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Unwrapping assumptions

A dialogical approach to communication

Master Thesis in Counseling

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The range of what we see and do

Is limited by what we fail to notice.

And because we fail to notice,

There is little we can do

To Change

Until we notice

How failing to notice

Shapes our thoughts and deeds

- R.D. Laing

In modern culture men and women are able to interact with one another in many ways: they can sing, dance or play together with little difficulty but their ability to talk together about subjects that matter deeply to them seems invariable (sic) to lead to dispute, division, and often to violence. In our view this condition points to a deep pervasive defect in the process of human thought

- David Bohm -

Just as food and water flow through the microorganisms, plants, and animals of an ecological niche, thought flows from our surroundings through us and back to our surroundings, changing us as we give voice to it and changing our surroundings as those words emerge from us

- William Isaacs -

I am learning about myself from moment to moment, and the myself is extraordinarily vital; it is living, moving; it has no beginning and no end. When I say, "I know myself", learning has come to an end in accumulated knowledge. Learning is never cumulative; it is a movement of knowing which has no beginning and no end

- Krishnamurti -

Abstract

This thesis investigates how David Bohm's idea of dialogue could function as means to prompt awareness of hidden assumptions, and how this impacts communication for people involved. This is explored through the research question: "*Can dialogue be a leverage to prompt awareness of underlying assumptions*? And by extension: *Would people experience this to benefit their communication?"* To answer this question a dialogical workshop with four participants was conducted in the business environment. The project utilized a qualitative methodology, and data was gathered by the use of semi-structured interviews with the four participants' from the workshop. Data from these interviews were analyzed by using the constant comparative method, which led to the categories "views on communication", "impact", "the workshop" and "time". The discussion of these categories are mainly grounded in the ideas of David Bohm, which is supported and extended by amongst Chris Argyris, Thomas Jordan, Jack Mezirow and Michael Poutiane. Findings in this suggest dialogue to hold the potential of being a leverage to prompt awareness of underlying assumptions, while also proposing that more extensive research is needed to say something substantial on how this impact peoples communication. Based on the findings there is also presented a model of how such processes plays out.

Foreword

My entrance into the field of counseling was in many ways hard and brutal. It forced me to rethink ideas I previously had taken for granted, and call into question the noble certainties that were guiding my life. In essence it was a brutal confrontation with the core assumptions I was navigating by, but wasn't aware I had (I guess Robert Kegan would say my assumptions had me). This awakening changed my thinking dramatically, and had huge impact on my awareness around my style of communicating. My dawning realization of how much thought dictates our reality evoked a growing interest for the field of communication, and dialogue in particular. It was when I encountered David Bohm's notion of dialogue the puzzle finally started to make sense. His ideas struck me as so full of meaning and insight that I more than once had to lie down and think for several hours after reading just a few pages. This thesis is a direct offspring from my admiration of his ideas and work on communication, dialogue, thought and assumptions.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The thing that mostly gets in the way of dialogue is holding to assumptions, and defending them
David Bohm

Communication matters. It's the central glue that binds together every human contact and interaction. As a consequence we possess great understanding and insight into the field of communication, through thorough research, theory and practice. However, across the line we see infinite examples on failures and breakdowns in communication. Between nations and cultures, in organizations, and even within individuals[1]. Often we find ourselves caught in a web where we bump into misunderstandings and misinterpretations, often leading us to situations we don't understand or don't know what got us there (Bohm, 1996). Even our best intentions may backfire. I find this incoherence a powerful paradox.

According to Ellinor and Gerard (1998) "millions of dollars are lost every day simply because of the limited and ineffective ways we have learned to communicate" (p. 9). The costs of poor communication are consequently enormous. Considering the ramifications of continuing this path it becomes evident that the need to develop capacities to deal with breakdowns in communication is critical, both in organizations and for individuals. Some scholars suggest that what's needed is a fundamental shift in mindset, a more comprehensive awareness about the involvements of communication (Bohm, 1996; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Scharmer, 2007.) Basically this involves elevating consciousness.

David Bohm (1996) had a firm belief that becoming more aware of the assumptions spinning around in our unconscious would heal most of the problems humans face. He states that if assumptions are oblivious spinning around in the background, it is hard to be fully aware of the extent to which they guide our thinking and actions. And, consequently, if we aren't aware we won't be in a position to take the governing assumptions in perspective and evaluate them. He believes such underlying assumptions are of great relevance for the way we communicate, with ourselves, and others. He points out that our mental models and underlying assumptions are highly reflected in the way we interact. What we choose to say and how we behave is a direct consequence of the assumptions that are governing our mind.

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[1] Psychotherapist Carl Rogers often claimed "the whole task of psychotherapy is the task of dealing with failure in communication" (Rogers, 1995, p. 330). For an emotionally maladjusted person, communication has broken down within himself. And because this their communication with others suffers (ibid.).

So, changing the way we think may have enormous impact on the way we talk; it transforms the quality of our conversations. "In this lies some of the immense potential of dialogue" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 310). Consequently, displaying and unwrapping these assumptions, through the principle and practice of dialogue, becomes the means for gaining access to our inner operating system that guides our actions and communication (Bohm, 1996). He invites us to rethink communication through the lens of dialogue, and propose a shift in the way we approach and engage in communication.

1.1 Research question

Due to the presented perspectives the question becomes insistent: *Can dialogue be a leverage to prompt awareness of underlying assumptions*? And by extension: *Would people experience this to benefit their communication?*
To investigate this question I conducted a workshop in a business arena, grounded in Bohm's (1996) ideas of dialogue. After some time I investigated the participants experience of this workshop by interviewing them; how did they experience the workshop, and did they noticed any benefits from this, in terms of communication?

1.2 Dialogue defined

"Dialogue has suffered from the tendency to be defined so generally that it becomes a synonym for almost all human contact" (Stewart & Zediker, 2000, p. 224). For Bohm, however, dialogue "is a particular way of conversing that creates new meaning which in turn leads to new understanding" (Leahy, 2001, p. 55). This involves opening up for "transforming not only the relationship between people, but even more, the very nature of consciousness in which these relationships arise (Bohm, 1985, p. 175). Eventually it's about "better communication that must ultimately come from clearer thinking, a whole new *way* of thinking" (Leahy, 2001, p. 55). It is as such the term will be understood in this thesis. I will extract and deepen this understanding further throughout the theory chapter.

1.3 Relevance for helping practices

Many organizations spend vast sums of money to improve their communication (Ellinor & Gerrard (1998). Often these take form as seminars that present specific criterion for which one should followed to fix breakdowns in communication (ibid.) However, as the theory in this thesis suggests, there are no such thing as quick fix to heal our problems of communicating. What's needed is a shift in mindset. Such change is by its nature an *adaptive* challenge (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Thus, transforming our mental operating system opens for the field of counseling and other helping professions, such as coaching, to help facilitate this process.

1.4 Looking ahead

To pave way for my research question, I first present an overview of theoretical perspectives that will illuminate my research. The next chapter describes my methodological approach, and also discusses methodological issues and concerns. In chapter four I take a closer look at the workshop. Here I describe how it was executed, my thoughts and intentions, as well as my personal experience. I then present my findings, and my analysis of them, before I finally discuss these findings. At the very end I summarize the essence of the thesis, suggests some conclusions, and propose how an expanded understanding of the theme may be reached through further research.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical foundation

In the process of thought there should be awareness of its own movement, of the intention to think and of the result, which that thinking produces. By being more attentive, we can be aware of how thought produces a result outside ourselves. And then maybe we could also be attentive to the results it produces within ourselves.

David Bohm

In this chapter I will present the theoretical perspectives this thesis is based upon. The main perspective in this regard is David Bohm's vision for dialogue. I have chosen to go in depth to this matter mainly because I have a deep interest and belief in his ideas, and consequently I feel it is here I have best foundation to provide something substantial. Also, due to the frames of this thesis, trying to cover a broad spectrum of things could create a risk of being shallow and superficial. In this regard all the presented perspectives relate or expand Bohms dialogical ideas.

First I conceptualize the nature of our time, and how this impacts organizations. Next I show how working with mental models seems to be critical if we are to meet the demands our modern world provides, and what this entails. Then I present Bohm and his idea of dialogue, while also using Thomas Jordan to expand this notion. At the end I sketch how Bohm's vision of dialogue often plays out in peoples mind.

2.1 Setting the context

"The most interesting and highest-leverage action for leadership is to expand the way we think"
William Isaacs

A sweep overview reveals that we live in a time in which globalization, constant change and growing complexity is the major hallmark. And "while specific future developments are increasingly difficult to predict, we can make two predications with great certainty: The pace of change will continue to increase, and the level of complexity and interdependence will continue to grow" (Joiner & Josephs, 2007, p. 5). However, faced with the uncertainty this condition carries, many organizations struggle to adapt to such turbulence. Yet, although most larger companies acknowledge the need for capacities to deal with rapidly changing conditions, there is paradoxically very little attention given to understanding the fundamental processes *behind* such capacities (ibid.). Consequently, because of the extremely turbulent environment in business, there are growing needs to develop agility skills that enable

organizations to keep pace with the ever-changing scenario that our time provides. Organizations of today cannot ignore the escalating challenges they are confronting from "expanding levels of complexity and the increasing speed of modern times" (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p. 17.)

In order to cope with the pace of change and escalating complexity Peter Senge (1990) advocates for a need to develop what he refers to as "learning organizations". The term points here to "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured" (Senge, 1990, p.3). And since any organization is made up by the sum of individuals this needs to grow from an individual level. "Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs" (Senge, 1990. p.139).

2.2 Mental models and theories of action

The key to unlocking the potential of being a learning organization, according to Senge, starts with taking ones current mental models as object for scrutiny. He defines mental models as "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p.8). In other words, these are the mental road maps we act according to. They are our theories of action. Argyris elaborates:

> Designing action requires that agents construct a simplified representation of the environment and a manageable set of causal theories that prescribe how to achieve the intended consequences. It would be very inefficient to construct such representations and theories from scratch in each situation. Rather, agents learn a repertoire of concepts, schemas and strategies, and they learn programs for drawing from their repertoire to design representations for unique situations. We speak of such design programs as *theories of action*. (Argyris, Putman & Smith, 1985, p. 81).

Although such theories highly affect thinking and actions, they are often of tacit character. "Hence, individuals are not aware of these background assumptions and therefore the latter are not easily accessible" (Schultz, 2008, p.460). Consequently, people are often unaware of the assumptions behind their thinking processes. This taken into account, people are often unaware of the governing assumptions behind their thinking, which in turn manifests in the

way they act. In this regard Senge (1990) notes that, due to the environmental complexity, many of the problems we face are due to precisely these mental systems we operate by. He insinuates that many problems seem more complex than we are. But, our current mindset does not match this complexity. This is causing a growing pressure to evolve, to expand and scale our mental operating system to match the complexity in the world (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). However, since these problems cannot be solved within existing skills and tools we need to cultivate more expansive ways of operating[2]. This starts with unearthing our governing assumptions, taking them as objects for reflection:

> The discipline of mental models starts with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny. It also includes the ability to carry on learningful conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking. (Senge, 1990, p.9).

2.2 Assumptions

"To *assume* makes an *ass* out of *u* and *me"*

Assumptions are vital. They play a natural part of helping the mind process and sort out information. "They are the building blocks we assemble to make sense of our world and support our mental models, or paradigms, we live within" (Elinor & Gerard, 1998. p.78). Reasoning anew in every new situation, search through every possible response and take all relevant information into consideration, would be an impossible task. Consequently we develop personal "theories of action" (Argyris, 1991). That is, a set of rules and assumptions we implement and design into our own behavior, that also serves to make sense out of others behaviors and actions (ibid.). Assumptions, in other words, are the compass we navigate by. In this regard, assumptions essentially become an indispensable tool that helps us attach meaning to our experiences, so we can keep a coherent and stable view of the world we encounter.

