental attitude of using physical and mental objects as creative tools rather than as restraint-jackets or givens to be followed without question. These reflections can be summed up as in table 8.0:

<b>Proactive/reactive intention</b>	<b>Authenticity</b>	<b>Form of action</b>	<b>Improvisational purity</b>
Context-sensitivity & improvisation, i.e. <i>good</i> improvisation	Authentic	Negative improvisation	Sufficiently pure
	Authentic	Positive improvisation	Sufficiently pure
	Authentic	Technical-rational action	Impure
<i>Taken for granted</i> structure of action	Inauthentic	Reified technical-rational action	Impure

**Table 8.0 Good improvisation, authenticity and purity**

A subtle message indicated in table 8.0 is that *improvisation in practice* is always intended as *good* improvisation; as a way of acting spontaneously and creatively that may ensure practical workability and effectivity. As we have seen with reference to Feyerabend (2002) earlier in this chapter, the normative and the descriptive amalgamate in abductive processes, implying that action always presumes *the intention of action* (Skjervheim 2001). In other words, thought is inevitably guided by a desire, an urge (Dewey 1929; Feyerabend 2002), in which case improvisation in practice results from intentions of good improvisation. A second reflection from table 8.0 is that good improvisation, and thus any form of improvisation, is not always sufficiently pure to be empirically recognized *as* improvisation in practice (positive/negative). For contextual reasons good improvisation can take the form of technical rationality, and when it does, it can be hard to identify it as improvisation even if it is in fact context-sensitive. This is why I have chosen to categorize only two forms of improvisation in practice, negative and positive, and to separate these from technical-rational action. Finally, in table 8.0 “good” and “taken for granted” are emphasized, and the point is to show that I see them as antagonists (i.e. Schön 1991). Good improvisation implies *not* taking something for granted. I have therefore separated three forms of authentic and improvisatory action from blind, inauthentic action which flows from taken for granted beliefs.

In the next chapter I will be using the new concepts presented to make sense of my empirical observations of InSitu managers.

## Chapter 9. Improvisation amongst InSitu managers

*“ . . . people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly.”*

*(Weick et al. 2005, p. 414).*

### Introduction

The ambition behind this chapter is to study in detail how improvisation evolves in everyday organizing amongst InSitu Hospital department managers: how they organize their worlds, deal with upcoming issues and how they create meaning and find solutions under emergent and complex conditions such as described in chapter seven. It is also an ambition to show how the managers reflect upon their work in terms of improvisation, and how they act in terms of positive creativity and knowledge growth. Building on “The improvising man”, key words for the succeeding empirical analysis are spontaneity, creativity, emotionality and sociality, and as argued in the previous chapter these are addressed to the extent that they are found in a *sufficiently pure* form. Furthermore, also based on the previous chapter, they are addressed from two angles, one negative and the other positive. Finally, throughout the succeeding analysis there is a focus on good improvisation and practical wisdom; on how to make things work in context. This is expanded upon in the next chapter, which deals explicitly with the role of technical rationality in everyday organizing.

Two elements of “The improvising man” can serve as an introduction to this chapter. Firstly, to act spontaneously implies acting according to what is happening here and now: acting in-context rather than on the basis of some abstract model. Secondly, whereas context may be purely mental, for example in theoretical contemplation (abstraction), in improvisation there must be an external and irreversible component as well. In this sense improvisation means *to create context spontaneously through external action*. Thus, organizing as improvisation is about making a difference in the *physical and social* sense. And above all it is about making a difference in the here-and-now, which presumes inspection of either the positive or the negative kind (see chapter eight).



## Negative improvisation

### Emergence, context-sensitivity and improvisation

In chapter seven I argued that an inevitable complexity underpins organizational reality at InSitu, and that it can be explained as emergence (Mead 1967). In this section I will try to show that the quality of organizing is closely related to the quality of emergence, and that organizing in an emergent environment takes the form of negative improvisation. In other words, negative improvisation occurs as emergent complexity is dealt with by means of practical and context-sensitive action. Context-sensitivity may, however, be a misleading expression, as it seems to indicate that there is a given context for the improviser to act upon. This is not my point. Rather, I take the view of Bergson (1944), Dewey (1929) and Joas (1996) who see context as a (shared) temporal image of social and physical reality at a certain point in time. So there is no One Context to relate to, no given Reality, but a continual and improspective projection based on practical measures of workability. Inspired by Mead (1967) I understand context-sensitivity as *continual openness to emergence*, and improvisation means to deal with and act upon this openness.

Improvisation is not just looking into the present (i.e. improspection), but acting creatively in the present. In that sense improvisation is constituted by actions taken in situ; actions that in themselves co-produce emergence. This means that improvisation simultaneously constitutes and has its origins in ongoing processes of gesture/response; i.e. in emergence (Mead 1967). Hence I would argue that in those cases where we have earlier seen managers trying to cope under vastly emergent circumstances (chapter seven), we may find illustrative examples of negative improvisation. And the more complex those situations are, the more illustrative they would be, as one would then expect purer instances of improvisation. To grasp the central role of improvisation in practical organizing, I therefore suggest drawing on the insights from chapter seven by analysing some episodes that are illustrative with regard to emergence. The difference is that improvisation, and not complexity, now is the primary lens through which these episodes are viewed and analysed.

## Presenting some stories of negative improvisation

Following the structure from the previous chapter the first extract to be presented gives an image of the way meaning is contextually bound, giving language a temporal, ambiguous and vague status. Here I argue for how improvisation is a process in which contextual meaning emerges, and how ambiguity and vagueness is organized through improvisation. I then present some extracts arguing that there is a relation between improvisation and clustering of events, and subsequently between improvisation, unpredictability and the unexpected. Finally, I have chosen to analyse the relation between improvisation and emotionality in a section of its own. Implicit in all the chosen extracts is a demonstration of how improvisation in a fundamental manner involves defining problems.

A written narrative can only hope to give indications of the unfolding of real life events, and the shorter and more superficially and generally a story is told, the more difficult it is to recognize practice-in-the-becoming: emergence. Hence I want to start by presenting a rather comprehensive moment-to-moment report from Elisabeth's work life. I urge the reader to pay attention to how the episode moves onwards; how one trivial thing leads to another, and how gestures create responses that themselves work as gestures for yet new responses. Furthermore, I want to direct focus to the apparently temporal and ambiguous status of language in this emergent process, something which spurs further gestures and responses for the sake of interpretation and meaning-making.

*[Elisabeth's assistant manager (AM) enters for the daily morning meeting, and immediately the two of them start going through the calendar.]*

*- We have 11 managers coming over from the Netherlands to visit us, Elisabeth begins. - We have to make a program ready for them as part of a larger national program issued by the former hospital director. Later they will be going to Oslo, she explains, and continues with another issue on her agenda. - Unit [Anonymous] has taken direct contact with the Ministry of Justice without going through us. They have not gone through the official channels.*

*AM: - This is not exactly the first time it happens.*

*Elisabeth: - No, but the guy from Unit [Anonymous] has randomly passed on information to some case officer. There must be a void of knowledge in their organisation.*

*AM: - Perhaps we should take this up in the management team?*

*Elisabeth: - I think we should rather take it up with Unit [Anonymous] directly.*

*AM: - Yes, I agree. - I choose to believe that Henrik has done this with the best of intentions. After all he is new at Unit [Anonymous].*

*[Elisabeth looks down at her calendar.]*

*Elisabeth: - Who should attend the [Anonymous] forum this year? Elisabeth suddenly asks. - It is being held at the [Anonymous] Hotel.*

*AM: – Oh, Helge is the case officer on this one.*

*Elisabeth: – Please bring with you this case anyhow, because I need to know who is going.*

*[She then gives an account of yesterday's meeting on cooperation out in the district, and adds that while she was there, the other attendants strongly wanted her to speak to them and give lectures for the mayors, chief officers and so forth, but that she is afraid this would hurt Lise's feelings, since she is usually the one doing it. The thing is that Lise and one of the attendants, Olsen, have a history of getting into arguments with each other.]*

*Elisabeth: - I think the two of them get into conflicts with each other because of their personalities. Because he is extrovert and Lise is the opposite. When I spoke at the meeting, however, Olsen actually said that for the first time he now really understood the problems of ZZ-medicine. Could it be that Lise is not explicit enough in her communication?*

*[Elisabeth expresses satisfaction that she succeeded in getting the attention of the attendants at yesterday's meeting, and continues to tell AM how they had a such fantastic time, and that they laughed a lot. It turned out, she says, that they all shared having attended the wrong meetings at some time. In one case a guy had even met up to the conference, looked at his watch, become impatient after a while, and started giving hints to the person in charge about the time – that surely it was his turn to speak now? As it happened, he had actually been granted the chance to speak, only to give the wrong speech that had nothing to do with the topic at hand.]*

*Elisabeth: - He gave the right speech in the wrong context, how about that?*

*[Elisabeth laughs at her story, but does not get any response from AM who seems to be looking at her in bored anticipation. From the lack of interest it seems that he is eager to move on to the next subject, and Elisabeth quickly follows up in a more reserved tone of voice.]*

*Elisabeth: - There is an upcoming seminar on how the community and three of our hospital units are cooperating on a project. By the way, she interrupts herself, are we talking about respect today? Or was it equality?*

*[She is referring to the department staff meeting starting in a few minutes, where a regular point on the agenda is to discuss the core values that they have received from central management.]*

*- Respect, is today's issue, AM says somewhat emotionlessly as he rises from his chair.*

*[Elisabeth rises too, grabs her notebook, and leaves for the conference room. 12 people from her staff are already waiting around a large elliptic table. The time is 0840. Elisabeth starts out by debriefing everyone about yesterday's meeting on cooperation that she attended, and says it was a really good and productive one, and that they have already come a long way at ZZ. Many of the attendants are nodding their heads approvingly.]*

- Yes, they are really doing well out there, someone utters.

*[Elisabeth does not pause and continues with the next topic.]*

- What is this so-called big city meeting, she asks the congregation. - Something I am supposed to attend?

A staff member answers:

- Oh, it is hardly about any big issues, but there are still some things that need to be corrected in the report.

- Ok, so who is attending? Elisabeth asks, apparently looking for volunteers.

*[They go around the table as people put their names on a list. Next, Elisabeth turns her attention to another issue about a phone-call from the accountant's office. Evidently there is something about how to deal with invoices that is difficult. After a short explanation of the problem, Elisabeth says there is one last point on the agenda: a conversation about the core values issued by InSitu's central management, and today's topic is "Respect".]*

*[Elisabeth calls upon Celia, one of the staff members, to address the meeting.]*

- Our group (Celia names the members) has been working on the core value respect. We have asked ourselves: "what does respect really mean"? We have been discussing this, trying to gain a deeper understanding of it. For instance, we propose that listening, understanding, caring, positive attitudes, human ethics and human worth, room, form and punctuality have to do with respect. These are not things you can demand from people, but things you have to earn. Likewise, not to interrupt, to understand in the best sense, to have respect for each other's differences and personal feelings are amongst the things we think go into respect.

*[Celia keeps talking to the congregation and uses a written list as her guidance.]*

- And more directly related to our workplace, she continues, we have concluded that it is vital that we have respect for each other's areas of competence, experience and knowledge. Moreover, we emphasize the importance of respecting each other's tasks and areas of responsibility.

*[The meeting room phone rings, someone answers, saying that "she" is busy attending a meeting. Celia then continues.]*

- Lastly, I briefly want to share with you what we found out about respect in the Latin language. Respect is derived from the Latin "re spectare" – to re-view – which indicates keeping an open mind and being able to reconsider your opinions.

*[As soon as Celia is done presenting the work of her group, a discussion commences based on the group's findings.]*

- Let us not forget about the general respect for human worth, a staff-member (Person A) says.

- Oh, but we did talk about that, about respect for humanity as such, Celia comments.

- Personally, I think what you said about punctuality is important, Elisabeth utters. She continues.

- Is there something else you think is worth spending time on?

- We certainly talked about all these things, Celia answers and continues, - For example, if someone is busy, she must be allowed to be so. (The phone rings again). Ha-ha... speaking of interruption...

[Celia takes short break before she continues.]

- What we did not do was to suggest concrete measures. This must be improved, of course.

- Exactly, Elisabeth comments, - because all these were certainly important points that need to be reflected upon.

- Yes, but they should be made more concrete and specific. More action-oriented, a staff member (Person B) says.

- What I should have done personally, Elisabeth says, is to show this group more respect from the beginning. After all, I was supposed to be part of it, and I do not want to let go of this matter. Rather, I'd like it to be addressed every now and then and to be reflected upon.

- We haven't really considered in context what needs to be worked on, Celia repeats. - What we have done is to make general sense of what respect means. But surely we could put some points up on the wall. I have seen it done in other places.

[AM who has been sitting rather quietly all along saying nothing, is now nodding his head slightly. Then he speaks.]

- What is important here, obviously, is to translate these issues into practical action.

- What is important is that what is agreed upon is the standpoint of the whole group, person B argues, and continues. - We should put together everything that comes from each different group, structure it and create a common document. The ambition of this would be to create harmony and a common way of thinking.

- Sure, but I have only got a personal relationship to this exact word, and not to the other three, Celia says. - Perhaps everybody should be allowed to discuss all four words? I'd say there is no rush to finish this in a week. We have to work on it over time.

[Everybody seems to agree on this, and Elisabeth takes the discussion a bit further.]

- Has everybody read the report on work environment and mental health care?

- No, they say, almost in unison.

- OK. Then I will make sure you get it. We had a very low score on core values. Even on bullying. These are definitely issues we will keep in mind and work on with the staff. Anyhow, are there any more issues you'd like to address? Elisabeth asks.

- Yes, Celia says. - I have received a phone call from unit FF. There is this 15 per cent position that they are withdrawing.

- I would definitely like to know more about this, Elisabeth states.

- Actually, Celia continues, - there are quite a few cases out in the different units that the union representative has decided to report.

- I do not want any more of this. It has to stop, and they must work on using the official channels, says Elisabeth in a raised voice.

- There is also another issue about specifying and setting wages using the official regulations, Celia breaks in. - It seems that we follow the regulations loyally, whereas a lot of the others do not.

- Hmmmm, this is clearly an issue that must be brought to the management group. OK, anything else? No? In that case the meeting is over, Elisabeth concludes.

*[It is 0920 hours, and everybody rises. Person B walks straight up to the end of the table where Elisabeth is packing her things and preparing to leave. Person B mentions something about a conference. The two of them discuss this for a few minutes, before another topic emerges. This time it concerns coordination of their meeting schedules. Then another issue pops up, then another. For a while they discuss some reports that have recently been published, and some official journeys that are to take place in the near future. Soon they decide to go into Elisabeth's office to continue the conversation. Some 15 minutes later they are finished, and Elisabeth walks outside for a cigarette.]*

Following this story from start to end it is almost as if things just occur by themselves in a steady stream of larger and smaller issues, something which corresponds to Mead's (1967) concept of emergence. Taking a closer look, the spontaneity of social interaction stands out: Elisabeth's sudden idea to tell AM about the budget crisis, AM's telling Elisabeth about a successful conversation with a co-worker, Elisabeth's sudden need to make a phone-call and so on. All of these may be ideas and thoughts that appeared because of something that took place immediately before, something that perhaps nobody expected, or at least something that triggered an unexpected thought. It would appear that the utterances of some provided cues (Weick 1995) for improvisatory idea making for others in a manner that was contextual, transitory and ambiguous.

On one occasion Elisabeth seems to provide her own cue: In one moment (before the staff meeting) she is talking somewhat formally about yesterday's meeting out in the district, and in the next she is caught up in explaining that they had such a fantastic time and laughed a lot. Indeed a related and interesting matter for Elisabeth, and only a natural prolongation of the narrative from her perspective, but for AM how much fun they had seems to be on the side of what should be the focus there and then; which he signals by showing very little interest. Elisabeth spontaneously responds to his gesture by immediately changing her course. AM has not given her the reaction she was hoping for, but Elisabeth picks up on his signal and tries to move on and find a new course of action. After this improvisatory act she suddenly

remembers the shortly upcoming meeting with the staff, and as she mentions this AM immediately gets up from his chair. As a result they are both out of the door less than a minute later.

In the immediately succeeding meeting Elisabeth goes through the agenda for the meeting issue by issue. Reading about this might somehow give the appearance that the agenda is completely unambiguous and straightforward. But following the logic of Weick (1995, 2001), Ciborra (1999), and Hatch (1999) there is no such thing as an objective agenda or plan, only the contextual interpretation of it. From an improvisatory angle Elisabeth's accomplishment is that she breathes life into, and adds context to, equivocal signs on a dead piece of paper. In Weick's (1995) language, the brackets of information on Elisabeth's agenda worked as cues for sensemaking; as triggers of emotions and ideas. And looking at the staff meeting in terms of gesture-and-response (Mead 1967), it is hard to tell how the different topics were interpreted by the attendants. As the agenda came to life through Elisabeth's voice, it triggered improvisation. Thoughts and emotions, arguments and ideas, emerged in ways that were probably not completely expected (nor completely random). In that sense the agenda was improvised into life and there emerged as many stories as there were attendants, each performing his or her private dialogue more or less connected to the public conversation (Mead 1967). On occasions, ideas from these private dialogues surfaced explicitly in the conference-room, often as responses to something that was said, and as a consequence the discussion took on new directions. Most visible, perhaps, were the comments that were spontaneously given to Celia on account of her briefing on the core value "respect": Celia thought she had emphasised sufficiently that the respect for human worth and punctuality are important, but was still reminded by the attendants that this was a point she had not addressed properly.

Perhaps the critical voices did not concentrate enough on Celia's presentation, or maybe they interpreted her differently? Maybe Celia was not clear enough? As we saw in chapter seven, however, there is no way to be sure that even the simplest piece of information gets through. From a sensemaking perspective, saying that "information gets through" is in fact something of an oddity, since it presumes that information can be objective. An essential trait of sensemaking processes is that people inevitably have their own unique version of matters, including Celia and the rest of the staff. As a consequence, there is no way of controlling or guaranteeing that messages are interpreted as intended or that things happen as planned.

Words are vague and ambiguous indicators of meaning; they are tools of sensemaking (Dewey 1929). And if sense is created socially as a living process of using abstract symbols, this might imply that in Celia's case complexity arose due to communicative equivocalness and vagueness, which in turn was cleared up through improvisation.

The previous extract illustrated two things of particular relevance for improvisation: Firstly, it indicated a close tie between linguistic vagueness and improvisation. Secondly, it gave an example of the emergent and complex quality of everyday life gesture-and response, in which negative improvisation forms through spontaneous sensemaking reactions. The negative dimension manifested itself as improvisation emerged as reactions to perceived ambiguity, rather than as creative play, for the sake of understanding and coping. The next episode, featuring Chris, continues along similar lines, and illuminates the negative role of improvisation in dealing with the *clustering of events*.

*[. . . After the meeting, Chris leaves the hospital for an hour and a half. When he returns, the first thing he does is to more or less throw himself at the phone that is ringing in the office next to his. The office belongs to an administrative employee, Hanne, a woman who is sitting at another desk further inside the room. In Hanne's office there are several phone-lines, and the phone call Chris answers is forwarded from his own office.]*

*- This does come a bit unexpectedly, he says into the phone. - Could we possibly wait a bit and I will deal with it in a few hours? Ok, Chris says and hangs up.*

*[As he turns around a man is standing by the door lifting his eyebrows and looking at him in anticipation. Hanne is now looking up, too.]*

*- Do you have time to discuss some administrative matters with me? the man asks.*

*[As Chris is about to answer the phone rings again. He picks it up. It is a former colleague of his wanting to talk to him about a drug which is somewhat controversial. Now things seem to be evolving fast, and without Chris taking any notice of it, Hanne is laughing quietly as if to underscore the turbulent situation.]*

*- Do not forget, Chris says into the phone, that in the ward the level of predictability is very low. Suddenly it is full, and there is no way of knowing this in advance.*

*[The man at the door nods at Chris as if to say goodbye and then leaves. Chris nods back with an empathetic smile. And as Chris hangs up, Hanne seizes the opportunity to ask him some questions about next week's program. It is noticeable that she has been waiting for a while, and that she is more than eager to get an answer from Chris.]*

*- Now, please, can I have my turn? she asks impatiently with half a smile.*

*[After Chris has discussed some matters related to next week's program with Hanne, he walks into his office, grabs a sandwich, and continues into Brit's (the department's head nurse) office.*



*The time is 1145. No sooner has he sat down than a nurse appears in the doorway. She wants to let Chris know that they have managed to find a solution for a complicated patient case they have discussed earlier. She leaves, and Brit and Chris return to their chatting while drinking coffee and eating their lunch. But less than a minute later, just as Brit's phone rings, a physician comes by with a question for Chris concerning the Christmas rota.]*

At the same time as Chris is engaged in several telephone conversations, a man in the doorway wants his attention. After waiting for a few minutes, however, he ends up leaving. Simultaneously, an impatient Hanne wants a word with him. Who should come first in line? How important is each request and who can wait? These are a sample of questions that Chris may have been dealing with as he is trying to define the situation. He had not been in this particular situation before. This was a new situation; it was genuine and special in its own terms. It kept evolving in ways not foreseeable or entirely controllable, as it depended on the outcome of continual negotiations. The simultaneous handling of phone calls and people begging his attention gives the impression that negative improvisation was at play.

“Simultaneous” is an important word for understanding this episode, as Chris seems to be handling clusters of events rather than an ordered sequence of happenings. It is almost amusing to notice how Chris is interrupted while being interrupted. At least Hanne seems to think so as she cannot resist a quiet chortle on Chris’s behalf. As argued in chapters five and seven interruptions do this; they compel you to consider new elements, to be sensitive towards, or rather, to create new and often unfamiliar contexts. Thus, where there is interruption one is apt to find negative improvisation. And in Chris’s case interruptions happen on a massive scale, to be followed by improvised measures. All of these incidents are not in sum very complex, however. Probably, the amount of complexity is not too overwhelming for him, but it nevertheless requires his spontaneous attention to sort out the various incidents, and as the situation emerges things happen in a largely unpredictable way. Complexity seems to overshadow intricacy and familiarity; there is no model for Chris to follow; and his past experience cannot give a full answer as to an appropriate course of action. Chris’s experience is more like a tool that facilitates seeing family resemblances (Wittgenstein 1994), and through negative improvisation Chris uses that tool to produce suitable action.

The cases above, featuring Chris and Elisabeth, provide good illustrations of improvisation as an everyday phenomenon. Improvisation as witnessed in these episodes is different from, and

in a way more subtle than, the rare sort of ingeniousness that dominates the improvisation literature (see chapter two). As they are logged on to the small and emerging details of the present, Chris and Elisabeth react intelligently to those details on a continual level. In that sense they are engaged in “deep improvisation” (Purser and Petranker 2005). They have not been in these exact situations before, and the situations keep evolving into ever new and somewhat unfamiliar and unpredictable scenarios. With spontaneous creative actions Chris, for example, tries his best to keep up with multiple and simultaneous demands, and even if in the previous passage there is no artistic elaboration of structures for the sake of creating genuine novelty, or utter complexity in the form of outright chaos, Chris is using skills and past experience as tools to enact and respond to the fairly complex everyday emergence taking place. The excerpt shows people coming and going, emotional signals being exchanged, tired faces and indulgent looks, and all of those things produce an emergent climate that can only be understood through inspection and empathy. In this setting improvisation is spontaneous intelligent action produced to meet novel conditions, and in Chris’s case novelty is embedded both in an emergent present and in the complex quality of it.

The episode featuring Chris indicates a bond between the two phenomena of “clusters of events” and “interruptions”. Thus, it is a reminder that none of these forms of complexity are discrete categories but related aspects of evolving practice. We shall continue with a more explicit focus on unpredictability and the unexpected in the next episode where John is virtually beleaguered with interruptions.

*[No sooner has John entered his office, than a man comes by asking for his help. As a consequence, John quickly follows the man out, only to return a little less than five minutes later. He stops for a moment before he suddenly leaves again and goes into his secretary’s office to ask whether the 0930 meeting is still on. He returns within seconds, and explains that the meeting has been called off. He sits down, pours himself a cup of coffee, and starts talking about a subproject which has been established in relation to project “New Hospital” in order to get a financial overview. (Soon after) John is in a hurry because he has just been told that they need to have a spontaneous meeting about a refurbishment project they are working on. John spurts out the door and down the hall where the meeting is to be held. On his way over he explains that late yesterday afternoon he was given authorization to proceed with this project, which involves refurbishing an old section of his ward.]*

*- Sure, this is good news, but things are really becoming urgent, he says gasping for air. - We will start the job at the end of next month.*

*[A small group of people await John in the meeting room. He sits down and they get right down to business. They need to find a solution to the problems that are caused by the refurbishment project. Some people will have to be relocated, but where to? They cannot sit just anywhere, because of limitations connected to building technology constructional technical limitations. More restrictions and constraints are brought up, such as a shortage of personnel to handle the relocation, lack of time to finish the project and lack of funding to get things the way they want them. Having reeled off all kinds of possibilities and limitations about the project, they round off the meeting by distributing tasks. John decides to take on a lot of these himself, including the task of giving notice to the implicated personnel, and of writing to the people who need to be informed.]*

*[At 0947 hours John is back in his office. He needs to make an important phone call, he says as he dials a number.]*

*- Hi, are you busy? Can you come down here for a minute? Good, see you then, he says.*

*[He hangs up and explains that they are currently working on a project of relocating people.]*

*- And we are conducting conversations designed to identify needs and problems because of project "New Hospital". I was originally meant to have one such conversation with a woman later this afternoon; a department nurse. But as she has been working all night, against her will in a sense, we need to have the meeting right away.*

*[A minute later the nurse and two other women from the administrative staff arrive at John's door. They all sit down, and John informs them about the forthcoming process.]*

*- Some will have to be relocated, he says, but personnel with legal rights will receive an offer.*

*[There is not much discussion, and soon the meeting is over. The women leave, and as soon as they are all out the door John informs me that he intends to read a science paper and to do some tidying up of his mail. Usually this is the kind of stuff that is postponed to late afternoons, but since a meeting has just been cancelled he can do it right away, he explains. John thinks it is a good idea that I wait in the office next door while he does his reading, so that he might work in peace. . .]*

*[The time is 1130 and John knocks on the door to the office he has let me borrow.]*

*- As usual the stuff I was supposed to do didn't happen, John utters resignedly. - As you know, I had planned to read a research paper and tidy up my mail, but instead several spontaneous meetings occurred. Most of them were requests regarding that special patient, you know, the one who requires such expensive medication. The patient is not from around here, you see, he's from another part of the country and the question is whether his local authorities might contribute towards covering some of the expenses. The other issue concerned the rebuilding of the hospital and consequences this has for us. Anyway, we should leave now to arrive in time for the scheduled lunch meeting.*

In this account John seems to walk into one unexpected happening after another: someone knocking on the door needing his immediate attention and help, several spontaneous meetings due to unexpected occurrences, cancellations, and changes of plans, to point out a few. These are occurrences that indicate a high degree of unpredictability. But they do not seem extraordinary; rather, they seem to naturally belong to normal organizing practice, to everyday life. As a colleague once said: How can a telephone ring in any other way than unexpectedly?

