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**Doctoral Thesis**

## The business of co-creation - and the co-creation of business

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**The Business of Co-Creation – and the Co-Creation of Business**

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# The Business of Co-Creation – and the Co-Creation of Business

**Maja Lotz**

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## **The Business of Co-Creation – and the Co-Creation of Business**



# **THE BUSINESS OF CO-CREATION - AND THE CO-CREATION OF BUSINESS**

*Maja Lotz, Ph.D. Thesis, March 2009  
International Center for Business and Politics, Copenhagen Business School*

THE BUSINESS OF CO-CREATION  
- AND THE CO-CREATION OF BUSINESS

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Ph.D. Thesis, March 2009  
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*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.*  
Leonard Cohen, 1992

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION – IMAGES OF SEARCH

### A STARTING POINT

This dissertation is about co-creation. It is a story about how people in contemporary organizations co-create in experimental ways. More precisely, it is a collection of stories about the business of co-creation (and, consequently, the co-creation of business) from the field of Danish manufacturing companies, i.e. stories about practices of co-creation framed by today's organizational topography of relentless change, high ambiguity and increasingly complex collaborative interdependencies within and among organizations.

We begin two years ago in one of the manufacturing companies under study. I am interviewing the CEO about the company's former achievements and future steps. I want to learn more about how they have proactively managed to become a global actor – a small multinational – by following their partners' "global steps" and building up collaborative partnerships across traditional boundaries. The CEO tells me: *"it's all about co-creation. It's the interaction and relating between people that is the co-creative force"* (Interview CEO2), and attributes the company's success especially to this ability to co-create inside and across teams, departments, workplaces, sites, partnerships and many other forms of collaborative communities. Later, on the way home, in my car, I have hundreds of questions bouncing around in my head: What co-create(s)? Who co-create(s) How does one co-create? Why co-create? How is co-creation facilitated in organizational life? How is it organized? Disrupted? In what way can co-creation be managed? On that drive home, I realized that the contours of a roadmap for my dissertation had been co-created through our conversation. A map to guide my research had started to take form: a roadmap for tracing the dynamics and consequences of co-creation within the realm of contemporary organizational practices.

Change of scene. At my desktop looking for searching questions that may structure my research on co-creation. What do I mean by co-creation and why tell a story around that label? In line with the CEO's thoughts about the interactions between people as the co-creative force, I use the term co-creation as a metaphor to describe the trans-actions<sup>1</sup> by which actors create products or processes that none of them could or would have achieved (working) alone<sup>2</sup>. Assessing the idea of co-creation in this way enables me to explore not only material products and knowledge based

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing on relational thinkers such as Norbert Elias and the tradition of American Pragmatism, I (often) use the concept of *transactions* instead of *interactions* in order to highlight the relational and intertwined nature of human beings and social action. According to Elias, 'social interaction' only *"scratches the surface of the relatedness of human beings"* (Elias 1969: 143), and therefore the concept fails to move beyond the homo clausus model of human beings as possessing an identity prior to their interactions with others. The same critique is raised by the 'transactionalism' of American Pragmatism. John Dewey and Arthur Bentley (1949) distinguish in a similar way between: *"interaction – where independent elements are seen as engaging in relations with each other, so that the elements are primary and the relation secondary – and 'transaction' – where the elements in the social process emerge from the relations between them, so that the relation is primary, and the elements secondary"* (Dewey and Bentley 1949[1991]; Krieken 1998). Thus the concept of transaction paves the way for a more relational and adequate understanding of the essential interdependence of human beings.

<sup>2</sup> At this point, it is neither the time nor place for any expanded elaboration on the notion of co-creation. However, let me already here clarify that I do not disagree with those who would argue that all creation is co-creation. I simply wish to stress the social and thus processual character of the term by putting a "co" and a dash in front of it.

solutions/objects, but also how subjects, work roles, ideas, meanings, scripts, routines, communing practices etc. are simultaneously being co-created in our world of work and organizing. That said, grasping the character and significance of co-creation is by no means a clear-cut matter and is first and foremost something which must be determined empirically<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, I place empirical accounts of co-creation at the heart of the research underlying this dissertation.

Desktop reflections on co-creation continue: why introduce yet another metaphor to the field of organizing already loaded with alternative concepts such as production (Marx and Engels 1976: Marx 1970), simultaneous engineering (Dorf and Sabel 1998), experimentation (Kristensen and Zeitlin 2005) or entrepreneurship (Dimaggio 1988; Shumpeter 1991; Garud, Hardy & Maguire 2007; Stark 2009), and why let co-creation play the main character in my story?

A short answer: because the “co” in co-creation seems to play a significant role in the ability of current organizations to continuously reorganize and recombine their resources in innovative ways (Girard and Stark 2002; Stark 2001; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). I argue that attempting to understand these dynamics theoretically as well as empirically requires the introduction of new metaphors that – as opposed to the former concepts - directly and tentatively address the significance of this “co”. Therefore, I bring the metaphor of co-creation into the scenery of work and organizing.

A longer answer: already many years ago, great sociological thinkers such as Emile Durkheim and Norbert Elias showed us how the highly complex division of labor in modern societies resulted in greater interdependencies, since people could no longer count on filling all of their needs themselves. Consequently, the intensified work specialization and social differentiation tied people to one another in longer and longer chains of mutual dependencies of co-creation<sup>4</sup>. Today the process of co-creation still seems to be multiplying. Just think of how many “steps of co-creation” are inscribed in everyday devices such as your cell phone or even the pair of jeans you (might) wear today. Accordingly, many organizational scholars and practitioners argue that the demands for complex knowledge-based production and the ability to constantly recombine and make new associations in order to innovate has stimulated progress towards intensified practices of co-creation (inside and across organizational settings) as an increasingly central principle of social organization within contemporary organizational life (Hecksher and Adler 2007; Chesborough 2003, 2006)<sup>5</sup>. Current debates about the need for more collaboration, teamwork, partnerships, co-design, outsourcing, mergers etc. support their claim and exemplify the dynamics and intensified significant role of co-creation in the corporate arena.

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<sup>3</sup> Exactly what it is that co-creates (e.g. transactions and relationships between people and/or technology and/or material) and what it is that is co-created (e.g. shoes, cutting tools, services, ideas, roles, communities, trust etc.) in organizations is an empirical question. The answer, at all times, depends on the specific context. In other words, on the particular situations in which people, technology and material are being related and recombined through the ongoing daily activities of organizational actors.

<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, at the same time as the social differentiation of modern societies also generated individualization.

<sup>5</sup> Of course co-creation has always been an integral part of organizational life, but the scope and complexity of the interdependencies of co-creation have varied in time and space.

Back from “fieldwork”, yet another answer presents itself. Why co-creation? Because the notion of co-creation has emerged as an *in vivo* concept. It is derived from the voices and experiences of the people in the seven case companies under study. Hence, I also introduce co-creation as the key concept of this dissertation because empirically co-creation is the process that best seems to capture how organizational actors in my study become able to constantly reflect upon, redefine, reshape, recombine and reorganize their transactions and resources for further human and organizational growth, i.e. growth in both a Deweyan and economic sense of the word<sup>6</sup>. In their world, a constant pressure to innovate and improve at the same time as reducing costs seems to call for complex interdependencies of co-creation, or in other words situations of co-creation that make innovation and ongoing search routines for improvements more and more distributed across organizational boundaries. A vast variety of such “transgressing” practices of co-creation are enacted in the case-companies as they reflect different ways to search, recombine and perform in experimental ways. I wish to explore these real time co-creative processes which – invoked by the interactions and relating between people – give the metaphor its content, meanings, forms, dynamics and consequences. Facing the screen of my Mac, I therefore end up formulating the underlying question for my research journey in the following way: *What and who co-create(s), and how does this operate in contemporary organizational life?*

Another change of scene. Now, in search for more detailed coordinates and directions for the organization of a “roadmap” to guide my research, I sit in the canteen of the old factory building talking with Susan about her career and the changes in work organization she has experienced since she started working at the manufacturing company 15 years ago. I am “on the hunt” for analytical focal points to direct and specify my exploration of co-creation. Susan tells me how her work was at first organized around a traditional assembly line, and mainly consisted of fitting and packaging components for blood gas analyzers. Characteristically, she and her colleagues only focused on their own particular job tasks while organizational boundaries between, for example, departments, planning and production, management and workers, professions etc. were very obvious and clear cut. She describes how her work roles were much more stable and predefined at that time. Likewise, the sense of community (and sense of self) she experienced through work, was more uniform and primarily tied to the bonds between her work fellows around the assembly line. Today, her world of work is completely different or rather reshaped. Susan explains: *“My work tasks are manifold, they vary a lot. I also do planning, testing and administrative stuff. Even coaching is part of my job now....and, in order to get my work done, I constantly need to interact with other people - not only with people from my own team but from many other teams and departments”* (S1). She stresses how, in particular, reorganizations based on the implementation of team work, co-managing team structures and lean concepts throughout the

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<sup>6</sup> In John Dewey’s account, growth is the continuing reconstruction of our experience. Dewey conceives of education as simply growth - as the continual flowering and actualizing of possibilities through experience. In this way he directly connotes the human aspects of growth. However, our experience is not determined by any outside or independent aim or end, but unfolds in non-teleological ways. He therefore rejects teleological explanations of human effort and stresses that growth can never be predetermined and imposed by external ideals or ends (since we never know what the future holds). Drawing on George Demettrion’s phrase, growth, in a Deweyan sense of the word, means progressive learning through continuity of development and engagement (Demettrion 2004). It is this form of ongoing learning (or in other words continuing reconstruction of our experiences) through participation, engagement and the ability to make inquiries into the (work) situations that constitute our lives, which I wish to articulate by introducing the notion of human growth (Dewey 1966/1916; Dewey 1949/1938; Dewey 2005). By organizational growth I refer to the more common sense economic interpretations of the term.



organization, combined with vocational training and continuous skill upgrading, have radically changed her work. This transformation of work and organizing, she explains, has resulted in a multitude of new work roles and communal (communing) work practices that are more diverse, interconnected, fluid and collaborative than earlier.

Puzzled by Susan's story of how the company's changes in work organization towards greater variation in work tasks, interdependence, collaboration and distributed accountability have resulted in completely new work role(s) and new practices of relating, a set of questions crystallizes from our talk. What is the nature of these new work roles and communing relationships she describes? How are they co-created and reshaped through the daily work organizing practices? And in turn, what, who and how do these new work roles and practices of relating co-create?<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, directed by my relational informed pre-understanding of the fact that one can only become an individual human being – and thus make, take on, and play with roles as a unique individual - within and through communities, (i.e. within a network of social relationships of interdependencies with, for example, one's family, school, class, work organization, and so on), I decide to use the link, that Susan sketched in her story, between work roles, communities and work organizing as analytical focal points to guide my research on co-creation. Said differently, I choose to use the concepts as my gateway to the empirical world of my study. In this way, the dissertation contributes to the inquiry into the micro dynamics and consequences of co-creation inside and across organizational settings by studying how the (re-)shaping of roles, communing and work organizing that emerge in these settings invoke - and are invoked by - practices of co-creation. By exploring this recursive link which Susan pointed out to me in the canteen, I hope to contribute to the knowledge (trans)formation on how organizational people co-create new ways of becoming, working and organizing in contemporary organizational life. The purpose of my research is to introduce an approach to understanding the nature and dynamics of different practices of co-creation in order to recognize more about how they may lead to both human and organizational growth.

Before I further specify the dissertation's research approach and introduce its theoretical groundwork, let me clarify the more general observations which have informed the starting point for my story.

## **THE GENESIS OF A STARTING POINT**

The million-dollar question is of course how processes of dynamic co-creation are facilitated and monitored for continuous improvement and growth within and among contemporary organizations. And yes, already here, I should make clear that I have neither any ambition, nor for that matter ability to present a fixed and definite answer to the question in the concluding remarks of this dissertation. In fact, I will not even try. Life in itself, as well as life in organizations, is an intricate

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<sup>7</sup> I use the verb forms, organizing and communing, to highlight the processual character of the notions of organization and community, hereby seeking to overcome what Norbert Elias calls the problem of "process-reduction" (i.e. the reduction of processes to static conditions) (Elias 1978: 112). The notion of role is sometimes also presented in -ing form as well, but since no such direct translation exists, I often stick to the substantive (although role-taking/role-making are alternative equivalents).

ongoing flow of organizing chaos, and obviously a far too complex and ambiguous affair to be captured in any fixed (organized) form. I will, however, explore how experimental orders of co-creation of both human and non-human resources actually emerge in everyday work life. From this I will try to distill some insights about how co-creation seems to be facilitated in these cases. In particular, as previously stated, I will address how work organizing practices are in different ways facilitated and monitored towards co-creation through the (re-)shaping of work roles, communing relations and work organizing within the field of Danish manufacturing companies.

Both in terms of key concepts (roles, community, work organization) and research context, I address a set of highly traditional notions inside the realm of a highly traditional industry, one that in today's knowledge economy, based on "flows of information" rather than on materials, is often claimed to have the characteristic of a dead end. So, why deal with an industry that seems more and more to vanish from the maps of western countries under the headings of globalization, deindustrialization, outsourcing, decline, crises, cost reduction etc? And why stick to (or even try to revitalize) outdated concepts such as community and roles that connote structuring social constraints and stability in a time where relentless self-realization and the project of creating a unique authentic self (always on the move and free to choose) have become our dominating guiding mantras in life? (At least according to the "diagnoses" of contemporary Western societies outlined by e.g. Baumann 2002; Giddens 1990, 1991 and Beck 2002).

I argue that the answers to these questions derive from two overall but closely related observations within the field of manufacturing: the first is the emergence of a new "traditional" landscape of dynamic re-organizing practices, ongoing experimentation and innovative new ways of co-creating within and across the boundaries of contemporary manufacturing companies. The second observation is the simultaneous formation and (re-)shaping of work roles and collaborative communities in manufacturing companies, which recursively enable the very emergence of more open, fluid, interconnected and adaptive forms of organizing and co-creating. This dissertation is built around an empirical study of these two traits of development and their interrelatedness.

These two observations will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2, 5, 6 and 7 but for now, let me briefly describe their essential characteristics.

*First of all*, it is empirically apparent that many Danish manufacturing companies (despite experiences of decline, periods of deep crises, closures and fundamental re-structuring) have not entered the new global economy as the general pessimistic and often highly deterministic expectations of globalization predicted. Contrary to such coherent paths of transformation, a patchwork of heterogeneous dynamics, new modes of re-organizing and collaborating - closely intertwined with new ways of continuously experimentation and improvement - seem to characterize the development in current manufacturing organizations (and their surrounding institutions).

Manufacturing industries in particular have from early on - before the coming of the global economy more deeply manifested itself in many other businesses areas (e.g. the service industry and the public sector)- met the challenges *and* possibilities of globalization very directly. Confronted for several decades with the pressure to innovate and improve - and at the same time to reduce production

costs - they have been strongly pushed to continuously experiment with new organizational principles and redefining practices of working and producing (Herrigel 2007). As a result - not exceptionally but rather especially - within the field of manufacturing, such heterogeneous changes and highly experimental contexts seem to unfold, regardless of the pessimistic discourses of globalizations and myths of manufacturing, as something inseparable from traditional hierarchical forms of organizations (Kristensen 1996; Kristensen and Zeitlin 2005; Kristensen 2009).

Accordingly, at least within a Danish/Northern European context, it is misleading to only associate manufacturing with traditional hierarchical organizations that are not able to respond effectively to the conditions of our “postmodern world” of rapid change, high speed and uncertainty. Instead, these conditions have “forced” Danish manufacturing companies to continuously question existent practices and routines, and to reorganize towards increasingly complex interdependent practices of co-creation. Consequently, these companies have built up a “reservoir” of experiences and practices in how to manage and grow with continuous change, as well as to constantly co-create new paths and possibilities of development in a world of relentless change and high ambiguity. From this perspective, the manufacturing sector is a vital and highly relevant study object in order to further our understanding of how people in contemporary organizations co-create(s) in new experimental ways.