Needless to say, assumptions are highly useful. However, if we shift our angle and look at it in a broader perspective we may see that they simultaneously can be very limiting. Since assumptions are of such importance for our navigation in the world, we generally don't offer

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[2] As Albert Einstein so famously noted, problems cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness that created them.

them too much of our attention. As so, they have taken an automatic and habitual position, and we rarely question them. Hence, our assumptions keep spinning around in our subconscious. Our "theories of actions become so taken for granted that people don't even realize they are using them" (Argyris, 1991, p.7). Consequently they often guide our actions without our realization (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Ladder of inference

As a way of describing how assumptions influence actions, Chris Argyris (1990) offers a model (Figure 1)[3] that illustrates how our unconscious mind processes information, shown through six rungs. The Ladder of inference visualizes thought's movement from receiving "data", manufacturing assumptions, and how we take action based on these. Put on the edge it indicates that we habitually jump directly to conclusions based on what we see and perceive. And typically this happens in nanoseconds with the speed of light, and often without our realization (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). However, in many situations this leads to misguided beliefs (Senge, 1994).
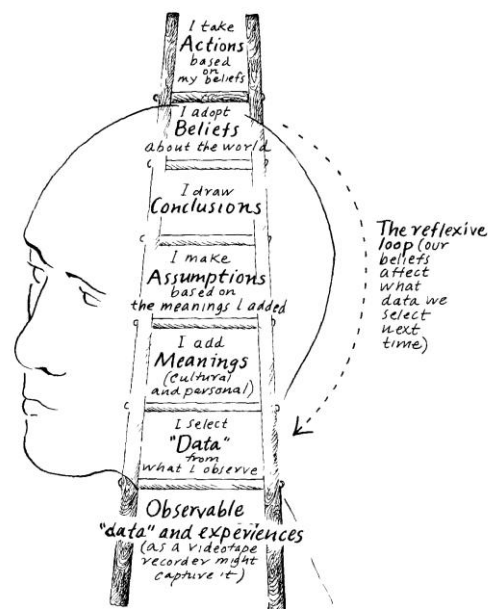

Figure 1: The ladder of inference

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[3] The ladder of inference come in various forms and versions, however they all originate from Argyris original model and thus must be seen as complementary and supplementary to the original idea. The model presented here is adapted from Peter Senge´s (1994) "The fifth discipline fieldbook".

On the bottom is the first level, which is all observable data. It may be helpful to think of this as all the information a video camera would capture. This is objective facts that not (yet) have been biased by our interpretation. However, this is too much data for the human mind to process, so we are forced to choose some data and ignore the rest. To make sense of a situation we then add *meaning* to our observations. This may for instance be grounded in cultural norms or personal experiences. From there we make assumptions based on the added meaning. These assumptions are pure guesswork designed to fill the gaps in my knowledge so that we can understand and make sense out of a situation. Now we may believe we understand the situation, and consequently we also draw conclusions based on this understanding. If we observe something that correlates with the conclusion several times, it may evolve into general beliefs. And if we believe something, we most likely will take action according to those beliefs.

What is problematic about the ladder is actually not the process itself. The problem is due to that it often spins around in our sub conscious, guiding our actions, without our realization. "We have forgotten that we are wearing glasses and that they impacts our result" (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p. 88). We are in other words looking *through* our assumption, without awareness of its existence (Argyris, 1991). As this process operates in the background it often creates recursive loops. One is from beliefs to selected data, also known as confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998). We typically tend to notice information that confirms our beliefs, and ignore the rest. Also, based on our beliefs we normally take corresponding actions. This may lead to situations that create more observable data that confirms our beliefs, which creates a second loop. If we're not aware of these processes existents, they may grow into a vicious self-inducing cycle.

Obviously we don't want to get caught in the ladders' web. The models intention is that gaining awareness about it could foster a capacity to climb down the ladder by inquiring into one's assumptions, looking *at* them and questioning them. And such awareness would itself be curative (De Mello, 1990; Galway, 2000). Chris Argyris (1991) referred to this ability as double loop learning. A relevant question here is how to stimulate and cultivate this capacity. One way to move beyond such limiting tendencies may be through the practice of dialogue (Schein, 1993; Senge, 1990).

2.3 David Bohm - Attentive awareness

The point is: thought produces results, but thought says it didn't do it. And that's a problem
 David Bohm

The core of David Bohm´s ideas may be summed up in one simple sentence: Be aware of thought. He holds that the main problem for our difficulties in communicating is rooted in our manner of thinking, claiming that we generally don't notice how much thought plays a role in the way we experience the world (Anderson, Baxter & Cissna, 2004). We are constantly creating situations we don't intend and that gives us trouble, however we don't seem to realize that it is our deeper hidden intentions that are producing these results. "I'm saying the reason we don't see the source of our problems is that the means by which we try to solve them are the source. I'm saying that the source is basically in thought" (Bohm, 1994, p. 2).

According to Bohm we have lost proprioception[4] at the level of thought; we don't see how our thinking relates to our actions and the results these actions produces.

> We could say that practically all the problems of the human race are due to the fact that thought is not proprioceptive…though hast to be in some sense aware of its consequences, and presently thought is not sufficiently aware of its consequence (Bohm, 1996, p. 28).

Reestablishing proprioception at the level of thought became the ultimate aim for Bohm. He essentially called for a shift in attention, where thought should become more self-aware, and the principle of suspending (thought and assumptions) was the core practice for fostering such awareness. In Bohm's view we generally don't have immediate access to this capacity, since our assumptions currently are blind spots we are unable to see. Bohm suggests the gateway into developing awareness of thoughts functioning was through the practice and principle of suspension, and dialogue would be the means for bringing this capacity into mind.

Dialogue

Dialogue, as perceived by Bohm, is "a multi-faceted process, looking well beyond typical notions of conversational parlance and exchange" (Bohm, 1996, p. xvi). It is a process, which explores the patterns of our thought processes and the function of our memory. The primary

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[4] Proprioception is a term borrowed from neurophysiology, basically referring to the awareness of how impulses create physical movements (a leg or an arm for instance).

objective is to unwrap and take a closer look at the tacit assumptions that are guiding our thinking, as well as "keep track of the subtle implications of one's assumptive/reactive tendencies, while also sensing similar patterns in the group as whole" (Bohm, 1996, p. xviii).

The main objective for a bohmian dialogue is to raise awareness of the manner in which thoughts actively participates in forming our perceptions (Bohm, 1994). The aim is to realize how our unconscious thoughts and feelings often act as a filter, which we are seeing the world *through*. It is by exploring this filter, looking *at* it, we may begin to understand *why* we act as we do. Bohm was convinced that "when we are able to sustain a dialogue of this sort you will find that there will be a change in the people taking part", and that "they themselves would then behave differently, even outside the dialogue" (Bohm, 1996, p. 21).

Thought and assumptions

David Bohm (1994) claims thought to be deceptive. It fuses the actual perception (of something) with our re-presentation of it, claiming them to be identical. As we are unaware of how thought processes information, we act upon the information thought provides us as if it where actual and independent facts. Thought, however, is a manufactured abstraction, a re-creation, and can never be an exact mirror of the actual thing we are focusing on. It is bound to interpret incoming information, but thought doesn't admit that. Hence, presenting its interpreting of "the world out there" as the objective truth. "The point is: thought produces results, but thought say it didn't do it. That's a problem" (Bohm, 1996, p. 11). Thought infiltrates the way we think and act, and ultimately drives our actions, without our realization. The capability to distinguish between what is actually perceived and thoughts' interference in this process thus becomes an essential capacity for bringing about good communication. We need to distinguish between the observer and the observed, he suggests, and the vehicle for bringing thoughts participatory nature into focus is through the principle and practice of suspension (ibid.).

Suspension

Suspension is the core principle in Bohm's theory and lies at the very heart of the dialogical process. In essence it is about developing the ability to observe judgments, your own and

those of others, from a neutral position, remaining detached and underactive (Bohm, 1996). Suspension essentially becomes the act of discovering and examining your own (and others) governing assumptions, where the objective is to realize what's on each other's mind without evaluating, judging or making any conclusion (ibid.). Bohm often referred to this process as the act of hanging our assumptions in front us, looking *at* them as objects. He believed such inquiring into ones reactions would catalyze tremendous shifts in the way we approach conversations, and that ultimately suspension was the tool that could help us reestablish proprioception. This, he suggests, would relief most of the problems humans face.

It is of great importance to underscore that suspension is *not* about stopping assumptions and judgments from occurring (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). Bohm (1996) emphasizes assumptions as a basic feature of thought, pointing out that it's crucial to understand that suspension does *not* means repression. What's wrong with it is not that it takes place, but rather that we are not aware of it (Bohm, 1996). In fact, suppression of thoughts and feelings may be the single most important thing that block for real dialogue. The aim for the whole process of suspension is actually that feelings and thoughts should come out, so that they may become visible and transparent. This entails what he called developing a neutral observer, a "witness self", that is able to identify and explore assumptions as they bubble up without being in a state where one acts on these in a rapid-fire automatic mode. One simply examines the governing assumptions and questions them, climbing down "the ladder of inference".

Suspension may not be easily grasped since the principle is both subtle and complex. It has an invisible dimension to it. In essence it becomes an inquiry into own thoughts and assumptions, where one explores what is going on in ones interior. Put bluntly, suspension is a simple but profound capacity to step back and reflect *while* acting. This may be hard since generally when our assumptions are under siege, we feel attacked and a need to defend ourselves (since we are so attached to our assumptions; we *are* our assumptions). The tension is often so high that we choose the easy way out. Thus it demands serious attention at the cost of releasing the grip of our certainties, but with the gain of expanding our awareness. When this process has gained some depth, assumptions cannot retain their status as ultimate facts; thoughts simply do not have the power they usually had before (Jordan, 2002). If we have this capacity to reflect *in* action, taking our assumptions as objects for reflection, we will have better grounds for taking action according to those outcomes we desire.

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Developing this skill is a continuous and never ending process, which demands effort and serious attention if it is to be maintained. And strange as it may sound, suspension is not a principle at all. It is a quality of being where one is aiming for becoming more self-aware. Ultimately the process of dialogue becomes a way of engaging, and we may speak of a dialogical attitude rather than a set of dogmatic principles.

2.4 A developmental perspective

Grounded in Robert Kegan´s work (1982, 1994, 2009) Thomas Jordan (2002) suggests that developing such self-awareness[5] as Bohm is describing, can be conceived as a stage-like process. Jordan identifies and describes this development in three phases, where one first is *noticing* thoughts, thereafter *evaluating* them, and finally intentionally *transforming* them, if necessary.

In relation to assumptions, the first step is to *notice* and identify assumptions as they bubble up. If one is able to take assumptions as objects of reflection, it may lead to increased awareness of how different experiences of a situation are grounded in different interpretations and assumptions. Jordan (2002) points out that such awareness "tends to lead to a dawning realization of the importance of different perspectives, including the peculiarities in one's own perspective" (p. 6).

After noticing assumptions, the next developmental step is to *evaluate* own thinking patterns. Are the assumptions, based on my interpretation, sufficient? Adequate? Desirable? From where do they originate? If one suspends and probes these images for a while one might start noticing that one's pattern of thinking rests on some unquestioned underlying assumptions, which previously have been treated as facts. As this realization occurs one gradually are enabled to decide which thought patterns that are desirable and healthy, and which are not (Jordan, 2002).