*“As usual the things I was supposed to do didn’t happen”*, John says. And the report certainly shows how he keeps on being interrupted from his planned agenda. Instead of John’s anticipations for the immediate future coming through, something else happens that constitutes a new reality all together; one that is not asked for. Unexpected occurrences follow each other and set John off in another direction than planned. As he has new contexts forced upon him, he is encouraged to perform a different kind of action than anticipated. In terms of sensemaking, interruption persuades John to redefine what is important and meaningful, and it is not always a pleasant experience. Observing him, I rather got a sense that he considered it troublesome and stressful to keep getting thrown out of context and into new ones.

Even if new contexts are constantly thrown at John, as argued by Weick (1995) these are contexts that John himself participates in shaping. He enacts and recognizes them through processes of improvisation in which he performs as best as he can. In some of the cases described in the excerpt, for instance the spontaneous meeting on refurbishment, there is even a significant degree of surprise and creativity, so there is not only task *variation* but complexity as well: The refurbishment meeting comes unexpectedly, requiring a change of focus and contextual, sensible action. Moreover, as the meeting evolves, there is a lot of playfulness and creative idea storming, which indicates positive improvisation. Seen from a different angle, however, the meeting displays negative improvisation, as the participants are responding (reacting) to each other’s emergent gestures. Still, as idea storming was not only anticipated but the very agenda itself, the reactive aspects might be toned down in this instance. After all, the refurbishment meeting was more about producing some good ideas for the future than about reacting to emergent problems.

I suggest that by using two different ways to approach improvisation (as elaborated in the previous chapter), one negative and the other positive, one may shed light on important

aspects of social interaction that might otherwise be left in the dark. From a negative angle, the reactive aspects of the situation stand out, such as responding to arising complexity in the form of other people's gestures. From a positive angle, the more playful and proactive aspects stand out, such as in the process of producing new ideas for future organizing. In addition, John's story indicates support for a theoretical observation made in chapter eight, namely that I do not think about positive and negative improvisation as discrete phenomena, but as different frameworks for understanding the same lived experience. In the latter sense, positive and negative improvisation evolves simultaneously and reflexively, as mutually constitutive phenomena feeding off each other.

I want to include one last episode to illustrate unpredictability and improvisation in practice. As was the case in the previous episodes featuring Elisabeth, Chris and John, this is a portrait of the way improvisation typically emerges in everyday social interaction: rather than take the shape of a grand event of peak performance, it tends to emerge as a *natural form of spontaneous and contextually intelligent presence*. The episode starts with Howard receiving a surprise visit by Ole, a department physician and colleague.

*[It is 1235 hours and Howard is back at the office. He invites me to have a chat about his normal workday as it usually unfolds.]*

*Researcher: - It seems to me that there is a lot of administration that needs to be done in your work, but still, in general, you appear to be acting spontaneously. For instance, in most of the meetings you attend conversational themes seem to emerge without being on the agenda, and things tend to happen that were not neatly planned. How do you relate to this interpretation?*

*Howard: - Yes, definitely! A lot of my time is indeed spent in meetings; everything from the detailed management of planning rosters and work schedules to more spontaneous tasks. I have spent a lot of time delegating detailed tasks. I have created report systems, and I have monthly meetings with every section in my department. Except from this, I encourage that the sections be given the liberty to manage themselves responsibly as they best see fit. It is impossible to plan everyday work life in detail. In other words: I really do recognize my everyday work life in your description. By the way, there is another meeting today at 1300 hours. With food!*

*[Just as Howard finishes his sentence, a physician comes by and asks for his signature on some documents. He also says that the meeting scheduled for 1300 hrs (with food) is cancelled. One thing leads to another, and soon they are discussing the effects of treatment and medications. The physician, Ole, tries to prioritize, he says, but it is extremely difficult.*

*Actually, he feels that he is rather restrictive, probably more so than others, but still it is difficult. And with regard to the new drugs that have been developed, they are not a real break-through. They merely indicate an effect, he says.]*

*- Regarding "fourth time treatment", Ole continues, - I am afraid to make political and financial decisions on my level of command.*

*[Ole and Howard continue discussing this topic for a while, before Ole brings up some personal problems related to his academic career. Ole proposes a solution for how he might be able to combine his medical practice with academic interests. Howard agrees. He says he shares Ole's point of view, and approves of his proposal. Next, Ole shares with Howard some personal concerns about the future. Howard mostly listens though he occasionally backs him verbally. Shortly after, Ole leaves and Howard turns to his mail.]*

The way this episode develops, the aspect of small-scale unpredictability is conspicuous. Throughout the episode, the context keeps evolving somewhat unexpectedly, and it even starts with an interruption, as Ole comes by unannounced. Intuitively I have the understanding that there could be no practical way for Howard to foresee his receiving a visit from a subordinate, nor could he know in advance the topics that would come up. Furthermore, in one moment Howard is looking forward to a meeting with a nice lunch, and in the next he is told that it is cancelled. Instead he finds himself engaged in a conversation, a meeting if you will, which he had not planned for. And in this conversation there is a process of continuous gesturing and responding that seems to follow no rule or system. The spontaneous choice of words, tone of voice, use of hand signals and facial expressions are just a few examples not easily caught on paper. Again we are reminded of the quality of emergence as we realize that we never know *how* a situation will be played out, and we seldom know precisely *when* something will happen (Petranker 2005; Purser and Petranker 2005).

As soon as Ole enters the room Howard is ensnared into social and emotional interaction, and he acts in an authentic and genuine manner. Soon Ole is sharing some personal reflections about the future, and some of his deepest concerns about the workplace. In a sense he is laying his problems upon Howard's shoulders, expecting him to listen and give advice. And Howard follows up. He listens patiently to Ole and backs him. Context-sensitivity in this situation can best be explained as empathy. Moreover, Howard does not merely understand Ole by taking his perspective and being passively empathetic; he is also showing empathy through explicit verbal and non-verbal actions. Thus he is actively taking part in the situation and producing the kind of actions that the situation demands. He is showing understanding and proposing solutions. He is improvising.

In order to see improvisation as an everyday phenomenon we must look for novelty on a detailed and practically realistic scale (i.e. Mead's (1967) notion of emergence). In this sense novelty is not only to be found in outright chaotic grand scenarios, but in *sufficiently* complex situations – more complex than familiar, more vague and uncertain than given, more unpredictable than predictable. In a variety of examples we have observed precisely such emergent everyday complexity, ranging from ambiguity and vagueness, via clustering of events, to everyday unpredictable scenarios. One aspect from chapter seven remains to be addressed, however: emotionality. On the basis of my findings I regard emotionality as a particularly central topic that in many ways binds the different aspects of complexity together. I have therefore chosen to discuss the role of emotionality in improvisation in a section of its own. Seeing how the implicit and subtle complexity introduced by emotions is dealt with by managers may contribute towards expanding the limits of what is traditionally considered to be improvisation.

### **Emotion and improvisation**

Emotion is unavoidable in a social everyday setting such as a workplace (Dewey 1929), but as implied in chapter four it is seldom talked about as a trigger or as a signifier of genuine improvisation. Rather, we are not strangers to associating improvisation with a technical family of concepts such as problem solving, innovation and (positive) creativity, almost as if they were emotionless subjects (for example Moorman and Miner 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Brown and Eisenhardt 1997; Ciborra 1996; Orlikowski 1996; Orlikowski and Hofman 1997; Zack 2000; Leybourne 2006). Whereas chapter four argued for the essential role of emotion in “The improvising man”, this section goes one step further and attempts to provide *empirical support* for the role of emotion in organizing as improvisation.

We saw in chapter seven that emotional complexity is a matter to be considered in everyday contextuality amongst the InSitu managers. We witnessed many examples of managers facing situations of emotional complexity, and saw how the managers countered those situations not by using technical rational measures, but with empathy and through reactive improvisation. Call to mind, for instance, Camilla's reaction to the unpleasant news about routine failure (pp. 202-203); Howard's having trouble with interpreting and responding to an employee crying (pp. 203-204); the manner in which the conversation between Peter and Julie emerged as emotionally complex, urging real time (reactive) improvisation from both parties (p. 205);

Thomas's dealing with the very agitated Sharon (pp. 206-207); and John's dealing with the tragic death of a patient (pp. 207-208). In all those instances we saw people making sense with people in an emotionally authentic manner.

I suggest that dealing with emotion at work can involve improvisation in a quite pure form. Wherever there are people of flesh and blood there is emotion and vice versa. Above all, social processes require empathy and the capacity to act in what can sometimes amount to immense complexity. Following Mead (1967) and Dewey (1929) one may ask how emotion might be made cognizant if not through the emotional register of another human being? Instrumentality of any business or work process is inevitable in some sense even in a hospital context, but in none of the previous instances were people treated *purely as* means, resources or machines. The point argued here is that whenever someone is addressing and treating people as they appear in a lived present, that person is improvising. To authentically read and interact with people requires certain corporal and improspective capacities of social sensitivity and empathy.

In the opening passages of this section I mentioned some instances of emotional complexity from chapter seven, and I encouraged the reader to see the improvisation involved in them. Keeping in mind the possibility of a connection between emotionality and improvisation I shall in the following present a longer and quite remarkable episode of social and emotional emergence. The situation features Howard in a negotiation meeting with two union representatives and a lady from the personnel division of the central administration about some department personnel cut backs. We join in as Howard is preparing to leave for the meeting.

*[Howard runs by his office to pick up a few things – a notebook and some files – and quickly heads off to the meeting room. Two female representatives from the labour union and a woman from the personnel division of the central administration (CPA) are waiting for him. The meeting is about downsizing, and particularly about two people whose temporary employment has exceeded the 6 months limit for such positions. . .]*

*[At 0835 hours the meeting commences. Howard starts out by saying that he has great sympathy for the union representatives' (UR) position, as he has himself a history of working for the union. Nonetheless, there is an explicit demand from central management that they cut three positions. As a consequence, two research positions will be made redundant. One of the union representatives (UR 1) responds with a question.]*



UR 1: - *How is the rest of the department notified about the cut? And by the way, is there really no other way to make cuts in the department's budget?*

Howard: - *I would have to remove other positions if these two were to be left untouched. I do not want to do that, however, since these two positions are not really part of the department's operations. On the contrary, they are research positions. And I am reluctant to remove resources I feel are crucial to our core operations.*

UR 2: - *What implications might this have for patient treatment?*

Howard: - *To some extent all research has implications for patients. But research is not supposed to be part of the department's ordinary operational budget.*

UR 2: - *But is research not part of the core activity at the hospital?*

Howard: - *Maybe, but I do not have any funding for direct research.*

UR 2: - *Are you sure about this?*

Howard: - *Yes, unless you are pointing at education. This is, of course, a matter of definition.*

*[The atmosphere in the room is growing tenser by the minute. Voices are raised slightly and facial expressions becoming a bit tighter. Howard keeps repeating his message over and over, only to get similar questions back, compelling him to once again go through his arguments and check whether they do in fact hold water. CPA's phone rings. She picks it up from the table, but does not answer and puts it down again.]*

UR 1: - *Surely you must agree that research is a primary objective of the hospital. No doubt you have the power to reverse this process, to find the positive aspects of keeping the positions? You might, for instance, turn this into a case of future succession.*

Howard: - *Yes, but the money simply does not exist! And funding for research is not supposed to come via the operational budget. And if money should rush in to publications, this certainly does not come via operations.*

UR 1: - *From where does it come, then?*

Howard: - *I don't know.*

*[Similar questions are once again repeated and answered in the same manner. Then again. And again.]*

Howard: - *I realize under the circumstances that I should stress the rules even stronger.*

*[Howard says this in a firm tone of voice. His body language signals irritation.]*

Howard: - *What I am referring to is the director's unambiguous view on the situation, and what he spells out to me I have to take into consideration!*

UR 1: - *So where can we find these regulations in writing?*

Howard: - *You have to make direct contact with the director. I cannot sit here and point out sources in detail. In that case we will get nowhere. There is an explicit demand for me to downsize. And this being the case, there is no way around these two positions not being carried on into next year's budget. As it is now that I'm having to turn down requests for treatment because of the two research positions. This is why I cannot take responsibility for*

*these positions on next year's budget. Researchers have their very own moneybag for everyday operations. Personally I have no influence on this as it concerns external funding.*

*UR 2: - So there is no other way to solve this?*

*[UR 2 sighs loudly and frowns].*

*Howard: - No, because then I would have to play the role of a research manager, which is not part of my job description. I do not want to enter into such a discussion. You must raise the matter with the director. If I had the responsibility for research in addition to everything else, I would have drowned!*

*UR 2: - How is this initially intended to work, then?*

*Howard: - Again, we are approaching a discussion we cannot have here, one that must be had with the director in person. The issue here is that there is no money for these positions on next year's budget!*

*[Howard sounds even more determined and his voice is very firm, almost cold. The discussion seems to be having a draining and wearying effect on him.]*

*UR 2: - But surely this is just a form of reorganizing; of cutting costs? And the point of reorganizing is not merely downsizing? Surely other solutions must be found first?*

*[UR 2 seems impatient and irritated and her voice is raised, too. She is interrupted as CPA's phone goes off again, but CPA ignores it. Howard hesitates and does not seem too eager to give UR 2 an answer. He then calls upon CPA to speak.]*

*CPA: - Of course we will look for other solutions. But in this case we must be aware that there is no guarantee that they will comply with our offers of relocation. We cannot even guarantee that we will actually manage to find realistic possibilities of relocation. And should we not succeed in doing so, they will be offered severance pay of five months' salary. Or they may be transferred to the "Personarhuset", which is an external collaboration partner who then takes over the employer's responsibilities. In that case they may receive 5 + 8 months' salary. But in that case the "Personarhuset" may employ them in their own organisation, and they may insist on as much as one hour of commuting, one way, every day.*

*UR 2: - Two hours in total, then?*

*CPA: - Yes, but this is no different from what we have today.*

*UR 1: - It seems a bit strange that the people are already picked before the process has even started. How have you informed your department? In a case like this is merely natural that the department is notified about it?*

*Howard: - My department has been notified on a general level, but in this case it is not even certain that anybody in the department actually knows the people concerned, as they are not physically present on our local premises. Anyhow, I have authority over some 260 employees, and it is not an easy undertaking to notify them all.*

*UR 1: - So it is not possible to remove some here and there when there are as many as 260 in the department?*

*[The CPA breaks in.]*

CPA: - One must be able to show concretely where the cut has been made.

UR 1: - I wish a decision had not been made before the matter was cleared on a level of principle, though. Research is very useful in this department!!

[UR 1 seems eager and determined, her upper body pointing forward towards Howard, who repeats his message a last time.]

Howard: - This is a case that should be taken to the director in person. The hospital's strategy on research is certainly not a part of this meeting!

UR 1: - But we should have received earlier warning. In writing. And this has not happened.

Howard: - I can put down the arguments on paper today.

[The CPA's phone goes off again. She ignores it for the third time.]

UR 1: - This is a new situation for us. A difficult case. Actually, this is my very first formal discussion with fellow union representatives.

[Then UR 1 repeats her arguments one more time, only to get the same message from Howard as before, and again he emphasizes that this is not the place to discuss the hospital's research strategy. And that this is not the forum to discuss which position Howard's department should have in relation to medical research.]

UR 2: - Have you considered that what you are doing amounts to cutting off the very branch you are sitting on?

[Howard frowns, takes a deep breath as if to demonstrate irritation, and responds.]

Howard: - I have estimated the departmental costs of doing this, both in the long and the short term, but within the present budget. And it is not my responsibility as head of department to facilitate research. There are other guidelines for this. You have to confer with the director in person.

[For the fourth time CPA's phone goes off, and she still ignores it.]

[UR 1 asks whether plausible possibilities for relocation exist.]

Howard: - Almost impossible to find an identical position. But this is a matter of what they are willing to do themselves, and which priorities they have. The reason we are gathered here today is that there are a bunch of rules, regulations and considerations that must be taken into account when cuts are being made in the staff. Other issues should not be addressed. But surely it is easier to build up than to tear down. How the process of funding research is to be managed is an issue to be addressed to the director in person. Clearly, there are a lot of things that might have been addressed here, but sadly they are outside of my jurisdiction. The limitation that I have to consider is to avoid making cuts in direct positions. And I have already made a cut of 1,2 positions in the administrative staff.

[It seems that both parties are realizing that they are not making any progress, and they agree to continue the meeting as soon as the written material has been handed out. The problem, however, is that Howard and the others all have a packed calendar. Hence, they agree to

*meet up later the same day at 1600 hours. (An important point is that the written material is supposed to be handed out in advance.) Soon the two URs leave, and only Howard, the CPA and myself are left in the meeting room.]*

In order to see emotion, emergence and improvisation in action, more than just a few lines of writing are required. In many ways a movie or sound clip might give a better view into real life improvisation in terms of spontaneity and emerging details, but from my perspective nothing measures up to real life experience. In written text one must as a reader try to visualize parts of the setting to make it come real. In the previous passage the length of the conversation in combination with contextual details of how it emerged hopefully goes a long way towards indicating the richness of emotionality and impulsiveness involved. Even though this episode involved the repetition of similar rhetoric and arguments by the participants over and over again, thus creating some sort of cognitive redundancy, I hope I have communicated sufficiently the emotional presence, the tension, and the spontaneity of real time gesturing and responding.

Immediately after the meeting Howard commented that he had to invest a lot of energy to remain empathetic and to stick to the situation at hand, and that he did not have a clear image beforehand of what the meeting was going to like. In an attempt to further illuminate the improvisatory aspects of the meeting from Howard's point of view, I have enclosed one last quotation which expands on Howard's remark. As we enter the situation Howard, CPA and I are slowly walking back to Howard's office, and I take this opportunity to ask Howard some questions about what just happened.

*Researcher: - The arguments that you used in the discussion, had you prepared them beforehand?*

*Howard: - No, I had not prepared my arguments in detail. Actually I did not have a clear image of the meeting at all before it actually took place. My strength, however, is that I was a UR myself for three years. So you might say that I am used to this kind of situation, as I have experienced similar contexts earlier. That being said, however, this was quite a new experience for me. I really had to invest a lot of energy to stick to the case at hand, and avoid being tricked into a far more elaborate discussion that did not really belong there.*

*CPA: - You had to watch yourself to avoid being caught in the trap?*

*Howard: - Ha-ha... Yes, I guess you might call it that – a trap.*

*Researcher: - Would you say that you are gifted in the sense that you are capable of understanding their position?*

*Howard: - Yes, absolutely. I think I understand them very well. And I understand very well how they might feel.*

How could Howard possibly be prepared for the practical details that emerged during the meeting? Although Howard has gathered much experience over many years of working under similar conditions, this exact meeting was unique. It was genuine and demanding – to such extent that Howard speaks of it as *quite a new experience*. Consequently, Howard was very well prepared for things that *could* happen, and he had the right tools to deal with the situation; he was prepared for those things that in this case one could be prepared for. But he was not prepared for the practical *how*. For this he relied on his capacity for spontaneous attentiveness and reaction, and his ability to utilize his knowledge contextually. As the meeting progressed there was a lot of tension that had to be addressed on impulse in some way or another. Thus, Howard had to match the emotional seriousness of the situation by creating genuine responses to the gestures of the others as they were trying to come up with a sensible solution.

In my view the previous meeting shows Howard as a skilled improviser; a man who knows how to react spontaneously (negative improvisation) and to make genuine conversation. On a larger scale it also indicates how emotions “entrap” people into authentic real time interaction and improvisation. In this sense it shows that sociality involves emotionality and that handling these matters authentically on a conscious level involves “deep improvisation” (Purser and Petranker 2005). There were no extreme acute incidents, no deaths and no emergencies in this episode. But nonetheless there was a chain of somewhat small and emerging events that to a large extent could not be anticipated, and although the events might not immediately seem constantly complex, the meeting was open ended, and as it proceeded it varied between the more and the less familiar. (It is my interpretation that the participants joined the meeting in search of a solution, not with the purpose of following some routine). Nobody could tell in advance what would happen, or which conclusions would be drawn, or which emotional patterns would form. Alternatively this could have been a routine matter with a rigidly performed agenda, with less of a need to pay attention to the actual circumstances. Instead it became an emotionally complex process; a genuine conversation between passionate and deeply involved individuals. Emergence was less predictable in this case than in processes of strict routine. As a consequence, even if the conversational themes might not seem severely complex, the practical process of conversing *was*, and thus the situation became complex, too.

It is my impression from observing InSitu managers that emotions vary with regard to their degree of explicitness. As a third person it is sometimes easy to spot the emotional component in a gesture, while at other times it is more difficult. Furthermore, there is always a chance that as an observer I misinterpret emotionality and the role it plays in a situation. This indicates that emotional interaction is a process of sophisticated improvisation; of playing roles, responding to equivocal gestures, of understanding one's own emotional vocabulary as well as that of others, and of participating in constructing trajectories of shared meaning into the future. Through the examples presented here and in chapter seven I have tried to give rich illustrations of emotion at play in everyday situations. The narratives I have presented, however, vary with regard to emotional intensity and explicitness. As it represents a phenomenon of more explicit emotionality, *humour* and the way it is manifested in action as *pure* improvisation provides the topic for the next section.

### **Humour at work – some cases of pure improvisation**

In this section I suggest *humour* as a specific facet of emotional sensemaking which may provide valuable insight into what can get blended together into a grey mass of everydayness. My impression is that humour is a recurrent and typical trait of everyday life amongst InSitu managers, and as such it might contribute towards consolidating improvisation as an important feature of organizing practice. Much like the metaphor of jazz music, through its emotional explicitness humour can help display sides of improvisation which might otherwise be hard to trace.

Whatever the purpose of humour – the act of making jokes, of having fun – in a given situation, I have found in my observations of InSitu managers that humour shows aspects of genuine improvisation. On many occasions humour was a very distinctive trait in social processes. In this regard my study suggests that humour is a natural part of everyday organizing, and that it is “used” as an instrument of improvisation and therefore deserves a place of its own. The following example is taken from a group discussion where John and his chief physicians are gathered to go through the different patients' cases.

*[The discussion moves on by itself between the physicians without John's interference. Soon a remarkable case comes up. One of the doctors reports on a patient with rare and abnormally stout and massive defecation. He explains that the faeces tend to come in lengths of up to half a meter, and that the quality is so firm and robust that they refuse to break off as faeces normally do. Consequently, once every month when the patient uses the restroom, the toilet*

*usually gets jammed, as a half a metre piece of faeces sticking up from the bowl is plugging it. Not only do the faeces not break off by themselves, the doctor goes on explaining, but they are almost impossible to break at all – even by force. No less than three toilet-brushes have broken off during attempts to crush the faeces, he explains with astonishment. He looks around only to meet silence from the other doctors. It is almost as if they are awaiting the next detail, but there is none. Then, in what seems like an awkward stillness of anticipation, a quiet chuckle can be heard; it is way too discrete to be called laughter. Next, someone makes a funny comment; something about how “hard” it is to believe what the physician is saying, upon which the whole gathering breaks out in laughter. Someone is holding out his hands so as to gesticulate the size of the faeces, which is followed by more laughter. “Incredible”, a male physician states in amazement.*

*With a smile the physician adds that the story was in fact so incredible that doctors initially had problems believing it. Consequently the patient had to bring photos from home to prove his story. More laughter follows, now much louder than before. And soon the whole meeting is making comments, visualizing with their hands and laughing.*

*Turn-taking seems to be essential to the meeting’s organization, and as the laughter calms down the turn is passed on to another physician coming off night shift, who starts out elaborating on the record of one of his patients in a far more grave tone of voice. Others are pulling out their notebooks, asking questions and making comments about the information presented, which regards an instance of leukaemia. It appears to be a tragic case.*

*The meeting is rounded off by John as he reports about a male patient who arrived from a different department last night with a large swelling on his neck.*

*- They did not have enough room, he says.*

*- Was it that big? one of the physicians asks as he half-heartedly tries to suppress his amusement, and once again the gathering breaks out in laughter.]*

This episode shows that laughter may come even if unintended. Whether the physician who reported the faeces incident expected the situation to become comical or not is hard to tell, but it was hardly his intention to joke about his patient. After all, this was a serious meeting in which humour occurred unexpectedly and spontaneously. And as it evolved, people seemed to gradually let out emotional tension, rather than instantly explode in laughter. They seemed to be feeling their ground, so to speak, to be considering the emerging context. The intersubjective comprehension of what was acceptable changed dynamically, inevitably leading up to a situation of spontaneous and genuinely creative comedy.

The comment on John's report of a huge swelling was harmless and witty. It appeared to be made as a deliberate misunderstanding of John's report, so as to produce an image of such an enormous swelling that it needed more room, and under the circumstances this was seen as funny. In this sense the absurd image of a gigantic swelling can be seen as an improvisatory play with meaning, provoking fantasy and imagination and liberating positive emotions.

In the previous quotation humour was sharply contrasted by the graveness of the leukaemia case, a contrast which stands out when emotion is the frame of reference. A similar contrast between graveness and humour can also be identified in the next episode, featuring Chris.