*Secondly*, the shifts from traditional (i.e. more hierarchical and routinized based) forms of organizing to new organizational forms that involve more complex collaborative interdependencies and heterogeneous experimental orders also seem to encompass a constant redefinition of work roles and communing practices within organizational life. In this respect, prior organizational research has generated useful knowledge in regard to how changes in organizational design are intimately bound up with and inseparably paralleled by a simultaneous metamorphosis in the character of role relationships that link and “commune” people (Barley and Kunda 2001; Hage and Powers 1992). According to Hage and Power, our roles and distinct ways of relating are products of a continuous hybridization of existing practices and innovations in interconnected relationships (technical, institutional, political, economical or cultural). In this light, changes in, for example, work practices, coordination patterns and work routines inevitably also mean changes in role relationships and in our communing ties (i.e. transformations of work also imply constant processes of role-redefinition and new formations of communing). An example is how work organizing practices, characterized by team work, distributed accountability or decentralized decision making, create distinct new situated work roles (such as the role of team worker, or accountable decision maker) as well as new collaborative communing settings (such as teams or work collectives of accountability or decision-making work groups) and vice versa. From this perspective and through exploring and questioning, we can ask what kind of role redefinitions and interlinked transformations of our communing practices are at work, or in other words are enacted (becoming more prevalent) within today’s corporate world and appearing relevant. At least, such exploring is relevant if we are to learn more about the co-creative forces of today’s experimental orders of organizing. I do believe that the richness of organizational experimentation within Danish manufacturing may reveal much potential for learning (also) when it comes to understanding the dynamic links of co-creation between our daily role redefinitions, communing relationships and organizing practices at work.

In sum, “traditional” industrial environments such as manufacturing seem empirically to reflect a rapidly changing context where companies experiment with dynamic strategies of “continuous morphing” and new forms of organizing in which work roles, collaborative communities and practices of co-creation are continually redefined and reshaped. My overall reasoning for addressing and exploring this landscape of manufacturing is triggered by and based on these observations, and I will use them as this dissertation’s (empirical) starting point.

In the following section, I outline the current debate and overall characteristics of today’s emerging organizational forms and work practices. Based on existing research within the field of work and organizing, I hereby place the CEO’s talk about co-creation, Susan’s work experiences and my empirical starting point in a broader perspective in order to inform, position and focus my research approach further.

## **NEW EMERGING ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS**

It is no longer breaking news that, in order to meet the current knowledge economy’s demands for flexibility, high speed and uncertainty, firms are shifting away from traditional bureaucratic modes of organizing towards new forms of organizational practices. The claim that organizational forms are changing and new forms are emerging has been a popular mantra for several decades. Within this debate, it is claimed that former production paradigms such as Fordism are being replaced by radically different ways of reorganizing organizational resources. Under the headings of post-Fordism, the network organization or post-bureaucratic organizational forms etc, it is said that bureaucracies are being dismantled and replaced by more loosely networked or heterarchical organizational forms based on horizontal collaboration of diverse teams (rather than vertical chains of command), distributed intelligence and high adaptability (Kellogg, Orlikowski, Yates 2006, Stark 2009; Grabher 2001, 2004b; Hedlund 1986, 1999).

When it comes to describing and analyzing these emerging new ways of working and organizing within existing research literature, they are often opposed and explained (as a negation) in contrast to a “past” or something “old” in highly dichotomized ways<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, the new emerging organizational practices are pictured as a radical shift away from Fordism and its related bureaucratic organizational forms based on a strict work division between planning and production, highly standardized production and formalized hierarchical structures. However, despite the debate about such radical shifts in organizational forms, the actual transformation processes towards new emerging ways of working and organizing do not seem to reflect a radical shift from one organizational form to another. Rather, the changes in today’s organizational landscape seem to be characterized by processes of a gradual mix of “old” and “new” organizational practices, a mix that involves the development of hybrid elements within established organizational forms. These hybrid organizational forms may often reflect complex and contradictory arrangements that for instance decompose bureaucracy without being, in any meaningful sense, post-bureaucratic (Marchington et al. 2005). Therefore the terms ‘post-bureaucratic’ or ‘post-fordistic’ are in fact often misleading when

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<sup>8</sup> The frequent use of dichotomist models and conceptions that mark the debate over current changes in organizational forms are in many ways parallel to the discussions about modernity vs. post-modernity.

describing the new organizational forms. Yet, with this reservation in mind, I will draw on the notion of post-bureaucratic organizing practices as the generic umbrella term for the emerging new ways of organizing, since this is the one which is most commonly used within the existing literature on new emerging organizational forms<sup>9</sup>.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL WORK PRACTICES OF BELIEF AND DOUBT**

Nevertheless, I do argue that what we are observing regarding today's organizational changes is not a movement towards something genuinely "post" or some static or steady state, but an ongoing transformation of work and employment practices. Contrary to how Fordism - based on routinization, automatization and standardization - relied on more stable and well described organizational models, the emerging post-bureaucratic forms of organizing and arranging work are not a matter of going from one static model or situation (e.g. Fordism) to a new one (e.g. Lean). Rather, it seems to be a case of creating constantly searching and reorganizing work practices that are able to recombine and redefine different organizational models, templates and routines in renewing ways. Organizational actors of such relentlessly changing practices cannot rely on fixed and stable organizational models (e.g. bureaucracy, management by objectives, TQM, rigid team models or lean principles), nor can they live without such forms of guiding templates and steady routines. In the first case, too stable routines may limit the scope for change. In the latter, the absence of guidelines and stabilizing routines may in return limit the scope for continuity. Instead, people engaged in these ongoing reorganizing work practices must have the ability to simultaneously believe in, as well as to doubt (cast doubt on), the organizational models, management templates and work practices in use. In this light, the adoption of a habitus of belief and doubt are the key to working within, while having the distance to reassemble routines and work practices when necessary (i.e. the key to a continuation of the present as well as ongoing change). Therefore, current organizational forms seem to be in need of both belief and doubt. But how is this capacity to believe in and at the same time doubt existing practices - in order to reorganize and innovate them - co-created within post-bureaucratic work organizing practices?

### **CHARACTERISTIC BUILDING BLOCKS**

While prior organizational research on the transformation processes towards post-bureaucratic forms of organizing have taken different routes and pointed to different consequences (e.g. Casey 1995; Sennett 1998, 2006; Hochschild 1983, 1997; Barley 1986; Barley & Kunda 2001; Weick 1997; Hutchins 1991, 1995), the field in general seems to agree on three overall characteristics of the emerging post-bureaucratic organizational forms. Characteristics that, in my view, all seem to

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<sup>9</sup> Let me therefore clarify my understanding of these organizational shifts towards post-bureaucratic forms of organizing. Rather than seeing these changes as organizational evolution moving rigidly from one organizational type to the other (i.e. shifts where one organizational form is exclusively replacing the next, e.g. from pre-industrial to bureaucratic organizations, from hierarchical to horizontal organizational types etc.), I argue that such changes unfold as gradual processes of translation, in which old practices are being fused and recombined with different ones in renewing ways. Thus, organizational shifts always encompass a mix of "old" and "new" organizational forms, whereas it is the context and its specific practices that determine which of these organizational forms become more prevalent than others at a given time and place. I therefore do not perceive our new post-bureaucratic organizing practices as representing a replacement of bureaucracy, hierarchy, industrial work etc. To the contrary, I see these newly developing organizational forms as "hotchpotch organizations" emerging from ongoing recombinations of former organizational types and new forms of organizing practices. Such "hotchpotch organizations" are always hybrids in constant translation and thus characterized by a great variety of organizational institutionalized forms.

facilitate the capacity to continuously draw on and question existing work practices and their routines in innovative ways.

*First of all*, it is characteristic that the emerging new ways of working and organizing involves an integration of planning and executing, flat organizational structures with distributed accountability, decentralized decision-making and relations of interdependence with considerable heterogeneity and limited hierarchy, i.e. forms of organizing that are more open, fluid, interconnected, collaborative and adaptive. The (ideal) type of such post-bureaucratic organizational form is the “heterarchy”/ heterarchic organization characterized by cross-cutting network structures, reflecting the greater interdependencies of complex collaboration and competing evaluative principles within and across contemporary organizations. These organizational structures are seen as a response to the heterogeneity and increasing complexity of organizations' internal/external environments and unpredictable future horizons (Stark 2009; Kellogg, Orlikowski, Yates 2006, Girard and Stark 2002, Grabher 2001; Hedlund 1999). In a world of such “limited foresight horizons” (Lane and Mazfield (1996) in Stark 2009) a habitus of believe and doubt is pivotal in order to cope with and prosper from conditions of high uncertainty and ongoing change. Because of their lateral, heterogeneous and fluid features, *heterarchic organizational structures*, in particular, appear to facilitate and make the ability to believe and doubt distributed and generalized throughout the organization.

*Secondly*, a central feature seem to be that current organizational success is closely tied to the very ability to continuously challenge and redefine habit, routines, work roles, communing relationships, work organizing practice etc. and thus to constantly innovate in recombinant ways on the basis of such ongoing transformation processes. These relentless changing organizing practices, at the extreme, are characterized by an uncertainty about even the product, as well as how the firm will be producing (it) in the future (Herrigel 2007; Stark 2009). Characteristically for these *constantly searching and redefining work organizing practices* is that they can (re-)combine a heterogeneity of organizational models and principles such as both hierarchy, market and community in dynamic ways (Kochan, Lansbury and Macduffie 1997; Sabel 2007; Kristensen and Rocha 2007; Hecksher and Adler 2007). Accordingly, also the ability to interact in multiple communities, to shift between various work roles, to adapt to competing principles and demands of interdependence, and to manage, grow and develop with continuous change seem to be fundamental for the post-bureaucratic work forms. Such ongoing search-processes of constant recombinations, role redefinitions and change in communities rest on work organizing practices of both belief and doubt. These searching practices may not flourish without the capacity to draw on existing roles, communities and practices, while at the same time being able to question and transform them through recombinations of old and new habits. In this light, work organizing practices of post-bureaucratic organizational forms generate a habitus of belief and doubt – as well as being shaped by such habitus - in order to be able to continuously redefine and recombine their resources for further co-creation.

*And thirdly*, it is characteristic that organizational competitiveness today relies more and more on the ability to collaborate across traditional boundaries, and through these *collaborative communing practices* to make knowledge sharing, ongoing experimentation and co-creation a general feature throughout the organization (Sabel 1997; Girard and Stark 2002; Hecksher 2007). Accordingly, Charles Heckscher and Paul S. Adler suggest that, contrary to the claims of neo-liberal approaches, neither

markets nor hierarchies are sufficient for coordination within today's knowledge economy: collaborative communities are essential as well (Heckscher and Adler 2007). These collaborative communities emerge when people work together to co-create, or in Adler and Heckscher's words: *"when a collectivity engages cooperative, interdependent activity towards a common object"* (Ibid. 21). As already mentioned earlier, according to Adler and Heckscher, today's demand for complex knowledge based production calls for such collaborative communing practices (inside and across firms) as an increasingly central principle of social organization within post-bureaucratic organizational life. In a similar vein, although from a much more critical position, Boltanski and Chiapello highlight the importance accorded to: *"face to face relations....to situations experienced in common....to mutual aid, to co-operation in establishing partnerships, in setting up projects, in constructing networks"* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) in firms of today's connectionist world. A world where the principal orientation is to establish connections. From this perspective, not only constantly searching and recombining work organizing practices, ongoing redefinitions of routines and work roles, but also new forms of diverse collaborative communities based on enabling relations of interdependencies seem to be emerging within the landscape of new post-bureaucratic work organizations. Apparently, these cross-cutting communities, in particular, seem to facilitate the process of shifting roles and transforming work practices via belief and doubt (for further co-creation) when they are based on both collaboration and rivalry (Stark 2009).

Prior organizational research has exposed valuable insights about these three characteristic aspects of post-bureaucratic work organizations. However, organizational knowledge about how the ability to recombine, redefine and collaborate actually evolves (is co-created) through the everyday transactions and lived experiences of the people constituting this "new" organizational realm remains relatively limited. Also, the question of how the adoption of a habitus of belief and doubt in fact is co-created and facilitated through the daily work practices is somewhat unaddressed within the literature. Additionally, little research has focused on the relational algebra and co-creative micro dynamics of work, roles and communing within such (recombining, redefining and collaborative) organizational contexts. The aim of this dissertation is to introduce an approach to understand and analyze these relational micro dynamics of co-creation, and against this backdrop to illustrate some empirical traces of what, who and how co-create(s) within post-bureaucratic organizational life. Drawing upon a relational analytical perspective, I argue that we need to direct attention to the recursive links between the "lived" work organizing practices, the everyday processes of role-taking, role-making and role-playing among organizational actors and their participation/engagements in and across multiple communities, if we are more fully to understand the dynamics of co-creation at work within contemporary post-bureaucratic work organizations. Let me position my approach within the existing research on post-bureaucratic organizations.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON POST-BUREAUCRATIC WORK ORGANIZING FORMS**

Existing research on post-bureaucratic ways of organizing resembles less a coherent field and more a divergent patchwork of research based on a wide range of professional traditions/streams (sociology, organizational studies, management studies, industrial relations, economic sociology etc.). In the following, I draw eclectically on this wide patchwork of knowledge. My intention is not to present an exhaustive review, but rather to pinpoint four central "blind spots" within the field (at

least as I identify them) in order to inform and position my own research-approach. Importantly, this “positioning exercise” is not a rejection of the extant research and literature on post-bureaucratic organizations, but a constructive contribution. The “blind spots” within the field concern a tendency towards structural determinism, an inclination to focus mainly on so-called knowledge intensive companies, the application of primary abstract or macro/meso-orientated analytical perspectives and the frequent use of polarized frames/views in the study of the post bureaucratic organizational forms.

**1. “Blind spots”** – a bias towards structural determinism. Much of current organizational literature emphasizes how industries, firms and the people in them for several decades have struggled *to adjust* to increasing international competition, changing consumer preferences, and new approaches to organizing production and associated employment practices. Most of this work conceives of and tends to analyze these processes of transformation as processes merely of adjustment triggered by external “forces” or factors coming from the outside or “the above”, such as, for instance, changing market conditions, new management concepts or institutional pressure (for example Kochan, Lansbury and Macduffie 1997; Meyer and Rowan 1991). Additionally, when it comes to examining the internal workings of the new organizational forms, their structural, cultural and technical characteristics are most often emphasized and treated in highly static ways (Dimaggio 2001; Volberda 1996). However, by lending such factors primacy and only seeing the changes in reorganization as mere adjustments and passive responses to external factors or internal structural conditions, we might blind ourselves (by either process-reduction or structural determinism), and thus not fully discover the dynamic nature and enabling possibilities of these new modes of organizing. Alternatively, this dissertation proposes a relational perspective, which acknowledges that any structure “has” agency and vice versa. I adopt a perspective that does not treat the agency/structure dualism as opposites but rather as reciprocal dimensions or analytical frames, because: *“neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both”* (C. Wright Mills 1959: 3).

**2. “Blind spots”** – limited/narrow research context. Up until now, the majority of studies on post-bureaucratic organization forms have largely been conducted within so-called knowledge intensive corporations such as Internet startups, biotech ventures, media companies, and finance (Powell 2001; Girard and Stark 2002; Heydebrand and Miron 2002; Wittel et al. 2002; Beunza and Stark 2004). Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to question whether knowledge-intensive organizations are the only breeding place for new post-bureaucratic ways of organizing. Why should the enactment of new organizational forms with more fluid qualities be limited to these specific contexts? While the answers to these questions are blowing in the empirical wind, the field apparently seems to rest on an assumption that the new post-bureaucratic forms of organizing only have a life within the realm of knowledge based businesses.

However, first of all the very distinction between knowledge based and non-knowledge based production is misleading, since materials and information always form a partnership in any economy. Although “wetware” has become the most significant corporate asset of our time, even today’s knowledge economy is based on both flows of information and materials. Additionally, it is therefore misleading to presuppose that knowledge and co-creation based on ongoing flows of



information should not be an integral part of other businesses such as manufacturing. On the contrary, both planning and production are two supplementary and highly integrated sources of knowledge in the realm of manufacturing industries. In fact, it is exactly the interaction between them which often provides the basis for more iterative and experimental work practices (Kristensen, Lotz & Robson 2007). Secondly, it is also misleading to only associate manufacturing with bureaucratic structures and static non-flexible work organizing practices. Contrary to this notion, former research (e.g. Kristensen 1996; Kristensen, Lotz & Robson 2007; Madsen 2006) has emphasized how the ability to constantly redefine roles, reorganize existing collaborative practices and experiment with new organizational principles in particular characterize the Danish manufacturing sector. Therefore, the Danish industry appears to be an ideal laboratory for exploring the dynamics and organizational shifts towards post-bureaucratic ways of organizing empirically. Based on these reflections/observations, it seems relevant to bring the studies on post-bureaucratic organizing practices beyond the realm of so-called knowledge intensive corporations. The study underlying this dissertation contributes to such an expansion by turning the perspective towards the realm of current manufacturing organizing practices.