In the third phase one intentionally attempts to transform one's undesirable thinking patterns. In terms of assumptions this involves a strong ability to relate to the content of one's own assumptions without feeling embedded in them. Furthermore, you see that they are just

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[5] Jordan (2002) defines self-awareness as "awareness of what is going on in one's own interior". He elaborates that this involves "awareness of the behavioral habits, emotions, desires, thoughts and images that tumble through our being" (p.1).

assumptions, and that they therefore may not be entirely correct. Consequently you don't act on them as facts. Otto Scharmer (2007) describes this process as "coming and let go". One simply recognizes and examines assumptions as they come and go, without being had by them. Then you can look at them as objects when they pass by, without feeling attached or embedded in them. You no longer see *through* your assumptions, rather it may be said that you look *at* them as objects (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Jordan describes this act as a "witness self" that is able to take one owns assumptions in perspective.

2.5 Thinking on the edge

As the theory depicts, the process of escalating our mental capacity requires some kind of transformation. Our current mindset does not seem to match the level of complexity in the modern world, and obviously the problems can't be solved within existing frames of reference: we need in some way to transform our very mental operating system to a qualitatively different way of constructing reality (Kegan, 1994). According to Robert Kegan (1994) such transformative learning occurs when someone changes "not just the way he behaves, not just the way he feels, but the ways he knows – not just *what* he knows, but the *way* he knows." (p.17). According to Mezirow (2000) this type of transformation is prompted by "a disorienting dilemma or experience" (p.22). Poutiatine (2009) elaborates:

> This is to say the individual encounters something that does not fit into his or her dominant narrative of how the world is or how it works. The disorienting dilemma could be triggered by new information; it could be a new behavior; it could be a new way of thinking or feeling. Whatever the dilemma, it creates the experience of being disoriented, as it does not fit with the current worldview of the participant. Once disoriented, the individual makes a choice: either to ignore, devalue, or discard the new information or experience (p. 194).

When our familiar concepts are outmatched, being on the brink to transforming our mindset, Gendlin (2009) notes that initially such new concepts of knowledge often take place in an implicit manner. One may have an embodied feeling, still struggling to articulate it into words (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). You know it, but you can't explain it (Svantesvoll, 2011). However this implicit knowing is also a sign that something explicit is emerging, being under construction. In the inception of a mental transformation it is consequently vital to nurture and foster this lurking implicit knowing, if it is to set root to be refined and cultivated. You have to treat it as a powerful stranger and let it guide you into new territories of knowing (Isaacs, 1999).

Chapter 3 - Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify how my research was conducted, while also explaining methodological choices and on what grounds these rest on. In this section I will provide a lens to assess my research, showing the methodological infrastructure of my inquiry. The aim is to secure my research's quality by making my methodical approach transparent and explicit.

3.1 Choice of methods

After skimming through relevant literature I started to have a notion for what I wanted to look into, and from this I sketched a research question; "*Can dialogue be a leverage to prompt awareness of underlying assumptions*? And by extension: *Would people experience this to benefit their communication?"* The next step was to consider what method would be best equipped to investigate this. Faced with the challenge I realized that there is no obvious way for how to do this. Different methods emphasize different aspects and have different ways for investigating, all having their strength and weaknesses. Consequently, choice of method would define much of the projects course and characteristic.

As a point of departure I found it natural to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative approaches. In a broad sense one may say that quantitative research are concerned with generalizations. Qualitative studies on the other hand, examine and look in-depth to a small, relative homogeneous and geographically limited field, where the aim is to understand the world through the subjects` point of view and unearth their experience of the world (Moen & Karlsdottir, 2011). Put differently, where quantitative research is concerned with the *why*, explaining and looking for causal relationships, qualitative approaches are more interested in the *how*, aiming to understand the subjects´ lived world prior to scientific explanations (Kvale, 1996).

According to Strauss & Corbin (1998) qualitative methods are well suited for obtaining "the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes and emotions that are difficult to extract through more conventional methods" (p.11). Its great strength is the ability to provide rich and vivid information on individuals subjective experience, which otherwise would be hard to capture by more conventional methods (Postholm, 2010).

For me awareness is precisely such a complex and subtle phenomena like Strauss and Corbin are referring to. It eminently concerns thought processes, and is highly interwoven with feelings and emotions. Trying to capture this into numbers by measures sounds strange in my ears. Given this understanding, and the nature of my research question, I found the qualitative approach to be best equipped to answer my research question.

Qualitative research

"The qualitative umbrella is a large one, sheltering many ways of working and many different traditions, lexicons, and pretheoretical assumptions" (Marecek, 2003). However, across the line they all share a common goal of highlighting the informants´ perspectives. The main objective for all qualitative research is above all to unearth the reflections and reason that are guiding the subject's life (Moen & Karlsdottir, 2011).

I do not locate my research to fit into the box of a certain qualitative tradition. I had no predefined philosophical stance to set frames for my research, so my main objective was simply to resolve and answer my research question in the best way. "What works" became the focus and I didn't want be limited by some frames from a certain methodical philosophy. Yet I did share the qualitative approaches common goal of understanding and highlighting the informants´ perspectives. In this respect I term my research a qualitative *stance* rather than a qualitative *method*. This term is chosen to indicate that I don't belong in a specific paradigm with clear directions to how research should be conducted; my research is first and foremost a qualitative approach, with the purpose of highlighting the subjects´ experience.

3.2 Selection of the research sample

There are no standard criteria for number of participants in qualitative studies. It depends on the study's frames and purpose (Kvale, 1996). The purpose of qualitative research is, as stated, to look in depth to subjects thought processes. According to Thagaard (2009) the sample should therefore "not be larger than it is possible to conduct a thorough and profound analysis" (p. 60). Then, if the number is too low you run in danger of having too few subjects to saturate the topic and find something that could be valid across people. On the other hand, if the number is too high you risk just scratching the surface, eliminating the possibility to go

in depth to the matter. Also, focusing on finding suitable informants rather than having many should be in precedence (quality rather than quantity). On these grounds qualitative studies normally operates in the area of three to ten informants (Dukes, 1984).

There were four participants in the workshop. Based on the above, and due to the combination of time and resources available, I found it reasonable and manageable to interview all four participants. I felt four participants were low enough to go in depth in a tangible manner, still being wide enough to saturate the matter. This way I had the opportunity to cover the experience from different stands, while also allowing all the participants to have their saying.

3.3 Strategy for collecting data

According to Kvale (1996) interviews are particularly useful when approaching people's subjective experiences. On this ground I chose to apply the qualitative interview when collecting data.

When developing my interview guide (Appendix 1) I made use of a semi-structured layout. I found this to be in advantage both for the informants` and for me as a researcher. A semi structured interview would help me keep track by having certain main topics I wanted to cover, while also providing me with the flexibility and opportunity to ask follow up questions, probe and pursue interesting aspects that could appear. It also would allow the informants to focus on the aspects they selves found to be of importance and relevance, and the freedom to express their experience in own terms (Kvale, 1996).

Since interviews deal with subjective experiences it is hard to know in advance what actually is going to appear. To be fully present and aware for what would emerge I therefore decided not to take notes during the actual interviews. I found that pen and paper would not only hinder my awareness, it could also distract the informants, potentially obstruct the conversations flow and restrict their willingness to elaborate vividly. To secure the quality of the conversation I therefore decided to only bring a digital recorder for the interviews. However, to not let my reflections during the interviews vanish, I sat down and wrote notes of my immediate thoughts straight after each interview.

The interviews took place approximately two months after the informants participated in the workshop. They were conducted face to face in a meeting room at the participants workplace,

mainly because this was most practical for both them and me. The interviews ranged from 52 minutes to 1 hour and 50 minutes.

3.4 Transcription

To make the process of analyzing the interviews tangible, I conveyed the recorded interviews into written text through transcription. I found this to ease the work on my analysis compared to analyzing straight from the recordings, making it easier to compare statements and discover overarching meanings. Also, this made me more familiar and closer to the content. I chose to initiate the transcription straight after the interviews, while my thoughts and impressions still were fresh and available. Having immediate access to my reflections I considered this to be in advantage for catalyzing the reflection process for the later analyzing.

There are no correct standards for how transcriptions should be conducted (Kvale, 1996). However, when making choices regarding style of transcription, one should keep in mind its purpose and for what it is intended (ibid.). In my case, as already stated, the transcription served the purpose of making the analysis more tangible, with the purpose of the analysis being to unearth themes that were of importance for the participants' experience. On this basis I decided to transcribe in a manner that kept intact what the informants actually where saying, keeping it verbatim. Yet I dropped transcribing pauses, coughing etc., since I considered this not being of any relevance for the analyzing part. I was looking for the meaning of *what* being said not *how* it was expressed.

All the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, with the participants having different sorts of regional accents. To secure not losing any part of the meaning they were trying to convey I chose not to translate this directly into English straight ahead, also keeping their accent. In addition this made it easier for me to analyze since my mother tongue is Norwegian, and naturally I have better grounds for understanding the whole concepts of these words and their underlying meaning. Thus, I decided to translate relevant quotes and statements after finishing the analysis.

3.5 Methods for analysis

When analyzing the data I chose to take advantage of the constant comparative method (CCM), which derives from Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory. While grounded theory as a methodological approach could be said to be embedded in strict philosophical preconceptions for the purpose of a study, CMM can be applied to any qualitative study where coding and categorizing data material is essential (Postholm, 2010). Since my research don't belong inside a fixed philosophical realm, the main criteria when choosing this method for analysis was thus that it where compatible with the purpose of my study. In this regard the strength of CMM is that "there are no absolute rules, except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study" (Patton, 1990, p. 372).

CCM is an analysis tool that helps structuring the data through the steps of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). *Open coding* entails abstracting the written raw data into categories, which in some way represent the expressed phenomenon (Postholm, 2010). The purpose of this is to condense the expressed meanings into shorter formulations, or labels, to make the data material more comprehensible for further analysis (Kvale, 1996). *Axial coding* involves relating these labels to its sub categories. By relating and comparing these, larger themes may start to emerge that tell something about the conditions related to the phenomenon (Postholm, 2010). *Selective coding* is the final part of the analysis and is concerned with selecting main categories, and relating the other categories to that. The focus is to find overarching categories, at a higher level of abstraction, that conceptualize the sub categories.

After transcribing the interviews I was left with a great amount of data. The oral interviews had been converted into 110 pages written text, and I started the *open coding*. To make the analysis more tangible I therefore reduced the amount of data into labels that summarized what was being emphasized. The purpose of condensing the data was to get it more tangible, yet striving to keep the content of meaning intact. This way it would be easier to surface common themes across the participants. After comparing statements and labels I started to look for the content of these categories through *axial coding*. What were the conditions for the categories? Here did sub categories emerge that helped elaborating, deepen and expand my notion for the content of my categories, which also made them more specific. Finally I took on the process of *selective coding*. At first several categories arose. Even though many of

them was interesting, I abandoned several of these since they were not emphasized by all the informants. However, I did include one such category since I found it to deepen the understanding of the research issue. I also merged categories that where similar or pointing to the same issue. This left me with the categories "on communication", "impact", "the workshop" and "time".

My focus when constructing core categories (and throughout the whole analysis), giving them names and meaning, was to highlight and bring forth the participants experiences. Still, I found it inevitable to see the link to my theoretical framework. Consequently, even though I strived to keep the informants meaning intact, it is important to acknowledge that the categories arose from a combination of their meaning and my theoretical understanding. Nevertheless, this abstracted categories also made it possible to have a tangible foundation to start interpreting and re-contextualize the interviews in terms of my theoretical context. It is these categories that are presented in chapter 5, accompanied and illustrated through embellishing statements from the informants to illustrate its content and meaning. The interpretation of these categories in turn gave birth to my discussion, which is being presented in chapter 6.

