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CHAPTER 7: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? OTHER APPROACHES TO CONVERSATION, PARTICIPATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

When I began working with organizations twenty-five years ago, it still seemed a sensible proposition that the task of leaders was to have a good overview, a grasp of the big picture, the real state of affairs which enabled them to direct and co-ordinate the activity of an enterprise. It went without saying that this view was superior, was indeed 'global', that it subsumed other, more local views. However over this period such hubris has been tempered by the experience of the world as more complex and less directly manageable. The image of the generals occupying an elevated position on a hill so that they could survey the coming battlefield, develop strategies and brief the troops, gave way to images of leadership more distributed amongst task forces, action teams and special project groups exploring the way forward. Horizons were no longer clearly visible. The idea was to metaphorically send out scouting parties to get a glimpse of what might be around the next corner, or over the next hill. Leaders were meant to ensure that their organizations were well prepared to take advantage of possible future scenarios. Competitive advantage involved 'getting to the future first' (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994). Despite considerable uncertainty, people could develop confidence that they would be able to find out about eventualities likely to matter, in time to respond to them effectively. Although this metaphor of organizational leadership is still prevalent, Lane and Maxfield (1996) point out that in the last decade or so the 'horizons' are now experienced in even more complex ways. The territory of exploration is increasingly understood by managers as not actually 'there' but being formed by the exploration itself. This is the new riddle posed for the mapping way of sense-making that has held sway for so long. It is difficult to map ground that moves with every step of the explorers, creating a different experience of uncertainty. 'Since their destination is always beyond their current foresight horizons in time, the connection between what they decide to do and where they are going is always tenuous and hence ambiguous. They inhabit a world of emergence, perpetual novelty and ambiguity.' Perhaps this underplays the possibility that this uncertainty also produces experiences of recognition and familiarity that may be comforting or frustrating, but nonetheless it is an image with which many managers I work with find resonance.

Griffin (2001) makes a similar point about the shift in flow or process metaphors. We may imagine ourselves as leaders standing by the side of a stream, planning and controlling a boat's passage between the banks. We may shift to imagining ourselves on the boat navigating through hazards and helpful currents with reference to fixed points on the banks. Or we may imagine ourselves as an inseparable

part of the turbulent movement of the stream itself, patterning the flow of our experience as we make sense together.

The global overview from the hill, the solid ground of the bank with its fixed reference points, is lost to us. In an economic world that increasingly talks of globalization, we are all local now.

It is this increasing convergence on ideas of complexity, diversity, plurality and interdependence in a socially constructed world of human action that is leading many organizational practitioners to attend to and work with the self-organizing, self-referential sense-making interactions of people as the key processes of organizational stability and change. In the following sections I turn to several such approaches. I point to what seems very similar in the kind of concerns and issues that practitioners advocating these approaches take up. At the same time, I draw particular attention to how these practitioners *account for or explain* what they are doing in different ways. I ask how these different ways of making sense shift what is experienced as important, what really matters and so where the weight of attention, energy and resources of other kinds comes to lie.

GETTING THE WHOLE SYSTEM IN THE ROOM

Carefully designed and facilitator-led large group events are an increasingly popular example of 'intervention' into the ongoing processes of organizing. These are intensive interactive conferences intended to stimulate new forms of action to address ambitious change in complex situations. Participants are invited to identify issues and create self-managing small groups to generate proposals for further work. The result is a public plan of action. The events are intended to mobilize highly-energized collaborative temporary communities during the event itself which, it is hoped, will sustain subsequent activity. The starting point is often the need to transform a messy, conflictual situation in which complex interactions between numerous diverse stakeholders are creating a situation that is unsatisfactory in the eyes of some at least. For example, 'despite much expenditure, effort and commitment, healthcare access in this town remains patchy', or 'as a result of disjointed activity in silos we are failing to capture market opportunities'. The working concept is to bring a microcosm of the whole complex system together and create the conditions that foster spontaneous reorganization into more aligned, goal-directed activity. These methodologies are heralded as major advances in large system or whole system interventions, capable of producing rapid change. I will look at two in particular, Open Space Technology and Future Search Conferencing.

In a way these approaches are providing opportunity for 'making sense of gathering and gathering to make sense' as I described in Chapter 2, but there are important differences. Primary among these is that when practitioners explain what they see as the value of these methods, they seem to suggest that self-organization can be sponsored and harnessed, however subtly, to good ends in the interests of all concerned. It is uncomfortable to raise questions about whether this is ever possible as the convictions and values of those concerned in promoting these methodologies are always overwhelmingly positive. Harrison Owen (1992), originator of Open Space Technology, talks of releasing love as the generating

force in the workplace. Weisbord and Janoff, writing about Future Search say 'anyone who organises a "whole system in the room" meeting contributes to the betterment of all of us' (2000:198). The way these practitioners account for their work suggests that we can marshal a whole system of concern or a microcosm that reflects it, and operationalize good intentions for that whole.

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

Open Space Technology (OST) was developed by Harrison Owen (1992). Owen later talks of the genesis of OST as residing in four organizing ideas. These are the geometry of the circle (meeting in the round), the rhythm of the breath (iterative cycles of working issues), and the two mechanisms of the marketplace (organizing around different interests) and the bulletin board (public posting of who is meeting where about what) (1997:6). He sees these organizing ideas as universal motifs of productive human communication. He is paying attention to stable patterns of human relating across history and cultures. In so doing I would point out that other, just as stable patterns of human interaction such as secret deals, patronage, power plays and so on are not being focussed on. Also, over time what all these patterns of human interaction give rise to may be judged both good and ill by different people making sense afresh of what has gone before.

Participants join the event on the basis of their interest in the question announced as the key task of the Open Space event. Once there, they have the opportunity to articulate to the public forum issues and topics of concern, related to the theme being explored. In so doing they are undertaking to lead a small working group of any others responding to this topic. The topics are logged on a large board indicating meeting slots that will take place at specified times and places over the period of the conference. People organize themselves around these topics, moving between groups as interest and capacity to contribute evolves, revisiting and reorganizing the bulletin board as the event progresses. The output of each working group is noted and pinned up by each topic owner and collated into collective output at the end of the event.

WHAT SOUNDS SIMILAR?

Participating in an Open Space event and joining working groups is based on people self-selecting themselves according to the strength of their interest and capacity to contribute. The work is conceived as a collective inquiry process. People organize themselves to identify, lead and contribute to issues of concern to them related to the overall aim of the Open Space event and to work them in whatever way they want, culminating in proposals and agreements for taking further action beyond the conference. The design is based on an iterative process of gathering, making sense, dispersing and gathering again in different configurations, creating opportunities for exchange, unexpected connections, involvement, learning, cross-fertilization, new ideas and possibilities for new action. Although the output is recorded and collated, no attempt is made to develop an overall picture.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