**3. “Blind spot” – level of analysis.** Most existing research on post-bureaucratic organizing forms (aside from a few exceptions e.g. see Barley 1986; Barley and Kunda 2001; Bechky 2003; Kellogg et al. 2006) draws on either a descriptive or a primary aggregated perspective in which macro- and/or meso-orientated perceptions are applied in order to explain, make sense of and learn from the emerging new organizational orders. With analytical lenses mainly focused on the level of industrial relations, business systems or firms/organizations, these studies have yielded highly valuable insights regarding the overall processes of organizational experimentation. Within these perspectives the patterns and dynamics of the new forms of coordinating and reorganizing within and across organizational boundaries are explored at the aggregated level of either firms/organizations or business systems (e.g. Womack et. al 1991; Durand et al. 1999; Kristensen and Zeitlin 2004; Heckscher and Adler 2007; Whitford 2005; Herrigel 2007). However, as a result, research on how people (within such organizational contexts) enact these new organizational forms and through their actual daily work practices are experimenting with these new orders of collective “continuous morphing” (Rindova and Kotha 2001) at the interpersonal level, is more limited. In addition these perspectives often seem to neglect (or only pay little explicit attention to) the link between the way we actually relate (at the interpersonal level) and the way we organize, and thus tend to disregard the significance of the lived work practices and interpersonal experiences for human and organizational growth. Accordingly, Barley and Kunda argue that current research is limited: *“efforts to make sense of post-bureaucratic organizing is hampered by a dearth of detailed studies of work”* (Barley and Kunda 2001: 76). In a similar vein, Kellogg et al. advocate for a more micro-orientated and processual approach in order to make sense analytically of post-bureaucratic work practices, since: *“...new modes of organizing are not created by a compilation of static characteristics, but are constituted through the everyday micro-level work activities of people in these organizations, and their ongoing interactions across a multiplicity of occupational boundaries”* (Kellogg et al. 2006: 25). I place my own research approach within Kellogg et al’s perspective, not in opposition to the more structural and aggregated orientated studies (as long as we remember that there is no structure without agency and vice versa and that micro and macro are relative and relational terms, not opposites (Fuchs 2004)), but as a supplementary relational-based approach that

strives for a more dynamic and processual understanding of the ongoing transactions underlying the new post-bureaucratic ways of organizing and co-creating.

**4. “Blind spot” – Oppositional frames.** When it comes to describing and analyzing the new forms of work and organizing, frequent use of dichotomist models and oppositional frames characterize the field. As an example, the way new team practices are analytically interpreted within existing team literature often tends to reproduce a dichotomist understanding of the collaborative work practices that emerge within current organizational life. While research has shown that there are many varieties of teams, the literature has predominantly discussed two kinds: socio-technical and lean (Mueller 1994; Bacon and Blyton 2000; Benders and Hootegeem 1999). In certain respects, this dual typology of team working is problematic, as such taxonomies tend to push in the direction of classifying diverse practices into one or the other, and therefore can easily oversimplify the ‘reality’ (read: the diverse empirical praxis of team working) and the debate about what is going on in this ‘reality’ and how it will evolve. In addition the dichotomies also imply a rigid separateness, when in practice elements often overlap significantly and constitute a variety of hybrids of a specific bipolar model. These approaches present a very homogeneous and often static picture of existing team practices, while empirically myriads of different criss-crossing collaborative practices and constantly changing team formations seem to unfold. It is difficult to imagine how we are to capture, understand and learn from these divergent, criss-crossing, team-based re-organizing practices within the frames of such dichotomist models. In this dissertation, I wish to move beyond such rigid polar frames by contributing with more refined empirical accounts of current work organizing practices, i.e. accounts that acknowledge the heterogeneity and constant change within today’s world of work and organizing.

Accompanying the transformation process towards new ways of working and organizing - and not least the debate about them - is also a significant divide between those commentaries on organizational life that connote and praise the positive and enabling dynamics of capitalist development and those that highlight and criticize its negative and alienating aspects. These two major strands mark the history of theoretical debate on work organizations – and divide the field of organizational studies into the pros and cons of capitalist development (the enthusiast and the pessimists). Linked to this dichotomized debate on the dynamics of capitalism is a similar division in interpretations when it comes to the nature, dynamics and consequences of the emergent organizational models and templates. Rhetorically, the new emerging organizing principles are either being framed as highly beneficial management recipes, rationalization tools or effective templates towards empowerment or deliberation, or as models that result in extra work pressure, add insecurities, dehumanize work relations, alienate and exploit human resources, and/or manipulate and create new forms of marginalization. The two opposing views articulate the inherent contradiction within our capitalistic structure - which Marx pointed out long ago - in very polarized ways. In his dialectical view of capitalism, an inherent tension (between for example socialization/valorization, skill upgrading/exploitation, labor process/valorization process, content/form etc.) is always present within capitalist production. It is, therefore, my argument that we need to go beyond these dual and rather rigid interpretations of capitalism that often seem to dominate the debate if we are to understand the emerging new forms of organizing we observe around us. Instead of reproducing such oppositional frames in theory as well as in practice, I argue

in this dissertation that we need more refined empirical accounts and fewer totalizing myths of today's organizational forms and actual work practices/ work relationships if we are to recognize the actual dynamics and consequences of our current work organizing practices. Consequently, the dissertation suggests that a more promising route is to study empirically how these organizing practices actually unfold, and (hereby) to always acknowledge and explore the inherent tension of work and organizing within today's spirit of capitalism. Such an approach situates work organizing at the contradictory intersection of the forces and relations of capitalist production without reproducing any prescribed oppositional frames (Adler 2007). In this way we become better able empirically (and theoretically) to explore how the workplace and our organizing practices are always beset by contradictions of both enabling and constraining processes, which are constantly shaped and reshaped by what, who and how one co-create(s) in organizational life.

In sum, my perspective on what, who and how co-create(s) within post-bureaucratic life seeks to overcome the four identified shortcomings by drawing upon a relational framework that addresses and analyzes the transactions and "lived" interpersonal dynamics of co-creation between work organizing practices, roles and communing inside the realm of Danish manufacturing.

### **TRACING TRANSACTIONS OF CO-CREATION WITHIN A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

It is my argument that, if we are to comprehend the post-bureaucratic organizational forms and their co-creative dynamics we observe around us, we need to understand the actual work practices and lived work experiences that these forms are designed to facilitate. Not only is work and organizing intrinsically interdependent and bound in dynamic tension; it is, as mentioned, also my assumption that any work organizing practices always enable/are enabled by distinct work roles and communing ties, and thus inherently rest on a highly recursive interplay between all three dimensions. In order to understand the dynamics of co-creation within current post-bureaucratic forms, I therefore further argue that we need to address the (re-)shaping links between work organizing practices, roles and communing. Thus my thematic coordinates in this dissertation are work roles, communing and post bureaucratic work organizing practices. My analytical objects are the transactions of co-creation (i.e. the co-creative relations) between them.

Drawing on a relational framework mainly rooted within the traditions of American Pragmatism, Interactionism and Norbert Elias' theoretical universe, I conceive of co-creation, work organizing practices, communing and roles not as fixed substantial notions, but as relational concepts that take form and derive their meaning only in relation to each other. I am hereby addressing a set of genuine recursive processes, or in other words a chain of interdependent relations between role-making, communing, co-creating, working and organizing. In practice these relationships are highly intertwined and simultaneously (re-)constituted in the very process of ongoing transaction. Only at an analytical level can they be singled out and dealt with separately. I refer to Chapters 2-7 for an elaborated discussion on the links between work roles, communing, work organizing practices and co-creation. For now, let me just make clear that I do not use the concepts as definite ones that provide fixed prescriptions of what to see, but as sensitizing concepts that guide my approach and

suggest directions along which to look (Blumer 1969, 1990)<sup>10</sup>. They are proposals that guide my inquiry into and “mapping” of the distinctive expressions of co-creation in the case companies under study.

Below, I briefly present the dissertation’s conception of the link between work roles, communing and work organizing practices and its overall take on the phenomenon of co-creation.

### **LINKING WORK ROLES, COMMUNING AND WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES**

Informed by the empirical world of work and organizing underlying this study, I argue, that (work) roles and communities rather than to disappear or outdate under the headings of today’s radical individualization, seem to undergo a transformation. A transformation that reflects how we concurrently with our strive for self-realization (individualization) constantly enact and re-shape social ties and new forms of communing relationships, which in return are a prerequisite for any role formation (even the most “free” and “me-centered”). Following this line of thought no (work) role is (re-)shaped without a community and vice versa – a thought, echoing the relational thinking of pragmatism. For instance, Georg Herbert Mead captures the link between roles and communing in the following way:

*“(S)He is what (s)he is in so far as (s)he is a member of this community, and the raw materials out of which this particular individual is born would not be self but for this relationship to others in the community of which (s)he is part”* (Mead 1934/1967: 200)<sup>11</sup>.

This realization of the self in the social situation as expressed by George Herbert Mead can be traced back to Hegel’s phenomenology of the spirit as well as found in nowadays banal but vital love songs such as in the lines of lyrics by the pop group Depeche Mode when they sing: “It’s only when I lose myself in someone else, that I find myself”<sup>12</sup>. YES, indeed the line is highly clichéd. However in a very straightforward way it captures that the formation of self (and multiple roles) emerges through a transcendence of the self into the social – and thus underpins Meads understanding of how it is only in social processes (of taking the roles of others) that selves can arise – i.e. selves as being that have become conscious of themselves. Meads, Hegel’s and Depeche Mode’s articulation of our social nature (hereby all questioning the myth of homo clausus), profoundly manifest itself in our everyday practices – for just as you, I could never be or become a me (or a you) without my relationships to others. In this way our being and becoming in the world by far is a one (wo)man show, but a genuine social process in which we continuously shape and re-shape our selves together with and through others in the constant flux of social situations that constitute life. In sum, my understanding of these linkages between roles and communing relationships is informed by the

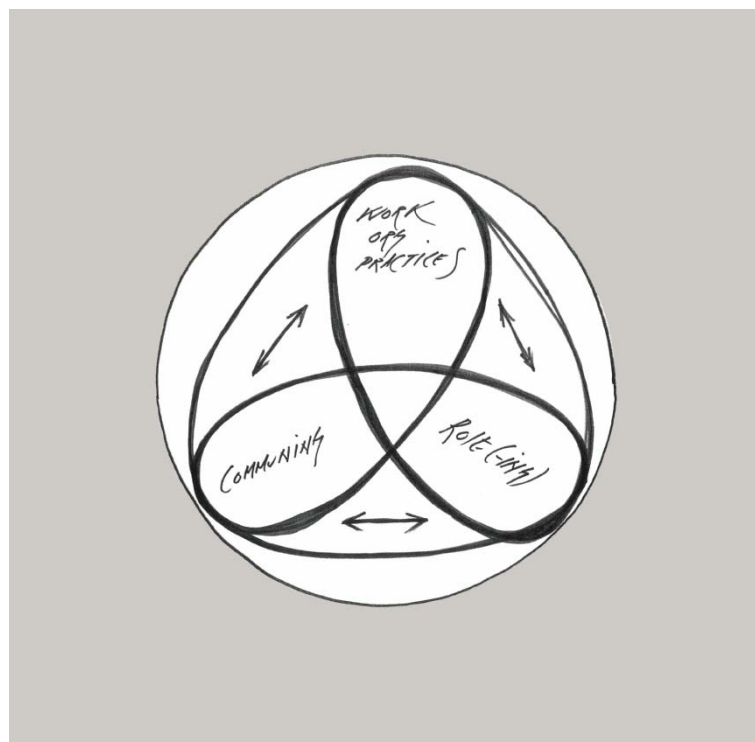
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<sup>10</sup> In this way the concepts help me to make inquiries and raise further critical questions as to what shows/appears throughout my research journey. As Herbert Blumer expresses it, theory, inquiry and empirical “fact” are always (or at least should be!) interwoven in a texture of operations: “*with theory guiding inquiry, inquiry seeking and isolating facts, and facts affecting theory*” (Blumer 1969: 141). Accordingly, my storyline will be structured by such interplay, i.e. an interplay that seeks to eliminate the divorce of theory from the empirical world by continuously confronting the two worlds.

<sup>11</sup> (S) is my emphasis/addition – bringing Mead up to date.

<sup>12</sup> From the song *Only when I lose myself*. Thanks to Lars Geer Hammerhøj for bringing Depeche Mode into the discussion of the social self.

pragmatists' – (primary Mead, Dewey and Hans Joas) – discussion of the social self (as something that arises out of social experiences). Hereby, the next link in the dissertation's analytical frame – the linking of roles and communing to work organizing practices - is already given. On the pragmatist view, the social self is always (re-)shaped by social actions/interaction/transactions – and thus inevitably embedded in concrete practices of action. Hans Joas describes this link in the following way: *"Only in action is the qualitative immediacy of the world and of ourselves revealed to us"* (Joas 1993: 22). Said differently, action is the fundamental "means of living" which always takes place and form in a common practice. Likewise, I argue that the link between roles and community/communings always is rooted in social situations of a given practice – and thus they cannot be fully understood without turning towards the actual transactions (action nexuses) that unfolds within these practices. Consequently, I treat the actual situations of co-creation (i.e. transactions of co-creation) within work organizing practices as the scenery for exploring the mutual constituent links between work roles, communing, work organizing and co-creation. As my overall routes of search the concepts of work roles, communing and work organizing practices have guided my inquiry into the indeterminate situations of co-creation in different organizational setting within the realm of Danish manufacturing companies. Hence, and as already mentioned, in this study the thematic coordinates are work roles, communing and work organizing practices. The analytical objects are the transactions of co-creation (i.e. the co-creative relations) between them. The figure 1.1 below maps how I analytically move towards an understanding of this landscape.



**Figure 1.1: Analytical Perspective**

## ONE PRELIMINARY TAKE ON CO-CREATION

In this dissertation I use co-creation analytically as a sensitizing concept that may explore and capture how organizational actors continuously manage to question existing practices and routines, and thus become able to constantly reflect upon, redefine, reshape, recombine and reorganize their

resources for further co-creation. Moving towards such a dynamic understanding of co-creation, I draw on three theoretical inspirational sources, or supplementary understandings of co-creation.

**1)** An understanding of co-creation as everyday reflective experiences or transactions triggered by uncertain or problematic situations: these transactions are an integral part of any (work) practice. Thus, co-creation is understood as a genuine collective process of engagement, participating and making inquiries into a given (work) situation/context. In this light, co-creation resembles a *state of being* or ability (a potential) to continuously (re)-shape experiences/human and non-human resources in alternative recombining ways (American Pragmatism: Mead; 1934, Dewey and Hans Joas 1993, 2000, 2005).

**2)** An understanding of co-creation as a process of ongoing exploitation and exploration where old and new practices/experiences (of, for example, organizing people, technology and material) are continuously recombined/reconstructed (merged and blended) in renewing ways (March 1991; Weick 1976; Stark and Girard 2002; Stark 2000, 2001). The exploitation/exploration dichotomy offers an analytical frame with which to grasp how co-creation does not only embody a search for newness, since anything “new” always emerges within the womb of the old. Consequently, co-creation rests on a dialectic relationship between these two modes. Following this line of thought, dynamic processes of co-creation are about striking a vibrant balance between exploitation and exploration. As counter examples, a sole lock-in to previous routines and habits (only exploiting existing knowledge) or a sole lock-in to a search for new routines (only exploring for new opportunities) inevitably tends to counteract dynamics of co-creation and create barriers for processes of continuous re-combinations.

**3)** Points 1) and 2) further involve an understanding of co-creation as always agency driven and consequently never just a by-product/effect of, for example, managerial action, strategic planning or structural organizational design (Symbolic Interactionism, American Pragmatism).

By applying such an analytical perspective that seeks to trace the transactions of co-creation within a relational framework, I hope to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the actual dynamics and consequences of the business of co-creation (and the co-creation of business) within contemporary manufacturing industries. In sum: within this changing landscape of work and organizing, I broadly ask: How does co-creation happen? What co-creates? Who does it? When does it happen? In what ways do dynamics of co-creation emerge? How is co-creation facilitated? How is it constrained? How is it monitored? More specifically, I further ask: how are work-organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created – and what do they co-create? What is the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enable such work organizing practices and vice versa? Which work roles, collaborative communing practices and dynamics of co-creation become possible within this organizational topography? How are these processes interlinked? Which co-creative dynamics do they spur? And how are they managed and continuously reshaped towards human and organizational growth? These are the questions that have guided/will guide the research for and writing of this dissertation.

## WAYS TO SEARCH AND MAKE INQUIRY

Overall, I approach and examine the (re-)shaping of work roles, communing, work organizing and co-creation within the specific context of Danish manufacturing companies and with a specific methodology: qualitative case-studies/conducting a “mini” ethnography of what and who co-create(s), and how co-creation takes place within this empirical context. Three points of observation have informed and structured the dissertation’s search and inquiry into this empirical world.