3.6 Quality in qualitative research

When conducting scientific research the issue of quality is of great importance. In order to prevent the work from being a random literary artifact, one has to secure the study's scientific stance, normally argued through the trinity of validity, reliability and generalizability (Kvale, 1996).

Validity and reliability

The issue of validity and reliability in research is deeply embedded in the philosophical concepts of truth and objectivity. From a traditional positivist standpoint, truth is a mirror of reality and thus is scientific knowledge a representation of an objective world, bare from subjective interpretations (Kvale, 1989). In a relativist perspective, however, truth consists of multiple individual experiences of reality, all being equally valid (Golafshani, 2003). Consequently "the quest for absolute certain knowledge is replaced by a conception of

defensible knowledge claims" (Kvale, 1996, p. 240). In this regard validity in qualitative studies is about choosing between competing interpretations, and providing arguments for the interpretation's *trustworthiness*. In other words, validity in qualitative research is about making the ideas and interpretations *reliable*. This is done properly when the researcher constantly has a "critical outlook on the analysis, states explicitly his perspective on the subject matter studied and controls applied to counter selective perceptions and biased interpretations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 242). The quality criterion thus becomes the issue of theoretically interpreting the findings, while providing arguments for the relative credibility of knowledge claims, also making these interpretations transparent (Kvale, 1989).

Through this thesis I have tried to keep a strong emphasis on being explicit and transparent about the research process and what have led to my conclusions. In this respect there is this entire chapter dedicated to clearly state my method for obtaining and processing data. This chapter aims to provide the reader with an understanding of the different steps in how the research was conducted, in an explicit and transparent manner. This includes being open about what I have done, describing the different steps in the process, while also arguing for the why of my choices. I have also stated openly my preconceptions and what may have influenced me in this work, and reflected upon the impact this may have on my findings. When presenting my data I tried to provide rich and plural descriptions to make the content and inner context logical and sensible for the reader. When interpreting these findings in the discussion chapter I also strived to keep the same coherence transparent, by making it explicit how and why I have interpreted as I did. Of course I hold no claim to *the* truth or correctness of my process and findings. However, by making my path as transparent as possible, I hope to have secured my thesis scientific stance through the quality criterion of trustworthiness, making it valid and reliable.

Generalizability

In addition to validity and reliability the dimension of generalizability is a persistent aspect of quality in research. However, in qualitative research there is no intent of generalizing findings. The main objective is to create an understanding of the specific case being studied (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985; Stake, 1994) Even though the researcher can't claim any external validity through generalization, there still may be possible generate what Postholm (2010) refers to as *naturalistic generalization*, which deals with the utility of findings in the research.

If the reader is enabled to experience a close relation to descriptions, experiences and findings in the research, hence finding it useful for understanding his own situation, research in a specific case can provide new perspectives for understanding and interpreting other fields. Naturalistic generalization, in other words, deals with *transferability* (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). Due to this I have no intention of making universal generalization from my findings. However, by providing thick descriptions of the background for my inquiry, findings and the research process, I hope to provide readers with knowledge that may be relevant for understanding and interpreting their own situation and/or experience.

3.7 My role as a researcher

The strong interpretational character of qualitative research is evident. The researchers values do not belong to a realm separated from scientific knowledge, but are subject to the creation and application of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Pushed to extremes they are in fact just artificial re-constructions. Thus every judgment and decision I have done is heavily influenced (and limited) by my scope of knowledge, experience, background and intention. With this aspect in mind Kvaale (ibid.) argues that when securing quality in qualitative research, it becomes essential to consider the person of the researcher. By making the researchers subjectivity explicit one allows the reader to see in which paradigm the research is situated (Carlson, 2009).

Perhaps the single most important aspect to have set frames for the lenses I look through is my academic background. I grow from an academic tradition that belongs inside the realm of the social sciences, with strong emphasis on a humanistic approach/worldview. This is not a coincidence. As long as I can remember I have had a deep fascination for the psychological dimension of human beings. This made me study psychology, which made me widen the scope of understanding how our inner conditions operates and plays out. From there I went to the field of sociology to learn more about how this aspect comes into play and affect interpersonal relations and structures. This gave me insight into how our mental models manifest in social structures, and how these structures seem to be maintained by being self-reinforcing. Here I became overwhelmed to see how people seem to believe that status qou just is the way it is, something they don't have any impact on. For me it seemed like people where caught in a web, where they viewed themselves as being victims of circumstances they don't have any impact on. For me this was a disappointing and sad discovery. My experience

was that we *do* have the power to influence our circumstances, through exploring the mental models we operate by. And I wanted to convey this message, help people see this! This notion was the main factor why I went to study for a master's degree in counseling; I wanted to help people. In this program encountered the ideas of philosopher David Bohm. His ideas struck me as so full of meaning and insight that it was clear to me that it was from this perspective my thesis should set of. Diving into Bohm´s universe opened a gate into other relating fields and theorists, such as developmental psychology and organizational theory to mention a few. Linking these perspectives together resulted in the theoretical lens I came to approach this research project with, and which is elaborated in the theory section. My knowledge belongs and operates within inside these frames of reference.

Obviously my academic background and its tradition hugely influence me. Of course! And I am aware that it plays out in my research. I recognize and acknowledge that. Even though one may claim this to interfere and confuse my interpretations, I still want to treat this as an advantaging rather than limit aspect. They the very reason and fundament my capacity to do research rests upon. Prejudice not only biases or limits me, it also enable me to have a place to look from (Gadamer, 2004). They create the lenses I have to look at case. However, by making these subjective lenses transparent and explicit, I provide the reader with a foundation to see in which paradigm my research was conducted and executed and how this in turn may have influenced my interpretations and findings.

3.8 Ethical assessments

The issue of quality in research are closely linked to the topic of ethics. In qualitative research the researcher is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge, and consequently "the person of the researcher is critical for the quality of scientific knowledge and for the soundness of ethical decisions" (Kvale, 1996, p.117). In other words, the research quality highly depends upon the researchers ability of being sensitive and to commit to moral issues and action (ibid).

To make my ethical concern and commitment explicit I initially reported this project to NSD (Norwegian Social science Data services). The project was approved, given that participating was voluntary and that anonymity and confidentiality was being kept intact (Appendix 2).

According to the ethical guidelines given by NESH (2006), all participating in research projects should be voluntary. This also involves the liberty of withdrawing from the project, at any time and without any consequences. Participants thus need to have knowledge about this. In addition they also must be provided with information on the projects intention and objective. Due to this all the participants received and signed a participant consent form (Appendix 3), with information on the projects objective and their rights. The paper also made clear that all information would be treated confidentially, and that all personal information would be depersonalized. In this respect all informants have been given pseudonyms in this thesis, and all information that may be tracked down has been left out. My aim and hope is that by conducting these procedures I have preserved the integrity and anonymity of my informants, and also being in accordance with the ethical standards provided by NESH (ibid.).

Chapter 4 - The Workshop

4.1 Participants and architecture

The workshop was based on the principles of dialogue as depicted by David Bohm (1996). There were five participants, me included, sitting in a circle. Throughout the session we had a free and open conversation where everybody was contributing by sharing stories and inquiring into each other's views and perspectives. I was facilitating this process yet also being a participant by sharing my perspectives. The workshop was restricted to one session and lasted approximately two hours.

4.2 The workshop

I started the workshop by introducing myself, why I was there and the purpose of the gathering; I told that the workshop was a direct offspring of my interest in communication, and especially my curiosity in why communication so often fails or break down. I stated that the aim for the workshop was to gain insight into how we create assumptions, and by becoming more aware of this process have better grounds to inquire in to this process, which could release some of the restrictions we experience in our communication.

After this introduction we talked into what the participants considered good communication, experiences they had with bad communication and the characteristics of them. It seemed to be a consensus that a major feature in good communication was the feeling of understanding, both being understood and understanding the other. This led us to talking about situations where this feeling was lacking. They then all shared issues and experiences they had with breakdowns in communication. These were not cases that necessary had led to huge conflicts, but situations where they had experienced frustration, misunderstandings or a feeling of not being understood properly. Talking into the matter it became quite obvious that breakdowns in communication were something they all experienced regularly on some level. Sitting together, sharing stories, we all took part in exploring and inquiring into each experience. What had been said, what did the other say, what where they feeling and thinking and so forth. People were asking each other questions about the situation, offering alternative views and adding their perspective on the matter. Here some of them expressed how good and

helpful it was to just talk into such things, sharing perspectives, without any agenda. This was not something they usually practiced intentionally.

The story

To illustrate how we often are forced to interpret and create meaning out of incomplete knowledge I read "the story" (Appendix 4), which basically is a variation of the uncritical inference test[6]. The intention was to create a disequilibrium that could be utilized for talking more into how assumptions take part in our understanding of things. Next I handed out statements where they were supposed to decide if the statements were right or wrong. The point here is that almost every statement is neither right nor wrong, we can't really tell for certain. But they all seem very logical, and to make meaning out of the story you have to interpret and add meaning (which the story doesn't tell anything about) to create some sense.

Then we went through each statement, telling our individual opinion on if they were right or wrong. Here the participants had interpreted differently and by sharing views, and listening to others, they slowly started to see how they all were just assumptions. After this we talked loosely around the assumptions, how we made them, and conveying this into real settings they had experienced.

The ladder of inference

To create more depth in understanding the process I then drew up the ladder of inference, explaining each rung. After that I used a fictive story to illustrate the process through the ladder, giving a visual picture of the process. After illustrating the model we sat down and talked about the ladder. How to make use of it, problems with it, when and why is it difficult, also touching on the issue of reflection *on* action vs. *in* action. We also explored real situations they had experienced, looking at it through the lens of the ladder, questioning conclusions they had made and on what basis.

At the end we talked briefly about what we had done in the workshop. We also talked about what we had learned, and how we could this outside the session.

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[6] "The uncritical inference test" was originally developed by William Haney (1973), and is designed to show how we often make uncritical assumptions about situations, and treats these as objective facts.

Chapter 5 - Presentation of data

In this section I will present my findings from the analysis of the interviews. To keep the informants' anonymity intact they are given fictitious names, and will be referred to as John, Brian, Sharon and Jessica.

During my analysis a range of different topics and themes emerged. Reducing and compromising these left me with four categories, which I named "views on communication", "impact", "the workshop" and "need for development". To provide a tidy picture that captures their content in a good way, I will mainly explore these through their subcategories. Even though the categories will be presented and explored separately, it is of great importance to emphasize that they must not be understood this way. They all relate to each other and must be understood as different parts of the same vehicle. Only this way one may get a grasp of the content of meaning as a whole.

First I present the category views on communication through the subcategories "ideas of good communication", "gap between theory and experience", and "obstacles". Next comes the category named "impact" with the subcategories "awareness", "reflection on action", and "on communication – at work and in personal lives". Thereafter the category "the workshop" is presented, including the subcategory "aha-moment". Finally I have a category named "time" which is a factor that did not fit directly into the main categories, yet still having a strong relation them. I found this to be of great importance for shredding light on my research question. In order to make the picture more clear and lucid I connect the threads at the very end.

5.1 Views on communication

The overarching topic for the workshop, as already described, was communication, so naturally this became the pin our conversations were spinning around. For instance we were talking about what good communication involves, what normally characterizes conversations, and so forth. Thus it also became an important issue in the interviews, which resulted in a distinct category during my analysis. This category doesn't necessary provide a direct and

explicit answer to my research question, still I find it of great relevance for being able to get a grasp for the whole.