The signal that draws people to an OST event, says Owen, must be a clearly focussed question: 'For OST to work, it must focus on a real business (or community) issue that is of passionate concern to those who will be involved' (1997:20). By 'real' here is meant 'widely-recognized'. Formulating a clear question with the sponsors of the Open Space, and disseminating the invitation to gather together those with a stake in working the issues raised by the question, is thus something that OST practitioners invest effort in doing. Having helped the sponsors send out an engaging signal, the role of the facilitators of Open Space is then to 'host' and 'hold' the open space as a container with a simple structure, rules of engagement and clear boundaries within which the participants organize themselves. They do not join in the sense-making process at the event. Their political engagement involves two aspects: their alliance with the sponsors who have formulated the nature of the inquiry, and the way their design channels activity towards public action plans in the service of that legitimated purpose. A lot of emphasis is placed on the recording and collating of output from small groups and the conference as a whole. This tangible output, a thick book of 'stuff', is emphasized by Owen as important for people to feel in a tangible way the productivity of the event. This, then, is an open space in which an overarching theme that makes sense of people's presence and their interaction has already been set. What Owen seems to mean by the event 'working' is that substantial action plans which make sense to those who developed them are generated in the service of this theme between people motivated to pursue them. What OST offers is a legitimated opportunity for intensive networking of a directed kind. In the tradition of OD as I described in the last chapter, it is a highly interactive goal-directed, action-oriented learning process. Although the structure and facilitation may seem light and minimal, it would be naïve not to notice the potency of the design for containing anxiety. It is challenging to compose one's ideas into a short statement or question that might invite others to join you in working further. It feels daunting and exposing for some to express this in a public forum and pin up their invitation on the board, waiting to see whether others will ignore or respond to their invitation, in the market place of interest. However, this is a designed process whereby everyone is asked to do the same thing at the same time. The facilitators emphasize such 'rules of engagement' as 'whoever turns up are the right people' and a generally benign attitude that whatever happens is of value. If, for example, you don't want to stay in a group and wander around, or develop ad hoc corridor conversations, then you are fulfilling the sanctioned role of cross-pollinator. The bulletin board structures the day into working sessions of specified duration from which output in the recommended format is expected. It is possible to track what is going on where and amongst whom, and we all finish up together with a wad of collated material to take away as evidence of our endeavours and what may come of them. This is what people often mean by a stimulating but 'safe', well-managed working environment, in which structure and purpose are clear, difference does not seem so threatening, and a satisfying sense of collective productivity flowers. Such experiences tend to engender enthusiasm and goodwill, a sense of mutual value, a strengthening of one's identity as a contributor to collective effort and increased motivation for taking future action. This, I think, is what leads Owen to talk optimistically about organizational processes that generate and are generated by 'love'. The design, pace and facilitation of Open Space conspire to offer people the opportunity to co-create briefly the dynamics of a highly active, apparently very productive working community in which the experience of fellow-feeling tends to flourish. The implication of Owen's writing is that organizing could/should be more like this more of the time. I

cannot argue with this aspiration as a human desire, but I question whether the conditions that enable this quality of fellow-feeling can ever be more than temporary.

In the previous chapters I have been describing my attempts to work intentionally as an organizational practitioner/facilitator with situations where there is far less clarity of design, purpose, structure, boundaries or rules of the game, situations which are far closer in fact to the 'everyday life' of organizational work. Open Space practitioners help to co-construct temporary power relations in which these constraints are held clear in a similar way for all, enabling rapid work of a certain kind within those constraints. In contrast I have been asking what is involved in participating in those interactive processes in which multiple ways of making sense of what we are doing are more obviously in play simultaneously. I am interested in the way conflicting themes which are organizing our experience of working together emerge, propagate and change in the ongoing conversations in which I participate. I am not trying to gather in one place a 'microcosm of the whole', where a clear 'system of interest' has been identified, but rather working as part of loose webs of relationship both legitimate and spun through a multitude of other kinds of relating. The Open Space event generates a strong temporary sense of community, whereas the kind of work I am describing generates a rather weaker, shifting, ill-defined sense of 'us' because conversations are always following on from previous conversations and moving on into further conversations involving others. People are often gathering and conversing around ill-defined issues, legitimation is often ambiguous, motivation is very varied. The work has much less clear and well-managed beginnings and endings, there is not the same sense of creating common ground for new concerted action. There is no pre-conceived design for the pattern of work; it evolves live. We are not necessarily trying to create outputs in the form of public action plans; rather, we are making further sense of complex situations always open to further sense-making, and in so doing redirecting our energies and actions. I have been describing a process of encouraging narrative sense-making as a fellow participant, different among other differences. That includes telling the stories that make sense of my own participation and joining the conversation that continues to construct further meaning together of the stories we are telling and hearing. My political engagement, with all the questions this raises, is akin to that of the people I am working with. What matters, because of the way I am making sense, are the political processes by which legitimate purpose arises and transforms unpredictably through ongoing activity. I am not setting out to make situations 'safe' for others. Rather I am interested in learning, with others, how we may live at times with a somewhat less 'safe' sense of self, as we experience changing and being changed by our sense-making interactions, as the enabling constraints we are mutually sustaining undergo spontaneous shifts. This is a capacity I think we need to strengthen in the increasingly fluid world of today's organizations and I am linking it to developing increasing appreciation for the craft of participation as self-organizing sense-making.

FUTURE SEARCH

Future Search conferences were developed by Weisbord and colleagues (1992) from the earlier work of Trist and Emery (1973) at the Tavistock Institute. Here again a group of sponsors prepare to take the lead in organizing a future search event by agreeing on a working title that will be the 'task' of the

conference. This task is usually a significant question about how to organize for the future. They consider the widest possible range of stakeholders who might be affected by working on the task, who have information to bring or who might have the authority and resources to act in relation to that task. These are then reduced by the planning group to around eight stakeholder groups who are personally invited to join the conference. Future Search has a generic design over three days, carefully facilitated, that involves everyone in a particular sequence of sense-making activity in particular configurations in and across stakeholder groups that culminates in action planning. The design is predicated on these basic ideas:

● invite the 'whole system' into the room.

● think globally, before acting locally.

● future focus and common ground rather than problem solving and conflict resolution.

● self-management and responsibility for action.

The idea of creating the 'larger picture' remains, although it is now understood as socially constructed rather than really 'out there'. If people can develop a larger picture together in some way it is assumed that they will be better able to integrate their actions to realize a more desired future for this larger picture.

WHAT SOUNDS SIMILAR?

Weisbord and Janoff point out how Future Search differs from traditional organization development activity. They say that they are not trying to close a gap between what is and what ought to be. They say that they do not ask conference participants to create or apply any kind of diagnostic framework that leads to the dissonance needed to 'unfreeze' a system and which leads people to want to reorder their relationships and capabilities (2000:8). They suggest that the introduction of training exercises, structured ice-breakers or diagnostic instruments may reduce the anxiety of participants and facilitators but serves no other useful purpose for this kind of event. They caution that expert input or top-down speeches followed by question-and-answer sessions are a weak strategy for building collaborative action. They discourage lots of advance data gathering and pre-read inputs as necessary to the process of Future Search (ibid.: 60–61). They say that they are not working to improve relationships between people or functions as an aim in itself. They do not try to teach people any special kind of skills to enable them to engage in the conference process; they say they only need people to 'show up and use the skills, experience and motivation they already have' (ibid.: 4). The conference works by engaging people in direct interaction with one another. They are not aiming for dramatic individual change, but rather changes in the action potential among individuals, based on discovering new alignments and possibilities (ibid.: 9).