### *The empirical horizon*

**First point of observation:** the puzzling survival of Danish manufacturing companies during globalization.

Informed by this puzzle the dissertation asks:

How have Danish manufacturing companies managed to survive and successfully compete on a global scale by creating learning based work organizations?

### *The empirical landscape*

**Second point of observation:** An empirical puzzling landscape of dynamic work organizing practices within Danish manufacturing companies characterized by a:

- High ability to constantly re-organize, re-define/re-shape and re-combine their human and non-human resources towards innovative co-creation. (RE-DEFINE/RE-COMBINE)
- High ability to co-create within and across collaborative communities and thus to build up complex interdependencies of co-creation which transgress traditional organizational boundaries. (COLLABORATE)
- High ability to coordinate organizational processes of co-creation through heterarchic structures and make authority and intelligence distributed throughout the organization. (DISTRIBUTE)

Informed by this empirical landscape overall the dissertation asks:

How are (these) work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created – And what do they co-create?

### *The analytical landscape*

**Third point of observation:** An analytical landscape of the co-creative recursive links between work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

I have identified the dissertation’s analytical landscape by asking: What is the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enables such work organizing practices of belief and doubt and vice versa?

Tracing the business of co-creation between work roles, communing and work organizing the following three questions will structure the analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7:

**On the co-creation of situated work roles**

How are work roles co-created and how do they shape communing relationships and work organizing practices of belief and doubt among organizational members?

**On the co-creation of communing at work**

How are communing relationships co-created and how do they shape work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt among organizational members?

**On the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt**

How are work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created and how do they shape communing relationships and work roles among organizational members?

Tracing the co-creation of business between work roles, communing and work organizing practices Chapter 8, 9 and 10 explore how new ways of team learning, managerial principles and modes of organizing towards continuous human and organizational growth are co-created within the firms under study.

Through these steps in my research the dissertation contributes to the inquiry into the micro-dynamics and consequences of co-creation within Danish manufacturing companies by studying the co-creation and nature of work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices that enable (and becomes possible within) this organizational topography.

The overall contribution of this dissertation is to show how the interplay of these three analytical dimensions makes the co-creation of these work organizing practices of belief and doubt possible. The work organizing practices of belief and doubt, in turn, seem to enable what has been called the "learning organization". The analysis that follows illuminates the inner workings of the work organizing practices that enable this organizational form which has been hitherto poorly understood.

**STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

This study is divided into two parts. The first part is a "mini"- monography consisting of chapters 2-7 focused on the business of co-creation between work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The second part consists of three individual papers (Chapter 8, 9 and 10) illuminating different aspects of the co-creation of business within the Danish manufacturing firms under study. Chapter 11 concludes.

**Chapter 2** introduces the dissertation's empirical world of work and organizing. It outlines the dissertation's empirical horizon by asking how Danish manufacturing companies actually have managed to survive and compete on a global scale. It theoretically defines the term 'work organizing practices' as well as the notion of 'work organizing practices of belief and doubt'. Chapter 2 also introduces the study's empirical landscape of seven case companies and provides case descriptions of the dissertation's two core case companies. Finally it presents the research design and methodology of the study.



**Chapter 3** addresses the role of roles at work. The link between the dissertation's thematic coordinates; work roles, communities and post-bureaucratic work organizing practices of belief and doubt is explored in this chapter through a theoretical discussion of the workings of work roles. The overall aim is to develop an analytical framework to guide the study on the co-creation and nature of work roles that enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

**Chapter 4** focuses on the notion of community and the question of how present-day communities within the world of work and organizing may be analyzed and explored. The aim of the chapter is to develop an analytical framework for understanding the co-creation and nature of communing among organizational members that may guide the exploration of (whether and) how communing relationships enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt (and vice versa). The chapter identifies four common dogmas of community and develops such a frame by introducing and identifying the notion of communing together with four analytical takes on communing.

**Chapter 5** analyses how the co-creation of work roles (and communing relationships) among organizational members in the case companies under study shape (and enable) work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The analysis aims to illuminate 1) how situated work roles are co-created through communing relationships of organizational members and 2) how this co-creative interplay enables and shapes their work organizing practices to generate belief and doubt. By applying this analytical perspective, the chapter contributes to a micro-based understanding of how the co-creative interplay between work roles, communing and work organizing practices allows for organizational doubt and belief and thus the ability to constantly recombine and reorganize organizational resources (human and non-human) for further co-creations.

**Chapter 6** explores how organizational members' communing relationships enable them to develop work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The chapter starts out by studying the experiences and meanings of communing among organizational members within the case companies under study. It then identifies some general characteristics of how communing is shaped and reshaped within these organizational contexts. Finally the chapter discusses how distinct organizational patterns of communing facilitate the co-creation of work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

**Chapter 7** places work organizing practices of belief and doubt in the foreground of the analysis exploring how they are *integrated, organized and managed*. Overall, it contributes with empirical insights into how organizational members co-create work organizing practices of belief and doubt that may embrace and continuously cultivate various situated work roles and communing figurations towards continuous human and organizational growth.

The next part of the analysis is based on three papers that explain different aspects of the co-creation of business within the Danish manufacturing firms under study

**Chapter 8** "Team Learning: Through the Relational Dynamics of Co-operation and Rivalry in Team Communities" explores the co-creative links between co-operation, rivalry and learning within the structure of team communities.

**Chapter 9** “Managing Co-creation in and between Collaborative Communities” addresses how organizational members coordinate work in highly collaborative settings, and how they jointly develop management practices facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities.

**Chapter 10** “Taking Teams Seriously in the Co-creation of Economic Agency: Towards an Organizational Sociology of Teams” investigates how teams mutually constitute each other and how they jointly may co-create the firm as a community of team communities.

**Chapter 11** concludes on the dissertations theoretical discussions and empirical findings. It returns the concept of co-creation to the field (of work and organizing) from which it emerged by outlining the basic reflections and findings of the study. The chapter also addresses alternative explanations and outlines some perspectives for future research on the business of co-creation and the (co-creation of business) as Danish firms expand abroad.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **FRAMING MY SEARCH WITHIN DANISH MANUFACTURING COMPANIES: EXPERIMENTING WITH WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES OF BELIEF AND DOUBT**

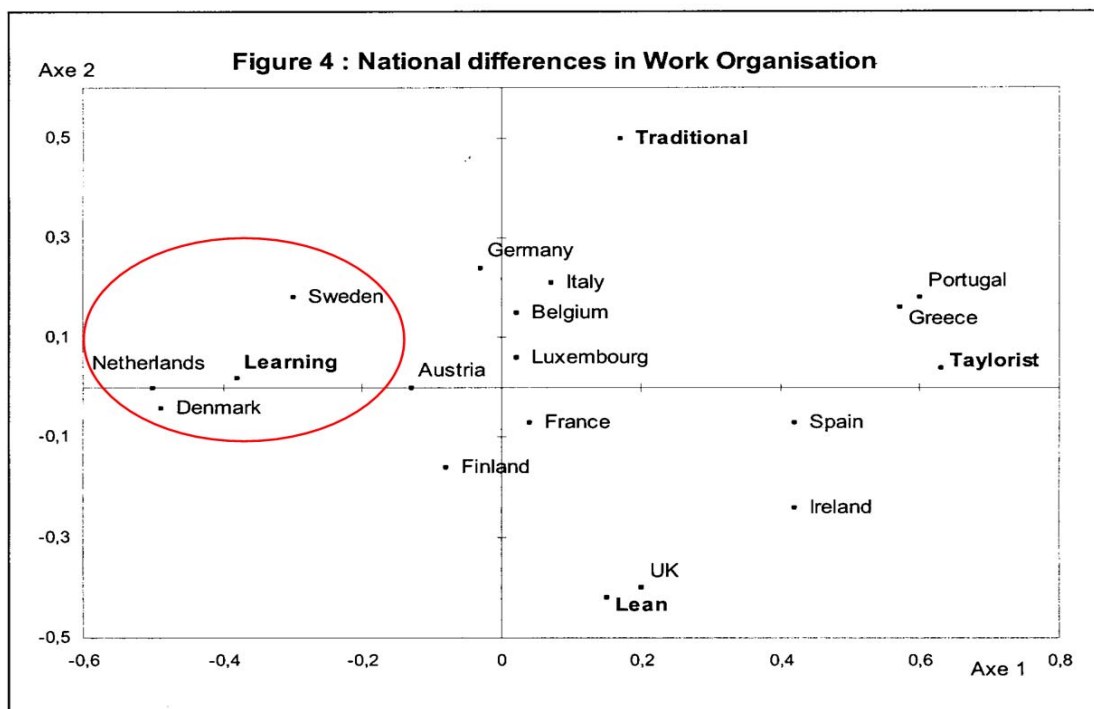
This chapter introduces the dissertation's empirical world of work and organizing. First, I outline the dissertation's empirical horizon asking how Danish manufacturing companies actually have managed to survive and compete on a global scale. Second, I theoretically define the term 'work organizing practices' as well as the notion of work organizing practices of belief and doubt. Third, the study's empirical landscape of seven case companies is introduced. I then provide case descriptions of the dissertation's two core case companies and present the research design and methodology of the study.

#### **THE EMPIRICAL HORIZON: THE PUZZLING SURVIVAL OF DANISH MANUFACTURING COMPANIES DURING GLOBALIZATION**

Only a few decades ago, the coming and demands of the new global economy seemed to spell doom for Danish manufacturing companies. However, today many of these companies have not only managed to survive but have also become highly productive firms generating continuous growth by innovating their organizational patterns of production and tapping into global value chains, sometimes even growing into small multinationals themselves. How Danish manufacturing companies actually managed to survive and successfully compete on a global scale remains an important empirical puzzle.

Any explanation of the successful transformation of Danish manufacturing companies would have to mobilize a realm of economic, political, institutional, organizational, educational and cultural explanatory factors. However, one striking facet is the move by Scandinavian firms toward an organizational model based on network- and learning-based work organizations premised on extended collaborations (Lorenz and Valeyere 2003; and cf. chapter 1). Research on national business systems, national industrial relations and national systems of innovation (Kristensen and Whitley 1996; Whitley 2001, 2006) shows that production and innovation are organized in highly different ways across countries. Since at least the advent of globalization, countries have taken different routes in transforming and moving their business systems towards new organizational patterns of production, organizing and innovation in order to meet (and prosper from) the demands of the global economy. Furthermore, different countries in Europe have not only taken different routes in these transformations, but are at different stages in the process of transformations towards new work organizational forms. In a study based on the third "European Survey of Working Conditions" conducted in the EU-15 in 2000, Lorenz and Valeyre (2003) provide an overview of the current national differences in work organization which is summarized in the two tables below:

**Table 2.1. National Differences in Work organization (source: Lorenz and Valeyre 2003)**



**Table 2.2 National Differences in Organizational Models (source: Lorenz and Valeyre 2003)**

**Table 6  
National Differences in Organisational Models**

(percent of employees by organisational class)

	Learning organisation	Lean production	Taylorism	Traditional organisation
Belgium	38,9	25,1	13,9	22,1
Denmark	60,0	21,9	6,8	11,3
Germany	44,3	19,6	14,3	21,9
Greece	18,7	25,6	28,0	27,7
Italy	30,0	23,6	20,9	25,4
Spain	20,1	38,8	18,5	22,5
France	38,0	33,3	11,1	17,7
Ireland	24,0	37,8	20,7	17,6
Luxembourg	42,8	25,4	11,9	20,0
Netherlands	64,0	17,2	5,3	13,5
Portugal	26,1	28,1	23,0	22,8
United Kingdom	34,8	40,6	10,9	13,7
Finland	47,8	27,6	12,5	12,1
Sweden	52,6	18,5	7,1	21,7
Austria	47,5	21,5	13,1	18,0
EU-15	39,1	28,2	13,6	19,1

Source: Third Working Condition survey. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

According to Table 2.1, Anglo-Saxon countries (the UK and Ireland) have primarily progressed towards Lean forms of organizing, while South European countries primarily make use of Taylorist forms of work organization. The clustering of countries in the centre of Table 2.1 suggests that forms of work organizations in many countries seem to be transforming, while directions for this process still are unclear. However, the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Austria have developed a distinct learning form of organization. This organizational form is the least well described of the four organizational forms (Kristensen, Lotz and Rocha 2009). It is characterized in particular by high autonomy and the absence of highly formalized forms of control. According to Lorenz and Valeyere, it is *“characterized by over-representation of the variables measuring autonomy and task complexity, learning and problem solving and to a lesser degree by over-representation of the variable measuring individual responsibility for quality management. The variable reflecting monotony, repetitiveness and work rate constraints are under-represented”* (Lorenz and Valeyere 2003: 6). As seen in Table 2.2, only 6.8% of the Danish employees say that they work under Taylorist forms of work organization, 11% in traditional (e.g. building and construction) and 21.9% under “Lean”. The majority of Danes (that is 60%) say that they work in “learning organizations”. Gjerding (1999) draws a similar picture, emphasizing how functional flexibility and new patterns of work organization in Denmark were primarily achieved by an extensive delegation of autonomy to employees (Gjerding 1999: 10).

Despite the distinct nature of this model, we know very little of the actual content of and routes towards creating these so-called learning organizations. What are the organizational characteristics and dynamics of this empty signifier? Focusing upon the business of co-creation at the level of work organizing practices within Danish manufacturing companies, this dissertation seeks to enhance our knowledge of this empty signifier and understand at the micro-level its role in the Danish transformation. Said another way, it seeks to understand how Danish manufacturing companies by means of re-organizing their work practices have managed to continuously co-create growth.

It is this general transformation process towards new organizational patterns of production and innovation that constitutes the dissertation’s broad focus (i.e. its empirical horizon). The dissertation contributes to this research-stream by looking at the micro level of work organizing practices in order to provide more nuanced explanations of the ways in which the work organizing practices of Danish manufacturing companies have contributed to these firms’ competitiveness. In this way, the puzzling survival of Danish manufacturing companies represents the dissertation’s first point of observation from which I have generated questions to guide the research process. Before presenting the empirical landscape (i.e. the empirical cases) of this study, the next sections elaborate on the dissertation's understanding of work organizing practices.

## **WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES**

What do I mean by work organizing practices? In this dissertation the term refers to the bodily-mental activities and routines through which organizational members plan, enact, develop and coordinate their everyday interactions (i.e. their doings and sayings) at work for further co-

creations<sup>13</sup>. Below, I elaborate on my definition by first addressing the notion of work organization/work organizing; second, I introduce the dissertation's conception of practices. What is work organization? Despite the frequent use of this notion and the vast amount of studies that focus on it, surprisingly few scholars have actually defined it. Most sociological studies of work begin with a definition of what "work" is. Often they outline its historical roots, going back to the understanding of work as slave activity (vs. contemplation as an activity only for the free man/citizen (e.g. Aristoteles 1982)) in antiquity, to the protestant ethic's linkage between work and virtue (e.g. Weber 1995), and/or to Marx's inspired conceptions of work as the fundamental category of human life (creation) (e.g. Husein 1984). Typically, it is highlighted that work encompasses both paid and unpaid activities and that this distinction is historically determined and changeable. Yet when it comes to "work organization" the concept often appears to be treated as so self-evident that any definition is unnecessary (Bottrup 1992) – or to be equated with "organization". For example, Watson's definition of work organization does not distinguish between these two concepts:

*"Social and technical arrangements in which a number of people come or are brought together in a relationship where the actions of some are directed by others towards the achievement of certain task"* (Watson 1995: 237).

Since it is quite reasonable to argue that work is the activity, while organization is the frame within which the work is being done, distinguishing between work organization and organization seems at one point rather arbitrary. However in order to highlight "the work within the organization", like Csonka (2000), I find it helpful to differentiate between the two concepts at two different analytical levels. Bennett offers a definition which more explicitly is focused on the level of work organization:

*"Work organization is a general term that is used to describe the way in which the people in the production or operation system can be organized and directed toward meeting its output objectives"* (Bennett 2009: 1).