5.1.1 Ideas of good communication

All informants emphasize the importance of good communication, and they also seem to point out somewhat similar ideas on what this involves. What they describe as the greatest importance for good communication is to create the conditions for common understanding. As Jessica articulate it:

> *Good communication for me is when people talk together. That they are sharing opinions, exchanging points of view and that they are talking about the same topic where the goal is to create some form of mutual understanding, common knowledge. Not necessarily agreement, but that one can exchange opinions…one opens to really listen to the other's opinion, and that one is open to be challenged on one ones view on the matter, and that both parts have a wish for exchange of meanings and ideas, something that can bring us together through a common understanding of some sort.*

She also elaborates on this notion, pointing out that it also involves being open for such a way of engaging conversations, and that all the participants need to have this type of focus if is to function properly: *"Both parts have to be open for such exchange of meaning…this, of course, largely depends on the relationship between the people conversing. Good communication is when the other person understands that we are on the same frequency"*.

Sharon states that good communication is when one truly understands each other: *"(...) One understands each other and that people understand you. One isn't always agreeing, but one understands what is being said."* To create understanding John also points to the importance of attitude: *"(...) Ones attitude will color the meeting. (You have to) put your self in their situation, and then you understand more easily. Then you are on the same wavelength and talk from the same point of view"*.

5.1.2 Gap between theory and experience

Even though they are well aware what they consider good communication, this doesn't always reflect their experience of typical conversations in real life. Hans tells that he often feels his intention and outcome crackles:

I often experience that they don't perceive it the same way as I did, or intended. One expresses a view and it is being understood in a completely different way than I had in mind…(and) often one believes one is better at communicating than one actually is.

In John's view it depends on the situation, but that he often experiences situations where they don't talk on the same level. This makes him create assumptions that often lead to conclusions:

In some situation it works well, when one is on the same frequency. And then you may meet people that don't understand you at all…and then there is some back and forth, and we talk past each other… Lately it has been much of this…Then I start to interpret, and often it ends with "okay that person is angry or difficult to work with", but it doesn't have to be so at all. But I easily fall in to such thought patterns.

In Jessica's experience we tend to choose not to talk directly about some issues. We talk them in an implicit manner, assuming that the others know what we mean, and that this often leads us to situations we don't understand: *"(…) often we are very good at wrapping in stuff, we talk around issues, and then we formulate in such a way that the counterpart doesn't understand what we actually mean".*

In addition Sharon points out that she sometimes ends up frustrated, especially when the topic concerns her as a person. In such situations she finds it hard to communicate, and has also experienced that conversations have gotten out of hand:

In some situations I get frustrated, especially situations that are concerning me as a person. Sometimes I manage to get out of such situations by myself, but I have also experienced situations where I had to get help to solve the conversations, because it got out of hand.

5.2 Impact

This is what I consider the main category that explicitly goes into how the workshop had an impact on the participants. Summed up the informants tell they have become more aware after participating in the workshop, yet they find it hard to pinpoint what this awareness actually contains. Still, they do tell that their reflection process has expanded, however finding it very hard to suspend their thoughts and practicing reflection in action. Mostly reflection takes place in retrospect of a conversation. In addition they tell that their growing reflection not is restricted to certain parts of their life, it relates both to work and personal lives.

5.2.1 Awareness

All the informants explicit tell that they feel more aware after participating in the workshop. John reported that the workshop fostered reflection and this has made him look at things from new perspectives:

> *If I am to sum up in short what the workshop gave me, I would say awareness. Because there are so many things spinning around by themselves, either you want it or not, but in the workshop I had to process these things and it made me look at things with new eyes.*

Brian points out that he feels this awareness has made him more equipped to consider choices, and by that are more able to choose how he communicates so it fits the situation:

> *I notice that I have become more aware (...) I feel I am more conscious, it is perhaps here it gave most impact on me, my awareness. (...) For me this involves not to act instantly on old habits, but analyze and think more through things. Then I am able choose what to do. I can choose in terms of how I want to communicate (...) this way I can adjust how I communicate so it fits the actual situation.*

Sharon reflects the same notion, also pointing out that this involves acknowledging that some of her thoughts may just be assumptions. This awareness also makes her try to frame sentences a bit differently:

> *I have become more aware in terms of assumptions. (...) I have expanded my reflection, and more often it strikes my mind. I get reminded that I can't say it this way because this is only an assumption. So then I try to reframe the sentence. (...) It's just, I basically feel I have become more aware.*

Also Sharon feels she has become more aware. She points out that what we talked about in the workshop wasn't totally new to her, but she have gone from not thinking about it in her everyday life to giving these thoughts more serious attention. In addition she tells, maybe as a consequence, that she still doesn't feel aware enough and that yet there's much work to do for improving/expanding this awareness:

> *(…) and in terms of assumptions I feel increased awareness, I am more aware when I communicate. (...) The ideas we talked about in the workshop wasn't something revolutionary and totally new for me, (...) but I have gone from not giving such thoughts so much attention to process and reflect on them more in my everyday (...) I feel I have become more aware, but far from aware enough. I believe there still remains much work to expand this awareness.*

5.2.4 Reflection - *on* action

As the informants describe, they feel they have become more aware after participating in the workshop. They have started to reflect in a deeper way, process and question their governing thoughts and assumptions more in depth, and this has led them approach conversations from a different angle. Even though they have become more aware, they still find it hard to carry this awareness into action during an ongoing conversation. However they do reflect more in advance and in retrospect then they have done before, and they feel that this helps them to gradually become more aware *in* action. John puts it this way:

> (...) after we had the workshop I have started to notice that I ´m not so aware during a conversation, it is easiest to reflect in retrospect. I think of it, but unfortunately mostly in retrospect. I find it easier to go back and reflect on it in retrospect.

Even though he tells it is easier to reflect on action rather than in action, he still feels that this helps him to develop: *"...over time. But it is hard to tell how long it will become a natural part of me. (But) persuading it helps me, and I notice that it gradually pops up more automatically."*

Brian shares the same experience:

> (...) maybe not always in the situation. I investigate a situation I have been in or explore a situation I am going in to. This way I feel more prepared or can evaluate what I said and if I could have done things differently. (...) But this is something I constantly work on, trying to improve.

Even though Jessica tells she has become more aware and that she reflects more, she states that she doesn't have immediate access to this awareness during conversations. Simultaneously she points to the importance of time, which is something she often lacks during a normal workday:

> Still I am not there that it pops up when I communicate (...) It is more like, from time to time I think and reflect on the situation. (...) I find it hard to think and analyze in the actual situation, because then I lose focus (...). I believe that there's a big leap from thinking about it to actually do it during a conversation. (...) and in a normal workday you run from one thing to another, and it doesn't get priority (...) I believe I should invest more time.

5.2.3 On communication

Brian tells he now thinks through things more, is more aware, and by that he emphasizes that he feels he has developed, and that this have improved his conversing. He also tells that this is not only restricted to his work, but can be transmitted into all types of social settings:

> *(..) I basically feel I have developed (...) it relates to my awareness, by becoming more aware I feel I have developed, and when I think of such things I try to change stuff. I feel I have developed, I think more through and process stuff (...) I believe it concerns my attitude and how I approach things (...) Now I try to process how the other person may understand things, and think things through before I say something. Therefore I also feel I am better in the way I talk. (...) I would say that this is independent of where I am (...) If it is at work or in a private setting doesn't matter, for me it's more at a personal level, independent of where I am.*

Sharon doesn't see that the workshop had any direct impact on her conversing, still she has a distinct feeling of being more aware. Like Knut she also points out that this is just as much in private settings as at the workplace:

> *(...) I don't believe the workshop had any direct impact on the way I talk, but still I do feel I have become more aware; more often I think of these things. I remind my self that it may just be assumptions (...) it´s just there, I am more aware (...) Previously I didn't have the awareness to ask such questions, because I just took it for granted that this is the way it is (...) This isn't restricted only to my job, I have also so started to reflect more in private settings.*

Jessica also does not feel a direct change in her communication. But as the other informants she has this notion of being more aware and that this is both in her private life as at work:

> *(...) I can't really say that the workshop had an impact on the way I communicate. At the same time I can't really say that it didn't either (...) because I feel more aware and that my awareness has increased (...) I relate much of this to my work, but I also relate it to my private life, in terms of relations, friends, family and others. It is very transformable (...) but even though the workshop made me more aware, I still find it hard to convey this into everyday practice. And from not paying any attention to it all, to actually bringing it into the back of my head is a really big step. There's still much remaining to make use of this in my communication.*

John on the other hand finds it easiest to relate it to his work, but he also sees how it fits other settings: *"(...) I find it easiest to relate it to work, but I also find the parallels to situations outside the workplace"*. Like Jessica and Sharon he doesn't see that the workshop had any direct impact on the way he approaches conversations. Like the others he points to the feeling

of being more aware, and adds that in time he hopes this will be reflected in his conversations:

> *(…) not so much, unfortunately. But I have been thinking a lot of what we talked about in the workshop (…) so I feel I have become more aware, but the thinking is mostly in retrospect. (…) But that is what I wish to achieve, that I am able to be more aware both in retrospect and during the ongoing conversation. It is a process, so I just have to work on it, trying to become even more aware (…) because when I first have gotten here it easier to take a step further.*

5.3 The workshop

The informants experienced the workshop as very different from communication courses they normally participate in. Normally there they are passive listeners' being fed with recipes for what good communication is and a fixed solution for how this is best done. However, talking together and sharing views in an interactive manner fostered more engagement, which in turn fostered more comprehensive reflection. They got time to make up their own mind and explore each other's views. This led them to a personal discovery of limitations in their own framework, that others may think differently, the value of others´ opinion and how this shared discovery provided better grounds for conversing. When explored and experienced in a such personal level, through open space for parlance, they felt it gave breed for a deeper personal engagement which glues in a different manner than just being told predefined steps of "how to do".

John emphasizes that creating space for what emerged enabled him to make up his own mind and reflect on how it could be related to himself. He also states that this is somewhat different from what he has experienced with other workshops:

> *This workshop was something different (than other workshops) (…) in workplaces you participate in many workshops, but often the attitude is "yes I've heard this before, but I will try to make the time pass" "(… But) I feel this was a different and very comfortable workshop. It didn't get so tight, doing this and that. It was very loose still we got into the things we felt where important. You got time to think and make up your own mind (…).*

In addition he points out that talking together and share views helped to create new understanding;

> *(…) because then you get to process it. Because we weren't agreeing all the time, before we started to take a closer look it. And then you became like, okay, I haven't thought of that, because I have locked my focus into this certain part.*

Brian elaborates this notion pointing at the benefit of sharing views. He feels that it makes him more personally involved, in contrary to how-to-do seminars, and that adjusting the content to himself fostered him to reflect on his own. On this basis he got inspired to change and take action:

> *When the group size was that small and everyone had the opportunity to say something, I feel it worked very well. And I believe that if it gets too concrete you won't be able to carry it along and actually use it. Also, if it gets too concrete it becomes more of a predefined step you are told to do, but now it became more like, eh, I managed to create my own understanding. You can adjust the content to yourself so that it fits you as a person, if you get too concrete it may not reach the person sitting there…through having such open space/shape you actually manage to think on your own. Then I get inspired to take action; I want to change on this or that.*

Jessica frames the same issue a bit different, emphasizing the benefits of talking about a subject together, creating a shared understanding:

> *(…) The power of assumptions wasn't something we didn't know (…) but you let us reflect and discuss these subjects, and there is something special when you get to reflect by yourself and share your understanding on the matter instead of just being told (…) then it glues so much better (…) when you go inside yourself and discover that this is something you know, you just don't normally think of it. (…) I really learned something by listening to others´ view and exchanging views, and by going through such reflections, my own and those of others, I felt my awareness expanded.*

Sharon finds it hard to describe to others what actually triggered her awareness, because in essence we were just sitting together talking and share views:

> *We often have courses where you are supposed to describe things, what this and that is and maybe some role-plays. But I'm tired of such things. (…) I find the workshop we had now was something different, because it foster and expands your awareness (…) I wondered how I can describe and explain to others my experience, because what we did was just sitting together and talk, hehe (…) but it surely made me become more aware in terms of assumptions.*

5.3.1 A disorienting experience

Early in the workshop the participants went through a task named "the story", which is a variation of the critical inference test. From what the informants are telling it may seem like this opened up for discovering how conclusions often are made on the basis of assumptions. Sharing their views on the story helped them see the value of how other people may make different interpretations out of the exact same situation, and that no one is completely right or wrong, they are just assumptions. Accepting this fact led them to better grounds for talking, since they came to see that their view didn't contain the whole truth. They came to a shared understanding of that their views just where assumptions, and by acknowledging this they found it easier to talk more freely around a matter. Some of the informants describe this as an aha-moment. Sharon elaborates:

> (...) After discussing it we came to an agreement that it was just based on assumptions, because we discovered that there was no such things as an right or wrong answer" "(...) then we have come to accept that our opinion is not the whole, nobody has the total correct understanding of it, and that it is essentially built on assumptions. When we all agreed on that, that all views were based on assumptions, then we had this hared understanding of that none holds the whole truth (...) This was an aha-experience for me, because I have never thought of it this way before (...) I know that one shouldn't draw conclusions before one is sure, but I never have experienced it this way before, never thought on it this way.