Weisbord and Janoff are working with sense-making processes but their emphasis on what really matters is again different. They are designing processes that will enable 'everybody' or as varied a group as possible consistent with the purpose of the conference to 'improve the whole system'. They spend time helping sponsor groups identify the task and the 'right' cross-section of people to invite to the event, and they emphasize the importance of full attendance for the whole event. I am not working with the idea of a whole system to be improved and so do not spend time trying to get 'the system' or a microcosm of it gathered together at the same time. It is, I believe, the spatial metaphor of 'system' as map that creates the sense that it is important to have everyone together at the same time in the same place in order to create the shift in patterns of interaction that can shift the whole system. This idea creates a practice of developing and following up highly designed and managed 'events'. My temporal metaphor orientates me to join others involved in the continuous process of making sense of gathering and dispersing, in constantly shifting configurations of political and social life in organizational settings.

Weisbord and Janoff understand change in terms of global patterns emerging from local interaction, not as a paradoxical process but in terms of people creating shared visions of desired futures and common ground for collaborating to achieve them. Only by identifying a desired future whole consisting of interlocking shared values and goals can people appreciate the shift in local interaction needed to allow such a future to emerge. This means that the Future Search design invites people to construct together trajectories of their own personal histories, global trends and the history of the particular organization, community or issue, rather than re-enact the conflicts and problems of the past. Publicly-stated commitments increase the potential of mutually sustained expectations. The roller-coaster journey engenders a tension of despair turning to hope turning to realistic choices, which is seen by Weisbord and Janoff as contributing to the transformational process of the Future Search conference.

Again, in the kind of work I have been describing, it is clear that participants experience a wide range of thoughts and feelings, but it is not orchestrated as a collective experience or collective journey in any way. The facilitation that I am interested in involves participating actively in the movement of sense-making as it evolves in ordinary everyday interaction. Compare the 'drama' of the Ferrovia meeting described in Chapter 4 with descriptions of a Future Search 'roller-coaster'.

The emphasis on developing common ground and a shared vision of a desired future as a necessary basis for creating change leads the Future Search practitioners to talk about encouraging difference but not conflict. This means that articulation of differences of opinion, of values, of goals are encouraged, respected, but 'parked'. They are listed separately from the developing shared common ground. In contrast it is precisely in engaging the immediate conflict of taking the next step that I would see the transformation of power relations and enabling/constraints taking place. Weisbord and Janoff are quite explicit about suggesting how differences in a group should be handled. When strong differences of opinion, values or goals are introduced, they look for 'sub-grouping', in other words others who will ally themselves with the speaker and view expressed, so that no one feels isolated or out on a limb. If this

does not happen they will find a way to offer support to the person expressing a difference. They are constantly tracking 'differences in apparent similarities' and 'similarities in apparent differences'. The unity of the system in the room is sustained by listening for or offering integrating 'both/and' statements when differences and strong feelings are expressed (ibid.: 180). Thus, anxiety rises as difference is expressed and is contained by acceptance and integration. This is very different from living with the anxiety of the paradoxical nature of identity/difference, inclusion–exclusion *not* resolved by the integration of both/and. I am not seeking to sustain the unified identity of the system in the room when I am working, but to live with others in the paradox that every inclusion is simultaneously exclusionary, every exclusion simultaneously inclusionary, every expression of identity is simultaneously an expression of difference.

The approach to facilitation that is advocated for running successful Future Search conferences draws very much on the Tavistock tradition. The facilitators hold the space, where keeping a focus on the stated purpose of the conference, maintaining the boundaries of task (the stated purpose of each session) and time (all sessions start and stop on time) and managing the large group dialogue are considered the key aspects of the work. They are influenced by Bion's (1961) psychoanalytic work on repetitive patterns in groups, particularly a tendency in the face of anxiety to 'fight or flight', dependency and counter-dependency patterns in relation to authority and scapegoating, all ways in which the group energies become diverted from working on the task. Weisbord credits Emery and Trist with the discovery that a clear task placed in a shared global context reduces anxiety in a group and thus the tendency to fight or flee. Thus the facilitators do not 'join' the work of the conference participants; they do and say as little as possible. Whenever the whole conference gathers for dialogue, they make it a point to stay silent as long as it takes for the first person to say something (ibid.: 177).

We keep the door open by listening without acting. We are mindful that each time we solve a problem we deprive others of a chance to solve it for themselves. Each time we interrupt the action, we preempt someone else's acting. Just waiting often is all a group needs from us to shift towards active dialogue, reality checking and creative collaboration.

(ibid.: 158)

Future Search facilitators say they endeavour to sustain a relatively neutral relationship with conference participants. In fact, their political alliance is again with the sponsors. One of the boundaries they say they use their power to hold is to keep the conference task or purpose 'centre and front'. When I am working, I intentionally participate in the chat of organizational life, joining conversations in corridors, informally dropping in on people in offices and taking many a cup of coffee. I also regularly phone people to talk things over. When I join existing task forces and working groups, I participate rather than attempt to facilitate them. I ask questions, voice opinions, make suggestions, interrupt people, show my responses. Weisbord and Janoff talk about being 'dependable authorities', meaning that they can be relied upon to 'provide information people don't have, start and stop on time, reiterate overall goals, manage large group dialogues so that all views are heard, and back out when the group is working'

(ibid.: 184). They reiterate that it is up to participants to take responsibility for what they want to do with the space. Their job is to hold the boundaries of that space and the process for moving through it. I do not seek to do either. I actively take up responsibility with others for participating in the often fraught processes by which we are always coming to know ourselves and what we are in the process of doing. To the extent that I have authority by being invited to work in the organization by a usually senior manager, I use it to exemplify and encourage curiosity in and exploration of a continuous inquiry mode – what do we think we are doing here?

The design of both Open Space and Future Search events regularly produces the enthusiasm, collective focus and new action plans that its advocates suggest. The experience often generates optimism and goodwill. What happens after is not examined or written about in any detail. My question is not 'Is this worth doing?' Much may come of such events. Much WILL come of them and this will bear a complex relation to the hopes, fears and aspirations of the participants. My question is how to work with the ongoing conversational life of organizations in which such events may occasionally arise.

ORGANIZATIONS AS 'LIVING SYSTEMS'

Amongst a growing number of organizational practitioners today, the conversation about organizations has changed in a significant way. Instead of just talking about organized wholes and whole systems, people have begun to talk about organizations as 'living systems' or 'living wholes'. There are many aspects of this approach that are very appealing, but it finishes up with a declaration that organizations are in some way 'alive' that, for me, has troubling implications.

Initially there is an evocative appeal to a perspective which is said to be organic, holistic and humane rather than the 'dead' and deadening reductionism of seeing organizations as mechanical systems. In the midst of growing concern about the impact of human technologies and enterprise on the earth's resources, there is also a metaphorical appeal to learning from the economy, creativity and resilience of the natural world, before it gets 'messed up' by human intervention. We are invited to learn from the way Nature organizes and works, by harnessing findings in branches of the natural sciences, particularly evolutionary biology and the complexity sciences. This includes an explicit or implicit ethical appeal to the need to create sustainable business and social justice by seeing human organizations as *part of* rather than *separate from* the ecology of the planet, part of a 'living world'.