According to this definition, work organization is "a way to organize and direct" the creation of certain objectives among organizational members. Yet I do find it problematic to conceptualize work organization as something merely being imposed on people in organizations – i.e. as a "way" or "managerial tool" that can be used to organize and direct their interactions towards meeting certain objectives (in a rather passive and structural deterministic manner). Not least in light of

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term 'organizational members' as an umbrella term for employees, managers and other organizational partners (e.g. suppliers, customers) working in a company, instead of distinguishing between these typical organizational groupings. The main reason for introducing this term is two-fold. Firstly, I wish to avoid reproducing a rigid distinction between these organizational groupings because such categories imply/connote bureaucratic and quite clear-cut divisions between groupings (e.g. between those who manage and those being managed, those who plan and those who execute and so on), while they may not always be reflected in the empirical practices being studied. Secondly, I use the term in order to highlight how collaborative communities of co-creation often imply that employees, managers, suppliers, customers and other partners engage in interdependent activities towards a common object. Put differently, such collaborative communities typically involve members from various organizational units and groupings and thus cut across various organizational levels. Within such organizational landscapes, traditional organizational dichotomist oppositions (such as managers vs. workers, top-down vs. bottom up, formal vs. informal, skilled and non-skilled workers) seem to be of less importance. Hereby, I do of course not imply that status differences, unequal power relations, bonds of inferiority and superiority etc. have vanished from the realm of organizational life. They certainly have not. My point is just that as our organizational forms and patterns of producing and innovating are transforming, so may the signifiers and categories by which we relate, divide work and draw distinctions between "me" and "you", "us" and "them" at work.

today's collaborative, continuously redefining and highly laterally accountable organizational forms typically based on many self-improving teams and various dispersed ad hoc project groups engaged with numerous customers and suppliers. Instead, I suggest a definition that conceives of work organization as something that organizational members actively and continuously enact and co-create through their everyday work practices, i.e. through their everyday interactions (e.g. their role performances and communing relationships), which are shaped and reshaped by both agency and structure<sup>14</sup>. I emphasize the processual nature of these practices by using the term “work organizing” instead of “work organization”. Accordingly, whereas Bennett relates the notion of work organization to the production or operation system, I relate it more broadly to the everyday practices (doings and sayings) of organizational members at work. Thus informed by, but also opposed to, the above definitions, in this dissertation I conceive of work organization as distinct organizing practices at work that are continuously co-created through the interactions of organizational members. These practices refer to both the vertical and horizontal work division and coordination of organizational members' work activities taking place at all organizational levels. The horizontal dimension refers to how work functions, work tasks and work processes are divided laterally among organizational members. The vertical dimension refers to the hierarchical coordination, decision structure and forms of control/governance of them. In short, work organizing practices describe how organizational members go about planning, doing, developing and coordinating their everyday activities at work for further co-creations.

But why introduce the concept of work organizing practices and not just work organizing? Overall, I include “practices” in order to stay analytically sensitive towards how action – as our fundamental “means of living (and working)” - always takes place (and shape) in social situations of a given practice (Mead 1934/1962; Joas 1993, 1997). Likewise, I argue that organizational members' interactions and ways of organizing their actions at work always take place (and shape) within distinct situated practices. Let me therefore explain how I conceptualize these practices in this dissertation. The term 'practice' carries many meanings. It is a complex and highly disputed concept within sociology and, in particular, the field of practice theory (e.g. Marx 1970; Dewey 1949, 66; Mead 1934; Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 1984; Certau 1984; Reckwitz 2002). I will not provide a discussion of the many theoretical debates within this field. Instead, I refer to Cohen 2000 and Reckwitz 2002 for a detailed overview of past and present theories of social practice and the debates about them. What I will do, is to briefly illustrate how the dissertation's “take” on practice is rooted within the pragmatist tradition. Within the pragmatist view, practice refers to what goes on when we act, for example, how organizational members make what they do happen. Pragmatic theories emphasize that practice consists of both mental and bodily activities. Opposed to Descartes' bias toward mind over body, Mead and Dewey suggest that it is not “I think, therefore I am”. Rather, we become who we are through social practices in which we act (through our bodies), and as the world reacts, our minds register and respond to the world, and then we act again (Cohen 2000; Joas 1993). The “elements” of such practices of situated activity are defined by Andreas Reckwitz in the following way:

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<sup>14</sup> I provide an elaborated discussion of my understanding of the link between work organizing practices, work roles and communing relationships in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

*“A practice...is a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the forms of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating...or of other etc....”* (Reckwitz 2002: 249).

Drawing on these theoretical approaches, I accordingly define practices (of work organizing) as routinized - but also routine-breaking - mental and bodily activities of exploiting and exploring “ideas”, “emotions”, “things” and their use for further creation (at work). In addition, I conceive of them as a set of doings and sayings organized by a pool of understandings (e.g. practical knowledge and know-how), a set of rules (e.g. habits, norms and routines) and common orientations (e.g. normative and emotional orientations) which are constantly being produced and reproduced through the course of social interactions/transactions. As we engage in many diverse social practices in our everyday social life, I likewise argue that organizational members carry out a multitude of different social practices at work. In order to highlight the multitude and heterogeneity of these organizational work practices (ways of working and connecting in organizational life), I use practices in the plural. Summing up, in this dissertation, work organizing practices refer to the situated bodily-mental activities and routines through which organizational members plan, enact, divide, coordinate and develop their everyday activities/interactions at work for continuous co-creations.

## **WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES OF BELIEF AND DOUBT**

In chapter 1 I introduced the concept of organizational work practices of belief and doubt, arguing that the ability to believe in as well as to doubt the work practices, organizational models and management templates in use is a vital asset for post-bureaucratic organizational forms (and their organizational members) in order to meet (and continuously develop through) the demands of today’s knowledge economy. Throughout the dissertation I use the term “work organizing practices of belief and doubt” as a heuristic concept to explore how organizational members of post-bureaucratic work organizations tackle the challenge of generating both belief and doubt. That is, how they become able to co-create a habitus of belief and doubt which enables them to continuously reorganize and recombine their work organizing practices and resources in innovative ways within today’s organizational landscape of relentless change, and also to address the need for stable routines and continuity. Before I present the dissertation’s case companies and provide a general description of the most common features of their work organizing practices, I elaborate some more below on what I mean by work organizing practices of belief and doubt at the conceptual level.

The concept of work organizing practices *of belief and doubt* draws on Charles Pierce’s understanding of the dimensions of and relations between doubt and belief in social life. For Pierce, doubt and belief are two mutually constituting elements within all developments of knowledge, i.e. within all meaningful social practices. He argues that if there is a state of mind where the world makes sense, then there must also be a state of mind where it does not, and labels these states as belief and doubt (Cunningham et al 2005). In the essay “The Fixation of Belief” (1877) Pierce states that *“our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions”* (Pierce 1955: 9). Accordingly, we always act on the basis of a set of beliefs through which the world makes sense to us. Our beliefs contribute to the establishment of



certain forms of habitual practices. In this way they represent a calm and pleasant state, a habit of mind which we may draw on whenever we are active in the world. In contrast, doubt is “*an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief*” (Ibid. 10). Pierce's basic point here is that the “irritation” of doubt moves us to act – to remove doubt and restore the state of belief. Exactly because doubt and uncertainty generate an irritation we would rather avoid, doubt becomes a motivation (i.e. a trigger) to examine a case/situation more closely, thus reducing the irritation of doubt. Therefore, according to Pierce, doubt should not be regarded as negative, but as a positive state that motivates inquiry and thus learning. He sums up this point by saying: “*The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle inquiry*” (Ibid. 10)<sup>15</sup>. Pierce describes the workings of belief, doubt and inquiry in the following way:

*“...both doubt and belief have positive effects upon us, though very different ones. Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises. Doubt has not the least such active effect, but stimulates us to inquiry until it is destroy...The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. It is certainly best for us that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject every belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in its place of that belief. With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion”* (Pierce 1955: 10).

Hence, it is Pierce's basic argument that doubt (e.g. the experience of uncertainty about how to tackle a situation at work or solve a certain problem in collaboration with a customer) continuously leads us to make inquiries (e.g. to question existing practices and to search for new ways to tackle a work situation or for better customer-solutions and services) which leads us back to belief, i.e. a state whereby we act and think as if our beliefs are true. However, as stressed in the quote, the process of inquiry is not about the production of “true” belief. Instead, its object is simply the “settlement of opinion”. That is a “settlement of opinion” which is based on our lived experiences and which requires and generates reflection at the same time. Let me clarify this point. Whereas our unreflective beliefs are simply habits, Pierce shows how our habits can be disrupted by doubt that triggers us to engage in inquiry. Making such inquiries resolves our doubt and may reestablish our beliefs, yet the significant point here is that reflection is now involved. Simply put, reflection would not be possible without an interplay between belief and doubt that triggers inquiry. For Pierce (and for Dewey 1949) this process of inquiry is the core of how we reason and become (self-reflective) human beings. Following his line of thought, it is precisely reflection which enables us to revise our beliefs (as well as to draw upon them) and thus to become able to establish new ones (e.g. a new “settlement of opinion” regarding how to develop a new tool or service among organizational members). Said differently, reflection is a prerequisite for our ability to prosper from as well as to question and transform existing habitual practices, guiding routines, behavioral codes and so on. In this way, the process of inquiry/reflection gives us capacity (at least potentially) to reorganize and recombine “old” and “new” practices (e.g. our work practices) in renewing ways. In sum, the workings and effects of both belief and doubt are essential building blocks for our ability to reflect upon and continuously change and cultivate our social practices. From a Pierce inspired perspective,

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<sup>15</sup> For Pierce inquiry is a fundamental process in all human action and not just the privileged activity of a few scientific “experts”, a stance which is very much akin to that of Dewey (Dewey and Bentley 1949).

without the ability to both believe and doubt we simply cannot build, reproduce and exploit our social practices, nor can we explore, change and innovate them.

Inspired by Peirce's conception of belief and doubt, I likewise argue that organizational members must be able to both believe in and cast doubt upon their work organizing practices (e.g. their everyday work activities, routines, roles, communing relationships and so on) if they are to continuously exploit and explore them in innovative ways. That is, in order to continuously reorganize and innovate organizational resources, I believe that organizational members must draw on both belief and doubt in order to avoid what I will call the "grip of habit" as well as the "grip of doubt". While a too strong grip of habit involves a world of habits and taken-for-granted causing an "organizational habitus" of primarily belief, the grip of (too much) doubt triggers a world without guiding beliefs, templates and steady routines causing an "organizational habitus" of primary doubt which is not able to benefit from the dynamics of stability and its routines. Both extremes result in organizational inertia – of either too much stability or too much change. The case companies underlying this study have all experienced the downsides of both extremes. In fact they constantly do. In trying to overcome, or rather search for a key to unlock the grip of both these extremes, they all seem to experiment with new forms of work organizing practices which facilitate the ability to generate both belief and doubt. Informed by this landscape, it is my argument that organizational members of today's highly collaborative corporate world(s) must enact (co-create) and develop a capacity to continuously believe in and at the same time doubt their existing work organizing practices in order to constantly improve and innovate their organizational resources (human and non-human). I name such practices *work organizing practices of belief and doubt*. While Pierce explores and discusses different ways of establishing belief, I also wish in this dissertation to study the ways in which doubt is established and organized (among organizational members)<sup>16</sup>. That is, I wish to explore how the capacity to establish work organizing practices of both belief and doubt are co-created and facilitated among organizational members within contemporary Danish manufacturing companies. In short, I ask: how do organizational members co-create and facilitate work organizing practices of belief and doubt within the case companies underlying this study? I turn next to a presentation of this empirical landscape.

## THE EMPIRICAL LANDSCAPE: THE STUDY'S CASE COMPANIES

In what follows, I briefly present the dissertation's empirical context, research design, applied methods and research activities. A more detailed description and discussion of the research design and methodology is provided after the presentation of the dissertation's two core case companies.

The specific research setting comprises seven Danish manufacturing companies operating within a wide range of sectors representing the transport, steel, medical, distillery and furniture industries in Denmark. The companies are medium-sized and employ approximately 200-600 people<sup>17</sup>. A common feature of the seven companies is that they are all experimenting with new work organizing

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<sup>16</sup> In "Fixation of Beliefs" (1877/1955), Pierce discusses four different ways of establishing a belief: the method of tenacity, of authority, of philosophical *a priori* and the scientific method. According to Pierce, the scientific method (i.e. the method of inquiry) guided by "the social impulse" is the only way of establishing valid beliefs. I will not go into this interesting discussion here, but refer to Strand (2005) for an elaboration on Pierce's four methods.

<sup>17</sup> Selection criteria for the seven companies were 1) that they all had several years of experience experimenting with team-based collaborative ways of organizing work, 2) that they were part of a multinational corporation and 3) thus competing in a global market.

practices characterized by horizontal collaboration of different groups, the dismantling of traditional boundaries (e.g. professional), continuous re-organizations, distributed expertise and lateral lines of authority. Another general feature is that all of the companies have either been bought up by a multinational corporation (MNC) or have evolved into a small MNC themselves, so they are today all part of a larger organizational setting operating on the global manufacturing floor. Further, they all compete in a highly uncertain and rapidly changing environment. Within the companies, most work is carried out in interdependent work teams/collaborative settings with fluid boundaries and authority relations, and there is close collaboration between design and production/integration, planning and executing. Another characteristic is that all teams/people extensively draw on artifacts, machinery and different information technologies to coordinate and co-create with one another. Quoting Jerald Hage and Charles H. Powers, they have all recognized how it today: *“is important for organizations to have more fluid qualities if they are to function under post-industrial conditions, for these characteristics facilitate structural experimentation, decrease response time, encourage adaptive change and give rise to the great variety of (new organizational) forms”* (Hage and Powers 1992: 5). Each of the seven companies reflects different versions or practices of such new experimental orders. Hence, although the companies differ in terms of the prevalence of such new organizational orders, they are all experimenting with work organizing practices characterized by the ability to 1) continuously reorganize and redefine organizational resources in innovative ways, 2) to collaborate within and across dispersed units, professional groupings and team communities transgressing traditional organizational divisions and 3) to distribute authority and intelligence throughout the organizations. In this way the case companies in this study are all characterized by the three features as pinpointed in the literature on new organizational forms (cf. Chapter 1).

My orientation to data collection/production in these companies has been explorative, using qualitative methods informed by a focus on the everyday practices and “fluid qualities” associated with post-bureaucratic ways of organizing work. Overall, the case studies, conducted over a period of over 2 years from spring 2005 to summer 2007 focused on the organizational work practices, work experiences and lives of organizational members (workers and managers) within the seven organizations. What do people *do* and how do they relate, coordinate and co-create to accomplish their work? This is the question that has guided my fieldwork and iterative research process. The methods deployed in the case studies include formal and informal interviewing, observations and secondary data obtained on specific information on each site. In total, approximately 82 formal and informal interviews with both workers and managers have been conducted. Additionally, 8 group interviews (typically of 4 -7 people) have been carried out.

The research process has been designed as a two-phase investigation: the first as an extensive exploration encompassing all seven case-companies, and the second as an intensive exploration based on two in-depth studies (mini-ethnographies) in two of the seven companies. My selection of case companies is purely strategic<sup>18</sup>. They were chosen because they are examples, particularly rich in information on new experimental post-bureaucratic ways of working and organizing, and thus also on how the (re) shaping of work, roles, communing and co-creation takes place within these reorganizing practices. From the sample of the seven case companies in the study’s first phase, the

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<sup>18</sup> I provide an elaborated description of the dissertation’s case selection, use of the mini-ethnographic study later in this chapter.

two most extreme cases were selected for the second phase in-depth study. I have not only chosen the two case companies because they are significantly rich on information, but also because they may serve as successful prototypes or forerunners (i.e. paradigmatic cases) in terms of facilitating work organizing practices of belief and doubt characterized by a high ability to collaborate, to redefine and recombine organizational resources in renewing ways and to distribute intelligence and authority to all organizational levels. Spending between 1 to 2 weeks in each company, I conducted a mini-ethnography of *what, who and how co-create(s)* in both of them, studying how organizational members in these two organizations engage in their daily work practices (i.e. for example interact, collaborate within and across team settings, take on different work roles, make use of artifacts, draw on technology, compete, negotiate, joke, design, learn, talk, exchange knowledge, make decisions etc.) in order to carry out their work activities and responsibilities. The two case companies are presented below.

## **INTRODUCING THE TWO CORE CASES: UNIMERCO (TOOLS LTD.) AND RADIOMETER (HEALTH LTD.)<sup>19</sup>.**

### **UNIMERCO (TOOLS LTD.)**

Tools Ltd. (pseudonym) produces cutting tools, nails and nail-guns, but sees its main business as offering customers production optimizing consultancy services, tool management and maintenance as well as education and training. It is a Danish multinational with headquarters located in Jutland. It is fully owned by management and employees. Ownership comprises 85% of the employees. The employees are team working in very unconventional physical facilities. As “roofed villages” all Tools Ltd.’s companies are designed along the ideals of a village community, with production and sales/administration situated in the same location with no walls separating departments. The headquarters is one big 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> building in which production, stores and administration are literally placed on the same floor in one open room. At the top of the building are seminar rooms, a huge auditorium, visitor rooms, etc., offering facilities for organizing courses for both customers and employees.