Also Brian points to a moment of aha. For him this was a direct result of sitting together and sharing views, because this made him realize that other people had other things in mind that he didn't realize or hadn't thought of. As a result he had a personal experience of how he had made quick conclusions without questioning them. He feels that they all shared this experience and that just having this common realization made it easier for them to converse since they had this common understanding as a platform for how they were engaging:

> (...) Often we sit with a belief that he thinks this or that, and we don't bother clarifying this notion. But we were sitting together and sharing our views, and suddenly I became like oh, I didn't think you saw it that way(...). I got a sort of aha-experience, like oh, now I did some very quick conclusions (...) this brought me to a more conscious understanding of that I often read between the lines and form conclusions based on a small amount of information (...) I believe all of us who were in the workshop got such an aha-moment (and) then we sort of got on the same wave length, we understand that we don't perceive it the same way (...) When we all see this it gets easier to discuss it and talk about it (...) So I believe we who were at the workshop find it easier to talk together, because we have a more open mind (...) I feel it provided me with a indefinable tool, if I may call it that. (...) Then it also is easier to

work together, since we have the same understanding or point of departure. We have the same foundation and tuning and then it gets so much easier.

Jessica supports this notion, and tells that it has much to do with how the story forced them to explore and question their assumptions (which first were treated as conclusions):

It showed in a very good way that we quickly make assumptions. Each of us interpreted in our own way (...) but when we started to talk about it we discovered that it all was just assumptions (...) this made us start to reflect and we discovered that we can't really know for sure (...) So sitting talking and analyzing it evoked a sort of awareness, which sort of affected us and had a strong impact on the way we talked.

5.4 Time

During my analysis a minor topic emerged that I found interesting and highly relevant for the research question, but that didn't quit fit in the main categories. Still I feel it need and deserve to be highlighted so we can get better grip of elements that are of importance to the research question. This issue was not in direct focus for the interview guide, and thus it was only emphasized by some of the informants. It is important to keep in mind that these thoughts therefore do not necessarily represent the group as a whole.

As described the informants tell that they do reflect more, while still finding it difficult to reflect in action. Reflection mostly goes on in retrospect. In relation to this John and Jessica point to the importance of time, which they don't feel they have an abundance of in their workday. Even though this isn't a distinct category all the informants' stress, I still find it necessary to include this aspect since it may be an important factor that affects their reflection process. John elaborates:

(...) Because if you have time you can reflect and think more thoughts. You are more relaxed and have more time to play with the thoughts, if you can put it that way. For instance you can ask where things are going, is it this way or that way, and you start to sort out these thoughts. (...) But often things are at such speed and need to be done, so it just go bam bam bam. Then you operate more by finding a quick solution rather than questioning and play with your thoughts, which may have given different options and solutions.

Jessica also reflects this view on time, adding that in a normal workday she often doesn't find time to do this:

(...) Awareness has a lot to do with time (...) it is hard to analyze things in the moment. In my opinion it is of great importance to have enough time so that you really can think through what is happening. This is especially important in such initial phases. (...) But often I run from this to that, from one thing to another, so I only have a short amount of time to give certain messages without evaluating the content of these.

Chapter 6 – Discussing the categories

In this chapter I will discuss the categories from chapter five, and link it to the theoretical perspectives presented in chapter two. To keep it clear and lucid the categories will be explored separately, however unlike the presentation of data I will mainly discuss the *main* categories.

6.1 Discussing "on communication"

David Bohm's (1996) very notion of dialogue revolves around the idea that good communication is when people are able to speak *with* one another, not *at* one another. He believed that speaking *with* one another has the potential for fostering a mutual understanding, a shared consciousness, where people "are sharing a common content even if we don't agree entirely" (ibid. p.30). As depicted by the informants' quotes, the subject of mutual understanding seems to be of great relevance for the notion of having good communication. Jessica points out that good communication doesn't necessary mean agreement, still it highly involves exchanging points of view "*where the goal is to create some form of mutual understanding, common knowledge*".

However, even though the informants seem to share Bohm's perception on the entailment of good communication, there often seems to be a gap between their normative understanding and what they experience in daily life. They often experience that their intention and outcome conflict. What they intended was understood in a completely different way, and they end up not understanding what caused the situation. This may in some cases accumulate frustration, especially if the topic concerns them as a person. What the informants are describing here is precisely what Bohm (1996) referred to as the core problem of communication. His firm held vision for dialogue grew from this fundamental notion, that we constantly are creating *situations* we don't intend, and that give us trouble (Bohm, 1994). People seem to be caught in a "pattern of an inability to understand each other", he suggest (Bohm, 1996, p. 6). This is what breaks down communication, it drifts people apart and manifests in inclined frustration (ibid.).

Chris Argyris (1991) has for many years pointed out the contrast between what we actually do and our intentions. He came to believe this discrepancy was due to flaws in our theories of

action. That is, there seems to be incoherence between our espoused theories and theories in use (ibid.). The real source to our difficulties in communicating, he suggested, was that people generally aren't aware the extent to which these theories manifest in how we act. And, more importantly, since our theories in use are tacit structures of an implicit character, we aren't aware they exist. In Bohm's (1996) view "that is a failure of proprioception in thought" (p.92). Or as Kegan and Lahey (2009) puts it, "it is a story about the fit between the demands of the world and the capacity of the person" (p.12).

Its obvious that, to some degree, that the informants' experience situations where they feel in over their heads. However, just based on the informants' statements', and also the theoretical contributions, it's hard to establish *the* actual cause for these obstacles. Most likely its not limited to one single aspect, but a symbiosis of different elements. Digging into this question is anyway not the main objective for this thesis. Nonetheless, even though we cannot establish whether the informants' obstacles are due to Argyris' notion of incoherence between theories of action or Bohm's attention on failure of proprioception of thought, it's safe to conclude that their concerns about peoples' obstacles in communication definitely is not taken out of the air. From what the informants are describing the issue is both real and in a need for developing capacities to cope with these challenges. And whatever theoretical explanation, this is what also unites the scholars: the need to develop skills and tools to meet this demand. This basically concerns elevating and expanding our awareness, by turning the mirror inward and inquiring into our deeply held assumptions.

6.2 Discussing "Impact"

The theoretical perspectives provided in this thesis suggest a lack of awareness to be the single most critical factor in communication practices. And the overarching objective for a dialogical process in this regard, is to raise awareness. It holds the promise that it "will not only change the way you think about conversation, it will help you move towards far more effective and satisfying action in the world" (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p.4). It is seen as "a powerful communications practice that transform those who engage in it" (ibid. p.1).

All informants express a feeling of being more aware after participating in the workshop. Yet, they find it hard to pinpoint what this awareness actually contains. They seem to have a clear embodied notion, yet are still struggling when trying to articulate it. However, in an

attempt to conceptualize the condition they use word as increased consciousness and expanded reflection. Nonetheless, the major benefit, they tell, is that it enables them to adjust their behavior to fit the situation. It allows them to *choose* how to communicate, according to the actual situation. It's obvious that these findings suggest a change in those who engaged in the dialogical workshop. However, their struggle in articulating it also insinuates that this still is something fuzzy, not quite refined to be characterized as a complete transformation. It seem like they are on a brink, where something subtle is rising, demanding to take form. According to Jordan (2002), Gendlin (2009) and Svantesvoll (2011) the wooly condition the informants here are describing is typical in initial phases of enhancing awareness.

Jordan (2002) notes that the process of elevating awareness tends to move through a stage like process. An initial premise is to *notice* and identify assumptions as they arise. This will free yourself to actively take them as objects for reflection. In Bohm's (1996) terms you suspend them. If you can do this you then are in a position to *evaluate* these thoughts, and from that *choose* how to act on them. In turn this may able you to cultivate this capacity and act intentionally to transform undesirable thinking patterns (Jordan, 2002). However, Jordan (ibid.) also states we don't always move easily into a changed pattern of mind. In order to cultivate such new behavior of thinking we need to be "patient and pay careful attention to these processes" (ibid.). This may be hard work since it demands serious effort and attentive focus. But if we pay careful attention to these things it will start to increase, developing into a cultivated way of being (ibid). With Jordan's theory taken into account, we may say that the slippery condition the informants are describing may be a sign that this process has been ignited. As reported they have started to *notice* how old habits and assumptions bubble in to their mind, and also that they now intentionally strive to *evaluate* and analyze these. However, it's also clear that the informants find it hard to practice this capacity, suspending thoughts and assumptions, *in* action. Reflections mostly occur in advance and in retrospect. Through Jordan's lens of interpreting it thus looks like a subtle process of change is emerging, however their reflection *on* action taken into account there is no evidence to suggest a complete *transformation*. Rather it may be said they are in a process, and it still remains hard work in order to be cultivated. As Sharon frames it, "*I feel I have become more aware, but far from aware enough. I believe there still remains much work to expand this awareness*". This interpretation is also supported by Gendlin (2009), which notes that when we are on the brink of transforming our mindset we often struggle to conceptualize the

experience into familiar terms. Nevertheless, this implicit knowing is also a sign that something explicit is emerging, being under construction (ibid.).

Bohm (1996) had a firm belief that enhancing awareness would improve the quality of people's conversations. He was convinced that changing the way we think would have enormous impact on the way we talk (Isaacs, 1999). And, such a shift would manifest into all parts of life (Bohm, 1996). "In this lies some of the immense potential of dialogue" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 310). In this regard an interesting aspect of the informants experience of being more aware, is how they relate it to their communication. When talking about how becoming more aware has impacted their communication the informants to some degree differ. While some report significant improvements, others haven't noticed any big changes. However, looking beyond these differences they all share a feeling of *approaching* conversations in a different manner then they used to do. Amongst other things this involves being more aware of assumptions, questioning and reflecting upon them. What's interesting here is that this concerns all parts of their life. It's not restricted to only a work setting or in their personal lives. It seems to infiltrate their whole being. So even though not all the informants to the same degree recognize changes in their style of communicating, their statements suggest a slight shift in their inner operating system. Considering that this system is where all our actions originate (Scharmer, 2007), and taken into account their notion of *approaching* conversations in a different manner, it's still *may* be a possibility that they actually have adjusted their style of communicating without being fully aware of it. It may have been so subtle that it has escaped their notice. Regardless, this remains as speculations. So with Bohm's proposal of improved communication in mind, there is no solid evidence in this research to neither support nor dismiss this notion. However it should be emphasized that there are elements that clearly suggest Bohm's hypothesis to be valid.