In this way of thinking, an organization becomes an autonomous living unity, with emergent properties of the whole, arising from the self-organizing interaction of networks of human individuals and groups, each of which is also an autonomous living unity. Individuals, at one level, and organizations, groups, cultures, ecologies and the planet (as in Lovelock's (1979) Gaia theory) at other levels can all be conceived as autonomous living wholes. This move draws in ideas about the nature of life which integrates the far-from-equilibrium dissipative structures of Prigogine (1984, 1997), the non-linear mathematics of Complexity theory and Maturana and Varela's (1992) theories of the autopoetic network structures of living cells. Writers such as Capra (1996) have shown how these ideas can be

brought together to offer an all-encompassing theory of the pattern, structure and process of life in systems terms. An organization can then be understood as a far-from-equilibrium dissipative network structure produced by processes of iterative communicative interactions of a self-referential, autopoetic nature.

The key idea that I want to focus on is what happens as self-organization in the world of human action starts to be seen as producing emergent 'living wholes' with their own integrity of identity and purpose, something with 'a mind of its own'. This move then starts to incorporate notions of the spirit, soul and collective intelligence, wisdom, even of this 'living whole'.

For example, not so long ago I found myself sitting, once again, in a circle of chairs with about thirty other people. A woman was holding a large semi-precious stone and explaining that this particular stone had been used at a number of previous gatherings. It had therefore acquired a special significance as a symbol. The woman spoke in words and tone that invited all those present to share with her the symbolic importance of the stone, to further invest it with significance. There was some suggestion in her words that the stone might be literally imbued in some way with energy and wisdom from previous gatherings. As the stone was handed to someone in the circle they were asked to voice their reflections. When each person had finished he or she got up and gave the stone to another in the circle who had not yet spoken until it had passed to all. No one refused the stone or remained silent with it in their hands. Some spoke briefly, some at length, some personally and emotionally, interested in exploring what we are coming to understand about how living organisms evolve in natural ecologies through complex webs of adaptive relationships. They then ask the question, as we have in this series, what these ideas can mean in the human social world where our experience of self-consciousness and freedom of choice must be taken into account. In Senge's thinking 'learning organizations' as self-organizing systems have become 'learning communities' and then 'communities of commitment'. His question is how people interact to generate joint commitment to enterprises in which their own sense of self is at stake. He points out how learning communities promote change in our very selves since 'to all intents and purposes, most of the time, we ARE our mental models'. He and his colleagues are very alive to the dangers of conformity. They are concerned not to exclude people who disagree so that learning communities do not degenerate into cults. They insist that content and process are inseparable. They advocate organizing around dialogue instead of planning elaborate agendas. They talk about the paradoxes of transformational learning. However, their understanding of the word 'transformational' is quite different from mine.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

When I talk of transformation, I mean evolving forms of identity, of persons, groups, societies, emerging as we participate in the non-linear processes of human relating, in which both continuity (sameness) and change (difference) occur simultaneously – that is the paradox. When many practitioners who espouse a 'living systems' approach talk of transformation they mean transformation from conflict and fragmentation to THE GOOD as the cohesion of shared vision and joint purpose.

Senge and Kofman write about leadership of 'communities of commitment' as the 'heart of learning organizations'. The work of such communities is to bring forth new realities and shape the future they deeply desire. They propose that we dissolve frozen patterns of thought that are mindsets generating deeply rooted dysfunctional patterns in our society. These dysfunctions are listed as fragmentation, competition and reactiveness. 'The solvent we propose is a new way of thinking, feeling and being: a culture of systems.' The rather analytical work that Argyris originally proposed for re-examining and changing our 'mindsets' or 'mental models', as I described in the previous chapter, is replaced by a more intuitive, indeed, spiritual approach.

When Senge and colleagues approach sense-making gatherings, they have different work in mind from what I have described in earlier chapters. People are encouraged to voice their aspirations for a better future and to develop a deeply felt commitment to this aspiration, fleshed out as a shared vision. People are also encouraged to articulate frameworks of core values and guiding principles which would 'operationalize' such a future. These are the core values of love (as compassion, fellow-feeling) in the face of difference, wonder (rather than a desire for control) in the face of unpredictability, humility in the face of complexity (all our maps are provisional and must be open to revision). Inevitably, such aspirational conversation tends towards idealizations of community, where the tension of conflict is transcended, diversity embraced, openness and trust become the order of the day.

The idea of people recovering 'the memory of the whole' that I mentioned above means that people are encouraged to develop 'the awareness that wholes precede parts'. This will make fragmentary thinking systemic. Discovering 'the community nature of the self' turns competition into cooperation: 'I cannot be me without you'. Reactiveness becomes creativeness when we see 'the generative power of language' to bring forth fresh distinctions from the undivided flow of life. In THE WEB OF LIFE, Capra (1996) talks about the shift from the parts to the whole as characteristic of systems thinking. Kofman and Senge say that, 'In the new systems world view, we move from the primacy of the pieces to the primacy of the whole, from absolute truths to coherent interpretations, from self to community, from problem-solving to creating' (1993:6). I would say that they are proposing a shift that understands wholes formatively causing parts, communities and cultures formatively causing selves, cognitive maps formatively causing the worlds of our experience through languaging. Leadership then becomes our ability to reshape these wholes closer to our deeply felt desire. Once again this involves the rational/formative split causality of Kantian dialectical thinking that we have been questioning in this series.

Since I am not accounting for my work in the same way I do not emphasize attempts to shape the self-organizing systems or wholes in which we are participating. Instead I am thinking in terms of the everyday conflict of taking the next step, as we participate in the ongoing patterning processes of communicative action in which identity and difference of persons in society are always emerging simultaneously. When I describe working with the spontaneous processes of continuity and change, I am not working with Kofman and Senge's core question, 'How do such leadership communities, form, grow and become influential in moving large communities forward?' My questions are: 'How are we are

making sense of ourselves and how do we go on from here?' When I describe gathering people in a self-organizing way, it is not by asking a bold and penetrating question or by gathering those 'with a predisposition' for a systems perspective. The gatherings I refer to are people coming together through the connections, associations and multiple motivations arising in their work. When I describe the messy sense-making conversations which shift the enabling constraints people are recreating through relating, this is very different from engaging in 'intensive and open-ended community building activities'. When I describe the new developments which emerge over time, I am not referring to special dialogue projects or learning lab projects which are attempting to grow a special culture or activity in a protected or hothouse situation.

At the gathering I mentioned above, Claus Otto Scharmer talked about his ideas for a new understanding of leadership which he referred to as 'sensing and actualizing emerging futures'. Examining what he means by this illustrates in some detail the kind of thinking that the 'living systems' approach seems to be developing as an understanding of emergence in human communities of commitment.

Scharmer (2000) distinguishes between two *different* sources or processes of learning and argues that *both* are required for organizations to succeed. He calls the first 'reflecting on the experiences of the past' and he calls the second 'sensing and embodying emergent futures' *rather than* re-enacting the patterns of the past. This immediately signals the 'both/and' nature of his thinking, and the particular view he takes of time. His view is that of linear time moving from the past through the present to the future, with one kind of learning relevant to understanding the past and another relevant to creating the future. He talks about *uncovering* ever deeper levels of the structuring nature of the past and bringing this into awareness as a process of presencing. The future is understood as an emerging transcendent whole to be accessed in an essentially mystical manner through bringing it also into presence. This presencing of both past and future is an essentially timeless experience, a fertile void, which he calls generative learning. The present therefore quite explicitly has no time structure and presencing is *manifesting in awareness* what lies beneath or above or behind our experience of direct interaction. In contrast in this series we have been talking about the time structure of a living present by which we mean our lived experience of the movement of experience. This is our experience of direct interaction as we reconstruct the past and construct the possibilities of the future by the same process of complex responsive relating.