Tools Ltd. was founded in 1964 and activities have developed considerably since. It has moved from standard to very specialized tools and service solutions, and has built up its international capacity since 1995 to become a small multinational with subsidiaries in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the UK, the USA, China and the Czech Republic. Today it employs 650 people of whom approximately 450 are working in Denmark. The company is a genuine success story, which is reflected in both financial results and in an excellent work environment. It has never operated at a

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<sup>19</sup> According to good methodological ethics and research standards conducting my research and writing up the dissertation I have named the case companies underlying my study by pseudonyms (also the precise location of their Danish site). After handing in my dissertation (March 2009) the two core case companies (Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.) were given the opportunity to read the dissertation in extenso in order to decide as to whether they wished to appear anonymized or not. Both companies have agreed not to be presented under pseudonyms, but instead to be mentioned by their real company names: Unimerco and Radiometer. I am grateful for their willingness to openly share and let us all learn from their experiences and I am honored for the trust they have shown me/and my work. However for the time of writing, the five other case companies have not read the dissertation and I thus refer to them by pseudonyms throughout the dissertation. For the sake of consistency in my use of pseudonyms, in this first printed version of my dissertation, I therefore only mention the company names; Unimerco and Radiometer in my acknowledgements and Chapter 2, whereas I stick to using their pseudonyms in the rest of the dissertation.

loss in its 42 years of existence. In the financial year 2005/2006, Group equity amounted to €73 million and revenue equaled €86 million. Year after year it figures among the ten best workplaces in Denmark. It improves constantly on the work environment from the benchmarks of short-term sickness absence, which it has managed to bring down to 0.9% and by lowering the level of staff turnover etc. Close to 10,000 visitors a year demonstrate that Tools Ltd. is a very successful and different company (Information sources: Tools Ltd.'s website (22-02-09; 20-02-07) and written company materials, brochures, etc).

At its beginning in 1964 the company's product program consisted of only Tjep nails and ancillary brands. Since then by continuously expanding its activities, Tools Ltd. has transformed itself from a small local supplier of Tjep nails to a service-oriented total supplier, operating on the global scene in a tight interplay with customers in need of high quality tools. Being not just a tool supplier, Tools Ltd. positions itself as a problem solver and supplier of total solutions, including customized tools and very know-how intensive services. It supplies "traditional" products such as cutting tools, lamina inserts, tool-fixtures, fastening systems, and measuring equipment, but always in combination with, for example, services such as tool maintenance, calibration and production optimization, and to many industries (aerospace, automotive, building and construction, food, general machining, oil and gas, telecommunications, wind turbines, woodworking and furniture).

Through its close interaction with customers, the company has developed a wide range of competencies, and what it learns from one customer can be used to service others. These competencies are collected under the "T-concept" (pseudonym). The total concept comprises competencies in production optimization, standard tools (complete tooling programs), customized/specialized tools, tool maintenance, tool management systems and training and education. With the customer Tools Ltd. works on continuous cost reduction and production optimization by analyzing and optimizing key processes, gives advice and guidance on machine and tool investments and offers guidance when customers introduce new products, according to specific needs and variety of contexts. Production optimization, according to Tools Ltd.'s working methods, is thus a continuous joint process built on collaborative partnership. As Tools Ltd. climbed towards technological excellence, it also became a highly interesting customer for its own suppliers of machines for tool-making, measurement instruments etc. They are eager to work with Tools Ltd. on test versions of their equipment and engage it in collaborative co-design of future generations of technologies, well before they become marketed for ordinary customers.

Cooperation across boundaries (professional, geographical, cultural etc.) through close co-designing partnerships with customers and suppliers has been one of Tools Ltd.'s central trademarks since the company was founded. This also explains why it has become a multinational. As many of Tools Ltd.'s local/national partners have moved units or whole production plants to foreign countries, it has been Tools Ltd.'s strategy to follow in their partners' "global footsteps" by proactively becoming a global actor itself. Since 1995 it has invested DKK 645 million in foreign facilities (Tools Ltd.'s website 02-01-07, written company materials, brochures, interview 1&2 w. the CEO).

### ***A Community of Various Collaborative Communities***

It is remarkable how Tools Ltd. has managed to remove organizational devices that could allow opportunistic, self-seeking strategies to be pursued by departments, managers, work-groups and employees. In particular five organizational characteristics seem to enable a highly collaborative work environment in the company. *First*, all employees are paid fixed salaries (within three salary-levels: blue and white-collar and managers) and these salary-levels are surprisingly low. *Second*, all employees and managers are subject to identical “profit-sharing”, that is a similar nominal bonus based on the past month's surplus compared to budgets. The extended “we” of the entire firm, not the individual unit, rank and/or team, is in focus. No discrimination between owners and non-owners; only absence due to sickness implies a reduction in bonus share. *Third*, approximately 475 employees are co-owners and own a significant amount of stocks (worth approximately €100,000 each). The price of stocks, dividends, etc. is dependent on Tools Ltd.'s revenue, earnings, and equity, and the argument for becoming a co-owner is that by contributing to the overall performance of the firm, the individual works for his/her own benefit. Ancient models for co-owning a fish-boat and dividing earnings have inspired the whole scheme. *Fourth*, the “roofed village” makes it easy to contact people across organizational divides, and to see who is available. No doubt, there are also good opportunities for people to mutually exert pressure so that everybody wants to look busy. *Fifth*, a direct consequence of the ownership model is a very horizontal and participative form of authority and a high degree or level of transparency. For example, employees are informed daily about turnover, and each month they receive a detailed report of accounts, strategies, assessment of outcomes etc. All relevant information is communicated on a daily basis through noticeboards located near the canteen and by intranet. Every second month all employees participate in so called café-meetings, where the CEO informs them about results, strategy, future challenges, etc. The co-existence and combination of these five characteristics seems to create a collaborative community of various collaborations and communing relationships within and across teams and dispersed groupings. According to the organizational members in Tools Ltd, working together within and across various collaborative communing relationships (e.g. with other units, teams, professions, production workers, engineers, technicians, sales representatives) etc, strengthens the ability to learn, relearn and take on new work roles (In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 I elaborate much more on these aspects).

Within this collaborative community, the co-ownership model enables increased democracy, delegation of responsibility, transparency, motivation and empowerment on the one hand, but it is also clearly being used as a management tool to make the most of human resources on the other. That the model seems to work both as a very effective incentive system and as an empowering organizing practice is a paradox that Tools Ltd. does not neglect. On the contrary, they are very explicit about it and discuss the two effects of the co-ownership model in a direct and open way.

### ***The “Roofed Village”***

The “roofed village” was introduced in 1990 because a traditional hierarchical organization impeded collaboration across units. Physical boundaries were demolished to create visibility, greater presence and shorter communication channels among units. The ideals of a typical village, where everybody knows each other and the roles of each now form the organizing template. As in the village community, physical surroundings allow for and support unlimited communication, swift decisions, facilitate the experience of proximity and connectivity among colleagues and knowledge sharing

across functions and occupations. The physical surroundings and corresponding work organization still seem years ahead compared both to existing literature on post-industrial work organization and to the current scope of comparative forms of innovative work arrangements based on employee participation (cf. Chapter 1). In Denmark, experimentation with new collaborative work practices transcending traditional bureaucratic or rigid team-based settings can be detected within most organizations, but very few have transformed the physical layout and structure as radically as here.

The physical design creates a significant work space that underpins the company's collaborative work style. Any form of space affects social processes and enables distinct social practices by governing the possible and not-so-possible actions and interactions. Thus Tools Ltd.'s physical design embodies an organizing technique or management tool that regulates rules of conduct. The interior promotes very clear relations of transparency, open communication and collaboration across traditional bureaucratic boundaries, and thus frames the employees' interaction patterns in a very distinct way. In particular, the physical layout makes the ease of collaboration and opportunities for continuous co-creation very visible<sup>20</sup>. In Table 2.1 below I present some empirical glimpses of my first hand impressions and observations doing fieldwork within the organizational landscape of Tools Ltd. based on an extract of my observational notes. I suggest that readers who are not interested in detailed field note descriptions should move directly on to the next section.

**Table 2.1 A few glimpses from the “roofed village” of Tools Ltd...**

Tools Ltd.'s large glass front door closes behind me as I enter the modern hall decorated with art, flowers, burning tea-lights in tall golden candle holders and a shiny tiled floor, to the accompaniment of a soothing, yet lively hum which attracts me to a large open area. The first half of the room is full of desks, computers, shelves, staff etc. From the open-plan office there is an unrestricted view of the production area, the only demarcation being the shift from carpet to bright lino flooring. The whole atmosphere is one of bustling activity wrapped into pleasant acoustics of soft and lively noises in the form of people talking and quietly humming machines.

From my interim desk on the carpet I have a wide view of the physical set-up (I was placed at one of the empty desks in the Finance department which are used for foreign visitors). There's a clock hanging from the ceiling. Brown, mostly height-adjustable tables fill the landscape. Most of the desks have flat screens, telephones, papers, coffee cups, mineral water etc. on them. In some places there are the odd Christmas decoration (we're approaching the holiday season). There are lit candles and tea lights on many of the shelves (it's Christmas time and mostly women working on the carpet). Some employees work in pairs. Most of them sit alone in front of a screen, perhaps wearing a headset. Many of them come and go from their desk. They approach one other, talk quietly, or simply consult each other. The voices are vaguely audible, but are not disturbing. The employees on the carpet are divided according to their function: Finance, Administration, HR,

<sup>20</sup> On the other hand Tools Ltd.'s unique design of space also is restrictive. For instance, it prohibits privacy, individualistic (egocentric) behavior, obvious laziness (e.g. arriving late, having too long coffee breaks, using one's private cell phone during working hours etc.), and unwillingness to follow the tact and tone of the group collective. Everybody is able to watch everybody. The panoptic tones are very precisely reflected in the following quote. *“Due to our physical surroundings we don't need a system to officially register the hours worked – because by looking around we can easily see who is here and for how long... It's a very sufficient indicator ”* (Interview Morten and Karina).

Sales, Design, Product Development, Project Management, but there are no physical demarcations between the different functions (the boundaries are not visible to the naked eye), and the distance between, for example, Sales and Design is short, just like in the old village community.

Transparency and accessibility across the room is also clearly reflected in the interaction and visibility of the employees. Communication and interaction takes place across the floor. Everyone can see everyone: Who is here? Who is talking to whom? Who is at lunch? Who is holding a meeting? Where is Ulla? Who is coming and leaving, when? The only artifacts are green plants serving as markers that divide the room into sections and form a boundary between the office area and the walking areas, but even the presence and placing of the plants has a more inclusive than excluding and demarcating effect.

From my position on the carpet I can only catch a glimpse of those machines in the production area which are closest to the carpet border, and the same applies to the storage area to the left of the administration area. But the visibility and proximity of the production provides a clear awareness of being in a business whose essence is to produce and create specific products. From time to time, production staff appear in the office landscape, typically to consult colleagues in Design or R&D. In these cases they interact and discuss on equal terms with their colleagues. Apart from the blue overalls and the fact that production staff have coffee and lunch breaks at different times than those on the carpet, the traditional organisational difference markers such as different trades, professions and functions, managerial responsibility etc. appear to have little significance or impact at Tools Ltd.

On the right, next to the windows, are four open meeting rooms, separated only by closed shelves. The meeting rooms are often in use. There is keen discussion around one of the meeting tables, while at the next there is a completely different scenario. Here, four employees are sitting quietly, apparently thinking and speculating together. They take turns in placing their hands on their foreheads, scratching their heads, resting their chins on their hands, turning pieces of paper over, pointing to their papers, looking into ring binders and discussing quietly together. There are many customers and visitors in the four meeting rooms as well as in the approximately ten enclosed conference rooms which also exist at Tools Ltd. This means that interaction with the surrounding world is also highly visible in day-to-day work. The use of many different languages when talking to guests and on the telephone also indicates that Tools Ltd. operates in a global environment and that interaction takes place in many directions across and outside the organization.

(Source: Fieldnotes 2006)

### ***A Collaborative Order of Criss-Crossing Self-Improving Teams***

Within the frames of Tools Ltd's roofed village, organizational members work in teams. The current team organization was introduced together with the roofed village. However, the company emphasizes that teams are not a new phenomenon. The work has always been collaborative, creating a pattern of employee and customer driven innovations premised on highly self-improving and continuously re-defining teams. In principle, all areas of the company may become involved in shifting combinations, dependent on particular customer needs. The entire formation of teams operates in very informal ways. Noticeably, the result is a dynamic team-based work practice creating



strong internal and external collaborative relations, where reflexivity (and thus the ability to both believe in and doubt existing work practices) and continuous search for co-improvements seem to be distinctive features. In terms of the ability to construct collaboration across boundaries and building situational co-designing and reflexive teams - internally among employees or externally with partners or new subsidiaries - Tools Ltd. seems close to utopia. However, the collaborative work environment, where cross-fertilization flourishes and gives rise to reflexive co-designing dynamics, also surrounds teams with strong ideological convictions:

*“At Tools Ltd. it is considered to be a team sport to run a business and that is why we place the team above the individual. Star players are always welcome, if they fit into the team and are willing to follow the group tactics – it is of no use being the best tennis player in the world if the rest of the team plays soccer. In practice this means that we have the courage NOT to offer a job to a really excellent individualist, if the person is unable to use his/ her skills in cooperation with others. We have no need for egoists but we welcome team orientated individualists at Tools Ltd.”* (Tools Ltd’s webpage 02.01.07).

At Tools Ltd. each unit (e. g. regrounding of metal tools, the calibration center, the sales or construction department etc.) represents a form of **basic unit** divided into smaller **basic teams** dependent on the units’ actual work functions, operations and work tasks. Strong professional bonds and feelings of pride towards the units’ specific work activities, competencies and performance results characterize life within different basic teams. Collaboration, a high degree of mutual interdependence, dialogue and ongoing professional exchange of know-how, ideas and jokes are how employees describe their work practices within their basic units and teams. In fact many depict the basic team as a home or a nuclear family. Yet, simultaneously more provisional, **ad hoc teams** are continuously constructed across functions and operating units dependent on required competencies and resources related to a given task or project. Hence, collaborative team communities of employees from different units and with different skills and competencies are assembled on an ongoing basis. This way of forming criss-crossing collaborative temporary teams not only unfolds locally (for example in Denmark), but is today connecting all the sites of Tools Ltd. on a global scale. In this way the organizing practice of the roofed village circumscribes the global organization (Interview with Paul and Chris from the development department).

The company’s collaborative order with hardly any centralized hierarchical coordination seems to be monitored by collective processes of mutual involvement and co-creation directed by a shared/common purpose. Asking the employees how this formation of teams was monitored made them look bewildered, replying *“that’s just something we do.... we seldom think about it”* (Interview with Tim and Steve). Clearly they take their fluctuating organizing form for granted. Without really noticing, they seem to monitor these criss-crossing collaborative team practices in a highly flexible way on the basis of mutual involvement and reciprocal adjustments. According to the employees, you cannot be a part of the team community if you are not willing to continuously learn and teach others. One of them puts it in the following way: *“Here we are all equal; whether you are a newcomer or one of the old ones we get the same salary – you can’t gain anything by keeping knowledge to yourself.... Success is all about knowledge sharing and collaboration”* (Group interview T1).

Consequently, the joint ownership structure, a community of various collaborative communities, a strong identification towards the wider community, a participative style of management based on mutual involvement, a roofed village concept to facilitate a highly collaborative order seem to underpin and govern the ongoing formation (and redefinition) of various collaborative communities within Tools Ltd. (nationally as well as internationally). Furthermore it seems that the more new customers are engaged, the more they will call for the setting up of new collaborative teams, offering opportunities for search and trigger within internal learning processes. This may explain why the company has been able to expand into a small multinational with such ease and at low cost over the past decade. Forming an ad hoc team of multiple competencies makes it possible to enter a new market with force, though employees are on gradually recruited in the new country. As a result, many organizational members have already gained foreign experience through being engaged in setting up a foreign subsidiary. In this way Tools Ltd. seem to be in the process of gradually turning their company into a thoroughly global village.