6.3 Discussing "the workshop"

Having established the informants' experience of becoming more aware gives birth to a more fundamental question: -*what triggered this awareness?* Even though the informants don't pinpoint what actually triggered it, we may find some clues in how they experienced the workshop.

<u>Dialogue</u>

The dialogical approach to communication seems to be a new and somewhat unfamiliar practice for the informants. Normally when participating in communication courses they experience to be in a passive mode, fed with recipes for what communication is and fixed standardizations for how one should communicate. However, they don't feel the content of such informal approaches stick. In this respect they found the dialogical workshop to be something different. Here they talked together and shared views in an interactive manner, which fostered more engagement, which in turn nurtured more comprehensive reflection. The dialogical angle provided space for inquiring into what emerged and needed attention. It gave them an opportunity to explore each other's views, while also being given time to make up their own mind. As Jessica puts it, "*there is something special when you get to reflect by yourself and share your understanding on the matter instead of just being told*". This led to them to discover limitations in their own frame of reference and acknowledge the value of others' opinions. When explored and experienced at a personal level, through open space for parlance, they felt it gave birth to a deeper personal engagement that stuck in a different manner than just being fueled with predefined steps on "how to". This experience seems to have nudged their awareness around the benefits of approaching from such angle.

What the informants are referring to here is the heart of the dialogical process. Highlighting the value of sharing and inquiring into each other's view, they actually are pointing to the value of the process itself, how they were *approaching* the subject of communication. It basically concerns a shift in attitude towards communication. As such they are in fact referring to the very concept of dialogue. Ultimately dialogue is not a set of principles at all, rather it may be said to be a conscious way of *engaging*, a way of being. This is both goal and means for the dialogical process. Dialogue invites people to surface the underlying ideas and assumptions that drive their action, taking them as object for collective reflection, deepening their understanding of different perspectives. The promise is that this will help them construct a deeper, more expansive, way of knowing. In turn this will enable them to develop new strategies for social interaction. In other words the very aim is to bring about a shift in consciousness, and Bohm (1996.) suggested that this would relieve most of the problems we face when communicating. The informants experience taken into account it thus looks like the dialogical *process* itself functions as door opener for a shift in consciousness towards communication; it taps into people's awareness around how we communicate and may function as a catalyst for a change in attitude towards conversations. However, like discussed

in the "discussing awareness" section, also this experience seem to be a subtle slippery thing to conceptualize (Gendlin, 2009). As Sharon says, "*I wonder how I can describe and explain to others my experience, because what we did was just sitting together and talk. But it surely made me more aware*". Ellinor and Gerrard (1998) frame this issue aptly:

> This capability for collective inquiry and reflection is what leads to quantum leaps and breakthroughs in a groups thinking. There may even be times when a group finds itself reaching beyond the boundaries of current understanding into a place it cannot find words to describe. At these times a new knowing is emerging, but the ability to articulate it has not yet caught up. These are the experiences of arriving at the frontiers of our thinking and looking upon lands yet to be explored. Often the result is a new model or way of viewing relationships (p. 122).

A disorienting experience

From what the informants are telling it may seem like "the story" functioned as a leverage for discovering, at a personal level, how conclusions often are made on the basis of insufficient assumptions. Sharing views on "the story" helped them see the value of how others made different interpretations out of the exact same situation. Also, that none of these where completely right or wrong, they basically where just assumptions. In this manner they came to notice limitations in their own frame of reference. In other words it opened for *acknowledging* the power of assumptions. The complexity became visible, that things are not clear and straightforward. The informants describe this as an aha experience. Sharon encapsulates this when she states that: "*this was an aha-experience for me, because I have never thought of it this way before. I know one shouldn't draw conclusions before one is sure, but I never have experienced it this way before, never thought of it this way*".

One of the main objectives for Bohm's dialogue is to raise awareness on assumptions and thoughts participating nature in our thinking (Bohm, 1996). As Poutiatine (2009) outlines, and the informants experience indicate, the findings in this project suggest that such awareness seems to be ignited by a disorienting dilemma or experience. When experiencing limitations in one ones framework at such a personal level it looks like it sticks in a fundamentally different way than just being told or instructed. It's one thing to have an intellectual understanding of how assumptions influence or thinking and actions, however it's a qualitative different kind of knowing when one holds and embodied understanding of it.

Recalling Jordan's (2002) path to awareness we may, given the interpretations above, suggests adding a column for his scheme. His sketches of the road to awareness could be experienced as somewhat insufficient; if it's just a matter of starting to notice assumptions, why don't people generally take this road? In this regard it consequently should be crucial to know something about how we get this process ignited. What is it that gets the engine running? I would say what's missing in Jordan map, is the *willingness* the informants pointed to. If the willingness to inquire into ones assumptions and pattern of thought is absent, I find it most likely their project of enhancing awareness would be doomed. When talking about willingness here I'm not referring to an intellectual want to be more aware. It's hard to imagine someone not wanting that. I here point to the mere *embodied* wanting, where one really *feels* that this is something I need to invest my mind into. Given the findings in this research we can say that what's needed is a disorienting dilemma where one experience limitations in one ones frames of reference. On this basis this should, in my opinion, be regarded as the focal point in any attempt to travel the winding road to expanding ones awareness. And, a task like "the story" holds the potential for creating such disequilibrium in mind, and thus be the vehicle to access Jordan's first column.

6.4 Discussing "time"

John and Jessica stress the need for time to process their dawning awareness. As already described the awareness that have been evoked still is something fuzzy and slippery. In addition it seems like this awareness behaves like a seed that is demanding to take form. Due to the embodied experience it can be said to demand their attention in order to thrive and be cultivated. To reflect and inquire into these processes consequently requires time and effort. However, in their daily work, the lack of time is an obstacle that slows down their inchoate awareness. During a normal workday things are at such speed that they don't find time to analyze and think things through. Tasks need to be sorted out quickly, and often they run from situation to situation where they only have time to give brief messages without evaluating the content of these. John and Jessica experience this to hinder them in practicing suspension. It's tempting to assume that this blocks them from developing the capacity. Anyway it's safe to say that it certainly doesn't promote it. "*Practice* is pivotal in developing competence around new behavior we desire. *Practicing* dialogue brings into relief our underlying behaviors and patterns of communication" (Ellinor & Gerrard, 1998, p.14). Given

this understanding time could be said to be a major exterior factor that impacts people's ability to level their awareness. Thus, in initial phases of enhancing awareness we also may say that sufficient amount of time to process new patterns of thought, is essential if dawning awareness is to be refined and cultivated. Incorporating the skill of suspending thoughts and assumptions, practicing, consequently are of major importance. As Jessica puts it: "*For sustained changed in behavior to occur I need time, it need to be repeated to secure focus*".

6.5 Connecting threads

It is obvious that the informants experience obstacles in their communication. As Bohm (1994) depicted they often end up with situations they didn't intend, and which manifest in a feeling of being in over their heads. In this regard the dialogical workshop seem to have functioned as a leverage to raise awareness around such situations. In the workshop they experienced at a personal level how they beyond the surface often operate by tacit assumptions. It looks like this had been invisible for them so far, and some describe this as an aha-moment. Experiencing limitations in their operating system at a personal level, through "the story", seem to have nudged an embodied want to inquire deeper into this matter. Having this willingness evoked the dialogical process functioned as a scaffold to facilitate this process. By addressing the subject of assumptions, introducing some language and concepts while also sharing views in an interactive matter, it provided them with some indefinable tools that made them approach communication settings with new lenses. Yet, even though they have a feeling of being more aware after participating in the workshop, this still is a fuzzy and slippery condition. However, even though it's a soft fuzzy condition it clearly does something to their quality of attention. We could say they *perceive* differently. Nonetheless, even though the informants experience a change in awareness towards communication we cannot frame this as a complete transformation. Their dawning awareness needs time and practice in order to be refined and cultivated. A process of change has been ignited, however, to say something about the sustainability of this change and how this may be conveyed into their communication goes beyond the findings of this thesis.

This study also provided additional findings that could help extend our understanding of dialogue, and the process of elevating ones awareness. The objective of dialogue is to expand people's awareness (Bohm, 1996), and Jordan (2002) notes how a higher level of awareness

usually is achieved through the steps of noticing, evaluating and transforming thoughts. What's missing here is the question of how to get this process ignited. How do we tap into peoples mind and create a *willingness* to start the process of self-inquiry? The findings in this thesis suggest that "the story" was a real eye opener for the informants. It created disequilibrium in their current frame of reference, which triggered an *embodied* k*nowing* of shortcomings in their personal framework. In turn this fostered an *embodied willingness* to inquire deeper into the subject of assumptions, with the goal of expanded awareness. Thus we can add a column to Jordan's scheme, and propose that a disorienting experience could be the vehicle for people to access Jordan's first column. And, dialogue has the potential to be the container, the platform, which holds the space for such processes to take place (Figure 2).
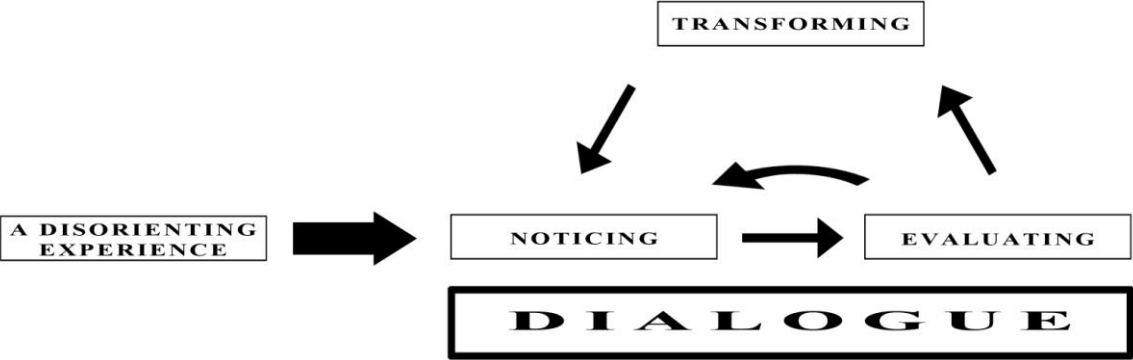
Figure 2: The dialogical vehicle

Chapter 7 - Concluding Discussion

Can dialogue be a leverage to prompt awareness of underlying assumptions? And by extension: *Would people experience this to benefit their communication?*

7.1 Conclusion and key findings

Yes, based on the findings in this thesis, dialogue holds the potential to be a leverage to prompt awareness of underlying assumptions. The informants *explicitly* express a feeling of being more aware, in terms of assumptions, after partaking the dialogical workshop. In an implicit manner they also point to the dialogical process when trying to articulate what nudged this awareness. Sharing and inquiring into each other's assumptions, in an open space for parlance, seem to have provided ground for discovering limitations in their own frame of reference. Experienced at such a personal level it fostered a personal engagement that created an embodied understanding of how assumptions play out in conversations, and which in turn nurtured an *embodied want* to become more aware of these. This way the dialogical process became a transformational conversation practice, which created a shift in people's attention and made them tap into a higher level of awareness.

However, how people experience this to benefit their communication is somewhat blurrier. The informants differ somewhat when talking about how their awareness is conveyed into their communication practice. While some notice big changes, others can't see any change in their style of communicating. Still they all report having started to notice how assumptions bubble in to their mind, and they also strive to evaluate and analyze these. Yet these reflections mostly occur in retrospect. However these reflections have also made them feel that they are *approaching* conversations in a different manner then they used to. Thus, in order to answer the question properly it needs to be accompanied by an extended understanding.