*[Chris looks at his watch. He tells Brit that he has a lot of things on the agenda and that he has to flee. Next thing Chris dashes out to take the elevator. Up on the third floor he meets up with an American product salesman who is promoting some new state of the art product line which can improve operation procedures in Chris' department. The two of them go into an office and meet up with a physician and a machine specialist. Soon they start discussing the product, which seems like a radical improvement on what exists in the hospital today. Chris sounds excited, and has many questions. He says his department could be the first in Norway to possess and exploit this new technology. And not a second too early, as there are a lot of problems with the current technology – something which urges an update. The American salesman continues his briefing for another half an hour, and explains that the product has been successfully implemented in Germany. Maybe Chris should go there and have a look?]*

*Having discussed the matter for a while they get up to leave. On their way out they stop by a piece of old and outdated machinery which is stored in the office. The machine specialist explains that it was earlier used for operation purposes.]*

*- It is quite a paradox, the machine specialist (MS) comments as he puts a hand on the old machine, - that in this matter the central authorities demand that we elucidate the possibilities to buy old and second-hand technology.*

*[The MS smiles and looks at Chris as if to invite a comment. Chris looks as if he just swallowed a frog. He laughs half-heartedly and this seems to loosen up the group. Soon everybody is laughing and making jokes about the lack of competence within the central authorities and their unhealthy preoccupation with cutting costs.]*

*- Perhaps, Chris suggests trying to avoid laughing, - perhaps old mixers could be made into the machines we need? Talk about saving money!*

*[As a response everybody laughs, louder now than before, as they slowly start moving towards the door. And as the MS is going through the doorway he stops and turns to face the others.]*

*- I say, this bureaucracy thing is something we simply have to do – like you know, on the side; in addition to what we really want and need to do, MS says.*



*[His tone of voice has turned more serious. Chris, not smiling anymore either, nods his head as if to show sympathy whilst resting his eyes on what appears to be some non-existent point in front of him.]*

It seems that in this instance humour was used as an instrument to make a serious statement. In times of strict budgets and downsizing, getting one's hands on updated and expensive operation equipment may prove difficult. Thus the departments are encouraged to save money and keep a low financial profile, which can of course seem quite incompatible with maintaining a professional medicinal edge. How humour was used, however, for which purpose it was utilized, is of secondary interest for now. Rather, my point is to show the spontaneity and context-specificity involved in this instance of authentic humour. More generally, my aim is to provide support for the argument that humour is a way of sensemaking which is highly emotional and thus improvisational. To the extent that humour presumes a particular feeling-state, humour without emotion would be an odd concept, and to the extent that humour emerges socially, it is a way of creating meaning in the here and now through physical gestures. Humour is improvisation.

I urge the reader to see in the previous extracts how improvised humour makes use of the stuff that dwells in the here and now, and that both physical and mental entities can be used as instruments. As a process of improvisation humour is contextual and impulsive as well as creative. Take the old piece of machinery in Chris's department for example, which through MS's joke becomes the centre of attention for him, Chris and the others. Throwing sarcasms at the "old piece of junk" can be seen as a way of using it as an instrument to make people laugh, and in this case the purpose appears to be that of creating a joint identity of ridiculing bureaucracy. Running the danger of exaggeration, one might even see this specific joke as a means to deal with technical-rational imprisonment: as an improvisatory act to deal with systemic shortcomings.

As indicated, I see humour as a social and improvisatory process making use of certain tools or instruments. In the previous example the tool was quite noticeable: The old machine. But as indicated, the object of conversation, the tool, may be far less tangible than this; it may be purely abstract or at least not physically present there and then, as in the cases of the extraordinary faeces and the enormous swelling. As an example of even more abstract

improvised humour, consider the next episode where John is in a meeting with the director and two of his assistants (DA).

*[Next the discussion turns towards departmental downsizing. John has promised the director to cut down on his number of staff, but currently he has only two options available. John explains that these are two vacancies that in fact do not require funding. These are leaves of absence, and amongst them one maternity leave.]*

*DA 1: - What happens when the leave expires?*

*[John's answer comes spontaneously.]*

*John: - I had, of course, hoped for another pregnancy!*

*[The meeting bursts out in laughter, which is followed by some comments on "sexual harassment", and yet more laughter. Moments later, as the mirth calms down, the director calls for another round of downsizing. John says he realizes that this was destined to happen, and admits that he has had no expectations that it would simply go away by itself. The group seems to take John's utterance as an understatement, and everyone bursts out in laughter. John joins in, too.]*

Are there any physical symbols in this extract? In a sense they are there, but not for the eyes to see. Rather, they are present as mental representations of experience; as language. As John makes his understatements, for instance, he merely indicates situations – things that *might* happen – but which for all practical purposes are not seriously considered. And this makes it funny: the fact that speculating in pregnancies is a highly dubious affair, one that is quite incomprehensible for responsible managers, not to mention doctors. Performing such speculation, as John so subtly invites everyone to do, can be seen as a way of proposing alternative realities. From a sensemaking point of view John, creates images of reality that are somehow not meaningful. John deliberately says unacceptable things and by doing this he creates a comical situation. There is no actual pregnancy in this case. Rather, there is John playing with the social context at hand, saying something which contradicts his formal and responsible position. In this case it seems that understating something works because John's position is somewhat *overstated*, thus making his statements harmless. John takes a risk, but the group picks up on his joke immediately, even though it is an ambiguous statement. For what if John is making fun of them, too, as well as of the whole process of cutting expenditures, however implicitly and gently it is done? The deliberate play on ambiguity therefore seems to be a key aspect in this situation, indicating the fundamental role played by improvisation here.

In John's case the large degree of ambiguity implies that it is hard to identify objective reasons for why humour appears. Only John knows his intentions, to the extent that he has any. It seems that the context and the novelty involved provide unique circumstances, and John's humour works because of these circumstances. In this situation John does not have any over-sized faeces to joke about, or some piece of old machinery to mock; instead he has the imaginary incident of a pregnancy. More importantly, he is involved in an authentic conversation with living and attentive human beings, and in this sense I regard John as context sensitive and improvisational. He is playing with forbidden and unthinkable ideas, and he is doing it together with, or rather to, someone else in a real-life situation (and in a convincing manner). The joke would be senseless otherwise. It is only funny because it belongs and makes sense *in the context*. And in this case it is a context of certain people discussing certain issues in a manager's office, in some Norwegian hospital building under particular political circumstances at a specific point in history and so forth. Forced pregnancies and "sexual harassment" are not funny topics *per se*. And this brings me to the last incident of improvised humour that I have chosen to include, one that perhaps did not work as well as the previous examples.

*[The director comments that he has noticed that some of the wards are advertising services to the private market.]*

*Director: - But no-one is doing any haggling!*

*Head nurse: - Can we really do that? Offer bargains, I mean?*

*Director: - Yes, certainly!*

*Head nurse: - There may be something in our culture that prevents us from it. We are not used to negotiating prices.*

*Director: - On one hand we are old Stalinists, as we focus on retaining costs. And we are obliged to tell you that. For example, "reduce your costs by 10 per cent". But please come up with your own ideas for how to do it! We want you to be pro-active. Currently we are accepting a bit too much.*

*George: - Yes, but we are very content that we hired an African as a hospital orderly at low wages. But then again he was really on some kind of a slave contract.*

*[George probably intends to imply that the orderly's wages were very low. It is hard to tell, however, whether or not George is aware that his utterance, which includes both "African" and "slave" in the same sentence, might be seen as having racist connotations. His statement seems more as if it is "hanging in the air" as looks are exchanged between the participants. It being an essentially ambiguous statement, nobody seems to spontaneously pick up on it before Richard, from the director's staff, responds in a joking tone of voice.]*

*Richard: - A black contract, perhaps?*

*[There is no laugh and only reserved smiles. Richard gets little response and the director breaks the silence.]*

*Director: - Anyway, we cannot see where you have cut costs. The work you have done on the budget, however, is very good, apart from the operation services.*

*[George is eager to comment and explains.]*

*George: - Yes, but there is a continual increase in hospital admittances. This year there is a 3 per cent increase, precisely the same as last year. Actually, Christmas Eve is the only time there are no patients in the corridors. And this is the way it has been for the last two years.*

*Director: - Yes, anyway, I think we are done here already. A highly unusual budget meeting as it was so short and efficient, I think.*

What is funny and what is not? What is good humour? When does humour work? I think these questions are similar to for instance “what is good music”? Concerts are often quite social in form as they are performed in real time by groups with large audiences. In social terms, then, listening to and sharing the experience of a concert resembles telling and hearing a joke. There might be a shared context to joke in and with, just as there might be a shared cultural conception of good music, and both happen as spontaneous events emerging in the here and now. As a result they may both work and they may not, no matter how carefully planned their contents. And a failure to recognize the actual circumstances, the audience, the physical and social setting, the culture, in short: the situation, may result in bad music. And bad jokes.

As pointed out in the reflections I made during my observation it is hard to tell whether or not George was aware of the potential of racist connotations in his statement. Richard, however, seemed to be quite conscious about *his* statement, but did he think about the implications? Did he intend it to be a racist statement? To answer these questions you would have to be Richard. Judging by the text there seems to be a considerable potential for interpreting Richard in a racist manner – something which is supported by the reactions of the group. But it might have been a slip of the tongue, or a play with prejudice and conflicts from a “safe” distance. Second best to actually being Richard is being present and reading the atmosphere, as I was, and from that stance this is what happened: Richard did not reflect sufficiently before telling what he probably saw as a harmless joke. The thing is, however, that no-one in his audience thought, or at least expressed, that it was funny. Thus the joke failed; it did not work under the circumstances, which made it an example of bad improvisation. However spontaneous, it lacked social sensitivity and intersubjective anchorage. One might say that it was good

improvisation from Richard's perspective, at least before he saw the (absent) reaction, but it was bad improvisation socially speaking. I see this as an indication that context is epistemologically relative; it is a matter of emergent and shifting perspective (see chapters three and four).

The quotations on humour in this section support Weick's (1995) and Weick et al.'s (2005) premise that sensemaking is an ambiguous affair and thus a matter of dealing with problem definition (for example "what does it mean", "what is the story?"). Consequently, this section ties a bond between the former sections of this chapter, which dealt with open-ended problems, equivocal situations, emotionality, unpredictability and the way sensemaking under such circumstances can take the form of negative improvisation. A *red line* through all of these sections is therefore the manner in which complexity has many dimensions, and how complexity can arrive *uninvited*, urging negative improvisation. As pointed out, however, there have been occasions where the negative is difficult to separate from the positive. In the following I will take a closer look at the latter, and study how positive improvisation manifests itself in everyday organizing.

## **Positive improvisation**

### **Some opening statements**

In chapter eight I argued that the quality of positive improvisation is context dependent and that it may be divided into two categories, one pure and one general. In the pure and specialist sense of positive improvisation, the goal is the highest possible degree of improvisational purity, and it is typically found in creative art forms such as free jazz and free theatre and in genuine innovative processes (Bastien and Hostager 1992; Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Zack 2000; Weick 2001). In the general sense, positive improvisation involves a proactive desire to create contextual, and not merely genuine, novelty (Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). There can be various reasons for such a desire, but in a management context one would expect it to be a matter of improving or facilitating work practice for the sake of achieving some kind of present and future success. In both categories, positive improvisation comes about not because of something you are compelled to, but because you *want* to do it – there must be an initial ambition for creative development based in sensitivity to emerging contexts.

I want to emphasize that I do not intend to propose any natural or categorical border between positive and negative improvisation, as it is difficult to say in a given situation what comes first of want and need, or indeed, if the one can at all be separated from the other. And as the previous sections have already implied, negative and positive kinds of improvisation seem to emerge from and blend into each other over time. What is voluntary in one moment might lead to a surprise in the next, which again might arouse more voluntary efforts of improvisation. Positive and negative improvisation is therefore a matter of less and more, not of either-or. As a result, I associate certain situations more with the one than the other, but even though this section is devoted to positive improvisation, the mutual connection to negative improvisation is maintained and emphasized: Positive improvisation, too, implies handling open-ended problems (problem *definition*), equivocality, clusters of events, emotionality and unpredictability. Indeed, positive improvisation might entail voluntarily seeking and thriving on these if possible. A philosophical argument guiding the succeeding analysis is therefore that positive and negative kinds of improvisation concern the same phenomenon, all depending on the perspective taken, and I will be pointing out how in many cases the one relates to the other.

As a way into this section on positive improvisation I would like to present some personal statements from the managers. They have in common the fact that they signify the managers' attitudes towards context-sensitivity, thus giving an indication of the role positive improvisation plays in actual practice:

*Howard: - I try to plan ahead as much as possible, but still I end up doing a great deal of spontaneous problem-solving . . . . The most dangerous thing in a job like this is to become blinded by rules. One needs a large degree of freedom to find local solutions, even if the rules are there as a fundament . . . . Is not [the ability to read, understand and act in unique contexts and situations] what it is all about, really? For example, the meeting with the union representatives was a whole new situation to me. Had never done this before. Still I have experience from other situations earlier in my career, but this unique situation was totally different.*

*Karina: - I evaluate the context at hand, and act accordingly.*

*Peter: - [Context-sensitive] is something I have to be. I have to be able to sense the attitudes wherever I go. And there are huge differences internally within the department. Some things I know because I have seen them so many times . . . . Nurses have totally retreated when it*

*comes to the issue of professionalism versus management, and they have exaggerated the focus on management as something in and by itself. Nurses would love to have a total overview, even if they are responsible for as much as 50 employees . . . . To sum up, nurses regard management as a profession in itself, disengaged from the lived context. This way they risk getting professionally outdated. They are not up-to-date on what is going on, because they are so preoccupied with “management”.*

In these statements I see a shared positive attitude towards context-sensitivity and the crucial role it plays in everyday organizing. Howard and John even indicate that it can be the most important factor. But it is one thing to claim to be constantly alert and context-sensitive; and another thing to actually practice it: to improvise. I shall in the following move from words to action and explore how context-sensitivity can be a driving force in everyday action, thus enabling positive improvisation.

### **Some illustrative cases**

The first example of positive improvisation concerns Camilla, who has gathered her medical staff to discuss structural challenges that her department will be facing in the near future. For the last half hour they have been discussing a range of topics when they are suddenly interrupted:

*[At 0931 hours a man, one of the section managers, suddenly enters. He apologizes for his tardiness, takes a seat and joins the discussion which now concerns the problem of breaking deadlines. Camilla says there are routines that regulate such occurrences, but she cannot remember the details. Neither can anyone else. At 0935 hours a female psychiatrist, who was also late for the meeting, rises. As she is more running than walking out of the meeting room she explains that she has to return to an acute incident, but that she will try to be back as soon as possible.*

*Later, as they are discussing the general role of the Ministry of Health, one of the male psychiatrists (MP) says that he is a bit upset with the politicians, who, he argues, speak with two tongues]*

*MP: - The politicians give the patients increased rights, but they do not simultaneously increase the budget so as to handle these rights. In other words, the more patients that are treated, the more the hospital is penalized!*

*Camilla: - Well, the Ministry wants increased control over the enterprise. Anyway, there seems to be an extensive use of double diagnoses that we need to sort out how to deal with.*

*[A female psychiatrist (FP 1) takes the word.]*

*FP 1: - Yes it is a paradoxical task to define whether a patient is mentally ill or ill from intoxication. How should we make our diagnoses? We often end up with double-diagnoses. And, of course, there is a great difference between the patients as well.*

*[The discussion is interrupted at 0948 hours as the female psychiatrist returns once again. Another female psychiatrist (FP 2) speaks up.]*

*FP 2: - Often problems with intoxication are caused by mental illness. And definitions are beating each other to death. One thing is no more correct than the other. It is merely a matter of different ways to perceive a case, she claims.*

*[The medical issues and dilemmas of double-diagnoses are discussed for quite a while, before a new topic is introduced by FP 2 at approximately 1030 hours.]*

*FP 2: - There are a great many vague points with regard to receiving patients. For example, it is often hard to say which patient belongs where. And it is difficult to know where to send the patient.*

*FP 1: - We are currently working on a system for differentiating between different categories of patients with psychosis.*

*[FP 1 asks Camilla if she can borrow the blackboard to sketch out a few possible solutions they have been working on. Camilla welcomes her to come up and do so, and as the psychiatrist makes her sketches and symbols all the participants start engaging in a brainstorming process. Nobody asks for permission to speak, they just speak as they themselves see fit. Nobody is controlling the process, except to some extent the psychiatrist who is putting the suggestions on the blackboard as they crop up. Camilla does not seem to attempt to control the process either, but sits back and contributes where she can, like the other participants. Ideas are put forward and discussed, and facts are brought in along the way to provide practical guidance and make the suggestions realistic. There are quite a few interruptions during the process, such as people coming and going, but nobody seems to pay them much notice. It turns out that finding a practical structure for performing diagnoses is a highly intricate matter as there are many pieces that have to fit together: The different sections work different hours, the wards have different kinds of patients, and they have different ways of thinking in terms of diagnoses, and different values that they hold high. Not until 1102 hours does Camilla formally close the meeting, some 30 minutes after the brainstorming began.]*

The first thing to happen is that one of the participants comes in late. Then suddenly another participant has to leave. However clear these incidents are as indicators of unpredictability, they are just part of the real-time emergence going on; for whilst all of these things are happening, a creative conversation is taking place on how to improve hospital practice. There is quite a bit of tension and inspiration amongst the participants, which seems to stem from the open-ended problems they are facing. In the middle of the process Camilla is trying to drive the process forward, however implicitly, towards a solution. In order to succeed, she has



to consider not only the ideas that are put forward, but the emotional state of the others, her own feelings and opinions towards them and the issue at hand, the great amount of professionalism and skill amongst those participating, and of course all of the unexpected incidents along the way. In this sense there is genuine complexity behind every corner and there is genuine reactive improvisation at play. And there is positive improvisation as well, as the participants are engaged in a genuine creative process, airing their thoughts and ideas spontaneously. Especially towards the end of the meeting it amounts to such genuineness that the improvisation taking place approaches flow.

To sum up, the previous excerpt indicates that Camilla is organizing through (positive and negative) improvisation. She deals with matters as they appear, and does her best to (co)create meaning and structure. She could easily have taken an authoritative stand and simply directed the process as she saw fit without considering the needs and wants of the others. She could have neglected suggestions, ideas and emotional aspects, or simply drifted away from the situation, but she did not appear to do so. There was little attempt on her behalf to force structure on to the meeting; rather, she took part in spontaneous structuring efforts, using her expert knowledge as a source of inspiration and direction. This way of behaving is in line with her general perspective on leadership:

*Camilla: - I would say I mostly act in the moment. They say I am not afraid of making decisions. My response is that it is better that I make them, than that I do not! I try to make things predictable for people, and when decisions are not being made, things soon become wearisome for others to relate to.*

From an improvisatory perspective, making a decision based on group conversation and involvement is different from making decisions on behalf of a group (acontextually). The fact that Camilla strives for predictability and order indicates that she has a thought-through intention. In her opinion, there should not be chaos for the sake of chaos; neither should there be rigid structure for the sake of rigid structure. She considers the problem at hand and the context surrounding it and does her best to move on. I would argue that this makes Camilla context-sensitive and creative, as she allows new elements to spark and guide her sensemaking and actions. By doing so she lays down the foundation for creative organizing through improvisation. Her way of organizing shows that creativity does not have to be in the shape of some innovation model, but can be seen as an ongoing social accomplishment

(Weick 1995, 2001). And as Camilla allows for sociality and emotion to influence her, she comes forward as an improviser in both the positive and the negative sense.

In the last episode we saw Camilla and her management group deeply involved in a game of quite genuine positive improvisation. They were using blackboards to front ideas which were then discussed, expanded upon, rejected or kept. Positive improvisation also stands out in the next episode, where Peter is unexpectedly required to deal with some problems in an ongoing OD-process in one of his sections. What starts out as essentially reactive improvisation (an interruption) soon turns into a process of playing with ideas and sketching out solutions.

*[At 1005 hours Peter is interrupted as one of the head nurses, Fay, enters. She explains that she is struggling with the project "reorganizing the operating theatre". They start discussing different solutions, and Fay tells Peter that he is needed at a section meeting in order to get the process moving. Peter appears to be very understanding and positive. He is goal oriented, but not domineering, and seems eager to give Fay the necessary support.*

*Fay: - There is quite a bit of frustration in the project.*

*[Peter is quick to reply.]*

*Peter: - The only thing I demand is that the project comes up with some propositions, although I wouldn't mind getting the alternatives graded and prioritized.*

*[To illustrate his points, Peter draws figures and models on a piece of paper which he shows to Fay. And it seems that this gives a boost to the communication, making it more effective, because soon Fay is starting to nod her head understandingly. They sit like this for a while, making proposals and refuting them: Can we move him, can we do that with her, how do you think she would react to this, can we arrange the beds in a different manner, or maybe move the chairs? Equipped with quite a few new ideas, Fay leaves almost half an hour later. Then Peter turns to me and explains.]*

*Peter: - What happened here was definitely improvisation, but it was only so in a context of goal management. There were no wild ideas, but creative thinking within parameters in which we can picture the consequences. And quite a few good ideas came out of it, such as for instance changing the day of operations for [a particular kind of] surgery.*

Peter's own comment towards the end of the episode supports the claim that this episode was positively improvisatory. The use of illustrations and models to create new understanding, the playfulness of the idea making and the genuine openness that accompanied it were good indicators. It all took place there and then, and things that were said could not be taken back. Even if the consequences were not too serious – after all, this was merely a planning session – the produced gestures and responses were irreversible in local terms (see chapter five). In this

instance, however, positive improvisation was not so pure as to challenge radically contextual features. Rather than it being a matter of a “completely” open process of allowing for just anything, quite robust frames and rules were guiding its direction. Some new solutions were proposed and elaborated on, but very much in line with preset and quite rigid parameters. Nevertheless, the improvisation was genuine in pointing out new and in some sense unfamiliar directions, and the context created by Peter and Fay allowed for hermeneutically free play and elaborate experimentation with possible scenarios. They spontaneously tested out ideas through conversation and imagined practice. Some ideas were dismissed while others provided the basis for further improvisation. In this sense it was a highly spontaneous situation of quite pure positive improvisation.

### **Good improvisation: a bridge between attitude and practice**

Positive improvisation is guided by a desire to be creative (see chapter eight). The way managers put their intentions into words can therefore teach us a lot about the phenomenon; the declared attitude of a manager says a lot about how he goes about the usual trot or at least how he intends to go about it. This section started with some statements from the InSitu Hospital managers on how they think in relation to the significance of context sensitivity in organizing. In general they all signalled, at least implicitly, a positive improvisatory attitude. How so? Context sensitivity is important, the managers say, *because* they want to achieve effective organizing; they want to take the contextually and practically best possible actions. In Purser and Petranker’s (2005) words the managers pursued a desire for “deep improvisation”. None of them is questioning the desire for development and efficiency, which seems to be somehow taken for granted. The managers jump right to explaining *how* they achieve effective organizing in practice, and “practical how” is explained by the managers as context sensitivity, not as, say, technical administration. Underpinning their role as managers, then, there seems to be a powerful canon of positive improvisation, and this canon seems in many ways to be the reason they keep looking for improvements, playing with ideas and forming the present into a desirable future. In short, they seek effectivity through good improvisation.

*Chris: - Being able to read and understand different contexts means perhaps more than anything. In my work there are new scenarios all the time. In this work you will not get far with ready-made recipes. The question, however, is how one is supposed to educate oneself for this. As a hospital manager I am in a kind of special situation, as I have so much clinical work. Nobody else has that. It is as if I am a “playing coach”, and it is a real advantage. I work at*

*night and so forth to keep up, because this is of vital importance to me. And it is unique to this department, too, because, after all, it is so small.*

A man like Chris, always tied up in something, always on the move looking for structure and order, informs me that his approach is context sensitivity. Chris's department is known to be amongst the most structured in the entire hospital. He says so himself, and his claim is largely supported by people in central management. His department is, however, anything but a Kafkaesque universe in miniature, and Chris himself does not appear to be some single-minded authority taking and giving orders without critical reflection. My impression of Chris is that he creates order in the here and now, from which structure can be traced retrospectively. And as he often works nights to keep, up I make notice of the amount of energy he invests in his practice. His success in creating order is in this sense not accidental. A lot of effort is laid down in continuously producing the best possible result; be it in the operational theatre, in the office or in the meeting room. By no means do I have the impression that order comes easily, or that it is pre-made in the shape of some inflexible plan or routine. As Chris argues: “. . . *you will not get far with ready-made recipes*”. Having seen him at work I take his word for it. Elisabeth shares this attitude:

*Elisabeth: - I am a good observer. I don't intend to brag, but I generally make good observations. I am capable of seeing the diversity of things. . . . There are large cultural differences and different problems to be addressed in different places. Things that were easy in [the part of Norway where I worked earlier] are difficult at InSitu and vice versa . . . . The only recipe is to take the context at hand seriously. I would not fit as a manager in some of the departments at InSitu. I am best off when I can make use of my direct appearance, humour, temper etc. I must be allowed to build upon who I am; on my personality . . . . It is vital that I realize that I am part of the context, too. My personality also plays a part in determining the relation, the process. I cannot see the context as something different from me, and that is why some places suit me better than others.*

Elisabeth's message is not that efficiency is found in planning alone or in management models. As she says: “*The only recipe is to take the context at hand seriously . . . . I am a great opponent of plans that just stay in the drawer. And words without action are not significant.*” Elisabeth is not saying that she does not plan for the future, only that she tries not to overdo or exaggerate her planning. Her intention is to consider the context at hand and adapt plans to the present, instead of planning acontextually: “*There must be no plan for the plan's own sake*”, she says later in the interview. Even if empirical accounts suggest that

Elisabeth does a lot of improvising, and that she is in fact a skilled improviser, she might not always succeed in this, but *at least she intends to*. In general, Elisabeth tries to improve the conditions in the workplace; she tries to improve the quality of services through improvisation and contextual sensitive action, rather than through thoughtless directions and insensitive orders. This makes her a proactive improviser in theory, but as I have seen glimpses of her in practice, I am of the impression that she is a proactive improviser in practice as well. Much the same can be said about Camilla. In her own words:

*Camilla: - Some things can be planned for, but far from all. I continually experience issues that occur in the here and now. Not necessarily putting out fires, but severely time-limited processes of decision-making. Sometimes the problems at hand are very complex, at other times they are fairly simple. I would say I mostly act in the moment, though . . . . I often work late after hours. The most important thing is that I am visible during the workday. I always have two minutes to spare for my employees. This is important because people must flourish here. It is imperative that they are seen . . . . Some kind of recipe for me, this is; to create a healthy environment. There is not much progress in creating conflicts. One should, however, not always agree with each other, which would be boring. There have to be tensions, but not rigidly locked tensions. The goal is to create a dynamic that creates movement/motion.*

Camilla displays an active and investigative behaviour, not only in this statement, but also in practice, and in general she seems to be searching for ways to improve the way things are done. I get the impression that she is seldom completely satisfied. Rather, she tries to change routines and structures whenever felt necessary. And when such is out of her immediate and formal jurisdiction, she says she is not afraid to let colleagues and superiors know her point of view. Her need to change routines seems to have little to do with making changes for the sake of making changes, however, but rather with improving and securing functionality so as to make things work as they are supposed to or even better. This is a genuine desire that she possesses, and not necessarily something that is thrown at her unexpectedly. From this I would like to make a general statement about the InSitu managers as a whole: that negative improvisation can be thought of as something which occurs in addition to, and even because of, positive improvisation.