Scharmer says that the key challenge for leaders is how to enable teams to uncover layers of reality that will move them from more superficial levels of reflection on the past to generative learning, and he proposes a methodology for doing this. Generative learning is understood as a cycle of seeing, sensing, presencing and enacting and the cognitive process involved is intuition, described as the highest quality of attention, in which Scharmer says that individual intention is at one with the intention of the emerging whole as it comes into presence. It is a process of bringing the emerging whole into reality 'as *it* desires' rather than as the ego desires. Generative learning, as presencing, is a collective forming, enacting and embodying of common will. Will formation involves envisioning understood as enhancing

the quality of aspiration, vision and intention and is said to be at the heart of leadership. Presencing is a process of becoming aware, which involves suspension, redirection and letting go. Suspension means taking off one's self-created cognitive filters. Redirection is turning inward to the source of oneself and redirecting attention from current reality (the object) to an emergent reality (the coming-into-being of the object). Next there is letting go, defined as emptying or surrendering to a deeper, higher collective will. Scharmer then adds another stage which he calls 'letting come'. For him, surrender means switching from looking for to letting come, receiving that which is attempting to manifest or that which one is capable of letting manifest. Letting come is a phase of quickening or crystallization in which one allows something to enter. This is the arrival of the highest possible future, the highest presence, the highest Self. What is received is an emerging heightened quality of will and a more tangible vision of what the individual and the group want to create. He describes this as a switch from seeing objects to sensing the field out of which objects and behaviours are enacted. It enables one to understand in a moment the *whole system* and how it is reproducing events and troubling symptoms. This is Scharmer's understanding of the power of intuition – as glimpsing the transcendent whole that one is co-creating through one's own participation.

Enacting is then a further phase of social activity of people all acting in differentiated ways from their highest inner selves now attuned to a deeply shared purpose. Embodying is the incorporation of such enactments into procedures and routines that sustain a desired reality.

Note how Scharmer uses the 'both/and' logic to resolve the paradox of individual/group, by asserting a process by which individual differences now interact to unfold a common desired future. There is difference at the level of the individual and unity at the level of the group because essentially meditative practices have 'attuned' the selves to the unfolding of a commonly desired future, a common good. It is also implied that this common good can also be attuned to the larger good of the larger wholes in which this particular community is embedded.

The language is strikingly mystical. Presencing is described as going through the eye of the needle, a birth, a breaking through a membrane. Scharmer describes it as a mystery and says that it is a mode of relating in which the individual relates to the collective whole of the community, team and organization. In this state people become more 'selfless and become aligned with their true selves and with the intention of the emerging whole. The self is an open gate through which new social substance passes as transformation.' Although he does not refer to Bateson (1973), Scharmer seems to be trying to penetrate the territory where Bateson paused in his postulation of levels of learning. Beyond Level Two learning, the capacity to reflect on the 'mental models' guiding one's actions, Bateson postulated a Level Three learning. He said he could not explain this. He thought it hardly ever happened and the nearest he could come was mystical experience or personal therapy. This is being taken up by Scharmer, when he talks about generative learning as the deepest level of learning and presents it as an essentially mystical experience.

Scharmer defines leadership as the activity of shifting the place from which a system operates and he defines this as shifting the conversation from talking nice and talking tough to reflective and generative dialogues of the kind described above. Generative dialogues lead to an intentional quietness or sacred silence. The only sustainable tool for leading change is the leader's self as the capacity of the 'I' to transcend boundaries of its current organization and operate from the emerging larger whole both individually and collectively. The leader's role is to create the conditions that allow others to shift the place from which their system operates.

Although the two approaches use the same words, therefore, those words have a completely different meaning. I have already noted the different uses of transformation and present/presencing. Participation also means something quite different in the two theories. For Scharmer participation is the immersion of individuals into the collective harmony of human groups attuned to their role in the larger ecology of nature. In complex responsive process theory participation refers to the ordinary everyday communicative interaction between people. Participation is thus not understood as a spiritual mystery but in terms of conversational turn-taking/turn-making and power relating. For Scharmer, emergence means the coming into presence of the transcendent whole while, in complex responsive process theory, it means the self-organization of pattern in communicative interaction between people. For Scharmer, communication is understood as a special form of dialogue, ultimately a sacred silence. In complex responsive process theory the focus of attention is on ordinary everyday conversation and how it constructs social realities.

Sharmer's work spells out the process of thought that accompanies the idea of organizations as Kantian self-organizing systems whose *as if* emergent purposes make sense of the parts and their relationships. The *as if* is literalized in the idea of 'living wholes' with their own consciousness created by the meditative communing of human beings. Leadership becomes the activity of creating 'good' living systems, ideal communities of unified identity at one with the natural world. Griffin (2001) explores in detail in his volume in this series the very important ethical issues facing us as we go down this route. He carefully tracks the implications of Mead's struggle with these issues as he lived through the turbulent years of war and their aftermath in the twentieth century. Mead recognized that idealized values are an essential and precious part of our human heritage. However, he was at pains to point out the danger of trying to implement idealized wholes directly, in other words by suggesting that voluntary commitment to agreed core values as guiding 'rules of behaviour' will unfold these idealized futures. He warns that this process produces a very subtle form of oppression. Scharmer's contribution to a living systems approach seems to go even further in proposing even greater 'surrender' to a good that is trying to happen. Participation comes to mean the willing submission of the 'good self', the highest or idealized self to the wisdom of a collective tuned into a transcendent wisdom. Reluctance to submit to this collectively generated higher purpose is respectfully attributed to the unreadiness of the lower self, the selfish ego. Again, raising doubts about this in the midst of the fervent good intent of practitioners who embrace these ideas is very difficult. Whenever I find myself in gatherings where these kinds of practices are being encouraged in organizational settings I feel deeply uneasy and troubled. A religiosity in a secular age searching for spiritual meaning seems to be embracing a missionary zeal articulated by

writers like Wheatley (1992, 1996) and Lewin and Regine (2000) who talk about communities of love and the soul at work. These writers insist that their approach is based on embracing conflict and difference, but in fact they seem to seek to transcend them. I find this disturbing. When I work in organizations, I do not have such aspirations, which does not mean that I do not care about the endless ethical dilemmas in which I am implicated.

THE ART OF DIALOGUE

I have used the word 'conversation' a lot in this book, aware that it has very ordinary connotations. People engage in conversation all through the day, in all sorts of situations, in twos and threes and larger groups. Some conversations are anticipated, prepared for and highly charged, others arise in unlooked for encounters in which concentration may come and go, some conversations seem to flower, others get stuck. The unexpected may arise in the most familiar exchanges, repetition and DÉJÀ VU in the midst of unusual gatherings. I have been most interested in a certain kind of free-flowing conversation in which themes arise, evolve and shift spontaneously. In this section I want to look at the process of dialogue as a special form of conversation taken up by Isaacs (1999) drawing on the work of the physicist David Bohm. Throughout his life Bohm developed an interest in the way meaning unfolds in collective communication (1987), what he called the 'implicate order' as a way of understanding the nature of 'wholeness' (1980) and the nature of thought as a system (1994). He developed his ideas by initiating and involving himself in numerous gatherings as a living inquiry. Some fifteen to forty people regularly convened in a circle with no pre-set agenda with the aim of sustaining a conversation through which the very processes of thought and consciousness themselves might be revealed in the ordinary processes of relating and communicating. The articulation of elements and principles of dialogue that developed out of this work have been continued by some of those who experienced dialogue with Bohm. This is the Dialogue Project at MIT founded by William Isaacs who has been influential in bringing the ideas and practices into organizational settings and when 'dialogue' is referred to by other practitioners, some form of Bohm's dialogue practice is meant. Dialogue is differentiated from other forms of communication such as debate, discussion or ordinary conversation.