First, even though the informants have a distinct notion of being more aware, they also experience this to be a rather woolly and slippery condition. It seems like they are on a brink where something is emerging, but still finding it too subtle to carry out in full extent into practice. It looks like it still remains much work before this is conveyed into a cultivated

practice. Yet Isaacs (1999) states that the way we think is highly reflected in the way we talk. In this regard it's tempting to suggest that there has been a shift in the informants way of communicating, just being so subtle that it has escaped their notice. Nevertheless, there is no solid evidence to suggest a significant revolution in their communication. From this perspective we cannot establish whether dialogue holds the potential of benefitting peoples communication or not.

Secondly, some of the informants stress the need for time to process their dawning awareness. There are signs that suggest that a seed has been planted, but in order to thrive it demands time to fully bloom. However, during a normal day at work they experience lack of time to be an obstacle to practice the capacity of suspension. Recalling Ellinor and Gerrard (1998), "practice is pivotal in developing competences around new behavior we desire" (p.14). So, clearly there are obstacles in the business environment that may slow down or cut of people being on the brink to transformation. Due to the informants' experience of a need for time, still don't finding it, we could suggest that it *could* be that it will be conveyed into their communication in the future when they have been given enough time. So neither from this angle we can conclude that people experience dialogue to benefit their communication. However, we could conclude that one two-hour workshop alone is not sufficient to carry forward such a process. This research implies that it is cognitively very demanding to get ones head around such things, and that it needs reinforcement, support and repetition to grow into a cultivated praxis.

In sum what we can conclude is: Yes, dialogue holds the potential to prompt awareness around underlying assumptions. And, this thesis finds no evidence to support that people experience this to benefit their communication. However it should be emphasized that in this research there also are elements that strongly implicate that this *could* happen in the future when they have been given sufficient time to process and refine their dawning awareness. Thus we could also establish that one two hour workshop alone is not sufficient to carry forward such processes.

7.2 Implications for the field of counseling

As implied initially in this thesis, such process as transforming ones very mental operating system opens up for the field of coaching and other related helping practices. Changing ones

frame of reference is very much an adaptive challenge (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). Thus a coach or a counselor could be a great help at facilitating this process. Also, for people unfamiliar with the dialogical idea and practice they need a skilled practitioner to get the process going. Consequently could a coach or counselor, skilled in group processes and dialogue, function as a facilitator that holds the environment and help people inquire deeper into hidden assumptions. Something also Bohm (1996) emphasized to be of great importance in initial phases of dialogue.

7.3 Limitations of the study

Due to the frames of this thesis I chose to conduct a short-term research project. The workshop was only two hours, and I interview the participants only a few months later. This means that I could not say something on the *long*-term effect of the workshop. As my findings suggest there are elements that point to the need of time to refine a dawning awareness, in order to be a cultivated state of being. But since I only interviewed the informants once, and, rather early after the workshop, I cannot say something conclusive on this. Also, dialogue isn't normally restricted to only two hours. As Bohm (1996) suggest it should be carried out for a while to reach its full potential. So due to the short amount of time for my workshop it could be said to not follow the dialogical principles dogmatic. Also, even though I am a master's student in counseling and have interest in Bohm's dialogue, I cannot be considered a fully skilled practitioner. Thus if someone skilled in practicing dialogue, it may have given more significant effect. This study was also based on qualitative interviews. Consequently I am obliged to trust what the informants saying. It could be that they were saying things they knew I wanted to hear. If these interviews where accompanied by observations I would had better grounds for the claiming in this research.

7.4 Future research

The limitations of this study pave way for several interesting topics in future research. First, a longitude study could say something about the long-term effect of the workshop, or dialog in a broader sense. Would their awareness expand and be cultivated, or would it relapse into old patterns of thinking and behavior? Also, this could help identifying obstacles or catalysts for

this process. Second, a longitude study could benefit from having several dialogical workshops over a given time. Then we could say something about the correlation between workshops and effect. Third, if one in addition to interviews could include observation we could say something more substantial on the correlation between thinking and actions, while also obtaining information on the process from gaining awareness to conveyed into practice. Fourth, it could be interesting to obtain information on the participants that did not take part in the workshop. Did they notice any change in the people involved? And fifth, in this study there only was a small group from a large company. What would it look like if the whole organization took part in dialogical group? And would this in any way benefit the organization, both in terms of income and employee satisfaction? I consider all these questions as being highly relevant for extending our knowledge about the potential of dialogue. I also hope that someday these questions will be answered in a more substantial way.

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Appendix 1 – Interview guide

<u>**Interview guide**</u>

Remember:

- Examples
- Open questions
- Paraphrasing
- Elaborate

<u>**Introductory questions – on communication**</u>

- What do communication mean to you?
  - What values are important to you?
  - What would you say is your philosophy of communication?
    - What is good communication for you?
      - Examples
      - Why is good communication important?
    - What do bad communication involves for you?
      - Examples
    - What kind of challenges/difficulties do you experience?
      - In what situations do you meet such challenges?
        - How do you handle these situations?

<u>**The workshop**</u>

- How did you experience the workshop?
  - If you are to sketch the essence and tell this to another person, what would that be?
  - What are your thoughts on "the story" (the critical inference test)
  - What are your thoughts on "the ladder of inference"?

- How did you experience our conversation/talk around assumptions?
- How did you experience the principle of *suspending* assumptions?
  - How do you relate to the principle?
  - What does it involve for you?
    - Have you applied the principle in some way?
      - Noticed any benefits?
      - Any challenges or difficulties?
        - More difficult in some situations?
          - What kind of situations?

- Did the workshop have any impact on the way you communicate?
  - In your personal life?
    - In what way? Examples!
  - At work?
    - In what way? Examples?
  - Have you noticed any changes in your awareness when communicating?
    - In what way?

Closing questions

- If you are to sum up the workshop and what you are left with, how will you describe this?
- Now I have gone through the questions I had written down. Is it something you would like to add?
  - Something you would like to elaborate or expand on?
  - Something that came to your mind?
  - Is it something you feel I haven't asked about that you find relevant?

  (eg. The presentation you had with the rest of your company?)

Appendix 2 – Receipt from NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Jonathan Reams
Institutt for voksnes læring og rådgivningsvitenskap
NTNU
Loholt allé 85, Paviljong B
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 13.05.2011   Vår ref: 26977 / 3 / LMR   Deres dato: Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 08.04.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

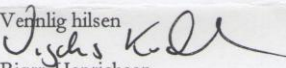|	
26977	*Three Leaders Encounter with the Principle of Suspension*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Jonathan Reams*
Student	*Erik Guddingsmo*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/- helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.11.2011, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henrichsen   Linn-Merethe Rød

Kontaktperson: Linn-Merethe Rød tlf: 55 58 89 11
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Erik Guddingsmo, Frode Rinnans vei 19, 7050 TRONDHEIM

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:
OSLO: NSD. Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD. HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. martin-arne.andersen@uit.no

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Utvalget består av tre til fire personer med lederansvar i en bedrift. Data samles inn via personlig intervju.

Førstegangskontakt foretats via bedriftsleder, som videreformidler informasjon om studien til aktuelle personer. Det gis skriftlig informasjon, og innhentes skriftlig samtykke. Personvernombudet finner informasjonsskrivet vedlagt meldeskjemaet tilfredsstillende, forutsatt at følgende tilføyninger gjøres, jf. telefonsamtale med prosjektleder av 13.05.2011:

- Opplys at det tas lydopptak av intervju
- Ta med dato for prosjektslutt

Videre legges det til grunn at informantene ikke uttaler seg om identifiserbare tredjepersoner (eks: kolleger/andre ledere), under intervjuet. Prosjektleder vil klarere med informant i forkant av hvert intervju, at han/hun benytter generelle termer fremfor eksempelvis navn, ved omtale av andre personer, jf. telefonsamtale med prosjektleder av 13.05.2011.

Prosjektet skal avsluttes 01.11.2011 og innsamlede opplysninger skal da anonymiseres og lydopptak slettes. Anonymisering innebærer at direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger som navn/navneliste slettes, og at indirekte personidentifiserende opplysninger (sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f. eks. bedrift, yrke, alder, kjønn) fjernes eller endres.

Appendix 3 – Participant consent form

Participant consent form

I have received information on the projects objective, and what my participation will involve. I have also been made aware how the gathered information will be used, that all given information will be treated confidential, and that all personal information will be made anonymous and deleted at the projects end. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may cease to take part in this project at any time, without any consequences.

I have read and understood the above, and give consent to participate:

Participant's Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

Appendix 4 – The story

The Story

A businessman had just turned off the lights in the store when a man appeared and demanded money. The owner opened a cash register. The contents of the cash register were scooped up, and the man sped away. A member of the police force was notified promptly.

Statements about the story (T/F/?)

1. A man appeared after the owner had turned off his store lights.
2. The robber was a man.
3. The man who appeared did not demand money.
4. The man who opened the cash register was the owner.
5. The store owner scooped up the contents of the cash register and ran away.
6. Someone opened a cash register.
7. After the man who demanded the money scooped up the contents of the cash register, he ran away.
8. While the cash register contained money the story does not state how much.
9. The robber demanded money of the owner.
10. A businessman had just turned off the lights when a man appeared in the store.
11. It was broad daylight when the man appeared.
12. The man who appeared opened the cash register.
13. No one demanded money.
14. The story concerns a series of events in which only three persons are referred to: the owner of the store, a man who demanded money, and a member of the police force.
15. The following events were included in the story: Someone demanded money, a cash register was opened, its contents were scooped up, and a man dashed out of the store.

Appendix 5 – Inquiry for participating

Information and inquiry for participation in my master thesis project

My name is Erik Guddingsmo and this semester I am working on my master thesis at Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim. The topic of my thesis is dialogue and leadership. Therefore I like to inform about the thesis´ theme, and direct an inquiry to you about participating in my project.

Objective

I believe the single most important aspect of leadership today, is communication. However, across the board we see infinite examples where communication collapses. So, what could be an intelligent and skillful way to end the problems we face when communicating?

I believe our obstacles in communication may be bridged through the practice and principles of dialogue. In short, dialogue is a process that displays communication successes and failures, and it enables an understanding of the sorts of processes that interfere with real communication.

In my project I wish to investigate how to facilitate the principles of dialogue. Therefore I wish to carry out a workshop, which focuses on an implement the principles of dialogue. By the end of the workshop I also wish to interview some of the participants. The information I gain through these interviews will make the basis of my project. Analysis and results will be presented in a written thesis.

Extent and duration

It's hard to give an exact usage of time for a workshop, but I believe two hours should be an appropriate estimate. The interviews by the end of the workshop I estimate to last between 60 and 90 minutes. I will be using a semi-structured interview, so the topic and some questions may be prepared on forehand, but with an opportunity to be explored further. There will be used a digital recorder to record the interviews. To ensure you have been correctly quoted and understood, I will offer you to look through the interviews after they have been transcribed.

Participation

To participate is of course voluntary. Even after you have signed the participant consent form you have the option to withdraw and have your data erased. A withdrawal will have no consequences for you. The participant consent is necessary to document that the informants have received the necessary information on the project and understand what it involves.

To ensure anonymity all participants will be given pseudonyms in the thesis. All participation in the workshop and in interviews will of course be anonymous. At the projects end all data (recordings and transcriptions) will be deleted. All information that emerges during the project is treated with confidence.

Do you wish to participate or have further questions, please contact me or my supervisor on email. I am looking forward to your response.

Regards,

Erik Guddingsmo
erikgud@stud.ntnu.no
Master's student in counseling at NTNU

(Supervisor:

Jonathan Reams

Department of adult learning and counseling, NTNU, Trondheim.

e-mail: jonathan.reams@svt.ntnu)