Standing alone statements like these from Chris, Elisabeth and Camilla are only a partly trustworthy source of knowledge into how people organize in everyday life. They give an indication. It would be interesting to see the personal statements from the managers contradicted by the way they actually behaved. But from my viewpoint the case is rather the

opposite: the statements support the image that has been created from observing the InSitu Hospital managers in practice. As a rule, the InSitu managers can be seen pursuing a doctrine of good improvisation as they typically act on the basis of contextual considerations and find ways to improve practice (i.e. theory-in-use); a point which is consistent with their verbalized intentions (i.e. espoused theory) (Argyris and Schön 1974, 1996). So with regard to positive improvisation there is coherence between word and action, and this indicates that improvisation is the rule and not the exception; not only in theory (i.e. chapter four and five), but also in practice amongst the managers; positive in the sense that their behaviour emerges from a taken-for-granted positive intention to create context-sensitive practical sense and organizational development, and negative as in many cases complexity comes unexpectedly and is dealt with reactively. Good improvisation can be a valuable term here, as the purity of spontaneity and creativity is not always high, but sufficiently high, so as to be recognized as improvisation in practice. Based on this study, then, I have found that effectivity of organizing is looked for and found in the becoming, from which good improvisation flows (Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005).

## Discussing and concluding

### A preliminary conclusion

If context comes first, and if context is emergence, organizing is never exactly the same (Weick 1995; Hatch 1999; Weick et al. 2005; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). Throughout a variety of episodes taken from typical everyday practice amongst InSitu Hospital department managers I trace a red line of complexity and novelty in organizing processes. In short, the typical organizing process amongst the InSitu managers is more unpredictable, complex and improvisatory than foreseeable and machinelike. As a preliminary conclusion of the findings in this study the following can thus be singled out:

Firstly, as a broad observation organizing has generally been found to emerge as improvisation: Everyday organizing amongst the InSitu managers is found in the spontaneous employment of practical skills that shapes and defines contexts and makes everyday business work on a continual level. This concerns improvisation in the form of real-time presence through (corporal) action, which is the prerequisite for all forms of organizing from the perspective of “The improvising man”. Being positively and negatively *logged on to the present*, everyday organizing emerges as a spontaneous *and* creative and relatively pure form of improvisation that goes far deeper into practice-in-the-becoming than mere technical manoeuvring. Thus I have not only found organizing to emerge as improvisation along the epistemic lines of “The improvising man”, but also in a sufficiently pure form so as to radically distinguish it from the more technical-rational (managerialist) forms of organizing typically found in strict administrative models, plans and structures. This is in line with Brown and Duguid (1991), who from the basis of the ethnographic studies of workplace practices by Orr (1990a, 1990b, 1987a, 1987b) claim that “. . . *the ways people actually work usually differs fundamentally from the ways organizations describe their work in manuals, training programs, organizational charts, and job descriptions*” (p. 40).

Secondly, following the vocabulary of Argyris and Schön (1974, 1996) the dominant espoused theory amongst the managers displays an attitude of context-sensitivity to novelty-in-the-becoming (Bergson, 1944) and creative development through *genuine* novelty and innovation, which both speak in favour of positive improvisation. It is also my observation that the espoused theory of positive improvisation is generally realized in practice.

Thirdly, in accordance with Weick (1989, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2001), Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) and Weick et al. (2005) I have found that unpredictability permeates organizing practice, and that unexpected, emotional and complex events often trigger a negative form of improvisation. In some instances, however, it is difficult to tell the two forms apart, and it often seems as if positive and negative forms of improvisation melt into each other. I would argue, however, that the particular form of improvisation taking place in a certain context (positive or negative) is less important than my finding that improvisation seems to be the kind of organizing that is naturally dominant in practice, as the InSitu Hospital managers tend to submerge themselves in everyday contextual emergence.

These findings have implications beyond most of the existing literature on organizational improvisation. Not only philosophically, but now also based on an analysis of my empirical data, I suggest that improvisation plays a far more comprehensive role than as a method of radical innovation (Bastien and Hostager 1992; Cunha and Kamoche 2001); as a particularly creative and spontaneous form of art, such as in free theatre and free jazz (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Weick 1989, 1998, 2001; Zack 2000; Alterhaug 2004); as radical change processes in organizations (Orlikowski 1996; Orlikowski and Hofman 1997); as a characteristic trait of temporary projects (Leybourne 2006); or as a last minute, second hand solution when planning has failed (Ciborra 1996; Miner et al. 1997; Kamoche et al. 2002). Above all my study indicates that there is much value in the “The improvising man” as a general theoretical framework for understanding everyday organizing, even if, or rather just *because*, in practice improvisation does not always reach the highest peaks of negative or positive purity.

Fourthly, and related to the previous reflections, I have found that over-focussing on flow and purity of improvisation might entail losing sight of *good* improvisation, and by that I mean that good improvisation in organizing practice only rarely seems to imply breaking contextual parameters and pursuing the unfamiliar and genuine as seen in, say, free jazz (Zack 2000). My conclusion is therefore similar to the views of Crossan and Sorrenti (1997), Ciborra (1999), Petranker (2005) and Purser and Petranker (2005) who regard good (effective) improvisation as a process of considering the emerging context at hand and acting accordingly. As implied, this involves less focus on improvisation and genuine novelty, and more focus on the quality of improvisation as an everyday organizing process. As a fifth finding, however, I have



identified quite a few cases in my study where good and pure improvisation are found to be woven together in extraordinary organizing practice, in exceptional instances of deeply felt creativity; in flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

Lastly, I would like to expand on an important issue that was indicated in the first paragraph of this concluding section, and which regards the relation between improvisation as sensemaking on one side, and decision making on the other. In short, in accordance with Weick et al. (2005), following Ciborra (1999) I hold that the secret to understanding the everyday trot amongst InSitu DMs lies *not* in treating everyday practice merely as a matter of analytical choice and technical-rational decision making. My observation of the InSitu DM is that only rarely does he/she have clear alternatives to choose from, and on the few occasions that he/she does, the DM knows that there can be no guarantees about future outcomes. The DM does not tend to harbour any naïve hope that systems and regulations will provide all the answers for the future. Typically he/she does not think first and act later, but as along the lines suggested by Schön (1987) the DM *thinks-in-action* and *defines problems* spontaneously. A reason for emphasizing this is that my findings contrast in a fundamental way the works of Simon (1968) on administrative behaviour; and Carlson (1951), Stewart (1967), Mintzberg (1973, 1994), Kurke and Aldrich (1983), Kotter (1986), and Tengblad (2006) on managerial behaviour. I will not make a detailed analysis of all these contributions, but use a few examples to point out some fundamental differences from my study which are crucial to acknowledging the value of my findings.

First of all the findings and reflections in my study belong to a sensemaking tradition, and my theoretical focus is on organizing as improvisation, not only amongst managers, but in all forms and varieties (see chapters one and four). In contrast, studies of managerial behaviour are explicitly directed at the manager and his job, but more importantly they are methodologically very different from my approach, as they share a theoretical anchorage in decision-making as opposed to sensemaking. Even if we may share certain observations of the nature of everyday life, due to a difference in methodology we attribute our findings to different phenomena and as a result we come up with qualitatively different conclusions.

Take for example Mintzberg (1973), who states explicitly that his view on managerial behaviour stems from contingency theory. Furthermore, according to Mintzberg (1973, 1994) managers are imperfect gatherers and traders of information; not spontaneous sense-makers.

*The job breeds adaptive information-manipulators that prefer the live, concrete situation. The manager works in an environment of stimulus-response, and he develops in his work a clear preference for live action. (Mintzberg 1973, p. 38).*

The philosophical starting point for Mintzberg is not the profound complexity of everyday social and emotional life, but a contingency view where variables in the environment create stimuli to which the manager responds. Thus, even if Mintzberg (1973) recognizes that “. . . *the classic view of the manager as planner is not in accord with reality*” (p. 37), he argues this from a dualistic rhetoric where there is little room for “The improvising man”. The lenses employed by Mintzberg to investigate the nature of managerial life are not sensemaking, enactment or improvisation but, as Weick (1974) points out in a review of Mintzberg’s (1973) study, a Stimulus-Response language (S-R) which underpins the decision making paradigm. So even if Mintzberg as a pioneer addresses, say, “interruption”, he addresses it from an S-R perspective and naturally fails to see important aspects of *how* interruption affects *sensemaking processes*. For example, as much as interruption in itself can be a very interesting feature of practical organizing, as a practical fact so to speak, my study connects this finding to a larger theoretical framework and proposes that if it is seen in connection with complexity and improvisation, it can spur quite radically new thoughts. Carlson (1951) states explicitly, however, that he has no vision of a larger theory. My ambition is quite the opposite, as I have a vision of connecting my study to the larger framework of sensemaking. For me *sensemaking is the lens through which empirical observations are made*, and the point is to build upon this perspective to contribute to both a *logical and practically anchored theory of organizing as improvisation*.

As the language of S-R operates within the same epistemological rhetoric as Simon’s (1968) administrative man, I identify a trajectory of dualism from the basic presumptions in “homo economicus” to Mintzberg’s (1973) seminal study. Even if Simon (1968) recognizes that “. . . *concentration on the rational aspects of human behavior should not be construed as an assertion that human beings are always or generally rational*”, he claims that “. . . *choice, in so far that it is rational and cognizant of its objective conditions, involves a selection of one alternative from among several*” (p. 61). As in “homo economicus”, then, information processing seems to be the ideal for both Simon’s work and for studies of managerial

behaviour, and in both cases sense is not made; it is *deducted*. In a similar vein Ciborra (1999) argues that:

*. . . this picture of organizational decision making, which seems to rule out improvisation completely, is due to a bundle of assumptions embedded in a particular perspective of analyzing and designing organizations, the information-processing perspective. (p. 81).*

I will not go as far as Ciborra who argues that the information-processing perspective potentially rules out improvisation completely; I propose, rather, that it frames it in quite a different way – as a matter of decision making instead of sensemaking. My argument is that from an information processing perspective, decision *outranks* emotion and improvisation, whereas from a sensemaking perspective it is the other way around. As a consequence, “improvisation” means different things in the two camps.

My observations of the InSitu managers imply that they *do* make decisions and they *do* solve problems in everyday practice, but from a sensemaking viewpoint each decision is merely a fraction of the far more fundamental process of improvisation and problem-definition leading up to it (Ciborra 1999; Weick et al. 2005). Improvisation is more profound than decision making and satisficing (i.e. Simon 1968). Underpinning and preceding situations of choice are always comprehensive processes of spontaneous sensemaking in which some issues have been favoured over others due to, say, emotional factors, their practical worth, political negotiations and power-plays or even by coincidence. Similarly, in a critique of the contingency view, Joas (1996) argues that human action is not merely contingent on the situation, but *constitutive of action*:

*In order to be able to act, the actor must pass judgement on the nature of the situation. Every habit of action and every rule of action contains assumptions about the type of situations in which it is appropriate to proceed according to the particular habit or rule. In general, our perception of situations already incorporates a judgement on the appropriateness of certain kinds of action. This explains why situations are not merely a neutral field of activity for intentions which were conceived outside of that situation, but appear to call forth, to provoke certain actions already in our perception. (Joas 1996, p. 160).*

Put differently, choice is hermeneutical, not technical (Husserl 1962; Shütz 1967). According to the framework of “The improvising man” the DM is creative not because he is capable of searching for and generating alternative solutions, but because he is capable of “abducting”

those solutions to begin with. It is because he feels and communicates, interprets, creates, defines, embellishes and adapts systems and structures *contextually* that the manager moves forward. This study suggests that managers do not primarily exchange information; they (co-)create sense through improvisation. As an implication, my study suggests that understanding authentic organizing practice presumes a rich, qualitative study of unique contexts, and – as pointed out by Purser and Petranker (2005), Petranker (2005) and Ciborra (1999) – that effective organizing can be found in the improvising based on the emergent details of that context.

### **An everyday story of the InSitu Hospital manager**

To round off this chapter I have chosen to include an analytic and general narrative of how the InSitu department manager organizes his world through improvisation. This way I hope that my observations may facilitate an understanding of the typical way everyday organizing occurs.

The InSitu department manager creates context in the present and prepares for a future that does not exist except from *in abstractum*. Improvisation can be found in the smallest details of coping with emotionality; both his own and others'. The emergent nature of reality encourages and compels the manager to enact an organization in the becoming, and through his actions he contributes to this joint orchestration of organizing. Even when spending time in his own company he cannot escape the impreciseness of language embedded in written communication. And the (re)constructed images of potential realities that his mind produces are never certain or final. Rather, they are temporal objects based on ambiguous experiences that validate their existence through practical rigor. The InSitu manager is dependent on these images of organizational reality, but typically, he is prone to refine them as he enters the social arena. He knows that a significant portion of his day will be taken up by the unexpected, and that he should not take things for granted. Thus he holds context-sensitivity as superior to system, and he typically expresses an attitude of positive improvisation.

The manager's own corporality forces him to consider sympathies and antipathies towards people as well as everyday problems and dilemmas. He is expected to have an opinion on organizational issues and to be of assistance in intricate and complex affairs, and as he engages in these matters out in the open, he cannot later withdraw his hand gestures, facial expressions or words. As the manager has improvised sense his actions are irreversible, as

they belong to a previous and explicated unique present. Thus, as he logs on to the present he must not only deal with the actions of others, but also with the consequences of his own actions, as they become constituents of, or at least influence, succeeding social processes. Alternatively, the manager could have drifted away from the moment, and at times he probably does, in which case his mind will lose the focus on present contextuality. Thus there is no method to ensure good improvisation in social processes. The natural rhythm and flow of good conversation is not subject to control. An attitude of context sensitivity may go a long way, but the practical realization of organizing is inevitably emergent and unpredictable. And as commented explicitly by one of the managers: remaining context sensitive – improvising on the context at hand – takes a lot of effort.

As implied earlier, my study suggests a nuanced approach to understanding the role of technical rationality in everyday organizing practice. In the next chapter I attempt to elaborate further on some crucial findings on the dynamics between system and context; between technical abstraction and concrete experience. A lot can be learned through studying how formal and systemic ways of administration interfere with everyday practice. In particular, I direct the focus at the tension between ideal administration as it is constituted by organizational routines, systems, directives, bureaucracy and plans on the one hand; and the practical application of these by improvising managers on the other. I have argued through empirical examples that complexity is the rule and not the exception, and this point will once again be put to the test as I juxtapose improvisation with technical rationality.

# Chapter 10. Technical rationality in everyday organizing amongst InSitu managers

## Introduction

*“To follow a structure or some demands blindly is impossible as there are always counter-demands and changes that make a streamlined structure impossible.”*

*Central staff member at InSitu Hospital.*

This chapter builds directly on chapter five, “Organizing as improvisation”, and deals with the phenomenon of technical or systemic rationality in everyday practice amongst InSitu managers. Here the insights from chapter five are used as a framework to understand how technical rationality and the use of administrative models relate to improvisation in practice. (Some of the findings have also inspired many of the arguments presented in chapter five, and in that sense the process has been hermeneutical). Chapter five contained a purely theoretical study of the implications of the conceptual framework of “The improvising man” on organization theory, and more specifically it addressed the role of the administrative elements routines, structures, plans and systems in organizing. A key argument was taken from chapter one; that a change of sociology from nouns to verbs (Chia 1996) implies a change of focus from organization (noun) to organizing (verb), and that this change facilitates a perspective on organizing as a process of improvisation (Ciborra 1999). In this respect, if formal administrative models such as structure, plan and system are seen as nouns, they comprise tools of improvisation. This is, however, *a philosophical argument* about the nature of technical rationality in the organizational literature, and it does not say much about how formal models are perceived and treated by InSitu managers who perform real-life organizing: Are structures, for instance, used as temporary tools in context, or treated as givens that should be followed acontextually?

My aim with this chapter resembles that of Kotter (1986), who sets out to study how managers perform their work authentically as opposed to the understanding of reality in management theory, which he claims focuses on tools, concepts or principles. An important difference, however, is that I seek to expand on and test the usability of a theory of improvisation, whereas Kotter emphasizes that he has no specific interest in any particular

theory. Another difference concerns the fact that Kotter's explicit interest in theorizing ". . . includes variables, concepts, and relationships that deal with both decision making and implementation" (p.148), whereas I conduct my study from a sensemaking perspective.

The following discussion expands on Argyris and Schön (1974, 1996) and sets out to investigate the triadic relationship between *how* InSitu managers *organize authentically* in practice (theory-in-use); *how they talk about their* organizing practice when they are allowed to reflect freely in interviews (espoused theory); and the nature of the *vocabulary* or *language* used by the managers in practice and interviews (language-in-use). I intend to show that investigating these three dimensions can teach us much about the nature of improvisation in organizing, and contribute to a nuanced perspective on the role of administration and technical rationality in improvisatory practice. In addition, mirroring authentic organizing practice with the espoused theory of managers as well as their language-in-use can provide us with knowledge about possible gaps between thought, action and language. Knowing about such gaps is a first step towards filling them, and can hopefully contribute to a more effective organizing practice. In that regard I want to contribute to uncovering potential "false-light subjective fusion" (Petranker 2005), which can occur:

*. . . when espoused theories are not distinguished from theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Organizations can get caught in false-light subjective fusion, convincing themselves through plausible stories invoking a subjective future that they are on the right track, or that their problems are about to be resolved, until events make painfully clear that they have been living more in dreams than reality. (Petranker 2005, p. 254).*

In chapter five the theory on organizing as improvisation seems quite neat and ordered. Studying administrative organizational phenomena such as structures, plans and routines in authentic practice has been a much more messy process. For example, when studying plans and planning, I have had to focus on specific kinds of "plan", namely agendas in different forms (for example meeting agenda and day agenda), the quality of which varies immensely in practice with regard to degree of detail, structure and layout. Still I hope I have found examples that are rich enough to give workable knowledge about plans in practice and improvisation. I also want to mention that the empirical analysis of the InSitu managers has provided me with greater insight about the intricacies of functionality, which is a key theme in practical philosophy and thus in "The improvising man". By relating abstract theoretical

concepts such as routine, structure and plan to authentic practice I learned to see functionality as a fluent phenomenon that depends on personal perspective and interest, and in practice these issues seem to be intertwined, and on occasion even contradictory. Which perspective comes first? Which interest should be given the highest priority? These represent the kind of question that creates challenges, dilemmas and great demands for improvisation, and are therefore a central part of the succeeding analysis.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: Firstly, I will present examples of technical rationality and systems thinking at InSitu, and point out how this approach has practical advantages, but that if it is taken for granted it can potentially create problems rather than solve them. Next, I discuss how technical rationality relates to practical workability and improvisation in the InSitu context. I ask in which settings technical-rational action works, from which perspective it works and how administrative systems function in practice. Lastly, I attempt to provide an analysis of technical rationality amongst the InSitu managers and its relation to taken-for-granted systems thinking. A key finding is that managers use administrative elements such as routines and plans as tools in improvisation rather than as control mechanisms. At the same time, however, the managers seem to be under immense systemic pressure, and they are afraid that different forms of Managerialism are about to become dominant. The chapter ends with a concluding analysis of the relation between improvisation and technical rationality in practice and the way this is expressed in talk, action and language.

### **Some introductory examples of technical rationality at work**

In spite of, or perhaps because of, a significant amount of complexity within and between different hospital practises, there seemed at the time of study to exist an urge to assemble InSitu Hospital as a whole under one common structure. For example, in connection with a centrally driven project called “New Hospital” there was a process of creating a formal and official structure of organizing that could contribute to producing order, coherence and predictability in management processes. One of the guiding principles was that everybody employed at InSitu should know the identity of their closest superior, which seems a more than reasonable expectation in terms of providing a sense of security and order. Another example of these efforts concerns the former Unitary Split Management (USM) model, which has quite recently been replaced by a unitary management model. A third and quite obvious example is that organization charts have been produced, giving names to different



departments and sub-departments, so as to provide a holistic view of the hospital's many functions. A fourth example is found in the process of creating a common culture, in which central management has worked out a common value base that all employees are required to follow. Note, however, that these values are imposed upon the organization, much like new computer systems, rather than having emerged from it "naturally". Such measures seem valuable in directing focus towards saving resources and gaining a general overview of the hospital, but one might ask how far such measures should be taken. Is there possibly a side-effect to the effect? Can the process of systemic thinking, planning and subsequent action in itself create problems?

According to Schön (1987, 1991), technical rationality as an abstract concept goes far beyond mere administration, and it contains more than the technological or computerized systems that are implemented by central management at InSitu. "Systems", for instance, imply more than computer software and hardware. Technical rationality is a way of thinking and communicating; indeed, it is a *paradigm* in that respect (Schön 1987, 1991), and as such it occurs regardless of hierarchical level. The following observations are included to give an idea of the multiplicity of ways in which technical rationality occurs in the practical life of the managers at InSitu Hospital.

In the first excerpt Howard is complaining about what from his perspective amounts to insensitive treatment by the central authorities regarding the planned dispositions of his department as part of "project New Hospital" – a centrally driven project of renewing both hospital structure and premises. As the department has received a visit from one of the local project coordinators, Howard has summoned a meeting of his administrative staff to comment on the architectural sketches. After having studied the sketches for a while together with his staff Howard has worked up quite a high level of frustration:

*Howard: – It probably won't be many months until we have a "Moelven workman's hut" placed outside.*

*[After saying this he sighs heavily as he looks out the window indicating the spot he has in mind.]*

*Howard: - I do not think the plan of the new department will work. It is not functional! This whole thing is just putting me off. There is no way of keeping key personnel with such a solution. I simply do not want this "open solution"!*

*[His voice has now turned harsh and firm. The atmosphere in the room seems to have lost the initial relaxedness, and the looks on the participants' faces are now grave and expectant. Howard continues.]*

*Howard: - They must be able to tell us how we are supposed to move ourselves into the new premises, how the area will be modelled, what our parameters are in terms of work methods. Indeed, it is hard to point out what this would implicate for work methods. Throughout the department there is a strong opposition to open solutions, but the refrain has been: "This is just the way it is". My comment to this, however, is: I do not accept it! I refuse to be held responsible for this. I would rather sacrifice my position. It is unacceptable: Social workers are supposed to have offices measuring 10 square metres, whereas chief physicians are not!? And by the way, how come social workers are placed in the middle of clinical operations?*

Two things may be pinpointed as having upset Howard in the quoted episode: firstly, the fact that the plans that are presented to him are not in accordance with his needs or anticipation. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, Howard is reacting strongly against what he perceives as a centralized process of planning first and asking important questions later. From his viewpoint other concerns than the essential ones have come first, such as the positioning and wellbeing of social workers at the expense of medical personnel. It must be stressed that this is merely how things look from Howard's perspective, and one should be careful about drawing conclusions about the project management and their intentions. And even if to some extent the process has been technical and insensitive, there may (or may not) be important reasons for this. A context sensitive decision from one perspective might entail disregarding certain aspects that are significant to others, and thus end up being interpreted as *insensitive* – a point I will be returning to later.

A typical way in which technical rationality is merged with daily operations at InSitu hospital is through the implementation of new systems and technology. Implementing computer systems, for example, to achieve greater efficiency, is regarded as a key element by central management. And since at InSitu there is a continuous pressure on DMs to achieve increased control over economic and material resources, budgeting and purchasing routines, a significant number of computer systems are planned and implemented to aid the process. Somewhat bluntly put, the slogan is to save money with your left hand and to make money with your right, and the systems are meant to secure greater efficiency and to produce as well as thrive on similarity between contexts. The goal is to find systematic ways of doing administration that work for all departments, and to replace local and potentially less effective solutions. Some examples of such systems from InSitu include the Electronic Quality System

(EQS), the Personnel and Resource management System (PRS), the Patient Administrative System (PAS) and the Electronic Patient Journal system (EPJ). These are all systemic measures that are initiated with good intentions, but do they always work as planned? The following extract is taken from a general meeting concerning the implementation of the PRS.

*[ . . . inside the auditorium a woman (PR) from the project responsible for implementing the PRS system is sharing some of her experiences with personnel administration. She says that no department has got any extra resources to implement the new system, but that rather, they have had to find room for it within the existing budget and with the personnel at hand. PR speaks warmly of the system and its capabilities, but says that since there have been quite a lot of discrepancies between the actual and the formal rosters, the new system could bring with it some challenges.]*

*PR: - Besides, physicians are away a lot, not ill, but away without anyone really knowing their whereabouts.*

*[Then PR discloses the fact that some physicians have not welcomed the system at all. Some have even asked her whether the physicians were consulted about whether they actually wanted the system to begin with! The audience finds the remark hilarious and breaks out in laughter. It seems that a lot of the people in the audience are empathetic to these critical remarks, and that they share the impression that people are not really being asked about their needs and wants, but rather that the system is just implemented anyway. And after this somewhat self-ironic anecdote, the project representative concludes that inevitably, the system is in fact being implemented, and that it will be effectuated as soon as possible. And since this is the case, it would be nice if people could be generally positive towards it! A quiet buzzing sound can be heard now amongst the audience. People are commenting on PR's last words, and are not immediately accepting her invitation to create a positive atmosphere. Some are starting to pose critical questions without asking for permission to speak, and others are just sitting passively and smiling indulgently about the whole thing.]*

*Member of audience: - What about the requirement that all kinds of absence must be documented? Where does it come from? Is it self-imposed? Where is the authorization for this in the formal regulations?*

*[The PR answers that it is indeed self-imposed, which is met with further commotion amongst those present.]*

I get the impression that the implementation of the PRS system has been a process of putting structure before action, and that from the perspective of the users it has failed to address their context. This is supported by PR's statement that the PRS system will be implemented no matter what the opinion of the users. So why cannot the audience try to be more appreciative and positive, PR wonders, as if she chooses not to recognize the unpleasantness of having

systems forced down upon the organization. In this particular case, then, technical rationality seems not to be used in an improvisatory manner, but to take the form of an insensitive model (Schön 1991).