WHAT SOUNDS SIMILAR?

I share with advocates of dialogue the experience that open-ended, exploratory conversation amongst attentive, engaged humans is the source of both continuity and change in the patterning of interaction of culture and society. Dialogue is a process of direct interaction that insists 'on facing the inconvenient messiness of daily corporeal experience' (Lee Nichols in Bohm 1999: xi). Bohm talked a lot about the paradox of human introspection, making the point repeatedly that there is no neutral place to stand with which to assess one's own thoughts. He wanted to bring attention to the movement of thought as a 'material process', in other words that thought involves the electrical and chemical activity of brain, nerves, muscles, hormones, blood flow and so on. He was not trying to 'reduce' thought to these processes, but to point out that the movement of thinking is the movement of our bodily experience, much as I have been saying that our sense-making is our experience as bodily selves. This led Bohm to

advocate developing attentiveness to the flow of awareness much as Gestalt practitioners have always done, although in his case his work with Krishnamurti, the Indian educator and philosopher, led him to speak of this in terms reminiscent of meditative practices. Isaacs and others, continuing to work with his ideas, are interested in the way that, in the free-flow of dialogue, people find themselves speaking what they did not realize they thought; that there is a quality of listening beyond empathy or sensitivity to others, in which the awareness of the very MIS-perception of one's spoken intent can lead to new meaning being created on the spot; that new perspectives and possibilities can open spontaneously and unpredictably between people, thus changing simultaneously people's experience of themselves and of what is possible socially. Dialogue is likened to jazz ensemble improvisation, but with the caveat that this is more difficult in the language of words than in music.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT?

I have never worked with David Bohm, but I have had the opportunity to talk at some length with his long-time colleague at Birkbeck, Basil Hiley (Bohm and Hiley, 1993) who collaborated with Bohm in his scientific work. I was struck by Hiley's description of the way Bohm clearly struggled to translate the difficult material coming out of quantum physics into insights that would shift our perceptions of 'reality'. Unlike many other scientists, he was not satisfied with the proposal that only the language of mathematics could express these findings and he was acutely aware of the conflicts between different scientists' views of what quantum theory might mean. He spent a lot of time pondering the paradoxes of the experiments with the nature of light, that sometimes seemed to have a wave-like nature and sometimes a particulate nature depending on the way the experiments were set up and conducted. It was this struggle that led him to propose his theory of the implicate order, a patterned invisible wholeness out of which manifestations unfold into the visible and are then enfolded back again. Reality then consists of an explicate order in which things may appear to be fragmented and unconnected, unfolding out of a deeper implicate order which is a flowing process of unbroken wholeness. Although he was a radical thinker, Bohm did seem to sustain one tradition of scientific thought in which the appearance of paradox indicated a problem in thinking itself. His proposal of the implicate order was a proposal for resolving the paradox of light having a dual nature.

Bohm found resonances in the ideas of his friend, the psychiatrist Patrick de Mare (1991) who was working with the free flow of conversation in groups, what he called 'socio-therapy', as a break-away movement from the tradition of one-to-one psychoanalytic therapy based on Freud's work. This was linked to the school of Group Analysis, particularly associated with Foulkes (1948) where the concept of the group matrix became a key idea, by which participants were conceived as nodes in a field of communication. De Mare also introduced Bohm to the idea of a dialogue group as a 'microculture'. This makes an analogy to a hologram, where the sampling of an entire culture, national or organizational, for example, might be thought to exist in a group of twenty or so people, thereby charging it with multiple views and value systems. He proposed that repeated experience of participating in such sessions led to the emergence of what he called 'impersonal fellowship', an atmosphere of openness and trust that did not depend on members sharing extensive personal history. Bohm's vision of dialogue involved free-

flowing communication amongst a group meeting regularly in a circle with no agenda, no purpose, no hierarchy, no authority, 'an empty place'. In this process, he theorized, people come to share a tacit pool of common meaning and coherence (akin to his idea of the implicate order), as they attend to the flow of APPARENT fragmentation of their assumptions, as these emerge from this unbroken wholeness into thought, language and overt expression (akin to the explicate order).

Again what I am pointing to is the particular way of accounting for what may be happening in free-flowing conversation that is being proposed here, which again makes central the idea of a whole beneath, behind or beyond direct interaction as essential to an understanding of the patterning of that interaction. Participation for Bohm means partaking of common meaning or a common mind that arises BETWEEN the individual and the collective, creating a whole that is constantly moving towards coherence. This way of making sense then infuses the work that Isaacs explores in his organizational consulting and facilitating. This leads him to pay a lot of attention to developing people's capacity to engage in dialogue as a special practice or discipline, involving learning through repeated experience the capacity to 'listen', 'suspend', 'respect' and 'voice', where each of these arts has a very particular meaning and theoretical foundation. In fact he sees this in a very similar way to Scharmer. Isaacs also emphasizes the need for a group to return regularly to the dialogue mode as they slowly develop the dialogue 'container'. The disciplines of dialogue allow people to share and tap a tacit pool of coherent meaning, in which the tensions of difference are resolved because they are held together as aspects of a larger unity. This emphasis on differences contained within a larger whole also means that Isaacs favours the introduction of various models such as David Kantor's 'four player system'. This offers a map of the structured repetitive patterns of conversation, the different kinds of roles that such structures require and the way people with certain preferences of style may take up those roles. The same kind of proposal is made for different qualities or 'fields of conversation', different kinds of language. All these GENERALIZED differences which people easily recognize are all seen to integrate potentially into a coherent whole.

Since I am making sense differently of the way continuity and change emerge spontaneously in human communication, I am not trying to foster a special form or discipline of conversation. I do encourage people to rely less on pre-set agendas and ready made presentations and to engage one another in exploratory conversation that generates stability and potential shifts in what we are holding one another to and how we are doing that. Rather than inculcating a special discipline of dialogue, I am encouraging a perception of ensemble improvisation as an organizing craft of communicative action.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Etienne Wenger proposes two views of an organization. There is the designed organization, which he calls THE INSTITUTION to distinguish it from the organization as lived in practice, and there are the CONSTELLATIONS OF INTERSECTING PRACTICES which gives life to the organization. Communities of practice, he says, may be in part a response to but never the direct result of the designed organization (1999:241). These communities of practice emerge from the local social engagement of people in the

day-to-day conduct of some kind of joint enterprise. They are self-organizing, arising, evolving and dissolving according to their own learning, negotiating their own enterprise and shaping their own boundaries of membership, even though all this may be in response to institutional prescriptions, planned events and assigned boundaries. Pursuing practices 'always involves the same kind of embodied, delicate, active, negotiated, complex process of participation.' This participation is understood as the process of producing meaning – meaningful identities, meaningful activities, meaningful ways of accounting to one another for what we are doing, the meaning we give to artefacts and resources.