In sum, the work organizing practices of Tools Ltd. are very much characterized by the same three features highlighted in the literature on post-bureaucratic organizational forms (discussed in Chapter 1). First, the company's world of work and organizing seems to be premised on various often criss-crossing collaborative communities (internal as well as external) operating at all organizational levels. Second, their work organizing practices are characterized by a management system of co-ownership based on mutual involvement and lateral accountability. And third, organizational members in Tools Ltd. seem to have developed a unique ability to continuously re-organize organizational resources in renewing ways through the creation of highly learning based work organizing practices based on knowledge sharing, continuous reflection, joint search processes and an outstanding willingness to join hands and work towards a common purpose. In Tools Ltd. these three characteristics seem to facilitate the capacity of organizational members to continuously draw on, question and reflect upon their existing work activities and routines in renewing ways. Informed by this empirical landscape, I conclude the case description of Tools Ltd, arguing that all three features seem to serve as important building blocks in the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt. In the analytical chapters (5, 6, 7) I explore this argument in more detail. Next, I provide a description of the second core case company in the study.

### **RADIOMETER (HEALTH LTD.)**

Health Ltd. (pseudonym) has become the world's leading provider of blood gas analyzers, which measure blood gases and other parameters used to diagnose patients in critical situations, and accessories, IT systems and support services for blood gas testing. Health Ltd. employs nearly 1,700 people worldwide and their products are sold in more than 100 countries. Its headquarters are in Copenhagen and its global organization comprises Health A/S, consisting of three product companies, and a number of international sales companies responsible for the worldwide sales and distribution of Health Ltd.'s products and services. Thus the Health Ltd. story is about a Danish family-owned company going multinational by developing excellent products and services that make it possible to cultivate close ties to surgery departments in hospitals all over the world. However, today Health Ltd. has become a subsidiary. In 2003 Danaher Corporation (DH), a U.S. Fortune 500 company committed to continuous improvement, innovation and growth, took over Health Ltd.

This shift has primarily implied a radical reorganization along DH's Lean model. Health Ltd.'s main product company with more than 800 employees (approximately 450 of them are so-called unskilled), is located vis-à-vis Health Ltd.'s corporate headquarters, close to Copenhagen city. It is surrounded by an old residential district, a shopping area and close to a beautiful lake. Inside the company the feel of locality, proximity and unity blends with employees continuously acting towards and being in touch with the world.

Organizational members of Health Ltd. express pride and commitment when talking about their company and work, and do not take their success for granted, but are conscious that the long tradition of successfully improving financial results, finding new and better ways to solve problems and expanding throughout the world was a co-authored process. Thus, the DH takeover created new challenges, conditions and reorganizations that stirred up habits and routines, caused new uncertainties and more intensive and constant pressure for innovative changes.

### ***Products and Services***

Though blood gas analyzers and production of instruments is the core métier, Health Ltd. also offers a wide range of, for example, liquids, samplers and services such as process analysis, IT systems, quality as well as technical support and training. The market share on analyzers globally amounts to 40%, while it is 97% in Denmark. In 2002, 96% of Health Ltd.'s turnover derived from export. 21% of the company's turnover derived from analyzers, 63% stem from accessories, 9% from services and 7%, from non-company produced products. It sells 41% of its turnover on the European, 25% on the US and 19% on the Japanese markets<sup>21</sup>. Co-developing partnerships with colleagues, customers and suppliers is characteristic of Health Ltd. For instance, the company initiates a new customer relationship with an analysis of the hospital's blood gas testing work flow based on dialogue, cooperation and exchange of experiences. The approach is called *The CARE System* (pseudonym) and is divided into three stages. First, process analysis of customer needs, testing environment etc., to identify opportunities for process improvement. Second, design of solutions to optimize customer testing environment, combining analyzers, IT systems and samplers. Third, provision of support in the form of training, QA, supplies of materials and technical support to ensure such degree of customer satisfaction that Health Ltd. becomes an ongoing partner, helping customers save time and increase productivity (Health Ltd.'s webpage 20-02-09). These external ties are supported by a highly experimentalist work environment inside Health Ltd (of belief and doubt), where everyone is encouraged to explore new ways of continuously improving products, services and work practices.

Health Ltd.'s work environment is particularly characterized by (1) a tradition for collaborative co-management between management and trade union representatives, (2) an experimental, team-based work organization made possible by (3) making use of surrounding institutional resources. These three practices have been vital for Health Ltd's success and seem to be its major assets for future growth. I elaborate on these characteristics below.

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<sup>21</sup> Source of information: downloaded PowerPoint presentation by the HR-manager (01-03-07).

### ***Collaborative Practices Between Management and Trade Union Representatives***

A long lasting partnership between convener/shop stewards and top-/production managers has cultivated Health Ltd.'s work organization. This partnership has created the basis for a highly trained and engaged workforce, flexible and with capabilities to respond to internal and external changes in innovative ways. Union representatives have simply been integrated into the management structure and have changed from distributive - in favor of integrative - bargaining in exchange for an offensive upskilling strategy. Thus, the roles of convener and shop stewards have become directed towards the role as facilitators, problem solvers, mediators, change masters or motivators within the organization. Having had a voice even in creating the strategy of top management, they negotiate this in place with middle managers and employees at all levels, where they can combine strategic goals with personal aspirations much more effectively than any manager. This partnership permeates the organization and manifests itself in a wide range of committees and ad hoc groups across units, departments, management levels etc., i.e. arenas where the partners share information, discuss strategies, negotiate, evaluate options and draw on each other's knowledge and expertise in an ongoing process<sup>22</sup>.

Although this unique alliance does not encompass all management levels (especially not the middle managers) it has been pivotal, especially since becoming part of the DH multinational. Health Ltd.'s Lean based reorganization process, for example, could not have been successfully implemented without this partnership, which secured employee commitment and cooperation about all changes. The partnership seems to facilitate transformations in very productive ways which not only seem to engage employees, but also strengthen their abilities to constantly search for and respond to innovative changes. One very central achievement is that the company's co-managing team structure has not eroded. To the contrary, it has become the central prerequisite for successfully implementing Lean principles, though the two often looked contradictory during the process of implementation. So the empowerment of socio-technical teams has been combined with the transparency of Lean, a mix which has resulted in higher performance without losing organizational members support (Interview with Chris).

Collaboration across, ongoing flows of information within and between units (and teams), transparency and delegation are all values that are guarded by both top-managers and union representatives, and their partnership is now highly focused on monitoring the teams' abilities to organize, depending on how they benchmark. This art of managing corresponds in a distinctive way to new organizational forms, such as heterarchies, with the ability to innovate and make ongoing exploration and experimentation a general feature throughout the organization (Stark and Girard 2001; Hedlund, 1999).

Top-managers and convener think that one of the crucial future challenges is to nurture a stronger common we-feeling in order to avoid organizational parochialism. The convener expresses the

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<sup>22</sup> E.g. the Dialogue Group (shop steward and management meet regularly to discuss/inform about the internal staffing situation – who wants to be moved, who needs help, etc.), Coach group meetings (shop steward, department managers and section managers meet once a month. The shop steward often renders visible the need to thinking and working across boundaries, and though it seems contradictory, s/he is often the one coaching the managers in that respect). Liaison committee, JOB2 committees, etc. (Field notes 08-01-07).

challenge like this: *"We have too much of 'who is most important' and of silo mentality... that is everyone attends to his own business without thinking of the whole... but collaboration across units and sections is imperative and therefore the silos must die!"* (Crista, 04-01-07). There is a widespread tendency among middle managers in particular to focus only on the needs and short-term goals of their own sections and Danaher's bonus and benchmark system has reinforced this tendency. The system only favors individualistic and section-based performance results instead of joint achievements across units and teams.

### ***Merging Experimental Team Work Practices with Lean Governance***

Salman Rushdie captures quite well how Health Ltd.'s adaptation to DH's Lean rule was far from a simple stringent use of these principles: "A bit of this and a bit of that; that is how newness enters the world" (Salman Rushdie in Hannerz 2003). What came out of the process was hybridization (Zeitlin and Herrigel 2000) and a new experimental order. However, a clash between two forms of work organization is a dramatic affair, a source of both frustration and dynamic experimentation. But the confluence of former and current work practices has caused reinterpretations of previous work practices and reflection on how to perfect and improve. A team worker expresses it this way: *"We take from Lean what we can use... that is, we make it work within the specific unit ... We are good at finding creative solutions when necessary"* (Interview with Ian, team worker). This attitude reflects that by working in teams, the workers are used to taking action, not orders, and searching for novel solutions. Since the team organization was introduced several decades ago, it has continually changed with the overall purpose of giving employees increasing influence over the development of work practices, distributing authority throughout the organization (Company materials, Christa's PowerPoint slides). Each unit consists of several co-managing teams organized around the unit's specific product lines. The size of the teams varies from 8-15 employees depending on the complexity and amount of work. After Lean, most product lines have been reorganized into U-cells, and employees have been trained at all workstations so that they are able to rotate between and support each other in the different cells. Proximity, interdependence, professional and social bonds characterize life within teams/U-cells. Teams take collective pride in mastering their specific work activities, products, competencies and performance results, but in an easy-going way.

Shortly after the acquisition, DH introduced Lean principles and expected them to be implemented within 3 months. All were taught DH's Lean principles, while production stopped and stores were reduced. Training included planning and participation in Kaizen Events to improve the abilities of managers and employees to reorganize towards enhanced efficiency and performance. The top-managers in Health Ltd. took a speedy approach to avoid DH sending an army of 80 "change masters" to enforce its Lean rule on the company (Interview with Tanja, shop steward). The union representatives decided to support the Danish managers, and once again they became partners and took on the role of change masters to make the best of the new situation. The production manager met with all the teams in order to clarify and discuss the underlying logic and future strategies of the Lean-based reorganization. Union representatives worked out a manual for the co-managing teams that addressed the future roles and rules for teams and collaborative practices. These rules explicated the division of responsibilities, expectations and rights of employees, union representatives and management in a work environment under constant change, and stated clearly that changes cannot be imposed, but must be negotiated.

### ***Two Organizational “Tools” to Enhance Learning and Collaboration Within and Across Teams***

Framed by these rules, it is of course still dependent on the creative powers of a multitude to actually make a dynamic team-based work arrangement. In Health Ltd., two different “tools” have been used to foster this. The first is the institutionalization of a role-division within teams. The second is a permanent second job (JOB2) arrangement, which invites employees to change jobs with colleagues across units on a temporary basis in order to learn new skills and competencies that, of course, increase organizational flexibility. Clearly, this diversity of roles enhances lines of lateral accountability, distributes intelligence and encourages reflexivity within and across team settings.

As a way of developing and monitoring work roles that facilitate an experimental and innovative working environment, the company has designed and implemented a role-matrix within each production team that, apart from their operational roles, includes:

<b>Formal team roles</b>	
1. Quality responsibility (process employee)	6. Technical responsibility
2. Coordinator (planner)	7. Education and training responsibility
3. Documentation responsibility	8. Environment responsibility
4. Capacity responsibility	9. Information and IT responsibility
5. Stock responsibility	

(Source: Company manual for co-managing teams.)

Union representatives have developed this set of formal roles in collaboration with managers and employees. To reach the highest degree of flexibility, more than one person within each team must, as a rule, be able to perform each role and employees are encouraged to change roles. According to the convener and shop stewards, the use and institutionalization of these different roles aim at attaining other advantages and objectives as well. Listed in the manual for the co-managing team is, for instance: a clear division of realms of responsibility, a better co-ordination of tasks across groups in each unit and section and in the whole company, so that production is facilitated and information and communication channels become more transparent and thus faster (Source: Company manual for co-managing teams.) With explicit roles the division of responsibility becomes more transparent, and across teams and towards the wider surroundings, formal roles facilitate coordination and decentralization of work and authority. Moreover, “role masters” with similar responsibilities exchange experiences and ideas across teams, creating a dynamic of learning and innovating across teams.

The second tool, the JOB2 arrangement is based on the institutionalization of changing jobs. This arrangement was implemented 10 years ago, and means that workers are given the opportunity to and are expected to swap jobs across teams or units, and many have voluntarily been “expatriated” to a JOB2 more than once. It opens the way for acquiring new skills and competencies and increases the functional and numeric flexibility within the organization. Over the years the JOB2 arrangement has been readjusted several times. A committee of union representatives, managers and employees are in charge of managing and adjusting the arrangement generally, but the practicalities of job

swaps are self-organized by the teams. JOB2 arrangement is used 1) to move and adjust capacity, 2) to meet employees' wishes for new challenges, 3) to ensure flexibility in relation to bottlenecks and key functions and 4) to expand the ability to change (Source: Material from the JOB2 committee). Both workers and managers think that JOB2 is a success. The "tool" increases exchange (of e.g. people, resources, ideas, knowledge) across units and teams, and it helps to create a "collective conscience" and a collaborative team community across units and skills. In this way new competencies and roles are assembled and mixed together on an ongoing basis. The JOB2 arrangement is a very unique tool that is monitored by the employees without direct management involvement. In many ways the JOB2 arrangement provides the same almost organic, fluid and highly flexible work organization form as Tools Ltd.'s ad hoc based collaborative team practices. However, at Health Ltd. it is much more institutionalized and initiated as well as facilitated by the union representatives. In sum, in Health Ltd. the three main features of post-bureaucratic organizational forms described in the literature seem to characterize their work organizing practices. Here, a unique partnership between management and trade union representatives, a pragmatic use of Lean governance principles merged with "old" co-managing team work-practices and the use of a set of organizational tools to enhance learning and collaborations facilitate the development of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices.

## SUMMING UP

Although Tools Ltd. and Health Ltd have taken different routes and experimented with different means to develop their work organizing practices, I argue that both companies have managed to build up highly experimenting work organizing practices of belief and doubt. That is, they have both built up a significant ability 1) to constantly reorganize and redefine organizational resources and to recombine "old" and "new" work practices in co-creative and highly innovative ways, 2) to co-create within and across various collaborative communities thus enabling complex interdependencies of co-creation which transgress traditional organizational borders and 3) to coordinate organizational processes of co-creation through heterarchic structures leading to authority and intelligence being distributed throughout the organizations. I explore this argument further in the dissertation's analytical sections, which therefore mainly treat the two case companies as representing a pooled empirical "reservoir" (see Chapter 5 for an elaboration of the dissertation's level of analysis, which is focused on the level of work organizing rather than at the firm level).

Informed, fascinated and puzzled by this *empirical landscape* of highly experimenting work organizing practices within the realm of Danish manufacturing, overall the dissertation asks: *How are these work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created, and what do they co-create?* In this way, I have used the empirical landscape of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices as my second point of observation from which to generate questions to guide the dissertation's explorations of the business of co-creation and the co-creation of business. Guided by this overall question, I have next identified the dissertation's *analytical landscape* by asking: *What is the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enables the co-creation of such work organizing practices of belief and doubt and vice versa?* In this way, the analytical landscape of the co-creative recursive links between work roles, communing and work organizing practices constitute the dissertation's third point of observation from which I have raised questions to guide my research on co-creation. I

address this analytical landscape at the theoretical level in Chapters 3 and 4, while I empirically explore it in the subsequent analytical chapters. In the last part of this chapter I present the study's research design, applied methods and reflections on how to acquire knowledge of the world (of work and organizing).

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

Overall, I have examined the (re)shaping of work, roles, communing, work organizing and co-creation within the specific context of Danish manufacturing companies and with a specific methodology: qualitative case-studies/conducting a mini-ethnography of what, who and how co-create(s) within this context. In this section I elaborate on the study's research design and the methodological reasoning behind the project. Writing a methodology chapter/section rationalizing about the research process, applied methods and ways of producing knowledge about the empirical world easily supports the illusion of researchers as being in control of the research process. Yet such an illusion of the linear and fully controlled research process neglects how this process is a matter of not only reflected choices, but also of taking up unforeseen possibilities as unpredicted circumstances turn up, making changes and leading to reconsiderations along the way (Poder 2004). In what follows, my aim is therefore not to reproduce the illusion of a fully controlled research process resulting in a misleading picture of the actual process leading to the empirical findings of this dissertation. As I see it, there is no such thing as the *the* correct method. Instead, I conceive of methods as alternative means with which to approach a given empirical context (Kvale 1997). Hence, the choice of method(s) should be guided by the overall research question and the objective that the researcher hopes to reach in that context (Andersen and Larsen 1995).