Next, I want to present a much more local episode where technical rationality appears to be playing a crucial role. In the following report, Thomas indicates having found himself performing technical-rational style of management, but that it was not his original intention, and that as a consequence an ongoing OD-process in his section broke down:

*Thomas: - It isn't possible to think through in advance every detail of how something is supposed to function in an organization . . . . there is always some vagueness as to who makes which decisions. To a certain extent we have a pseudo-democracy here. But codetermination is of the essence . . . . It is a cornerstone of this department that everybody must have the opportunity to participate. But I must say "should" have the opportunity, in the sense that I am certainly not that attentive all the time. Sometimes context is not in my head at all. With regard to [the OD-process], for instance, I was not very context-sensitive.*

Thomas's report supports the theoretical observation that technical rationality is not just a property of central management or political authorities. It is a way of thinking that is latent in all sensemaking activity, including that of managers, and it may come out even if it is not called for. Again this indicates the validity of Schön's (1991) warning that technical rationality can take the form of a model for action that is taken for granted. For example, in Thomas's case he claims that it is his intention to take situations seriously and to be context-sensitive, but in practice he finds himself having deviated from that intention. Drifting out of the moment and wandering into abstract landscapes is something most people do from time to time, and this merely points to the challenges of maintaining a context-sensitive gaze and improvising (Petranker 2005). However, uncritical technical rationality is a different matter; it is forgetting and neglecting context and from that stance to address the situation, or rather; *not* to address the situation. Blind technical rationality implies acting purposely on the basis of acontextual considerations, and this is what Thomas reports having done. Recall from chapter seven that Thomas has formed a management group together with a doctor and two other managers, and that they have created organization models that were originally intended to be implemented in his section. Thus Thomas and the management group seem to have fallen into a taken-for-granted technical-rational way of organizing (i.e. Managerialism), and as a consequence Thomas has failed to fulfil his original plan of involving his staff.

As it will be an interesting point regarding the succeeding discussions, pay special attention to how Thomas regrets having followed an idea, a system, despite his original intention, and thus being in a way *seduced* into thinking that things were all right when, as it turns out, they were not: The next excerpt shows how as a consequence of the technical approach taken by Thomas and the management group the OD-process has been brought to a halt. As a result a general meeting has been summoned to clear things up. As we revisit this meeting, Sharon, who is a doctor and a member of the management group, is trying to explain to the employees how despite their good intentions a closed managerialist logic has replaced contextual and democratic involvement.

*Sharon: - It has actually been a totally open process, only it has happened behind closed doors, which is unnecessary. It was not intended like this. It was supposed to be open. We did not want to "control" things. And we should have adjusted what was going on in the management group. We were working just as much on the one model as on the other. We have not been sitting still politely watching the process in a condescending manner. But the fact that it might have appeared that way is beyond any doubt.*

The contradiction in Sharon's opening line seems obvious; the OD-process has been *open* behind *closed* doors. And this suggests an explanation for why the process has stranded. From the point of view of the management group there has been structure all along, both with regard to the process and to the different models that have been considered. One might even say that structure and functionality have constituted the very objective of the OD-process. The intention is one thing, though. The actual outcome is another. In this respect the previous two extracts provide illustrative examples of technical-rational *Managerialism*, which tends to come up with a solution first and then as a secondary measure implement it in practice without listening to or being sensitive to those it concerns (Schön 1991). And again, although this was not the original intention, it happened anyway, which implies a taken-for-granted form of technical rationality as opposed to one that is chosen as contextually appropriate on the basis of improvisatory considerations.

Through these previous examples of massive system implementation, insensitive planning and top-down restructuring processes we have seen some indications of how deeply technical rationality may penetrate everyday organizing. In the following, more empirical examples will be presented, leading into a discussion on how technical workability relates to everyday

complexity. The ambition is to try to get closer to technical rationality in practice, and to point out possible advantages as well as limitations.

## **Technical rationality and workability**

### **Temporality and subjectivity – structures as tools of improvisation**

Improvisation in practice entails keeping an open mind and looking out for the nuances in practical situations (Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). Hence one should be careful not to condemn technical rationality as something that should be categorically avoided, as it might help accomplish many great things in organizations, such as justice, efficiency, structure, and predictability, to name but a few. Then again one might ask: justice and efficiency for whom? This section deals with questions related to the workability and perspectivity of technical-rational models in the InSitu context, and I begin by presenting an excerpt where Chris and Brit, his Head Nurse, are having a meeting in Brit's office with two representatives, PR 1 (female) and PR 2, (male), from the PRS project management team about the implementation of the new personnel system.

*Brit: - Anyway, I don't understand why it is so important to take away our files!*

*[Brit utters this while shaking her head lightly, looking down at the floor.]*

*PR 2: - According to the central management this is related to attestations, calculation of seniority etc. The consequence might be that different kinds of files are created, much like things used to be*

*[PR 2's tone of voice is quiet and apparently relaxed.]*

*Chris: - That being as it is, there is an evident conflict of interest here. I sincerely fear over-centralization, even though I understand the need for attestations in order to calculate the right salaries and so forth. Could it be that this whole new system is a result of three employees in the central staff retiring?*

*PR 1: - No, definitely not. Of course there are other considerations behind this, for instance that the cuts in expenditures have not been sufficient!*

*Chris: - But why, then, does this system require so much personnel, considering that it is supposed to be automatic?*

*[PR 1 sighs.]*

*PR 1: - Oh, I guess it isn't as automatic as we initially thought it would be.*

*[ . . . The discussion does not continue for long, and soon the two PRs leave. After they have gone, Chris and Brit remain in Brit's office, reflecting upon the meeting. Brit says she is deeply sceptical towards the female PR, whom she thinks is the worst of them all. She says this woman, who by the way has no proper education, was merely guarding her own territory,*

*rather than doing what is best for this department and the hospital as a whole. Chris seems to have no comment on this, but they both agree that changing the system is more about power struggles between professions than about real needs. After the old system was decentralised, and Brit took over the responsibility for handling wages, they have had no problems at all. The other departments at InSitu were not allowed to handle their own wages, however, as central management argued that they lacked the competence. Chris and Brit are not entirely convinced about by this argument. Rather, they maintain that the hospital's wage administrators have produced the need for a new system themselves, being as it is that wages is a profession of its own. They have probably exaggerated the need for a new system, and downgraded the old out of consideration for their own situation: - "Nobody else than us can possibly do this", Brit says, miming an imagined wages administrator in a ridiculing tone of voice. Chris emphasizes that he is a great fan of the director's and of his strategic thinking, but that in this particular case, he is wrong. He suspects that the director might have been fooled by some of his co-workers.*

In this instance, system functionality was originally defined by those in the central administration who wanted a more centralized and efficient system for handling wages. As they have proceeded with the implementation, however, the project representatives admit that the system has in fact not worked out as smoothly as they expected. The improved efficiency and the cost reductions that were hoped for are yet to materialize. It may seem that in this case, the PRs may have had quite a naïve expectation of system perfection, as they have had to reconsider the degree of automation that was originally hoped for. The system did not work by itself as it were, and now further adaptations and adjustments must be made.

As a result of analysing this episode another and related issue strikes me: that workability is a matter of perspective. Before the empirical study, practical philosophy had taught me the importance of functionality and workability in theories, models and systems, but I did not at the time realize sufficiently the importance of asking, if a something works, *for whom* does it work and *for which purpose*? Analysing my empirical observations, however, I see that as long as there is a conflict of interest, the question of workability will always be there. An important part of the previous story is that Chris's department only recently went through a similar process, which ended up in decentralized authority; and since that time, Brit argues, everything has worked smoothly. As a result, they fear changing into something that resembles the old and non-functional solution. Consequently, chances are that Brit and Chris would disagree with central authorities no matter how well the new system works out,

because of their fear of losing autonomy and flexibility in the handling of local administrative matters.

Let us move on to another facet of technical rationality (and workability). *Bureaucracy* is an example of an organizational *system and routines* that managers at InSitu cannot avoid interacting with. Bureaucracy plays a decisive role in determining the way health care services are governed politically, and as it is built over strict *rules and structures* it points to the inevitable influence of technical rationality in everyday practice. In the following episode we join a coordination meeting of a section in Karina's department. The meeting has been summoned by the chief surgeon to deal with some bureaucratic flaws, and besides the surgeon and Karina two nurses, the section accountant and a representative from central health authorities (CA) participate.

*[The chief surgeon argues that cancer patients should get a certain piece of preventive medical equipment covered. They need this equipment, he explains, to maintain different kinds of corporal functionality, which are ruined by the radioactive treatment. Without it, they might easily end up needing immediate medical attention. He reaches into his briefcase and takes out one of the items referred to. As I look at the device I suddenly realize the tragedy involved in these patient cases.]*

*Chief surgeon: - Preventive treatment using this device is currently not covered by the existing regulations, but the reactive treatment needed as a consequence of not using the device actually is. In order to receive the treatment, however, you need a certain functionality, and to get that you need this device.*

*[As he says this he points at the plastic item.]*

*Chief surgeon: - But still the item is not covered. The same is the case with [particular piece of medical equipment (PME)]. The proactive treatment involving the PME is not covered, but as soon as immediate treatment is required, it is covered. It doesn't make sense, now, does it?*

*[Around the table the attendants seem very attentive to and affected by the chief surgeon's message. Some are looking down at the table quietly shaking their heads; others are lifting their eyebrows looking to CA for a comment.]*

*CA: - I can see the paradox in this. It is clearly unreasonable.*

*[Judging by her rapid head movements shifting between looking at the chief surgeon and CA, and by her wrinkled forehead, Karina seems upset. One of the nurses seems upset, too, as she is slightly shaking her head as if in anguish. The surgeon continues in a very calm and formal way to explain that they have been thinking about producing some kind of package which the patient can bring with him to the National Health Insurance Office.]*



*Chief surgeon: - This way the patient does not have to think about these things at all. And by the way, on a national scale this might just be a unique solution, and it would even save us some money, I suspect.*

In this episode I want to shed light on how one kind of logic explicated by one particular bureaucratic structure might create a problem that has to be handled later by another. As such this serves as an example of two rules within the same system that do not pull in the same direction. One might say that the two logics contradict each other in that sense, but only to the extent that patient care is the focus. Honouring the Hippocratic Oath implies seeking to offer the best possible patient care, and in that respect it involves taking the patient's perspective. It is from this perspective that the chief surgeon has summoned a meeting. The argument made in the previous quotation is that from the patient's perspective, the bureaucratic system in its present state is not effective and cannot be trusted. According to the chief surgeon it does not provide the best possible patient care; nor does it pursue the most cost-efficient solutions.

Patients should be given proactively what they will in any case receive reactively, those present agree, which in this case implies a need for system improvement. In theoretical terms, then, if their suggestion is accepted and regulations successfully changed, order will have been restored as they will have made the system work for them; at least temporarily. And as they make adjustments to ensure that the system works, the meeting attendants are improvising new sense: They realize that the system has only temporal validity and seek to create new structure and new routines that will fit the new context. This new structure is itself a technical-rational measure, however, but it is one that is *contextually chosen*. Instead of following the system blindly they are trying to keep up with emergent demands, and even if in this case the solution might seem obvious, it is not given from following established technical procedures; hence the meeting.

Whereas bureaucratic equality and predictability are examples of acontextual ideals, and indeed constitute the building blocks of bureaucracy for precisely that reason (Weber 2002), it follows that bureaucracy as a technical-rational system can only vouch for those instances covered by its systemic nature (Schön 1991). In simple terms, bureaucracy and any system for that matter, can only handle what it is defined to handle. It only works within its own limits, and in terms of predictability this is functional; it is much like knowing something about the future, having something to trust and take for granted. Thus *the upside of system is*

*simultaneously the possible downside* to the extent that incidents occur that are not anticipated. The previous extract gives a clear indication that technical-rational measures are temporary, and that acontextual ideas must be adapted to the present context in order to work; they do not work as such.

What I suggest is that trust is put in bureaucracy for its capacity to provide future justice, and in order to do this it must be perpetually subjected to practical wisdom and scrutiny so as to keep up with the unfolding of events. Of course, there is predictability in knowing that something will not change, and that bureaucracy will not discriminate between similar future incidents, but if this instance of bureaucratic constancy is categorically wrong bureaucracy might merely produce continual *injustice*, thus pleasing nobody. For instance, you may want the bureaucratic right to be treated the same as all others, but would you not prefer to be treated *rightly*? And since from a sensemaking perspective the definition of right and wrong is a continual negotiation (Griffin 2002), bureaucracy must *be made* sensitive to context. As a general statement I would thus argue along the lines of Hatch (1999) that only in those cases where contexts are less emergent and less complex will systems “survive” and work *more or less* autonomously.

As shown in the previous excerpt, the bureaucratic system is sometimes perceived as undermining organizing processes rather than facilitating them. When bureaucracy does not work, complexity arises which needs to be resolved, and if this happens the manager has no other option than to change the setting, and perhaps try to change or find ways around established routines and structures, not knowing what the outcome will be. Dealing with bureaucracy can on occasions be a demanding and uncertain process, as John indicates in the following episode.

*[We enter a messy room with lots of equipment scattered around. John says the room is being refurbished and transformed in order to fill new medicinal purposes. This, however, requires a special kind of power supply.]*

*John: - We actually had to fight to have this done, even if it will produce savings of NOK 1.8. million! How about that? We actually had to fight the bureaucracy to cut budget expenditures! Luckily, after quite a bit of bickering the project came through at a total cost of 200 000 NOK. Typical rigid bureaucratic process; formalities and conservative interpretations creating problems and increasing costs.*

In the quotation John refers to “typical rigid bureaucratic process”, but what should we make of that? The process of getting permission to refurbish was hardly bureaucratic in the sense that John simply followed the rules? He did not merely comply blindly with the system so as to come up with a fast solution? I doubt that this is what he means by “bureaucratic”. Weber (2002) claims in his seminal treatise that one of the greatest advantages of bureaucracy is its speed and swiftness, but John’s experience seemed to be of a different nature. My interpretation is that John is indicating that he has had a close encounter with bureaucracy and *the downside* of its rigidity, and that he has taken extraordinary measures to get around it somehow. John did the things he saw fit to solve an issue of great concern and importance for his department, despite the bureaucratic hindrances along the way. And finally, after much fighting and arguing, he managed to get permission to have the office –space refurbished.

Did the system work (swiftly) for John in this situation? From John’s perspective it did not; but like Karina and the gathering from the last episode John made the system work for him. He realized that new sense had to be made where, from his point of view, nonsense ruled. He had to act creatively instead of following some bureaucratic rule to the last detail if he were to get things done. Thus it was of no help to John that the bureaucracy as a rule is fair and legitimate in many other regards, as long as it could not be trusted in the *one* regard John needed it. This indicates the theoretical observation that bureaucracies are swift and reliable in the sense that they can work fast along the lines of their present constitution (e.g. Weber 2002). In instances where the bureaucracy does not apply to context, however, the result can be quite the opposite, in which case genuine improvisation is needed to make order. Once again, then, my empirical observations indicate a tight connection between improvisation, workability and perspective.

Next we shall witness John admitting that he actually only rarely *follows* systems and rules; that bureaucracy is only the right tool in certain formal instances.

*John: - As money is short at the moment, a financial plan must be presented to the board. I am currently involved in producing manpower plans. A large number of personnel must be relocated, so there are a few formalities to be handled. And I am trying to avoid conditions like those at Avinor<sup>6</sup> in the process. But I only do things by the book when I really have to. Because it takes much longer time. But in this case it is important to do things by the book. I*

---

<sup>6</sup> Avinor AS is a state-owned limited company responsible for air traffic control services in Norway, which during the course of the study experienced extensive challenges and problems related to personnel administration.

*am certainly no formalist. I have a staff that is fairly good in guiding me. In this matter, however, things are about salaries and workers' rights, which makes it important to take the right formal steps.*

The way John sees it the bureaucracy and the political regime are not always sensitive towards his needs. As a result he does not see himself as a formalist, but rather as someone who lets rules *guide* him in an open process, and in that process he uses his staff to make sure he stays within accepted limits. Nevertheless, he recognizes the need to play by the rules in matters of great importance in terms of predictability and structure for the individual employee, matters that are at the heart of the *raison d'être* of bureaucracy: to secure justice and equality (Weber 2002).

I have so far in this dissertation argued that technical-rational action is right in some instances and wrong in others (and sometimes somewhere in between), and that *the evaluation of when it is right or wrong is improvisatory*. I end this section on technical rationality and workability with a short discussion on quantification in organizing and suggest some connections to improvisation.

*Whatever can possibly be counted should be counted*, a central staff member at InSitu declares. And in itself I see nothing wrong with this, quite the opposite, as long as there is a clear and explicit understanding shared by all parties in terms of what such quantitative measurements can produce when it comes to knowledge, as well as of what it does *not* produce. Counting and quantifying might be a rewarding approach if it is done well and the results are treated right.

*Peter: - Anyway, I am what you could call a numbers fetishist. I have gathered numbers from the operations section since 1990. I actually started doing this long before it became my formal assignment [he says with a laugh and continues.]*

*- I am quite proud of this. I punch the numbers myself and print out the report. It costs me some 1-2 hours of work every month, but in return I get a highly personal relationship to the data. You might say it is a kind of combined analysis and punching, which is much more effective than having it punched by others and delivered to me. I miss the same kind of numbers from the other wards, but I do the same with data from the waiting lists. I know what the numbers mean when I do the work myself, which makes them much more valuable for me. I prefer to use the deviations from last year's numbers as a basis for management rather than*

*this year's budget. But in order to be able to speculate about anything regarding deviations, you have got to know their history.*

In Peter's case there seems to be little danger of quantity being made equivalent to quality. For Peter, quantification represents a place to start, a tool for further analysis, and not something final or conclusive. Peter seems good at contextualizing numbers and translating them into practical significance. A way of seeing is a way of not seeing (Poggi 1965), and counting something implicates focusing on that something rather than on something else. Hence, although it can be a valuable instrument, counting has its limits and its results should not be categorically trusted as representing truth (Dewey 1929; Feyerabend 2002). If they are, technical rationality is no longer an instrument but a taken-for-granted paradigm (Schön 1991).

### **Some concluding thoughts on technical rationality and workability**

On the basis of a preliminary analysis of the episodes presented in this section, four theoretical observations can be singled out in terms of systemic rationality and workability: Firstly, as a fundamental theoretical remark, systems cannot reach beyond their predefined logic (Schön 1991; Stacey et al. 2000). Secondly, for technical-rational action to work it must be contextually validated. In most cases dealt with in this study systems are not followed blindly; they are not chosen on the basis of technical analysis and employed without caution or consideration for evolving contexts. Rather, they are subjected to scrutiny and adjusted to fit contextual demands. Examples of this include the way Karina and John dealt with bureaucracy, and how Peter used quantification, counting and measuring as guidance. In these cases workability is ensured in the shape of renewed technical measures based on improvisatory evaluations; or in simpler terms: Workability is a matter of improvisation. On the whole, the InSitu managers seem continually to be keeping an eye on emerging conditions and to be evaluating technical-rational measures on that basis. In theoretical terms this implies that in improvisatory practice, context comes first and system later: *system and structure are temporary objects that are used as tools in improvisation*. Thirdly, in those cases where systemic thinking was taken too far so as to disregard context altogether or to overestimate system perfection, it ended in conflict, failure or both.

Fourthly, and lastly, technical rationality and workability was found to be a matter of perspective. Taking systemic action might be the contextually right thing to do from one perspective, and might indeed prove to work according to these considerations. From another

perspective, however, the action taken might be perceived as contextually insensitive. Who is right and who is wrong? There is no objective answer to this from a sensemaking point of view. Although some degree of budget control and centralization might be right from one perspective, it could interfere negatively with everyday operations from another. Thus, in practice it appears that in accordance with Ciborra's (1999) findings, some balance is negotiated in situ – not as a static one-time decision, but as a living process of determining good and functional organizing. In situations of conflict, context-sensitivity seems to work both ways, just as shared understanding is not *only* a management concern, but a concern of all those involved in (joint) organizing.

As a general observation, an approach to organizing which categorically overlooks important contextual factors might in the end be seen as strategy of failure (Kotter 1986; Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). For instance if organizing becomes Managerialism through blind employment of control and system, it would imply one contextual factor as categorically superior to others, in which case there is little room for negotiation and lack of balance. From an improvisatory standpoint, I am inclined to say that whenever strict control mechanisms are effectuated it should be from a contextual perspective that takes into account the many important aspects that in this particular instance are downgraded in favour of control. It might sound banal, but it is easy to take for granted the supposedly objective superiority of technical-rational management formulas and to lose sight of other perspectives and the fact that workability must be continually revalidated.

## **Plans in practice: technical rationality or improvisation?**

### **Agendas**

This section addresses *planning* as a particular form of organizing amongst InSitu managers. As planning is often held up as a contrast to improvisation (Ciborra 1999; Alterhaug 2004), it represents a form of ingrained technical rationality that I have chosen to give special attention. At InSitu planning is an important tool for securing order and predictability, not only through grand strategic discussions or budget plans, but through the meeting plans or agendas which are used in most formal meetings:

*John: - I spent last week on preparations, to avoid falling behind. There is generally a lot of ad hoc stuff happening; things that fall somewhat in between. And it can get very hectic. The meetings, however, are easier, because then at least there is an agenda.*

At least there is an agenda for meetings making things easier, John says. And indeed this is what agendas are for – to make things easier. They give enough room for people to get prepared, but do they depict exactly what will happen? As they consist of abstract information about a tentative future, one might say that agendas define *that* something will happen, or alternatively, *what* will happen, but they never say *how* (Ciborra 1999). Being by nature linguistic structures, agendas are also by nature imprecise and vague. As much as meetings have their own specific agenda, it is important to understand that each of them, even the most structured ones, in practice requires the manager's constant attention. Seen as an instrument of improvisation an agenda does not allow for mindlessness. In Dewey's (1929) vocabulary it is merely a tool to aid a complex process. We shall follow John into what was intended as a structured staff meeting for which he had prepared a simple two-point agenda: 1. to provide information about a request that had been successfully accepted by central management and 2. to provide information about the implementation of the new EQS system.

*[The time is 1415 hours, and a local staff meeting concerning both central and local administrative matters is about to begin. In addition to John, five members of the departmental administrative staff are present, and they are all gathered in John's office. John opens the meeting by repeating something that he has stated earlier: that he strongly wishes to have control over the process of appointing his own staff. He continues, with a not-so-modest smile on his face, that he has recently been notified that his claim has been accepted by central management. Actually, although he had prepared himself particularly well for the meeting with central management and assembled some very solid arguments, not to mention his mental preparations, John says that his claim was accepted very smoothly and that he did not even have to argue much. In a way he had over-prepared, as he was definitely not expecting such goodwill. His department got everything they asked for, he says, including the discretion to rank job applications. John underscores the importance of this, on account of their department's uniqueness in terms of special needs. The attendants immediately show their contentment with this, and having received the news the group spontaneously breaks out in joyful small talk, everyone gesticulating and nodding their heads in delight. One after another they make comments on the importance of this resolution, and one of them expresses particular joy that they will no longer have to deal with unnecessary delays.]*

*The mental and emotional atmosphere in the room seems vibrant. Everyone is making jokes and they are all laughing their way through the meeting. In the centre of it all John is making spurious comments and he appears to be enjoying himself. A participant reminds him that he has a meeting with the nurses tomorrow, which he has totally forgotten. Once again laughter breaks loose, as John's bad memory is for some reason considered hilarious. But the*

*atmosphere soon calms down as those present start discussing, with great inspiration, how some administrative routines in the office could be improved – a matter that was not originally on the agenda. Time seems to fly by as quite a few potential improvements are identified. Possible solutions to difficult problems are brought forward, and having “negotiated” their applicability and functionality, the group decide together which improvements should be made and not. Much later, after a lot of spontaneous conversation inspired by the decision to decentralize the appointing of staff, they return to the meeting agenda and, more specifically, to the matter of EQS.*

*John starts out by stating that EQS does not work as well for physicians as the present system does, but then again, he says, the motion of EQS is carried centrally, and there is little they can do about it. The meeting is suddenly interrupted by someone knocking on the door. The time is 1502, and a delegation from central management – the director and two of his assistants – arrive to discuss John’s budget.]*

Having an agenda might provide some support and limit the amount of complexity that can emerge in a meeting. Still, as the extract implies, meetings can to a large extent take their own direction. In the previous example the participants are through a genuine process of positive improvisation inventing their own agenda as they go along. One might say that the real structure comes alive as process (Hatch 1999; Bosworth and Kreps 1986), as the participants express emotions, discuss decisions and make proposals. Creativity in this setting does not seem to follow a preset agenda, and thus the meeting sets off in new and to some extent unexpected directions. And John follows up, reads the social context as it emerges, plays along and improvises. In this process of positive improvisation he cannot possibly know exactly what to expect, but being logged on to the present he participates in an ongoing process of making order.

### **Some reflections by the managers on plan and the unexpected**

This section presents some extracts which show how the InSitu managers reflect upon the issue of planning in practice. In the first excerpt Howard is sharing some thoughts about plans and technical rationality:

*Howard: - I try to plan ahead as much as possible, but I still end up doing a great deal of spontaneous problem solving. For instance: Stop, no, go ahead and talk it over once more, make compromises, such as the nurse applying for funding to finish her master’s degree. I feel that I must create peace and tranquillity; even if the nurse was applying for something that was a bit outside of what we should really be doing here in terms of research. The most dangerous*



*thing in a job like this is to become blinded by rules. One needs large degrees of freedom to find local solutions, even if the rules are there as a fundament.*

According to Howard there is a lot of spontaneous problem solving in his work. Is this a sign that he is a bad planner, or perhaps that he chooses to postpone things until there is no way around them? I think the answer is neither of the two. The way Howard sees it, things simply happen unexpectedly and they must be dealt with spontaneously. This seems to be the true nature of organizing as he perceives it. Rules are there as a fundament, Howard says, and one should not become blinded by them, and by taking this position he is opposing a reified view of technical-rational administration (Managerialism). Plans should not be followed blindly; they must be used in-context.