This perspective allows Wenger to offer an image of organization different from that familiar to most organizational members. The institutional aspect is not an umbrella or overarching structure which unifies the constellations of communities of practice clustering beneath it. Organizational design is rather understood by Wenger as a method by which a set of practices manages itself as a constellation. The designed institution 'does not sit on top; it moves in between. It does not unify by transcending; it connects and disconnects. It does not reign; it travels, to be shaped and appropriated in the context of specific practices' (ibid.: 247). Wenger imagines the work of designing an institution as itself the enterprise of a particular community of practice within a set of practices. This may well be, but is not necessarily or exclusively, that of 'management'. He points out that the work of this community of practice is as local as that of any other. The institutional design is not to be mistaken for a global overview of the constellation of practices, no one can have such a global perspective because the scope of mutual social engagement is always limited. The global is always emergent and beyond design. Thus practice, itself a global phenomena, is not amenable to design. 'One can articulate patterns or define procedures, but neither pattern nor procedures produce the practice as it unfolds. One can design systems of accountability and policies for communities of practice to live by, but one cannot design the practices that will emerge in response to such institutional systems. One can design roles, but not the identities that will be constructed through those roles. One can produce affordances for the negotiation of meaning, but not meaning itself …' (ibid.: 229). What we MAY be able to do, Wenger suggests, is learn to design in the service of practice, to support the knowledgeability of practice that is continuously created and reproduced in the process of social engagement. Wenger makes his contribution by articulating a move away from managing organizations as a 'plan of action' and instead as a 'constellation of practices'. His work greatly enriches the concept of the learning organization by discussing a conceptual architecture which may resource conversations about the ongoing definition of an enterprise by those engaged in pursuing it. He disentangles notions of design from any kind of blueprint for organizational practice and so fosters intelligent reflection on the inherently uncertain relationship between our grasp of organizations as designed institutions and our experience of the patterning of organizational activity.

WHAT SOUNDS SIMILAR?

Wenger's ideas about the nature of organizations as constellations of communities of practice generated in the process of human sense-making, have much resonance with the perspective of this

book series. This resonance comes from a similar understanding of learning and identity formation as a social process. The similarity of our ways of thinking here is clear in relation to Lave and Wenger's earlier writing on situated learning (1991). They develop a theory of LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION, the process by which 'the production, transformation and change in the identities of persons, knowledgeability in practice and communities of practice are realised in the lived-in world of engagement in everyday activity' (ibid.: 47). Their focus of interest bears many similarities to the theorizing in terms of COMPLEX RESPONSIVE PROCESSES OF RELATING which this book series develops.

Lave and Wenger focus on learning and knowing as social participation, in which person, activity and world are mutually constitutive, rather than on cognitive processes or conceptual structures. We do not learn ABOUT a practice, they say. Our learning, as the experience of engaging day-to-day as bodily persons in sustaining and developing meaningful activity with others, IS practice. Practice and personal identity emerge together as our by, but one cannot design the practices that will emerge in response to such institutional systems. One can design roles, but not the identities that will be constructed through those roles. One can produce affordances for the negotiation of meaning, but not meaning itself …' (ibid.: 229). What we MAY be able to do, Wenger suggests, is learn to design in the service of practice, to support the knowledgeability of practice that is continuously created and reproduced in the process of social engagement. Wenger makes his contribution by articulating a move away from managing organizations as a 'plan of action' and instead as a 'constellation of practices'. His work greatly enriches the concept of the learning organization by discussing a conceptual architecture which may resource conversations about the ongoing definition of an enterprise by those engaged in pursuing it. He disentangles notions of design from any kind of blueprint for organizational practice and so fosters intelligent reflection on the inherently uncertain relationship between our grasp of organizations as designed institutions and our experience of the patterning of organizational activity.

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learn ABOUT a practice, they say. Our learning, as the experience of engaging day-to-day as bodily persons in sustaining and developing meaningful activity with others, IS practice. Practice and personal identity emerge together as our experience of co-created patterns of meaning. Lave and Wenger question the validity of descriptions of social behaviour based on the enactment of prefabricated codes, rules or structures. They reject classical structural analysis where behaviour is explained and serves as empirical evidence for pre-existing, 'underlying' systems. They move away from seeing learning as located in an individual mind that acquires mastery over processes of reasoning and description by internalizing and manipulating structures. As Hanks remarks in his foreword to *Situated Learning*, we do not learn a repertoire of participation schemata; rather, we learn to *do* practices as modes of co-participation. This involves, he suggests, the ability to improvise together. We do not require a commonality of symbolic or referential structures to co-participate. Language here is not a code for *talking about* but is a means of *acting* in the world. Participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. 'The notion of participation thus dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience; persons, actions and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing and learning' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:52).

In my view Lave and Wenger come close to positing the same kind of transformative teleology which we introduced in Volume 1 of this series. Their interest is in how to theorize about the conflictual nature of ordinary, everyday social practice in a way that claims a common process inherent in the simultaneous production of changing persons and changing practice over time. Thus, the transformation of the social order is linked to the immediacy of persons relating as part of situated activity through understanding learning as a process that incorporates meaning-making, politics and the formation of social identity. Because Wenger is explicitly moving away from thinking in terms of systems, he does not make the move I discussed above to creating an *as if* unity of purposefulness of formative teleology for thinking about communities of practice. He is thus in no danger of romanticizing notions of community.

However, as Hanks points out, the theory of legitimate peripheral participation posits a learning process through which the continuity and transformation of the identities of persons, the skills they are mastering and the larger community of practice is necessarily *entailed* by the relational, historical, decentring theorizing, but not *explained*. Theorizing in terms of complex responsive processes of relating does attempt such an explanation. It does this by incorporating the analogy from edge of chaos complex digital simulations of the inherent capacity of iterative, non-linear interaction to pattern itself. It then translates that analogy to the domain of human communication by drawing on Elias's (1970) ideas of power figurations and Mead's (1970) ideas of the evolution of mind, self and society in the complex human conversation of gestures.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

As Wenger takes up and develops the ideas of communities of practice in relation to institutional design, he seems to move away from the potential paradoxes of transformative teleology implicit in a liberal

reading of the earlier writing. In order to discuss ways of designing institutions in terms of conceptual learning architectures or infrastructures, he starts to introduce the logic of dualities. Organisations, he suggests, are best understood as the interaction of two aspects which influence one another, but which maintain their own integrity as sources of structure, one designed and the other emergent. Institution and practice cannot merge because they are different entities that complement one another: 'The point of design is to make organisations ready for the emergent by serving the inventiveness of practice and the potential for innovation inherent in its emergent structure' (ibid.: 245).

Although Wenger states that institutional design is a practice of a community of practice like any other, his interest is exploring the rationality of design as a set of macro concepts, not the political learning processes in which any particular design emerges. In doing this he loses the paradoxical relationship between design and emergence which I have wished to preserve because my focus of interest is on how particular forms of institutionalization are emerging in the social engagement in which I have been invited to participate. Wenger approaches this when he says that the designed institution and the emergent constellation of communities of practice exist in a tension that cannot be resolved once and for all. Rather, he understands the evolution of an organization as the constant renegotiation of the alignment between institution and constellations of lived practices through the negotiation of meaning.

Once again in pursuit of his interests in macro concepts of design, he introduces another duality to explain what he means by the negotiation of meaning: that of participation and reification. What Wenger seems to be saying is this. In their participation as members of a community of practice, in their acting and their interacting, people are producing reifications on which they focus attention and enable sharing in their participation. By reification Wenger includes far more than artefacts. So, for example, when people are interrelating with each other through talking, say, they are projecting meanings onto 'objects' that their interaction is producing, say plans, stories, gestures, silences, glances. These reifications then offer a focus of attention around which further negotiation of these projected meanings can be organized. Taken together as a unity, this dual process of participation (mutual recognition of each other) and reification (projecting meaning onto 'objects') constitutes the negotiation of meaning, which is essentially what a practice is, producing both novelty and continuity. Thus Wenger explains the emergence of meaning as a participative process that both produces and uses reification. There is a sense of participation and reification taking place at the same time but as the interplay of distinct but complementary processes, occurring in different realms, which together constitute an inseparable interwoven unity. This differs from the explanation of the emergence of meaning as the movement of a paradoxical dialectic as in Mead's theory of the emergence of mind, self, and society in the conversation of responsive gesturing. Here meaning emerges *as significant symbols* in the conversation of gestures between interacting bodies. The act of gesturing (moving, talking, doing) is continuously finding its meaning in the response to it, in the context of a history of such responsive gesturing. The paradox of continuity and novelty in the evolution of meaning is created by the way response is always acting back to further shape gesture in the very process of gesturing as well as when a gesture is later appealed to as part of subsequent gesturing.

By explaining the process of meaning as the interplay of a duality, of two distinct but complementary aspects occurring in different realms, Wenger serves his concern to conceptualize institutional design as learning architectures. His explanation of sources of structure in organizations as the interplay of design and emergence, and the other dualities he introduces, serves him in the same way. He can now suggest we ask such questions in relation to institutionalization as:

● what should be institutionalized and when should participation be relied on?

● what forms of participation are required to give meaning to institutional reification?

● how can design be kept to a minimum and still ensure continuity and coherence?

● what are the obstacles to responsiveness to the emergent?

● what are the mechanisms by which emergent patterns can be perceived?

● does the institutional design serve as a communication tool?

The discussion can now reside entirely in rational reflection on what kind of 'lever' we may use to influence the future shape of practice, to maintain the status quo or to redirect the practice. Wenger says: 'You can seek, cultivate, or avoid specific relationships with specific people.' Also, 'You can produce or promote specific artefacts to focus future negotiation of meaning in specific ways' (1999:91). He also says: 'Because of the complementarity of participation and reification, the two forms of politics can be played off against each other.' 'As a result of this complementarity, control over practice usually requires a grip on both forms of politics …' (ibid.: 92).

Because the negotiation of meaning is the convergence of participation and reification, controlling both participation and reification affords control over the kinds of meaning that can be created in certain contexts and the kind of persons that participants can become …The combination of the two forms of politics is powerful indeed when it affords a hold on the development of a practice … No form of control over the future can be complete and secured. In order to sustain social coherence of participation and reification within which it can be exercised, control must constantly be reproduced, reasserted, renegotiated in practice. (ibid.: 93)

When Wenger does offer us insight into the interactive detail by which communities of practice are emerging as political sense-making processes, he takes the classic ethnographic position. He offers us a composite picture of a 'day in the life' of a claims processor in a large health insurance company, composed from his fieldwork notes. His own engagement in the meaning-making processes of that work at the time are almost entirely missing from his account. He takes us in the direction of investing more attention and care in design rather than in the quality of our ongoing participation in the actual political learning processes themselves. He and I therefore share very similar interests, yet we would draw attention and invite investment differently.

The question, 'How do we go about changing complex organizations?' often means 'How can we formulate intentions and communicate them as agreed plans of action to be implemented?' In other words, it involves conceiving a future different in some way from a conception of the past and taking action to realize the change. The focus is then often on providing tools to help produce conceptions of both the content and the process of change – survey instruments, diagnostic and strategic frameworks, system models, visioning aids, simulations, planning tools, interactive technologies, process designs and change methodologies. Such books on organizational change help us with tools for giving birth to our ideas about what and how to change. They help us to step back and frame a view of ourselves in our situation with all the material, technological, cultural and political factors that we may need to take into account. They are tools to help us as participant-observers in organizational change. The more sophisticated tools help us frame views of ourselves in the very act of doing the framing, so that they become reflexive tools to help us as participant-conceptualizers.

In this book I have been asking and exploring a rather different question. I have been asking, 'How do we participate in the way things change over time?' meaning 'How at the very movement of our joint sense-making experience, are we changing ourselves and our situation?' This means inquiring into the ongoing local situated communicative activity between experiencing bodies that gives rise to intentions, decisions and actions, tool-making and tool-using. Such an approach attempts to explore the paradox that our interaction, no matter how considered or passionate, is always evolving in ways that we cannot control or predict in the longer term, no matter how sophisticated our planning tools.

I have suggested working iteratively with such questions as:

'Who are we realizing we are as we gather here?'

'What kind of sense are we making together?'

'What are we coming to talk about as we converse?'

'How are we shifting our understanding of what we are engaged in?'

'What kind of enterprise are we shaping?'

The movement of sense-making I keep illustrating is not a steady move towards a unified 'we' constructing consensus and common ground as a basis for joint action. Rather I have referred to the inevitable conflictual nature of organizing our immediate next step as difference, misunderstanding and plurality emerge in webs of interconnected relating. Emerging coherence here does mean integration into a unified whole, but is inherent in the self-organizing nature of interaction amongst differences. Since it is the webs of enabling constraints of a material, political and cultural nature that we are

continuously recreating and potentially shifting, our interaction is at work creating continuity and change at all scales simultaneously. This happens as the patterning of interaction is amplified and damped over time as interaction continues.

I have sought to shift the current emphasis of strategic work in organizations described in terms of conceptual ability brought to bear on the large-scale combined with individual skills of communication exercised at the small-scale. I am saying that this is not an adequate description or account of how organizations and other social forms evolve, disappear and appear. I am encouraging us to experience the paradox of forming and being formed as situated social selves, emerging persons in emerging social worlds patterned by history but open to movement as present interaction. Thus I am drawing attention to organizations and ourselves in the process of changing as we live our lives together. Although I emphasize the constantly recurring potential for change as we interact, what I am drawing attention to is as much an account of the potential for repetition and recurrence. Our human capacity for narrative sense-making means we create our sense of continuity and change, stability and instability as a single movement of living experience.

I have wanted to give much more emphasis to strategic work as the living craft of participating as an intentional fellow sense-maker in conversation after conversation (both public and imagined), encounter after encounter, activity after activity. I want to help us appreciate ourselves as fellow improvisers in ensemble work, constantly constructing the future and our part in it as daily activity as we convene or join or unexpectedly find ourselves in conversations. I have called this a craft because, just as we can learn to conceptualize, to design, to communicate and persuade, we can also learn to participate with imaginative concreteness as co-narrators, joint authors, co-improvisers, and in so doing, locate our competence as leaders differently. Although I have described my own work in terms of a different account of process consultation, what I am saying is as relevant to anyone wanting to think about their participation in organizational life.