In a similar vein to Howard, Karina presents the following perspective:

*Karina: - My work is very predictable in terms of the calendar. But unforeseen events happen constantly, and often in the shape of emergencies. One might say that it is very predictable that I am interrupted a lot, but the nature and the content of the interruptions are unpredictable. There is lot of predictability in terms of meetings, hours at the policlinic etc., but all along there are interruptions: things that break down, personnel issues and so forth.*

It seems Karina is trying to communicate a similar argument to that of Howard's; that practice is an emergent property and that it is profoundly unpredictable. For example, a calendar is just a calendar, a plan just a plan, however intricate and detailed. Plan is theory, interruption is practice, Karina indicates. Elisabeth has similar reflections:

*Elisabeth: - Future images are exactly that – future images. There must be no plan for the plan's own sake. I am a great opponent of plans that just remain in some drawer. And words without action are not significant. You are always measured by your actions, and never measured on the basis of the lovely plans that you make. This is the pitfall of working in a staff, as you meet those who are less action-oriented and who like planning for its own sake.*

Only in rare instances does the context allow for the strict following and execution of plans, but it is my general impression that managers put a lot of effort into preparing for the unexpected and not only for the familiar and anticipated. Peter has some insightful comments on the significance of being prepared for the unexpected. He has just received an e-mail

message with some unexpected news concerning the theft of a trailer packed with unsterilized medical equipment when he leans forward and explains:

*Peter: - They sure are in for a surprise!*

*[Peter suppresses a chuckle and stops for a moment of reflection. Then he looks at me and continues.]*

*- Here, at the hospital, we cannot do as the air traffic controllers and simply stop the production at will. Car accidents come unexpectedly whether we want them to or not. So as a basis we must have a robust system that is self-upholding. We must be capable of solving the problems that occur there and then with the staff we have got. And then it is my responsibility to coordinate horizontally, both internally within the hospital and in relation to other institutions.*

Peter speaks about having a robust and self-upholding system as a basis, but what does he mean? Is he indicating some piece of intelligent machinery that is capable of dealing with all kinds of occurrences? Probably this is not a viable interpretation as I suspect that the capabilities Peter is calling attention to are not definable in universal terms. He is speaking of the staff and the routines they master, not the system in its own terms. Rather, as I argue in this dissertation, it is the practical and intelligent utilization of skills and routines that allows for contextual and decisive action. For example, as Peter points out, accidents happen unexpectedly, of course they do, and no injuries are alike. Pick any two patients and they are always dissimilar in *some* respect. Therefore, practitioners should have a trained eye for practical details and should be capable of making sense and acting under unique circumstances; they should be the kind of people who can handle the unexpected *and* the complex: people like Silje, Howard's departmental head nurse. I conclude this section with some statements from Silje regarding the significance of being prepared for the unexpected.

*Silje: - My job is to facilitate the job of the section head nurses and help them. You see, they have really busy days. The head nurses are responsible for 50 employees, for patients whose beds are lining the corridors and everything. Their everyday work life is highly dynamic, to say the least. I, too, like to juggle many activities simultaneously. This is part of what it means to work here. We are spontaneous and solve problems continually. Since I am very experienced, I know immediately whom to consult on the different issues etc. We have a saying here that you must like the uncertainty which is inevitably part of everyday life in this department. Remember, 95 per cent of our activities are acute. You have to like working under such conditions. If you don't, you will not fit in. Because we are used to working like this, we become good at finding solutions, too. We learn how to avoid getting frustrated. But often I wonder how come things are going as well as they are. But then again, we are trained to*

*master these conditions. And the work environment in this department is fantastic, because people are trained to handle the uncertainty.*

Unpredictability in organizing indicates that planning has its limits (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Ciborra 1999). In cases of the unexpected there is need of spontaneous and swift action, but this does not imply that improvisation is a way of acting without preparation. A meta-message from Silje seems to be that preparation is more than having a plan. Preparation *can involve* planning (Ciborra 1999), but more importantly it builds on a corporal repertoire of skills and routines (Dewey 1929; Schön 1991; Molander 1996). This repertoire enables and develops the capacity to see family resemblances in everyday situations (Wittgenstein 1992, 1994) and is of the essence if the unexpected should occur. The improvisational quality will depend on the nature of unexpectedness. More specifically, the degree of genuineness and purity of negative improvisation is related to the perceived degree of complexity (see chapter four). Much in the same vein as Mintzberg (1973) and Crossan and Sorrenti (1997) I see spontaneous action as the rule and not the exception in organizing, which indicates that improvisation in practice plays a more important role than mere planning. According to Ciborra (1999) improvisation is more profound than planning or any kind of structured activities, methods, data and processes, which he sees as “. . . *the fragile result of a long chain of abstraction and cleansing activities*” (p. 85). The previous statements of InSitu managers support this view, from which I deduce that improvisation is at the centre of what these managers consider as crucial to effective organizing.

### **Some concluding thoughts on plan and improvisation**

Planning entails creating images of a tentative future, and as such it is an acontextual technical-rational activity (Schön 1991): It addresses that which is yet to happen so as to create a model for action. Three points can sum up this analysis of planning-in-practice amongst InSitu managers: Firstly, they often make use of planning in everyday organizing, and the degree of tentativeness varies in practice from yearly agendas to short-term planning addressing what is likely to happen tomorrow or even as soon as in the next few hours. Due to the non-longitudinal nature of my study I have primarily focused on the latter kind of planning; as an activity of addressing factors that are likely to occur in the immediate future, such as for example in the case of meeting agendas.

Secondly, although planning for the future can be an effective weapon against complexity, practical events tend to come up unexpectedly – a fact which points to the limitations of planning. At the very least the quality of emergence requires the DM to keep alert and to direct his/her focus towards real-time occurrences. This suggests a normative improvisatory message that planning should not be exaggerated; the DM should plan as far ahead as possible, but not too far into ideal futures.

Thirdly, on the whole, as contexts emerge plans seem to be continually fitted and contextualized by the InSitu DM. Plans are not used as restraint-jackets but as sources of order and inspiration. This theory-in-use is supported by the managers' espoused theory that plans must be continually made relevant to be of use; plans are seen as tools and not givens. In a subtle way this contradicts Mintzberg (1973), who appears to say that a plan *in itself* should be adaptive, and that managers should have a collection of alternative plans in decision-tree form. This resembles Weick's (2001) and Thompson's (2005) view that some structures are more open to creative elaboration than others. From my point of view, however, flexibility does not come from some autonomously adaptive plan, or from a number of plans, but from the very *perception of* plan. Following Dewey's (1929) line of reasoning all plans are tools; all plans are adaptive. There is from a sensemaking perspective no objective way of measuring whether a plan is more or less adaptive; rather, flexibility is found in the way plans are translated into action in context. In that sense my view resembles Kotter (1986) and Ciborra (1999), who claim that plans should be *seen and treated as* flexible context-sensitive tools in order to become positive contributors to effective organizing.

All structures, including plans, receive some sort of secondary priority when perceived from an improvisational perspective; call it instrumental value. In other words, claiming that a structure has instrumental value is equivalent to the view that mental objects are temporary constructions (Bergson 1944; Berger and Luckmann 1991). They are tools and not ends in themselves (Dewey 1929). And from the perspective of a skilled practitioner, a (mental) structure is only used and maintained to the extent that it has practical value. A carpenter does not bring a hammer to a sawing job. Rather, as a context-sensitive improviser he changes his tool to fit the task at hand; he chooses the saw, not the hammer. And in the case of InSitu DMs, as tasks keep changing or in fact never stand completely still, the DMs are prone to make *continual* refinement and development; to improvise. In linear organizing theory, however, there is great emphasis on plans as a *controlling* basis for succeeding action: first

there is plan and then there is the *strict following* of plan in practice (Urwick 1934). This point can be further consolidated through the way plans are sometimes talked about in everyday speech, such as, for instance, in “did you not have a plan to follow?” or “we need to follow a plan”. My point is that the term “follow” is essential here as it presumes a preset linearity of organizing. But only orders are followed; tools are *used* (Dewey 1929).

The *idealized* technical-rational way to approach organizing is through a rigidly planned linear sequence of action (Schön 1991). This approach is contradicted by everyday organizing practice as it is typically found to evolve in this study. Working as a DM seems to be everything but a somewhat mindless activity of following preset agendas or choosing between ordered alternatives and making decisions. It typically involves *defining* problems and *making* spontaneous sense, which implies interpreting, interacting with and utilizing ambiguous structures and systems but not following them blindly. This reflects the theoretical observation that understanding structure as a noun is more about understanding the intention behind it and its instrumentality than about understanding the structure itself (Hatch 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). As a practical implication, then, in order to obtain effective organizing, one should keep an open eye even when performing the most simple and pre-planned organizing activity, and make sure that one is not misled into taking for granted the practical validity of plans in a reality that is emergent and continuously novel.

### **Discussing some problems of technical rationality: taking it for granted...**

Taking for granted the existence of autonomous systems, the dominance of certain views and languages, implies not seeing emergent contextuality on account of a prearranged image of reality (Mead 1967; Goffman 1969; Berger and Luckmann 1991). In chapter five I argued that this entails seeing language as a system of *unambiguous* entities in line with an unquestioned objectivity of reality. At InSitu hospital there is currently a central undertaking of *measuring* the quality and standard of management within each department, and I see this as an indicator of the *implicit* and taken-for-granted nature that technical rationality might have. My study suggests that performance measurement at InSitu is characteristically more prone to be a discussion of *how* rather than *whether*. Whether one should in fact measure or not is rarely up for debate, rather, the discussion concerns how it should be done, almost as if taking for granted that it is possible to quantify and measure quality to begin with.

George: - *To be honest, I don't feel that I am being measured on the right things. Should have been measured on things like production, research, number of scientific articles, number of complaints and so forth. The quality indicators handed to us by the Ministry of Health are not really that good. Take for instance the case of patients lining the corridors – is it not better to treat patients in the corridors than not treating them at all? Actually, I think the Ministry of Health is too politically governed; so many laws and rules which are so resource-draining that the health worker doesn't have the time to execute them nor to fulfil all the demands and regulations. Bureaucracy and political governance have taken complete control. Quality, however, resides with the physicians and the nurses, not with the regulations of the Ministry. In short, the entry of the technocrats is not good for the health care service.*

*Take for example the EPJ-system. Some believe that this system will implicate more health care per [monetary unit], but this is an illusion. The time you spend on a computer journal is much longer than on a paper journal. The same goes for the EQS-system; I have no time to use it. Ergo the system is not really exploited. Being a busy physician there are a lot of other things on which to use one's energy. Amongst the things that bring the most frustration, is the imposition from central management to administer a system that does not actually improve the quality of the everyday relation between patient and health care worker. The systems, the rules, the regulations, are simply forced upon me. I use a lot of resources on implementing technocratic systems, although everyday work life is pretty much the same as it was six years ago. Without doubt, though, quite a few things have happened that have made everyday life easier, but on the whole what I am saying is right. I dread the day I am going back to a full-time clinical position, because I will have to spend too much time in front of the computer. Besides, the costs are not decreasing at all, rather, they are increasing as a consequence of expensive computer systems. And I am not sure that these increases in costs occur where they are needed the most. For instance, my experience is that we can barely afford using resources to buy the equipment we really need. Moreover, I don't think the Health Reform has been a success. Very little of the new technology which is taken for granted in our neighbouring countries is available here. We cannot afford it. Soon, Bill Gates will probably be the one dictating hospital budgets.*

In George's view there is an exaggerated belief in and execution of technical rational-measures amongst the political authorities, but instead of commenting on whether such performance measurement should be conducted in the first place, he merely expresses dissatisfaction with *the way it is done*. For better or for worse, this can be seen as a way of expressing that some sort of technical-rational quantifying is needed so as to improve quality. A general and political debate as to the pros and cons of quantifying health care services is beyond and outside the realm of this study. The point here is merely to call attention to how

ingrained technical-rational thinking might become over time, allowing it to occupy space in everyday organizing which goes unquestioned.

Like George, Peter is of the opinion that technical rationality has become too ingrained in hospital management and that it has grown to unhealthy proportions. He claims that the dominant jargon at the hospital has changed, and that the culture and tradition of patient care is threatened:

*Peter: - I put a lot of effort into avoiding taking into use expressions from management fads. I try to be at the forefront in terms of maintaining our own vocabulary. There is one hell of a pressure now on us to use the language of the Norwegian School of Management.<sup>7</sup> The term "production" is starting to take hold. The core of health services, however, is patient treatment. And therefore the ones that are preaching "production" must learn "patient treatment" rather than the other way around. But as I said the pressure is immense, and significantly amplified through the national hospital reform, by the Ministry of Health and so forth.*

*Researcher: Have you given feedback on this?*

*Peter: No, not externally. Not to the central management or to [Regional Health Authorities]. But internally we do.*

*Researcher: Is "productivity" important to you as an everyday term?*

*Peter: I restrain myself from using the word in the literal sense. But of course I am constantly looking for cuts in cost and increases in income. And the goal is to cure more patients . . .*

*Researcher: Why are you saying that too many words from the Norwegian School of Management are dangerous?*

*Peter: Because the National Health Service contains some values that we should take care not to change. It is all about helping sick people. It is not car production that we are engaged in, such as for example the Toyota model. No doubt we are infected by this, by quality assurance and so forth. BUT DO NOT CALL IT THE TOYOTA MODEL IN THE HEALTH SERVICES! Rather, one should call it clinical research and patient follow-up; expressions that we have used earlier. I strongly oppose the ISO-marking of our services.*

Karina, too, expresses fear of the new terminology, the new language.

*Karina: - [With regard to terms like management, control etc.] I get negative associations. They are new words to me. I feel insecure about these terms, they are not part of my vocabulary .*

---

<sup>7</sup> The Norwegian School of Management, BI, is one of the most influential business schools in Norway.

So what if the hospital lingo changes, how does it matter? It depends on how you see language. From a non-dualist perspective, language is a theoretical device that enables and constrains everyday operations (Dewey 1929, Schön 1991). In the same vein I see language as a constituent of reality, in which case administration is a form of language, and medicine, too. Consequently, if a language changes the implications can be massive, as it might imply a change in reality and everyday focus. Furthermore, if a language, in this case technical-rational organizing, is perceived as given and superior, if people stop questioning the validity of it, it opens up the theoretical possibility of complete control (Mead 1967; Goffman 1969). Instead of administration and medicine emerging together, organizing might become Managerialism and thus medicine might have to succumb to its taken-for-granted superiority. In other words: as Managerialism substitutes for good improvisation, plan and technology are no longer pragmatic instruments. Rather, they claim hold of reality as such (see chapter six), in which case the language of medicine, and hence the quality of medicine itself is challenged.

Based on the initial presentation of technical rationality in this chapter, and if we are to believe the InSitu managers, there are signs that technical rationality might be about to take possession of the throne, rather fit into the existing order as a contextually smart way of thinking. In a way, administration might become more than *a* language; some fear that it will become *the* language, and that technical rationality will become equivalent to rationality as such. In some respect administrative systems, reforms and directives may be on the verge of being made autonomous, and as a consequence a single, taken-for-granted right way of organizing could emerge, much like portrayed in the early formulations of administration theory (e.g. Urwick 1934). To the extent that the managers are right in their assessment, this could in one sense have catastrophic consequences for the tradition of health care: It might mean that in the official and explicated approach to administration, financial aspects would categorically come first and patients later; system before context and efficiency before effectivity. Instead of seeing system and structure as part of organization, or rather, as tools of organizing, they would take on lives of their own. In other words, what the managers seem to fear is the creation of a managerialist “Frankenstein” threatening the quality of patient treatment.



## Conclusions and implications

### Everyday organizing practice: Managerialism or improvisation?

Based on Schön (1991) I have argued that technical rationality involves thinking first and acting later, and that this is at the heart of a terminology based on concepts such as system, production and control. Through multiple examples I have tried to show that *technical rationality can be efficient in some regards and less efficient in others*, and that *workability is a matter of perspective*. As a general theoretical speculation, systemic behaviour is efficient in those contexts where the degree of emergence and complexity is low, whereas in other instances context would continually outdate and invalidate it. There is little use in clutching on to an extensive and intricate structure that produces a certain output when practical needs never stay the same. In accordance with this I have found that managers put a lot of effort into contextualizing plans, structures and systems: When systemic invalidation occurs the manager sees it as a challenge to revalidate it through intelligent utilization, upon which the flow of technical-rational action would resume until once again outdated and eventually renewed. As has been thoroughly pointed out, problems of this scale are from a sensemaking perspective more or less inevitable, as systems can never keep up with the flow of everyday events. And this is perhaps not so much a problem of the system, of technical rationality, as a problem with the nature of real-life emergence. If, however, technical rationality is categorically clutched on to irrespective of the actual surroundings, serious problems may arise.

In chapter five I portrayed Managerialism as a technical exercise of systems thinking which involves seeing organizational members as un-autonomous (and caged in) pieces of an autonomous whole (Stacey et al. 2000; Stacey 2001; Griffin 2002). Through the lenses of systems thinking all that can be spotted is what fits with defined features of the system. Everything else remains unaddressed, much like the way Polaroids close out all sunlight except that which follows a certain vector. In “production” the products, and hence the problems, are already defined, and in a hospital context this converts patients into customers or, more generally, into input and output. In its extreme form this amounts to Managerialism, which is a way of systems thinking that turns patients into bits and pieces passing through a production line.

	Improvisation	Systemic pressure
Practice	<b>Actual organizing practice</b>	<b>Imposed system and structure</b>
Talk	<b>Alternative language of improvisation</b>	<b>Dominant managerialist language</b>

***Model 10.0 Management talk and practice***

It could be interesting to juxtapose these observations with the empirical findings of how InSitu managers go about their job, and to try to sketch out some *implications for practice*. On the one hand we have seen DMs acting as skilled improvisers in a complex reality, and who in interviews explicitly recognize context-sensitivity and improvisation as their most important tool (model 10.0, left column). Thus there seems to be harmony between words (espoused theory) and action (theory-in-use) as they both amalgamate in a perspective of improvisation. On the other hand, I have identified a tendency of systemic thinking which occupies a significant amount of space in everyday practice, typically as imposed by formal and official channels. This happens both in words and in action (model 10.0, right column): Not only may the technical-rational language be in a position where it might assume dominance in health care organizing through the excessive use of concepts such as management control, planning, system and production; but in practice, too, managers are spending a huge amount of time and energy in (centrally issued) planning and strategy meetings, on systematic budget and expenditure control and negotiation, on system implementation, and of course, bureaucracy.

## Aspects of practice

I will start off with practice (model 10.0, upper half of the quadrant) and deal with talk later. As a first step towards an understanding of what immediately strikes me as a paradox, I propose that even if managers are simultaneously improvisers *and* performers of technical rational activities, the one does not preclude the other. First of all, when dealing with systemic issues managers typically improvise: they pragmatically contextualize, embellish and adapt. They use administrative models as tools of improvisation; in those cases where managers make use of administrative models it typically comes about as a result of improvisation and contextual evaluation. Only on very few occasions throughout the period of my study have I witnessed instances of blind following of systems thinking amongst the department managers, and those instances were followed by repentance. A more rigid and controlling form of systems thinking, however, was found in the directives and impositions from superior and official channels. Systems and structures are necessarily part of the context of public hospitals; political processes and bureaucratic structuring, for example, are part of a hospital's *raison d'être*. As long as there is a political system governing both budgets and strategies, technical-rational elements should be expected. As a critical comment, however, it would seem that such elements might be in danger of taking up too much space in everyday practice, thus stealing time and attention from upcoming events.

Frequently when DMs are dealing with real-time and often unexpected occurrences, it seems somehow that they see themselves more as *putting out fires* and handling undesirable interruptions, rather than as encountering natural and necessary components of practical emergence. As a general observation it seems that so much focus is typically devoted to order and system that it somehow overshadows a view on complexity and unpredictability as something natural. A typical workday for the InSitu manager involves a more or less continual stream of formal and official errands, and all other issues have to be fitted in between these, or indeed they come up as interruptions. Thus I am tempted to ask if too little time and energy is typically put aside for everyday emerging events? Furthermore, I wonder if more structure might perhaps flow from focusing less on structure? The general espoused theory of InSitu managers is that context-sensitivity and the ability to be spontaneously creative is crucial, but to some extent they seem to cut themselves off from utilizing these talents, as they allow themselves to be trapped in for instance an endless row of formal

meetings. From these observations I would like to pose the question of whether the quality of organizing might increase if the systemic pressure was less pronounced.

Judging by my study needs and wants seem to occasionally be transcending (or at least significantly influencing) a DM's situation in a way that may cause him/her to act somewhat insensitively given the context. For example there seems to be quite a substantial levels systemic pressure which to a large extent comes from external authorities and central management. This pressure seems to be imposed on the managers rather than chosen by them. Systemic pressure does not only come from formal meetings but also through management directives, quantitative measurements, incentives to improve efficiency, from top-down control and administrative structures, system-implementations and reforms. In turn these matters become constituents of a somewhat systemic contextuality for department managers, and as they enact upcoming situations they are in a sense "encouraged" to interpret reality through system lenses. Not to take seriously technical-rational demands is not a viable option, and as the systemic pressure mounts, the manager's task of translating systemic demands into practical outcomes via improvisation becomes more of a challenge. In that regard "the system" weighs heavily on the manager's shoulders, which increases the pressure of seeing system in context and subjecting it to practical validation. From a sensemaking perspective, increased systemic pressure does not make the practical *how* less complex. The case is perhaps the opposite, something which indicates a potential increase of the managerial challenges associated with performing effective organizing.

Even if systemic pressure to a large extent comes from the outside, and maybe justly so, I suggest that the manager can decide the extent to which this pressure is allowed to take hold of him/her. The manager has power to report back on system ignorance as it appears from his perspective. To some extent this is already happening at InSitu, but is the vertical communication sufficiently functional? Another study is required to determine this; here, the question is merely raised. As a theoretical observation, however, I'd like to point out that increased systemic pressure and control does not categorically lead to increased effectivity (Ciborra 1999). Rather, the more one seeks to control the behaviour of others, the more one also risks entrapping them in closed rhetoric and systems thinking, in which case *less* effectivity is a possible outcome. Jorid, a member of the central management staff of InSitu hospital, made an interesting comment on this in an interview:

*Jorid: - We are taught structure, control and to focus on details. In a way it is pleasant to keep things that way, so naturally I strive for it in every day life; wishing to make things fit into a system. Indeed, I feel it in the flesh sometimes. If only we had managed to do so and so... But the world isn't like this. So in everyday life I am torn between lose structures and the desire to have full control. And sometimes it becomes quite stressful. There are people who want a structured and predictable environment, and people who want the opposite. And here at the hospital there is as we speak a confrontation going on between Taylorism and the machine bureaucracy on one side, and new things on the other. If improvisation were the language we used, everyday life would be so much easier for me. I can feel it physically, in my body so to speak, that in that case I would not be imprisoned by anything, like a structure for instance. But today other parameters are controlling my behaviour and making me feel like I am stuck in some kind of a rigid frame.*

Open-ended creativity and practical wisdom may not fare too well under technical-rational imprisonment (Pitsis et al. 2007). One might argue that there is a latent paradox in this respect, between crucial political, bureaucratic and generally systemic concerns on one hand, and room for practical manoeuvring on the other. As a consequence, even if my study suggests that practical organizing emerges as improvisation, the conditions for *good* improvisation can be undermined if Managerialism prevails. I shall be careful about my conclusions in this regard, and merely suggest that the indications I have found of dominant technical rationality can form a valuable topic for further discussions in the search for better organizing. From an improvisatory point of view I would argue that new and more effective ways of organizing can always be found, but that the creative potential of practical wisdom might be inversely proportional to increased control. This is not at all meant as an attempt to romanticise complete lack of control, but rather to emphasize the fact that balancing the amount of control is something of an art form – the key to which lies in context.

## Aspects of talk and language

I shall end this chapter with a discussion on how the InSitu managers *talk* and the way they address the issues of technical rationality and improvisation. First of all, when allowed to elaborate freely on systemic issues InSitu managers exhibit improvisatory attitudes, and they seem to have clear views on models of technical rationality as temporal and instrumental. As an example I have included some comments by Peter:

*Peter: - I see the hierarchy as a tool . . . . My task is to deal with matters if there is a great incongruity between the hierarchy and actual practice - if there is a discrepancy. I have got a fresh example to illustrate this: An office manager has just quit his job here. What I did was to split the single position into two group leaders, each counting 20 per cent. That leaves me with 60 per cent which I intend to use on admission services, because there is such a rat race with the new patient rights. Mind you, I haven't told the director about this, and the process itself has possibly been a bit top-down on my behalf, but in a very short period of time this change has received broad support. People seem to be pleased with it.*

In contrast to such free contemplation (espoused theory) as expressed in interviews, the dominant language-in-use amongst top- and middle level managers seems much more technical. It is packed with systems and managerialist analogies. This tendency seems to a large extent to come from outside of medical practice. As the DMs themselves report, they are exposed on a large scale to a way of talking about practice that belongs more to business jargon than to traditional medicine. Potentially I might have found that the dominant language-in-use at InSitu was one of improvisation, in which case there could be said to be a strong emphasis on the *instrumental* value of systems and structure, but I would say it is the other way around. A language that addresses organizing practice as it evolves on an everyday basis – a language that fits the empirical findings of this study as well as the way managers ideally picture everyday life through espoused theories – seems to be lacking. And lacking a language to adequately address their work practice, managers are prone to employ system metaphors, which may possibly limit the potential of creative organizing. For example, they talk about production rather than health care, control rather than improvisation and problem solving rather than problem definition. Similarly in chapter seven we saw how managers regularly use expressions such as “ad hoc” and “behind on things”, as if to signal a deviance from some desired ideal state of stability and equilibrium.

Summing up, there seems to be some degree of inconsistency between:

1. *actual everyday practice versus language-in-use*
2. *the way managers reflect on and talk about practice in interviews (espoused theory) versus language-in-use*

A partial reason why there is such a strong tendency to use managerialist lingo in the worlds of InSitu managers might stem from the tough budget process currently taking place at the hospital. During my fieldwork I sat in on a multitude of budget meetings, many of them involving the director and his staff, and I have no doubt as to the severity of InSitu's financial situation. There is much debate, formal and informal, on *how* to cut costs, *whether* costs should be cut and the *priority* of expenditures. My study is not an attempt to make a contribution to this debate, but to call attention to the influence evidently asserted by managerialist issues on organizing processes and to indicate some theoretical implications of exaggerating systems thinking in everyday language-in-use. My proposition is that a language of improvisation might provide a tool for better understanding and communication about authentic work practice amongst InSitu managers. Such understanding might subsequently contribute to the contextualizing of models of technical-rationality and thus facilitate their translation into effective organizing action.

## Chapter 11 Conclusion

### A hermeneutical journey between text and context

The research question for my study is: “What is the nature of improvisation in everyday organizing practice and how does improvisation relate to technical rationality?” In this concluding chapter I attempt to provide an elaborate answer as I present a synthesis of the preceding analyses and discussions.

The thesis which has inspired this dissertation is that organizing can be understood as a process of improvisation (Weick 1979, 1989, 1998, 2001), and in that vein I have conducted an empirical study of *organizing as improvisation* amongst department managers in a large Norwegian hospital called InSitu. My project stems from a deep fascination with Weick’s work, but throughout the research process I have in many ways departed from his writings on improvisation as a retrospective process of sensemaking. However, two very essential (and interconnected) premises of Weick’s work have constituted the building blocks of my research: Firstly his view of organizing as a *general process of making order* in a complex world (Weick 1989; Weick et al. 2005), and secondly the view that organizing is a *social process of sense- and identity-making* (Weick 1979, 1995, 2001). Based on these assumptions I define organizing as “externally oriented acts of sensemaking carried out in the private, social and organizational sphere”. In the same vein, based on my study of practical philosophy, I propose a framework of improvisation under the label “The improvising man”, and suggest that improvisation can be defined as “spontaneous and hermeneutical sensemaking via external action”, which leads to a perspective of *organizing as a process of improvisation*.

Unlike Weick (1995) who fundamentally sees sensemaking as a process of retrospection, I take a different route and suggest that sensemaking constitutes a process of *improspection*. Furthermore, whereas improspection is merely a way of seeing and thinking in the present, improvisation involves something more as it is a way of *acting* in the physical, external sense. From my point of view improvisation is thus a process of thinking-*in-and-as*-action that characterizes the human body. Through my improvising man framework I can therefore be positioned alongside authors like Schön (1991), Ciborra (1999) and Purser and Petranker (2005) who have in common a focus on improvisation as a philosophical aspect of existence.



From this philosophical position I build on authors such as Dewey (1929), Mead (1967), Strauss (1993), Heidegger (1996), and Stacey (2000, 2001) and suggest that emotionality plays a significant role in improvisation. As I suggest that sensemaking is a process constituted by human bodies tuned to emergent feeling states, I arrive at the understanding that sense is always induced with feeling, and as a result, that improvisation is emotionally conceived and upheld.

My take on improvisation is guided by an interest in *everyday organizing*, and this distinguishes my study from much of the earlier literature in the organizational field, which seems to share a focus on improvisation as a rare and exceptional phenomenon. For example, theorists have portrayed improvisation as a method of radical innovation (Bastien and Hostager 1992; Cunha and Kamoche 2001); as a particularly creative and spontaneous form of theatre and jazz which can be used as a metaphor for organizing (Crossan and Sorrenti 1997; Hatch 1997; Weick 1989, 1998, 2001; Zack 2000; Alterhaug 2004); as radical change processes in organizations (Orlikowski 1996; Orlikowski and Hofman 1997); as a characteristic trait of temporary projects (Leybourne 2006); or as a last minute, second hand solution when planning fails (Ciborra 1996; Miner et al. 1997; Kamoche et al. 2002).

I have found these descriptions to be unsuited to my empirical project of capturing the essence of everyday organizing amongst InSitu managers. In addition I found my initial framework of “The improvising man” to be too wide to be employed as a tool of empirical analysis. As a consequence I realized that I had to hone the concept to make it practically applicable to my empirical case. The dual exploration of the empirical case of InSitu managers and the theoretical framework of “The improvising man” resulted in a new and deeper understanding of improvisation in organizing practice evolving gradually and hermeneutically. At this point I want to accentuate that my conception of improvisation has never been, and is still not, final, perfect or closed. It is merely an attempt to mould and hone a logical concept that can and should be further developed through both empirical research and theoretical reflection. From its very start this dissertation has emerged from a devotion to studying the role of improvisation in everyday practical life. I am convinced that I could not have reached my conclusions about improvisation without trying them out analytically as a framework for understanding an empirical case.

As explained, when attempting to analyse the empirical data I discovered that my initial framework of “The improvising man” was insufficient and overly abstract. The concept worked on paper, so to speak, but not well enough as a practical instrument. Thus I had to make some theoretical adjustments, and came up with the concept “sufficiently pure”, as opposed to “pure” improvisation. As another observation I found improvisation in practice to vary between voluntary/proactive and involuntary/reactive forms, which inspired me to use Taylor’s (1985) philosophy to separate between “positive” and “negative” improvisation. Furthermore, I have on occasions found improvisation to be quite impure, but still practically wise, and as a consequence I suggest that the concept “good improvisation” can be a fruitful and important alternative to “pure improvisation”. Although different from, and slightly less dramatic than improvisation seen as radical altering of structures, I have nonetheless found improvisation to be a constructive concept for understanding organizing practice, and found that it fills a void in the literature.

The empirical study has helped me to understand improvisation in an everyday practical perspective *as well as* in a philosophical perspective, allowing me to construct even clearer connections between the two. As an example, I realized that in order to link complexity in the becoming (Bergson 1944) with improvisation, I needed a new tool. As a result I have found much value in the term “emergence” (Mead 1967), which I use as a metaphor for improvisation being an ongoing process of dealing with complexity through gestures and responses. My take on emergence, then, is not like the complexity sciences’ view of it as something which grows onwards in an ontologically objective manner (Stacey et al. 2000; Stacey 2001); I see it as the very process of creating order from chaos. Emergence is not just chaos, and it is not just order. It is an improvisatory process of making sense, in which the quality of the sense that is made relates to the quality of complexity. In other words, the emergence of sense is inseparable from the emergence of complexity. Based on my analysis, then, I arrived at the idea that emergence is simultaneously improvisation *and* complexity that are woven together. This has both deepened my personal insight into philosophical non-dualism and made it possible to theorize about my empirical data.

## **Main empirical findings**

A general empirical observation is that improvisation occurs as InSitu managers are logged on to and act in the emergent present of organizational becoming. More specifically, the nature of everyday organizing seems to take two forms: positive and negative improvisation. These have in common that they are not necessarily radically pure in terms of spontaneity and creativity, but *sufficiently pure* so as to be recognized as improvisation in practice. I shall deal with the former first and then turn to the latter. Lastly I will sum up my findings on how improvisation compares to technical rationality, and show how the managers, on the whole, use administrative elements as tools rather than as control mechanisms.

## **Forms of negative improvisation**

As a general observation, the InSitu department managers seem to be submerged in the emerging context they take part in producing, and as a consequence there is a high degree of spontaneity in improvised practice. Furthermore, novelty is found in the becoming of situations (Bergson 1944; Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005), which encourages the managers to make new sense in a continual manner. Lastly, I have found the degree of complexity to regularly overshadow familiarity, thus triggering improvisation in quite pure forms.

More specifically I have found that department managers at InSitu improvise negatively as they make spontaneous sense of complex situations comprised of:

1. Vagueness and ambiguity both in verbal and written communication.
2. Clustering of events: there is seldom an ordered sequential manner in which situations occur. Rather, the typical work situation emerges through a simultaneous variety of issues. Each of these issues is often inherently complex, but complexity is also found in the clustering experience itself.
3. Unpredictability.
4. Emotional aspects associated with everyday organizing as a corporal exercise of socially dealing with living bodies. Situated corporality in the context of InSitu managers implies emotionality in varying degrees of explicitness.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, the points are meant as different and intertwined angles on the same phenomena: emergence and improvisation in practice. As a red thread through the list, emergence stands out as a *complex* and *dynamic* trait of the way situations unfold for the InSitu managers. Thus, in all of the issues above understanding and sense are at stake, implying a continual effort to improvise. I will deal with each at a time:

### **1. Improvising sense from vagueness and equivocality**

The pitfalls of communication are evident in that symbols of language can never encapsulate a reality-on-the-move (Bergson 1944). Using symbols of language means to engage in acts of gestures and responses (Mead 1967), which can be seen as interpretative efforts of improvisation for the sake of establishing sense and coherence (Weick 1995), and the way these processes evolve can be described as emergence (Mead 1967). From a sensemaking perspective the vagueness and equivocality of language can only be countered by improvisation (Weick 1995). For the InSitu manager the emergence of gesture and response often takes on a largely complex character; interpretative problems and misunderstandings are vivid and recurrent examples. As a consequence, improvisation which is qualitatively rich in both spontaneity and creativity is triggered.

### **2. Improvising sense from clusters of events**

Everyday events have a tendency to crop up and come in messy clusters rather than in neat and ordered sequences. No matter what the extent to which linguistic symbols are involved, the managers face occurrences that emerge simultaneously, and which often trigger immense efforts of improvisatory sensemaking. Without the manager's spontaneous and creative endeavours the situations could not be handled. Problems are defined in context and are dealt with spontaneously by the managers, and as problems tend to come in clusters creating turbulence, the manager is compelled to refocus and improvise fast.

### **3. Improvising sense from unpredictability**

The way emergence manifests itself in practice for the InSitu managers is largely unpredictable. As a result, a profound complexity in the becoming is constituted, which is often visible through unexpected events. These are not always very complex, however, but as they come up surprisingly they arouse spontaneous acts of improvisation. In short, managers sometimes seem to make sense with less genuine creative effort, and sometimes with more. Nonetheless, as unpredictability is woven deeply into practice, managers improvise their way ahead and in the process they create order and predictable outcomes.

#### **4. Improvising sense from emotional complexity**

As everyday emergence is found in the emotionality of situations, it takes on a deeply complex character. Improvisation in an emotional context is a matter of empathy and interpretation (Dewey 1929; Strauss 1993). As feelings and emotions continuously feed situations with complexity, managers are forced to overcome that complexity somehow, and the particular way this is done seems to be contextually determined and acted out through improvisation. Being logged on to the present, the manager regularly expresses great difficulties with interpreting and understanding emotional gestures, and as a result improvising in emotional contexts implies high degrees of spontaneity.

Amongst my findings are emotions in an explicit sense, meaning emotions that stand out from the point of view of the researcher (i.e. “feelings” (Dewey 1929)). Vivid examples are instances I have interpreted as frustration, anger, disappointment, grief and humour. It is characteristic how managers seldom address emotion explicitly in situ, irrespective of the contextual significance of emotion. Often, feelings and emotions appear to be under-communicated. Still, as I have found them to be important triggers of improvisation, I suggest that much can be learned from putting emotions on the agenda and studying how they influence organizing on an everyday basis.

#### **Negative improvisation versus decision-making**

To sum up, InSitu managers improvise negatively in everyday practice in the sense that they react to the emergent, unpredictable and complex flow of everyday events. Complexity typically stems from social and emotional factors creating subtleties and ambiguities that are dealt with spontaneously. Furthermore, rather than being faced with a series of familiar problems or issues, in complex situations managers are cast into unstructured scenarios in which genuinely new sense must be made. These are the kind of situations where meaning is not pinned down without effort – situations with distinctive uncertainty, in which it is difficult to identify or count problems, or to compare them analytically to each other. In organizing practice, complexity is typically perceived as one (long) unstructured situation-in-the-becoming (Bergson 1944); not as many concrete situations succeeding each other. Organizing in complex situations is about getting to know what is happening: about defining problems more than solving familiar problems (Ciborra 1999). It is about creating context, and as the manager succeeds, he makes reality predictable. But the manager can never know when something unexpected will interrupt him.

The outcome of real-life situations for managers is from a hermeneutical viewpoint dependent on past experience (Heidegger 1996). As argued by Purser and Petranker (2005), Petranker (2005), and Ciborra (1999), the present cannot be captured by objective analysis. This creates unpredictability, but it also generates structure. Hence, even if emergence is profoundly unpredictable, it comes to life as structuring efforts and is everything but completely random. Emergence is not “either – or”, but “both – and”. If the manager cannot discern objectively what is happening now, but is compelled to improvise his own reality in collaboration with others, he cannot expect to know what will follow next. The way the manager’s present evolves into a future, the way he constitutes reality, depends hermeneutically on his thoughts, interpretations and actions – and on those of others. As such, context never *is*, ontologically speaking; it merely exists in and as emergence. Context is not chaos, however. Context is stability; it is reality. However dialectical and social in form, however socially conceived and upheld, context is a manager’s continual accomplishment, and it generally comes about by way of improvisation, negative as well as positive. From this point of view, decision-making is subjected to improvisation, not the other way around (Ciborra 1999). In other words, as I take a phenomenological approach to choice (Husserl 1962; Shütz 1967), I do not see improvisation as a process of decision-making, but as one of sensemaking (Weick et al. 2005). Ciborra (1999) puts it this way:

*. . . improvisation poses a challenge to our conceptions of decision making, management, information and systems: i.e. to abandon the neat, but artificial world of models, structures and univocal meanings, enter the world of sense making and experience in the everyday life of organizations, and call into the picture a hidden, but powerful presence: our existence, or Being-in-the-world. (p. 91).*

## **Forms of positive improvisation**

According to my findings, positive improvisation is to a large extent taken for granted amongst the managers. It is seen as a natural part of the manager’s role, one that ranks higher than any other aspect of organizing. This is particularly visible in the managers’ attitude of context-sensitivity in the sense that they seem to be continually searching for better ways to perform in situ even when there is no uninvited acuteness involved. It is important to note that as positive improvisation takes place in the same environment and emerges in the same manner as negative improvisation, the four traits presented in the previous section are also evident in positive improvisation. Positive improvisation, too, involves dealing with vague

and equivocal symbols, dealing with a multiplicity of concurrent issues in unpredictable and emotional situations. On occasion it can therefore be difficult to see where positive improvisation ends and negative improvisation begins, and the two types are often likely to express different facets of the same situations, where the one somehow prompts to the other. The theoretical difference is, however, that what I have identified as positive improvisation is *chosen voluntarily*, and concerns those aspects of everyday improvisation where there is a conscious *intention* or *attitude* to create novelty.

InSitu department managers exhibit positive improvisation in many forms. Firstly, they proclaim that they hold context-sensitivity as superior to systems thinking, and in practice, they follow up on this view even if spontaneity is sometimes hampered. Secondly, the managers are generally playful, innovative and enthusiastic with regard to improving and developing organizing processes. They make the most of situations, and regularly encourage free creative thinking, innovation and brainstorming in which they too take part. Dedicated to the novelty of becoming, they regularly seek new solutions, authentic understanding and new meaning. Aspects of positive improvisation are also evident in humour, where creativity is found in the very process of having fun, of being sarcastic, ironic or the like, rather serving the explicit purpose of improving work practice. Thus, humour has been identified as a very explicit process of improvising which uses ideas and physical artefacts as instruments.

### **Improvisation as utilizing elements of technical rationality**

Partly from personal reflections that have emerged over a number of years, partly from my empirical analysis, and partly from a study of practical philosophy, I have been inspired to look deeply into the relationship between technical rationality (Schön 1991) and improvisation. This has helped me to understand in greater detail how organizing practice is not a matter of either the one or the other, but essentially a grey matter where the one can *involve* the other. Finding that the two constructs, which were antagonisms in theory, were not so clearly separated in practice was an essential turning point in this research process. This was of particular significance since it inspired me to write more deeply about the interconnection, rather than the difference (i.e. Schön 1991), between technical rationality and improvisation. Moreover, the theoretical and empirical study of technical rationality taught me the significance of perception in determining what is functional and what is not. The insight from practical philosophy that a theory's worth is decided by its practical functionality (Dewey 1929; Joas 1996) was for me given a new depth when my analyses showed me the

importance of taking different perspectives on functionality: When something, say an administrative routine or a system, works, for *whom* does it work and for which *purpose*; from which *perspective*?

My empirical study suggests that technical rationality occupies a central role in everyday organizing amongst InSitu managers. Management reforms, massive system implementation, bureaucracy and budget processes are amongst the most important examples. Rather than following their prescriptions blindly, however, the InSitu managers use elements of technical rationality such as routines, structures, plans and directives as instruments in improvisation. Thus, in an *improvisatory pursuit of increased workability* a lot of effort goes into contextual adaptation and embellishment of administrative measures. Rather than linear decision-making this implies a process of problem-definition and understanding (Schön 1991; Ciborra 1999). Thus I would argue that the everyday trot of InSitu managers is more holistically covered by an improvisatory conceptual framework than by a technical-rational doctrine. This is in harmony with the observation that situations in which managers make sense and act are fluid and emergent and not objects of technical analysis.

Even if this study of organizing practice indicates that improvisation constitutes the dominant mode of action, the InSitu Hospital managers seem to lack a linguistic apparatus to help them realistically address such practice. Instead I have found a dominance of systems language (language-in-use), in which quantitative metaphors substitute for qualitative experiences. Moreover, a similar language seems to dominate the official channels, as there is much focus on systemizing and structuring for the sake of productivity and predictability. Considering the managers' own statements about their everyday life, which in general seem to favour context-sensitivity and improvisation, there are, expanding on the vocabulary of Argyris and Schön (1974, 1996), traces of paradox between the different ways to talk *about* practice (espoused theory) and *in* practice (language-in-use), and between actual practice (theory-in-use) and language-in-use. I propose that an improvisational vocabulary might contribute to reducing this paradox, as I see it as a practically realistic framework. As such the improvisational language might contribute to a greater understanding of organizing practice and facilitate the communication about such practice.



## **If not improvisation, then what?**

In my studies I might have found a predominance of inauthentic conversations in which the level of spontaneous commitment was minimal, and where improvisation would be a less functional idiom than, say, technical rationality. I might have found that InSitu managers are mainly isolated in private offices with little contact with physical and social surroundings, and with little concern for current and evolving organizational matters. Indeed, I might have found that managers categorically overlook interruptions, that they are not significantly influenced by emotions, and that they shun real-life contextuality. And I might have found an ideal in the espoused theory of the managers that systems must be obeyed blindly and routines reconstructed for their own sake. But to answer all of these speculations: I did not. Rather, I found that at InSitu Hospital everyday organizing is more a matter of finding out what is happening, and of making things work, than of solving predictable and familiar problems. In essence, everyday decision-making is about (positive and negative) improvisation rather than technical-rational linearity (Ciborra 1999). As a result the amount of decisions, the quantity of choices, is less interesting from a non-dualistic point of view than the quality of the genuine processes of spontaneous creativity leading up to such decisions.

In accordance with Ciborra (1999), Weick et al. (2005), and Purser and Petranker (2005) my view is that the objectivist version of technical rationality is not a good tool for understanding the emerging details of everyday organizing. From a sensemaking point of view, models of all kinds are tools used in improvisation, not frames within which improvisation takes place (Hatch 1999). In organizing systemic and structural frames are continually altered through reconstruction; in other words they are brought to life through improvisation. With regard to InSitu managers, they do not constantly improvise in the same sense as jazz musicians, however, as their arena is substantially different with regard to contextuality. Everyday organizing does not always reach conditions of pure improvisation and flow, but at times it does. Everyday organizing is *sufficiently* pure; it is sufficiently spontaneous and creative to be labelled improvisation (rather than something else). InSitu managers do not perform Managerialism; they improvise.

Could it be that another concept than improvisation is more suitable to describe the overall perspective on everyday organizing practice found in this study? In an attempt to answer, it is not my view that improvisation should be seen as apart from or as a substitute for all other

concepts. Rather, improvisation emerges and borrows from other concepts and highlights certain aspects more than others. Particularly important amongst those aspects is the hermeneutical, emotional, active, and externally oriented sensemaking typical of everyday organizing. Thus, rather than it being a question about the *term* improvisation, my point is primarily to focus and expand on the epistemic connotations of improvisation and to propose a particular definition. By this I do not attempt to provide some final conclusion to all aspects of practice, but to illuminate certain everyday traits that in my view are not sufficiently covered by existing literature on organizing. The aim is not to present a concept that covers “everything”, but to propose some alternative, fruitful and mind-sparking approaches. And with regard to organizing practice it is my conviction that improvisation offers new insights above all with respect to the run-of-the-mill details of everyday life, and the distinctive spontaneity and creativity that goes into dealing with these for the sake of understanding, of forming identity, and of making things work.

### **Some practical implications**

The potential of my study in terms of improving practice is indicated by the following quotation from Petranker (2005):

*With a greater ability to see stories in operation, managers have a wide range of options. At the level of the subjective future, they can consciously set about changing stories that are told both by others and by themselves, with the aim of changing the stories that organizational actors live. If they are willing to go deeper, they can explore changing their own lived story, learning to inhabit that story more fully, so that the implied truth of the way things are and what's happening comes more fully into view. Finally, they can let intention infuse their work and their perceptions so that it infuses their knowing as well. (Petranker 2005, p. 254).*

My methodological approach of narrative ethnography (Tedlock 2000) has allowed me to present such rich life-stories from which practitioners can increase their knowing. In particular, several practical implications for organizing can be suggested from my study. First of all, the findings call for a focus on the complex and evolving present of everyday life. Secondly, and as a consequence, good organizing is to be found in improvisation, context-sensitivity and spontaneous action. It is in the emotional, social and linguistic moment of becoming that there is a room for practical manoeuvring; in the present that solutions can be found and the future shaped. Good organizing is found in empathy, emotional understanding, continual openness and spontaneous action. How to go about this in practice is a matter of

contextual evaluation and perspective, as I see workability as a matter of subjective perception.

Thirdly, as practice only exists in the evolving present, it emerges in a profoundly unpredictable way. To match this complexity-in-the-becoming one must rely on hermeneutical forehaving, practical and theoretical experience, to provide a tool for spontaneous organizing. In order to become a skilled improviser, then, the manager should keep an open eye for everyday emergence, look for potentials in the present, and evaluate situations with a diagnostic eye facilitated by practical experience (Ciborra 1999; Purser and Petranker 2005; Petranker 2005). And as nothing can substitute for experience, one should maintain a flexible attitude of curiosity and openness, rather than relying on and following fixed models.

Following this line of reason a fourth point can be indicated: There are severe limits to organizing as blind technical-rational action (Managerialism). And the limits are set by the resistance provided by contextual (social and physical) elements. Not to question a system's validity implies seeing only one perspective, namely the one defined by the system. Thus, everyday complexity can seldom be resolved by taking systems for granted. Practical wisdom is not about silently accepting structures of reality, but seeing beyond them even if this seems unfeasible at the time (Ciborra 1999). Conversely, following the notion of technical rationality uncritically implicates playing the role of a cogwheel in a piece of machinery; it implies conducting systems thinking to the smallest detail whilst leaving matters of contextuality unquestioned. Only when technical rationality is contextually chosen as the right way to think and act in a specific situation does it become an attribute of wisdom.

The argument above implicitly implies a fifth point: that administrative objects like structures, routines or plans are tools of improvisation; not restraint jackets. They can provide valuable points of departure and creative inspiration, but should not be allowed to freeze the contextual gaze of improvisation. Being an improviser implies maintaining a humble approach to practice, allowing for surprises and "expecting the unexpected" (Weick and Sutcliffe 2001), but being prepared as far as possible. Preparation involves building experience and equipping the mental (and corporal) toolbox with a variety of structural objects, because from a practical philosophical perspective it is those objects that facilitate the mind's capacity to put together

new images; either because one has to (negative improvisation) or because one chooses to (positive improvisation).

As a sixth point, one should be careful about the language one chooses to describe everyday practice through. Systems metaphors, for instance, are powerful and seductive. It is easy to be tempted to view organizations as networks or systems, to see plan before context, and parts or wholes instead of processes. In practical philosophy, however, objects are temporary and emotionally infused, and should not be seen as ontological frames or constituents (Dewey 1929). Objects are instruments and must be breathed into life by practitioners (Ciborra 1999). “The improvising man” depicts that a routine, a structure, a system does not feel or live in any way - it is perpetually *brought to life*. An organizational structure does not get *emotional*, but it can only come to life via emotion (Hatch 1999). A technical-rational measure can therefore not be expected to capture the richness of emotional exchange. Organizing as seen through the lenses of “The improvising man” may provide a framework that is close to actual practice, allowing for a realistic, balanced and multifaceted conversation on everyday practice, and as a result of that, potentially contribute towards effective performance.

To summarise these implications, this study indicates that improvisation is found in organizing practice in ways not usually addressed. The fact that jazz musicians and actors improvise in their jobs is commonly accepted. Using these professions as metaphors applied to everyday organizing may be problematic, however, as they might create a biased image of improvisation. They might invite us to see improvisation only as something extraordinary; as a rare feature belonging to just a few groups of people. And indeed it is true that the degree of improvisation varies between contexts, and that some improvise more and better than others, but this is no reason why improvisation should be made into some exceptional attribute of certain contexts or professions; as if it rarely happens elsewhere. “The improvising man” suggests that improvisation is not an exceptional phenomenon, but a natural part of everyday work life for most people, something which is supported by my empirical study of managers.

## **Implications for research**

With more time on my hands I would have taken the results of this study back to the respondents for further discussion and validation. One way of seeing my project is as a starting phase of an action research project, and if subjected to further interaction between thought and action (Greenwood and Levin 1998), a more practically applicable result might emerge.

Research such as mine is about definition and framing; about building language and a way of seeing organizing-in-the-becoming. As such it provides windows for looking into the frequently grey everydayness that is easily taken for granted and not usually given much attention. It is my hope that the kind of research conducted in this project can contribute towards keeping some windows open, so as to facilitate an ongoing conversation on the difficult and complex nature of everyday organizing. And in that regard I would once again like to refer to Mary Jo Hatch (1999) by repeating that my project is less about doing something that has not been done before, than about doing something worth doing again.

As a last comment, having a rich empirical base from which to perform comparisons between contexts could create better underpinnings for the understanding of everyday improvisation. It is therefore my view that there is need of more empirical research on improvisation and how it relates to specific contexts. Both empirically and theoretically there might be facets of improvisation that need further elaboration, and I suspect that much could be gained from discussing in greater detail the role of improvisation in other research disciplines such as organizational learning, group dynamics, leadership and strategy. In that regard it is encouraging to notice that however young improvisation may be as an academic field, there is a living and growing interdisciplinary awareness of the phenomenon, and improvisation has already become the centre of attention for a variety of disciplines including organizing, leadership, pedagogy, music and philosophy.

## Bibliography

20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1984. *Paris, Texas*. [video]. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.

Alterhaug, B., 2004. Improvisation on a triple theme: Creativity, Jazz Improvisation and Communication. *Studia Musicologica Norvegica, Universitetsforlaget*, 30, pp.97-118.

Alvesson, M. and Skoldberg, K., 2008. *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Andersen, H., 2000. Funktionalisme. In H. Andersen and L. B. Kaspersen, eds. *Klassisk og moderne samfundsteori*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag, pp. 235-262.

Angrosino, M. V. and Mays de Pérez, K. A., 2000. Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 673-702.

Argyris C. and Schön D. A., 1974. *Theory in practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Argyris, C. and Schön, D. A., 1996. *Organizational Learning II: Theory, Method and Practice*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Audi, R. ed., 1995. *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barbalet, J. M., 1995. Climates of Fear and Socio-political Change. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 25(1), pp.15-33.

Barrett, F., 1998. Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations: Implications for Organizational Learning. *Organization Science*, 9(5), pp.605-622.

Barthes, R., 1991. *Mytologier*. Oslo: Gyldendal.

Bastien, D. T. and Hostager, T. J., 1988. Jazz as a process of organizational innovation. *Communication Research*, 15(5), pp.558-560.

Bastien, D. T. and Hostager, T. J., 1992. Cooperation as communicative accomplishment: A symbolic interaction analysis of an improvised jazz concert. *Communication Studies*, 43, pp.92-104.

Berliner, P., 1994. *Thinking in Jazz: the Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berger, P. and Luckmann, T., 1991. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.

Bergson, H., 1944. *Creative Evolution*. New York: Modern library.

- Bergson, H., 1992. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York: Carol Publishing Group.
- Blaug, M., 1992. *The Methodology of Economics: Or How Economists Explain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloom, P., 2004. *Natural born dualists: a talk with Paul Bloom*. [online]. Available at: [http://www.edge.org/3rd\\_culture/bloom04/bloom04\\_index.html](http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/bloom04/bloom04_index.html) [accessed 25 april 2007].
- Blumer, H., 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bonazzi, G., 1998. Between shock absorption and continuous improvement: Supervisors and technicians in a Fiat 'integrated factory'. *Work Employment and Society*, 12(2), pp.219-243.
- Bosworth, S. L. and Kreps, G. A., 1986. Structure as process: Organization and Role. *American Sociological Review*, 51, pp.699-715.
- Brown, J. S. and Duguid, P., 1991. Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation. *Organization Science*, 2(1), pp.40-57.
- Brown S. L. and Eisenhardt, K. M., 1997. The art of continuous change: linking complexity theory and time-paced evolution in relentlessly shifting organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42(1), pp.1-34.
- Brown, S. L. and Eisenhardt, K. M., 1998. *Competing on the Edge: Strategy as Structured Chaos*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Carlson, S., 1951. *Executive Behaviour: A Study of the Work Load and the Working Methods of Managing Directors*. Stockholm: C. A. Strömberg Aktiebolag, Publ.
- Carter, C. and Mueller, F., 2002. The 'long march' of the management modernizers: Ritual, rhetoric and rationality. *Human Relations*, 55(11), pp.1325-1354.
- Chappell, C., Rhodes, C., Solomon, N., Tennant, M. and Yates, L., 2003. *Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner – Pedagogy and Identity in Individual, Organizational and Social Change*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Chia, R., 1996. The problem of reflexivity in organizational research: Towards a postmodern science of organization. *Organization*, 3(1), pp.31-59.
- Christians, C. G., 2000. Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 133-155.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper and Row.

- Ciborra, C. U., 1996. The platform organization: recombining strategies, structures and surprises. *Organization Science*, 7(2), pp.103-118.
- Ciborra, C. U., 1999. Notes on improvisation and time in organizations. *Accounting Management and Information Technologies*, 9, pp.77-94.
- Clegg, S. R., 1975. *Power, Rule and Domination*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Clegg, S. R., Courpasson, D. and Phillips, N., 2006. *Power and Organizations*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cohen, M. D., March J. G. and Olsen, J. P., 1972. A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17(1), pp.1-25.
- Cooper, R. G. and Kleinschmidt, E. J., 1991. New Products: What separates winners from losers? In J. Henry and D. Walker, eds. *Managing Innovation*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 127-140.
- Crawford, C. M., 1991. *New Products Management*. 3rd ed. Boston: Irwin.
- Crossan, M. M. and Sorrenti, M., 1997. Making sense of improvisation. *Advances in strategic management*, 14, pp.155-180.
- Cunha, M. P. E. and Kamoche, K., 2001. Minimal Structures: From jazz improvisation to product innovation. *Organization studies*, 22(5), pp.733-755.
- Cunha, M. P. E. and Cunha, J. V. D., 2003. Organizational improvisation and change: two syntheses and a filled gap. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16(2), pp.169-185.
- Cyert, R. M. and March, J. G., 1992. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Malden Mass.: Blackwell.
- Czarniawska, B., 2005. Karl Weick: Concepts, style and reflection. *The Sociological Review*, 53(1), pp.267-268.
- Czarniawska, B., 1999. *Writing Management: Organization Theory as a Literary Genre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Czarniawska-Joerges, B. (1992) *Exploring Complex Organizations: A Cultural Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Czarniawska, B. and Sevón, G. eds., 1996. *Translating Organizational Change*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Daft, R. L., 2001. *Organization Theory and Design*. Cincinnati: South Western College Publishing.
- Damasio, A. R., 1994. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. London: Picador.



Damasio, A. R., 1999. *The Feeling of What Happens; Body and Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. London: Heineman.

Dehlin, E., 2003. Organiserings Irrganger: om kompleksitet og improvisasjon. Master's Thesis, Bodø Graduate School of Business.

Dehlin, E., 2005. Kan organisasjoner la være å føle: om emosjonens betydning for organisatorisk praksis. In F. Nyeng and G. Wennes, eds. *Kan organisasjoner føle?* Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, pp. 67-81.

Denzin, N. K., 1989. *Interpretive interactionism*. Newbury Park: CA, Sage.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. eds., 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

Descartes, R., 1996. *Om metoden*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

Dewey, J., 1917. The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy. In A. W. Moore, H. C. Brown, G. H. Mead, B. H. Bode, H. W. Stuart, J. H. Tufts and H. M. Kallen, eds. *Creative Intelligence. Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*. New York: Henry Holt, pp. 3-69.

Dewey, J., 1929. *Experience and Nature*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Dewey, J., 1934. *A Common Faith*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Doherty, R. W., 1998. Emotional contagion and social judgement. *Motivation and Emotion*, 22(3), pp.187-209.

Eisenberg, E., 1990. Jamming! Transcendence through Organizing. *Communication Research*, 17(2), pp.139-164.

Eisenhardt, K. M., 1985. Control: Organizational and economic approaches. *Management Science*, 31(2), pp.134-149.

Fauske, H., 2000. Neofunktionalisme. In H. Andersen and L. B. Kaspersen, eds. *Klassisk og moderne samfundsteori*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag, pp. 263-278.

Feldman, M. S., 2000. Organizational routines as a source of continuous change. *Organization Science*, 11(6), pp.611-629.

Fenton, N., Deacon, D., Bryman, A. and Birmingham, P., 1997. Sod Off and Find Us a Boffin: Journalists and the Social Science Conference. *The Sociological Review*, 45(1), pp.1-23.

Ferrell, O. C, Fraedrich J. and Ferrell, L., 2008. *Business Ethics; Ethical Decision Making and Cases*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Feyerabend, P., 2002. *Against Method*. London: Biddles.

- Fineman, S. ed., 1993. *Emotion in Organizations*. London: Sage.
- Fineman, S., 2000. Emotional Arenas Revisited. In S. Fineman, ed. *Emotion in Organizations*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 1-24.
- Fineman, S., 2003. Emotionalizing organizational learning. In M. Lyles, ed. *The Blackwell Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 557-575.
- Fineman, S., 2005. Appreciating emotion at work: paradigm tensions. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, 1(1), pp.4-19.
- Fineman, S., 2006. Emotion and organizing. In S. R. Clegg, D. Hardy, T. B. Lawrence and W. R. Nord, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, pp. 675-700.
- Fløistad, G., 1993. *Heidegger – en innføring i hans filosofi*. Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S.
- Fonseca, J., 2002. *Complexity and Innovation in Organizations*. London: Routledge.
- Fontana, A. and Frey, J. H., 2000. The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 645-673.
- Foucault, M., 1981. The Order of Discourse. In R. Young, ed. *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 48-78.
- Foucault, M., 1989. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Gadamer, H. G., 1975. *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury.
- Gallagher, S., 1992. *Hermeneutics and Education*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Geertz, C., 1973. *Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture*. In C. Geertz, ed. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3-32.
- Gergen, K., 1999. *An Invitation to Social Construction*. London: Sage.
- Giddens, A., 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A., 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilje, N. and Grimen, H., 1993. *Samfunnsvitenskapens forutsetninger: En innføring i samfunnsvitenskapens vitenskapsfilosofi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget AS.
- Gioia, D. A. and Mehra, A., 1996. Book review: Sensemaking in Organizations, by Karl E. Weick. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(4), pp.1226-1240.

- Goffman, E., 1969. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin Books.
- Greenwood, D. J. and Levin, M., 1998. *Introduction to Action Research*. London: Sage.
- Grennes, C. E., 1999. *Kommunikasjon i organisasjoner: Innføring i kommunikasjonsteori og kommunikasjonsteknikker*. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag AS.
- Griffin, D., 2002. *The Emergence of Leadership: Linking Self-organization and Ethics*. London: Routledge.
- Gupta, A. K. and Wilemon, D. L., 1990. Accelerating the Development of Technologically Based New Products. *California Management Review*, 32(2), pp.24-44.
- Hagen, R., 2000. *Rational Choice*. In H. Andersen and L. B. Kaspersen, eds. *Klassisk og moderne samfundsteori*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag, pp. 219-234.
- Hardy, C. and Clegg, S. R., 1996. Some Dare Call It Power. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy and W. R. Nord, eds. *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: Sage, pp. 622-641.
- Harre, R. and Parrott, G. W. eds., 1996. *The Emotions: Social, Cultural, and Biological Dimensions*. London: Sage.
- Hatch, M. J., 1997. Jazzing up the theory of organizational improvisation. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 14(1), pp.181-191.
- Hatch, M. J. and Weick, K. E., 1998. Critical resistance to the jazz metaphor. *Organization Science*, 9(5), pp.600-604.
- Hatch, M. J., 1999. Exploring the empty spaces in jazz: how improvisational jazz helps redescribe organizational structure. *Organization Studies*, 20(1), pp.75-100.
- Hatch, M. J., 2000. Jazz time. Paper presented at *the annual meeting of the Academy of Management*. Canada: Toronto.
- Hatch, M. J., 2004. *Organisasjonsteori: Moderne, symbolske og postmoderne perspektiver*. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag.
- Heidegger, M., 1996. *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hellesnes, J., 2001. Sosial konstruktivisme i vitenskapsteorien. *Nytt norsk tidsskrift*, 2, pp.132-148.
- Heron, J. and Reason, P., 2001. The practice of co-operative inquiry: research “with” rather than “on” people. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury, eds. *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage, pp. 179-188.
- Hochschild, A., 1983. *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Husserl, E. (1962) *Ideas*. New York: Collier Books.

- James, W., 2007. *The Principles of Psychology*. New York: Cosimo.
- Janesick, V. J., 2000. The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design: Minuets, Improvisations, and Crystallization. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 379-399.
- Joas, H., 1993. *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Joas, H., 1996. *The Creativity of Action*. Cornwall: Hartnolls.
- Joas, H., 1997. *G. H. Mead. A Contemporary Re-examination of his Thought*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Joas, H., 1999. *Action Is the Way in Which Human Beings Exist in the World: Conversation with Professor Hans Joas at Freie Universität Berlin, September 21 1999, Claus Otto Scharmer*. [online]. Available at: <http://www.dialogonleadership.org/Joas-1999.html> [accessed 17 March 2006].
- Johne, A. and Snelson, P., 1990. *Successful Product Innovation*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Johnson, P. and Duberly, J., 2000. *Understanding Management Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kamoche, K. N., Cunha, M. P. and Cunha, J. V., 2002. *Organizational Improvisation*. London: Routledge.
- Kanter, R. M., 2002. Strategy as improvisational theatre. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Winter, 43(2), pp.76-81.
- Kernfeld, B., 1995. *What to Listen for in Jazz*. Yale University: New Haven, CT.
- King, N., 1994. The qualitative research interview. In C. Cassell and G. Symon, eds. *Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 14-36.
- Kotter J. P., 1986. *The General Managers*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kuhn, T. S., 1996. *The Scientific Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 3rd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kurke, L. B. and Aldrich, H. E., 1983. Mintzberg was right! A replication and extension of The Nature of Managerial Work. *Management Science*, 29(8), pp.975-983.
- Kvaløy, S. S., 2006. Improvisasjon og musikalsk kreativitet – et spørsmål om kompleksitet. In K. Steinsholt and H. Sommerro, eds. *Improvisasjon: Kunsten å sette seg selv på spill*. Oslo: Damm & Søn AS, pp. 95-113.
- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Large, W., 2002. Impersonal existence: a conceptual genealogy of the “there is” from Heidegger to Blanchot and Levinas. *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Routledge, 7(3), pp.131-142.
- Latour, B., 1986. The powers of association. In J. Law, ed. *Power, Action and Belief*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 264-280.
- Latour, B., 1987. *Science in Action*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E., 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Leybourne, S., 2006. Improvisation within the Project management of Change: Some observations from UK Financial Services. *Journal of Change Management*, 6(4), pp.365-381.
- Lewin, K., 1951. *Field theory in social science; selected theoretical papers*. D. Cartwright, D., ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lewin, R. and Regine, B., 2000. *The Soul at Work*. London: Orion Business Books.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G., 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills: CA, Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G., 2000. *Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences*. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 163-188.
- Magala, S. J., 1997. The making and unmaking of sense. *Organisation Studies*, 18(2), pp.317-338.
- March, J. G. and Simon, H., 1993. *Organizations*. New York: John Wiley.
- March, J. G., 1994. *A Primer on Decision Making. How Decisions Happen*. New York: Free Press.
- March, J. G. and Olsen, J. P., 2004. *The logic of appropriateness*. Arena - Centre for European Studies. [Working paper 09]. Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Marples, D. L., 1967. Studies of Managers – A Fresh Start? *Journal of Management Studies*, 4(3), pp.282-299.
- Mayo, E., 1945. *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*. New York: Macmillan.
- McDonald, S., 2005. Studying actions in context: a qualitative shadowing method for organizational research. *Qualitative Research*, 5(4), pp.455-473.
- Mead, G. H., 1967. *Mind, Self, & Society*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M., 2002. *Phenomenology of Perception: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.

- Milne, A. A., 1992. *Winnie the Pooh*. New York: Puffin Books.
- Miner, A. S., Moorman, C., and Bassoff, P., 1996. *Organizational Improvisation and New Product Development*. Unpublished Manuscript. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.
- Mintzberg, H., 1970. Structured Observation as a Method to Study Managerial Work. *Journal of Management Studies*, 7(1), pp.87-104.
- Mintzberg, H., 1973. *The Nature of Managerial Work*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Mintzberg, H., 1994. Rounding out the manager's job. *Sloan Management Review Management Studies*, 36(1), pp.11-26.
- Mirvis, P. H., 1998. Variations on a theme: Practice Improvisation. *Organization Science*, 9(5), pp.586-592.
- Mjølborg Jørgensen, K. and Dehlin, E., 2006. *Identity and the management project*. Paper presented in the 7th International Conference on Organizational Discourse: Identity, Ideology and Idiosyncrasy. Netherlands, Amsterdam, 26- 27 July 2006.
- Morgan, G., 1998. *Organisasjonsbilder*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget AS.
- Morgan, G., 1986. *Images of organization*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.
- Molander, B., 1996. *Kunnskap i handling*. Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos.
- Moorman, C. and Miner, A., 1995. *Walking the tightrope: Improvisation and information in new product development*, Report No. 95 – 101. Cambridge, MA: Marketing science Institute.
- Moorman, C. and Miner, A., 1998a. The Convergence of Planning and Execution: Improvisation in New Product Development. *Journal of Marketing*, 62(3), pp.1-20.
- Moorman, C. and Miner, A., 1998b. Organizational Improvisation and Organizational Memory. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(4), pp.698-723.
- Mueller, F. and Carter, C., 2005. The Scripting of Total Quality Management within its Organizational Biography. *Organization Studies*, 26(2), pp.221-247.
- Mueller, F. and Carter, C., 2007. We are all managers now: Managerialism and professional engineering in UK electricity utilities. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 32(1-2), pp.181-195.
- Nelson, R. R. and Winter, S. G., 1982. *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Nicolaisen, R. F., 2003. *Å være underveis: Introduksjon til Heideggers filosofi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Nilsen, F. S., 1996. *Nærmere kommer du ikke: Håndbok i antropologisk feltarbeid*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

- Noël, A., 1989. Strategic Cores and Magnificent Obsessions: Discovering Strategy Formation Through Daily Activities of CEOs. *Strategic Management Journal*, 10(special issue), pp.33-49.
- Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H., 1995. *The Knowledge-creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norén, L., 1995. *Tolkande företagsekonomisk forskning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Nyeng, F., 2000. *Det autentiske mennesket – med Charles Taylors syn på menneskevitenskap og moral*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Nyeng, F., 2004. *Vitenskapsteori for økonomer*. Oslo: Abstrakt Forlag.
- Nyeng, F. and Wennes, G. (eds.), 2005. *Kan organisasjoner føle?* Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Nyeng, F., 2006. *Følelser i filosofi, vitenskap og dagligliv*. Oslo: Abstrakt Forlag.
- Næss, A., 1984. *Logikk og metodelære*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Okrent, M., 1988. *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics*. London: Cornell University Press.
- Orlikowski, W. J., 1996. Improvising Organizational Transformation Over Time: A Situated Change Perspective. *Information Systems Research*, 7(1), pp.63-92.
- Orlikowski, W. J. and Hofman, J. D., 1997. An Improvisational Model for Change Management: The Case of Groupware Technologies. *Sloan Management Review*, 38(2), pp.11-21.
- Orlikowski, W. J., 2002. Knowing in Practice: Enacting a Collective Capability in Distributed Organizing. *Organization Science*, 13(3), pp.249-273.
- Orr, J., 1987a. Narratives at Work. Story Telling as Cooperative Diagnosis Activity. *Field Service Manager*, 12(3), pp.47-60.
- Orr, J., 1987b. *Talking about Machines: Social Aspects of Expertise, Report for the Intelligent Systems Laboratory*. Xerox Palo Alto Research Center: Palo Alto, CA.
- Orr, J., 1990a. *Talking about Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. PH. D., Cornell University.
- Orr, J., 1990b. Sharing Knowledge, Celebrating Identity: War Stories and Community Memory in a Service Culture. In D. S. Middleton and D. Edwards, eds. *Collective Remembering: Memory in Society*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, pp. 169-189.
- Ouchi, W. G., 1979. A conceptual framework for the design of organizational control mechanisms. *Management Science*, 25(9), pp.833-848.

Ouchi, W. G., 1980. Markets, bureaucracies, and clans. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25(1), pp.129-141.

Pascale, R. T., Millemann, M. and Gioja, L., 2000. *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business*. New York: Crown Business.

Park, P., 2001. Knowledge and participatory research. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury, eds. *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. London: Sage, pp. 81-90.

Parrott, W. G. and Harré, R., 1996. Some complexities in the study of emotions. In R. Harré and W. G. Parrott, eds. *The Emotions*. London: Sage, pp. 1-20.

Peirce, C. S., 1966a. *Collected Papers. Vol. VII*. Harvard: Belknap Press.

Peirce, C. S., 1966b. *Collected Papers. Vol. VIII*. Harvard: Belknap Press.

Peirce, C. S., 1974a. *Collected Papers. Vol. V*. Harvard: Belknap Press.

Peirce, C. S., 1974b. *Collected Papers. Vol. VI*. Harvard: Belknap Press.

Pentland, B. T. and Rueter, H. H., 1994. Organizational routines as grammars of action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(3), pp.484-510.

Perlow, L. A., 1999. The time famine: Toward a sociology of work time. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(1), pp.57-81.

Perlow, L. A., 1998. Boundary Control: The social ordering of work and family time in a high-tech corporation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 43(2), pp.328-357.

Petranker, J., 2005. The When of Knowing. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 41(2), pp.241-259.

Pitsis, T., Clegg, S. R., Marosszeky, M. and Thekla, R., 2003. Constructing the Olympic Dream: A Future Perfect Strategy of Project Management. *Organization Science*, 14(5), pp.574-590.

Pitsis, T. S. and Clegg, S. R., 2007. We live in a political world: The Paradox of Managerial Wisdom. In E. Kessler and J. Bailey, eds. *The Handbook of Managerial and Organizational Wisdom*. Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage, pp. 399-421.

Poggi, G., 1965. A Main Theme of Contemporary Sociological Analysis: Its Achievements and Limitations. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 16(4), pp.283-294.

Popper, K. R., 1981. *Fornuft og rimelighet som tenkemåte*. Oslo: Dreyer Forlag.

Psathas, G., 1995. *Conversation analysis*. Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage.

Prigogine, I. and Stengers, I., 1984. *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: The Free Press.



Purser, R. E. and Petranker, J., 2005. Unfreezing the Future: Exploring the Dynamic of Time in Organizational Change. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 41(2), pp.182-203.

Russell, B., 1995. *History of Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

Sartre, J. P., 1981. *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821-1857*. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schein, E. H., 1992. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. H., 1996. Culture – The Missing Concept In Organization Studies. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41(2), pp.229-240.

Schuller, G., 1986. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schön, D. A., 1987. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schön, D. A., 1991. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*. London: Ashgate Publishing.

Schwandt, T. A., 1996. Farewell to criteriology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(1), pp.58-72.

Schwandt, T. A., 2000. Three epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, and Social Constructrionism. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 189-213.

Scott, W. R., 1981. *Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Scott, W. R., 2001. *Institutions and Organizations*. 2nd ed. London: Foundations for Organizational Science: A Sage Publications Series.

Searle, J. R., 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. London: Penguin Books.

Senge, P., 1990. *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.

Senge, P., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J. and Flowers, B. S., 2004. *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*. Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning.

Shütz, A., 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press.

Silverman, D., 2002. Analyzing Talk and Text. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 821-834.

Simon, H. A., 1968. *Administrative Behaviour: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization*. 2nd ed. New York: The Free Press.

- Sinclair, J., 1987. *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*. London: William Collins Sons & Co.
- Skjervheim, H., 1996. *Deltakar og tilskodar og andre essays*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Skjervheim, H., 2001. *Objectivism and the Study of Man*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Snyder, N. and Glueck, W. F., 1980. How managers plan: The analysis of managers' activities. *Long Range Planning*, 13(1), pp.70-76.
- Solomon, R. C., 2002. Back to Basics: on the very idea of "basic emotions". *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 23(2), pp.115-143.
- Spradley, J. P., 1980. *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.
- Stacey, R. D., Griffin, D. and Shaw, P., 2000. *Complexity and Management: Fad or Radical Challenge to Systems Thinking?* London: Routledge.
- Stacey, R. D., 2001. *Complex Responsive Processes in Organizations: Learning and Knowledge Creation*. London: Routledge.
- Stacey R. D., 2003. *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics: The Challenge of Complexity*. 4th ed. London: Prentice Hall.
- Stake, R. E., 2000. Case Studies. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 435-454.
- Stewart, R., 1967. *Managers and their Jobs*. London: Cox & Wyman.
- Strauss, A. L., 1993. *Continual Permutations of Action*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Styhre, A., 2003. *Understanding Knowledge Management – Critical and Postmodern Perspectives*. Oslo: Abstrakt Forlag AS.
- Sutcliffe, K. M., 1994. What executives notice: Accurate perceptions in top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(5), pp.1360-1378.
- Svendsen, L. F. H., 2003. *Hva er filosofi?* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Taylor, C., 1985. *Philosophical Papers I and II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C., 1998. *Autentisitetens etikk*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag.
- Taylor, F. W., 1967. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Tedlock, B., 2000. Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 455-486.

- Tengblad, S., 2002. Time and space in managerial work. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 18, pp.543-565.
- Tengblad, S., 2006. Is there a 'New Managerial Work'? A Comparison with Henry Mintzberg's Classic Study 30 Years Later. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(7), pp.1437-1461.
- Thompson, M., 2005. Structural and epistemic Parameters in Communities of Practice. *Organization Science*, 16(2), pp.151-164.
- Tsoukas, H. and Chia, R., 2002. On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking Organizational Change. *Organization Science*, 13(5), pp.567-582.
- Tulku, T., 1994. *Dynamics of Time and Space: Transcending Limits on Knowledge*. Berkeley: CA, Dharma Publishing.
- Urwick, L., 1934. *The Function of Administration with Special Reference to the Work of Henri Fayol*. In L. Gulick and L. Urwick, eds. *Papers on the Science of Administration*. New York: Institute of Public Administration, pp. 115-130.
- Verbeke, W., 1997. Individual differences in emotional contagion of salespersons: its effects on performance and burnout. *Psychology and Marketing*, 14(6), pp.617-36.
- Vermersch, P., 1999. *Introspection as practice*. In: F. Varela and J. Shear, eds. *The View from Within: First-person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*. Exeter, Imprint Academic, pp. 17-42.
- Vetlesen, A. J., 2007. *Hva er Etikk*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Vidich, A. J. and Lyman, S. M., 2000. Qualitative Methods: Their History in Sociology and Anthropology. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 37-84.
- Weber, M., 2002. *Makt og byråkrati*. Norway: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.
- Webster, N., 1994. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Gramercy Books.
- Weick, K. E., 1974. Review: The Nature of Managerial Work. By Henry Mintzberg. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 19(1), pp.111-118.
- Weick, K. E., 1979. *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. 2nd ed. New York. McGraw-Hill.
- Weick, K. E., 1989. Organized improvisation: 20 years of organizing. *Communication Studies*, 40, pp.241-248.
- Weick, K. E., 1993a. The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(4), pp.628-652.

- Weick, K. E., 1993b. Organizational redesign as improvisation. In G. P. Huber and W. H. Glick, eds. *Organizational Change and Redesign*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 346-379.
- Weick, K. E., 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Weick, K. E., 1998. Improvisation as a mindset for organizational analysis. *Organization Science*, 9(5), pp.543-555.
- Weick, K. E., 1999. The aesthetic of imperfection in organizations. In M. P. Cunha and C. A. Marques, eds. *Readings in Organization Science*. Lisbon, ISPA, pp. 541-564.
- Weick, K. E., 2001. *Making Sense of the Organization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Weick, K. E. and Sutcliffe, K., 2001. *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. and Obstfeld, D., 2005. Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16(4), pp.409-421.
- Weick, K. E. and Quinn, R. E., 1999. Organizational change and development. *Annual Reviews Psychology*, 50(1), pp.361-386.
- Weisbord, M., 1988. *Productive Workplace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weitzman, E. A., 2000. Software and Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, pp. 803-820.
- Wenger, E., 2004. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wheatley, M. J., 1999. *Leadership and the New Science*. Revised edition. San Francisco: Berrett and Koehler.
- Whyte, W. F., 1943. *Street Corner Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Winch, P., 1959. *The idea of a Social Science*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1992. *Om visshet*. Stockholm: Thales.
- Wittgenstein, L., 1994. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Wittgenstein, L., 2001. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. New York: Routledge.
- Wyller, T., 1996. *Etikkens historie: En systematisk fremstilling*. Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag AS.
- Zack, Michael H., 2000. Jazz Improvisation and Organizing: Once More from the Top. *Organization Science*, 11(2), pp.227-234.

Zirger, B. J. and Maidique, M. A., 1990. A model of New Product Development: an empirical test. *Management Science*, 36(7), pp.867-883.

Zuboff, S., 1988. *In the Age of the Smart Machine: the Future of Work and Power*. Oxford: Heinmann.

Ödman, P. J., 1979. *Tolkning, förståelse, vetande. Hermeneutik i teori och praktik*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.