## **CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY**

Guided by my overall research question (How are work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created among organizational members, and what do they co-create?) the chosen methodology is a qualitative multiple-case study design. Robert K. Yin defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident (Yin 1984: 23). According to Yin, a multiple-case design contains more than a single case and the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, thus facilitating a more robust study (Ibid). The applied multiple-case study design is therefore well suited to investigate and compare the everyday experiences of work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices (and the co-creative links between them) among organizational members in their real-life (work) contexts (Yin 1984). The heart of qualitative research is that it refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things (and their use), and thus requires (and enables) an interpretative perspective on the social world and the patterns of actions and meanings that give it its particular shape and characteristics (Olsen 2002). Denzin and Lincoln emphasize how qualitative research moreover is context sensitive and multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that phenomena such as things and practices (e.g. work roles, communing and work organizing practices) are studied in their natural settings "*attempting to make sense of, or interpret, [these] phenomena in terms of the meanings people brings to them*" (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). The study is based on such an interpretative approach, drawing on different empirical



sources in order to explore and interpret the everyday experiences of co-creation among organizational members at work. Thus the dissertation's qualitative research is not based on one "correct" method, but builds on and combines a wide variety of methods. According to Robert K. Yin, the case study's unique strength is exactly its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence: documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations (Yin 1984: 20). Before I describe the applied methods through which I have "gathered"/produced the study's empirical material, I elaborate on the study's case selection and research phases.

## CASE SELECTION

As described earlier, the research process has been designed as a two-phase investigation: the first as an extensive exploration encompassing seven case companies, and the second as an intensive exploration of two of these case companies based on two in-depth studies (mini-ethnographies). In terms of case selection Bent Flyvbjerg suggests that the "generalizability" of case studies can be increased by strategic selection of critical cases. He argues:

*"When the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. This is because the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied"* (Flyvbjerg 2001: 78).

Accordingly, to attain a sufficient foundation for nuanced in-depth comparisons as well as generalization, the seven case companies in this study have been strategically selected (Flyvbjerg 2001). The basic criteria for their selection were 1) that they had several years of experience experimenting with novel team-based and highly collaborative ways of organizing work, 2) that they were part of a multinational corporation and 3) thus competing on a global market<sup>23</sup>. In this way, they were chosen because they are particularly rich in information on experimenting with new forms of work organizing practices characterized by the ability to collaborate, redefine resources and distribute authority throughout the organization (i.e. extreme cases). From the sample of the seven case companies underlying the study's first phase, the two most extreme cases were selected for the second phase in-depth study. I have not only chosen the two case companies because they are rich in information, but also because they may serve as successful prototypes (i.e. paradigmatic cases) in co-creating work organizing practices of belief and doubt. Next, I reflect in more detail on the two research phases.

## RESEARCH PHASES AND ACTIVITIES

On the whole, the project triangulates three different data sources: talk, observation and documents (Stake 1998). The deployed methods and research activities are described below.

*The first research* phase was conducted as an extensive exploration encompassing all seven companies and was aimed at attaining a rounded view of how they experiment with novel team-based ways of

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<sup>23</sup> I conducted the first research phase together with two colleagues from the DanReglo research project. My PhD study is part of this larger project. Guided by the above mentioned selection criteria, primo 2005, approximately fifteen companies were invited to participate in the DanReglo research project. Ten of the fifteen companies replied positively and seven of them had time/opportunity to participate in the project from Spring/Summer 2005.

organizing. One day visits were carried out in each company interviewing managers, workers and union representatives about their team organization and collaborative modes of organizing work (based on individual as well as group interviews). Approximately 42 interviews with managers, union representatives and employees were conducted as well as several group interviews. One central idea governing the first phase was to identify a set of distinct types of team-based high performance work organizations (HPOWs) enabling an enlarged perspective of the variance of Danish companies' strategies towards creating novel forms of team organizations. Different types were identified, but on return visits these had completely changed and new reorganizations were in the making. All cases demonstrated a changeability which made a set of distinct typologies seem of little use. Instead, they demonstrated an empirical “hotchpotch” landscape of diverse and constantly changing team organizing practices characterized by a high ability to collaborate between and within various collaborative communities, to continuously reorganize their practices and distribute intelligence and authority to teams.

Informed by these general observations *the second research phase* was carried out as an intensive exploration based on in-depth case studies in Tools Ltd. and Health Ltd. This phase focused on attaining a nuanced view into how work organizing practices of belief and doubt are co-created (and of what they co-create) among organizational members by exploring the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enable the co-creation of such work organizing practices and vice versa. I conducted a “mini”-ethnography based first on a one-week visit of detailed observation and interviewing in each company (Spradley 1979; VanMaanen 1988)<sup>24</sup>. The study encompassed managers and employees of all types (e.g. production workers, managers, team leaders, engineers, sales personnel, people from the R&D unit etc). These visits were (approximately 5 months later) followed by a 2-4 days revisit in both companies, making follow-up interviews which were particularly focused on the nature and workings of work roles and communing relationships among the organizational members of Tools Ltd. and Health Ltd. During my visits I “gathered”/produced data through formal and informal interviews, conversations, observations and by collecting written material about the two organizations. I interviewed approximately 40 people based on semi-structured interviews (Kavle 1997). In addition I also had ongoing and more spontaneous conversations with both managers and employees during my stay. The formal (i.e. scheduled) interviews lasted about 1-1.5 hours and typically took place in a meeting room. I continuously negotiated the selection of interviews with my contact person in each company, and this allowed for an iterative expansion of the sample and the recruitment of supplementary interviewees. In the interviews, I asked people about their background, career plans and work trajectories, present job position, work experiences, their concrete work activities, their everyday interactions with their colleagues, work roles, communing relationships at work, subjective meanings of work etc. Starting with the observation “to draw is to see” during some of the interviews, I asked the interviewees to

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<sup>24</sup> I use the term “mini” ethnographic study to describe the intensive phase of exploration. While the case study design represents my all-encompassing method covering multiple empirical sources, I conceive of the “mini” ethnographic study as one of several methods underlying the case study design. I am, of course, aware of the fact that conducting a “mini” ethnography is therefore different from the traditional method of data collection associated with ethnography that requires long periods of time in the “field”, detailed observational evidence and lengthy narratives (Yin 1984; Fetterman 1989). In short, the case study approach should be seen as a form of inquiry that draws on but does not depend solely on ethnographic or participant-observer data.

draw a pictogram of their work roles and communing relationships during an ordinary work day in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of their subjective experiences, articulations and meanings of both work roles and communing<sup>25</sup>. I refer to Chapter 5 for a description of this “methodological experiment” and the graphic illustrations of the pictograms.

Following workers and managers in their daily work processes and routines, I also traced how people, technology and material were assembled through the everyday work activities. In addition, I explored/focused on what was being co-created (e.g. new work roles, cutting tools, ideas, a collaborative community, routines, orders etc.) in and through these processes of ongoing association (and disassociation). In particular, I focused on how different work roles and communing practices were being enacted through these work activities. Summing up, I have traced and produced knowledge of the nature of work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices through methods based on talk, observation and written materials. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I elaborate on the ways of producing knowledge of work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt. In Table 2.3 below an outline of the research design is provided.

<b>Table 2.3: Multiple-Case Study Design</b>			
<b>Phase</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Methods/Data</b>	<b>Key interviewees</b>
<b>1.</b>	Seven Danish Manufacturing companies	Formal interviews (based on a 1 day visit in each company).  Secondary data	Managers, union representatives and employees  In sum 42 interviews
<b>2.</b>	The two core cases  Conducting a “mini” ethnography in each case.	Formal and informal interviews/conversations Pictograms Observation Secondary data (e.g. company documents, annual reports, websites, secondary company specific empirical research etc)	Employees, managers and union representatives  In sum 40 interviews

Summing up, these comprise the empirical context, applied methods and research activities that frame *the social world of co-creation* I explore in this dissertation.

## **THE METHODOLOGICAL TOOLS AND THEIR INTERPLAY**

Methodologically I make use of empirical bric lage or method triangulation not only to better illuminate the many viewpoints and angles of the co-creation of work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt, but also as a way of "verifying" the informants' viewpoints

<sup>25</sup> In terms of transcription of interviews, 17 interviews have been transcribed in full length/in extenso, while I have transcribed passages from the other interviews or taken notes while listening through them.

through comparison. Stake describes method triangulation as a way in which the researcher can present multiple perceptions and thereby clarify the meaning of the phenomena. Triangulation is also used to identify different viewpoints and thereby clarify the picture of the target field (Stake 1998:96-97). The multi-methodological characteristics of the case-study method lend themselves to just such a triangulation approach. In concrete terms, the study therefore takes its point of departure in a multiple set of methodological tools that embrace qualitative individual interviews, group interviews, observation and text analysis.

Let me briefly outline the interplay between these methodologies. The qualitative individual interviews constitute the nucleus of the dissertation's empirical bricolage. However, the interview material will interact with the other methodological approaches applied (observation and text analysis) as a means of achieving a broader spectrum of the business of co-creation and the co-creation of business among organizational members within contemporary Danish manufacturing companies (Amanda and Atkinson 1996; Launsø & Rieper 1997). With regard to the overall analytical strategy of the dissertation in relation to the interview material, I have used "opinion condensing" as inspired by Steiner Kvale (1997), and a coding technique that draws on categorization methods used in grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994).

## **THE DISSERTATIONS EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

According to Robert Stake, when one chooses to study a defined system or a case, the choice being made is one of target field not methodology (Stake 1998:86). Nevertheless it must be said that the qualitative case study implies a scientific premise, as Yin, among others, outlines when he stresses that the purpose of the case study is to provide a meaningful and holistic characterization of actual, real events. (Yin 1984:14). As mentioned, the concept of "meaning" or "contextual meaning" is central in the many theoretical clarifications of qualitative research and of the case study, and a specific characteristic of the meaning phenomena is that they must be described and interpreted so that we can understand them. The scientific basis of the dissertation is thus related to the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition of meaning interpretation. In the following I will explicate the ontological, epistemological and methodological deliberations that form the basis for this premise<sup>26</sup>.

Ontologically, I do not assume, like the positivistic tradition, that an objective and "closed" reality exists independently of our recognition of it, a reality which, when it becomes acknowledged corresponds, so to speak, to our recognition at "face value". I do not believe therefore that our experience of the world can be equated with the world itself, which is an "epistemological fallacy" (Nygaard 2002: 283-85; Wad 2000: 9)<sup>27</sup>. Neither (and as an extension of this) do I believe that scientific recognition can only be based on that which can be experienced logically and observably

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<sup>26</sup> Whether sociology should take an explanatory and objectifying perspective of the social world, or whether social phenomena must be understood through meaning interpretation, depends on which perception of reality (ontology) and acknowledgment ideal (epistemology) is ascribed to sociology. Positivism and hermeneutics may be said to represent the underlying arguments that can be adduced for use of one or the other perspective. Both approaches contain limitations, and my scientific premise therefore targets a complementarity between the two perspectives even though the dissertation's qualitative case study is primarily hermeneutically based.

<sup>27</sup> The epistemological fallacy consists in other words of ontology being equated with epistemology.

through the senses, since such a view excludes the recognition's subjective dimensions (e.g. belief and feelings) from the scientific field (Flor 1998: 122-131). Contrary to this, hermeneutics asserts that a reality does not exist independently of each recognition and conceptualization of this reality, and that human consciousness consequently is crucial for the individual's actions and for the social reality as a whole. However, being constructed and therefore exclusively existing by virtue of our subjective recognition, reality ultimately leads to the research (read: Maja's subjective recognition) constructing the reality being studied, another "epistemological fallacy" that in its radical form leads to knowledge relativism (Gilje & Grimen 1998; Danermark 1997). For how then can we assess and judge competing statements about reality and, for example, differentiate between what is meaningful and not meaningful, true or false, and so on? I distance myself therefore also from this form of pure idealism. Instead I draw upon a more critical, realistically inspired recognition ideal that considers our recognition of reality as a result of a process of social construction and our knowledge of the world as depending on concepts and theories, but which neither determines nor is determined by the world (Wad 2000). By relating to the hermeneutical tradition in this dissertation I am therefore aware that the knowledge thus generated is a social product, i.e., social constructions influenced by the pre-understanding and conceptual/theoretical vision with which I address the field. In other words, interpretation means there can never be a simple reflection between "reality" and empirical knowledge. The reality is, so to speak, "its own", and exists independently of our recognition of it. It is, however, not objective and closed as positivism postulates but open, as it is acknowledged subjectively and consequently perceived by virtue of our interpretations of it.<sup>28</sup>

## **PATHS TO INSIGHT AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY**

But what recognitional "paths" to insight into the "reality" that I am seeking to illuminate in this dissertation do hermeneutics and phenomenology more specifically refer? While hermeneutics (as stated) asserts that understanding and the associated methodology interpretation are a prerequisite for the study of social and meaningful phenomena, the phenomenological tradition also emphasizes that meaning is constituted not only through language and discursive processes but also through perception. The point is that language can give access to experiences; however, this is not synonymous with experiences being language. Therefore, according to phenomenology, concrete and immediate experience is the primary source of insight into phenomena. Consequently, getting close to the immediate experience - everyday experiences and their perceived meaningfulness - is the basic methodological principle of the tradition. A basic principle which means that alongside linguistic consciousness our being also embraces practical intercourse with existing bodily experience and interactive communication (Bloch 2001; Olsen 2002)<sup>29</sup>. Hermeneutics and phenomenology therefore contribute recognitional insights in different ways, establishing a complementary platform for the recognition ideal that forms the basis for this study. This is a study in which I am seeking to determine and gain insight into the subjective contextual meaning and everyday empirical universe

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<sup>28</sup> My approach lies close to the pragmatic social "realism" that builds on an assumption that there is a reality "out there", and social phenomena are therefore not only based on consciousness but exist in the "objective world" (Olsen 2002: 53).

<sup>29</sup> Phenomenology embraces a variety of tendencies, and it is principally the existential phenomenology represented by, among others, Martin Heidegger, that places focus on how our being in the world contains elements beyond merely the linguistic consciousness. (Bloch 01: 31).

of the organizational members in relation to their work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices.

However, such an approach embodies the paradox precisely captured by Gadamer in his concept of the hermeneutic circle. As already implied above, his point is that our understanding is always based on certain pre-conditions. Pre-understanding is a necessary condition for any understanding. Put another way, the interpretation of meaningful phenomena will always have its starting point in our given pre-understanding. He points therefore to the obvious link between what is interpreted, the pre-understanding, and the context in which it must be interpreted (Gilje and Grimen 98)<sup>30</sup>.

Accordingly, the case study inevitably provides an opportunity to verify the researcher's (my) preconceived opinions. Because social phenomena (such as contemporary work roles, collaborative communities and work organizing practices and the co-creative links between them) are not tangible, observable "objective" variables, the requirement for objectivity must therefore be accommodated methodologically by a requirement for intersubjectivity. We cannot free ourselves from Gadamer's pre-understanding or prejudices, but by creating clarity about the methodological and theoretical choices made, my aim in this dissertation is to achieve a high degree of intersubjectivity. For, as Fog points out, "*constantly debating about why we do as we do, think as we do, say as we do, speak as we do, and interpret as we do*" (Fog 1994: 171) from the beginning to the end of the study process, is the way that we seek reliability and validity for the analytical results of qualitative research. Next chapter introduces the dissertation's theoretical understanding of the role of work roles.

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Giddens seeks to capture the problems of hermeneutics in the concept of "double hermeneutics" which describes how the researcher must on the one hand relate to a world that the social players have already interpreted themselves, and on the other hand use theoretical concepts to conduct research and reconstruct the players' interpretations. The social researcher must in other words go beyond the players' self-perceptions and be "objective" (Gilje og Grimen 1998).

## CHAPTER 3

### FROM ROLE TO ROLE(-ING)

#### BACK TO ROLES: RETURNING ROLE THEORY TO THE STUDY OF WORK AND ORGANIZING

Observation point: The link between the dissertations thematic coordinates; work roles, communities and post-bureaucratic work organizing practices of belief and doubt is in this chapter explored through a theoretical discussion on the workings of work roles. My analytical object is here the co-creative relations of work roles within the world of post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. The overall aim is to develop an analytical framework to guide my study on the co-creation and nature of work roles that enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I address the role of roles at work. My purpose is two-fold: 1) to bring role theory back into the study of work and organizing and 2) to introduce a sociological framework for understanding how work roles are being shaped and reshaped within contemporary work organizing practices of belief and doubt, and how they in return enable and shape these practices.

I start out this chapter by addressing the link between selves and roles. I do so in order to clarify the motives for my turn towards role theory instead of drawing on the much more popular identity studies. Secondly, I provide and outline the roots of role theory. Thirdly, I move on to present and discuss the two overall theoretical streams within the field of role theory. Fourthly, I introduce the notion of situated work roles. I use this as my point of departure for developing a framework for analyzing the nature, workings and (re)shaping of work roles within the realm of contemporary work organizing practices.

#### THE ROLE(S) OF SELF – THE STARTING POINT FOR A RETURN TO ROLE THEORY

The question as to how work roles are shaped and reshaped within and against the practices of corporate work leads into the question of how we become who we are and thus of how to conceptualize the self and its formation. Let me therefore start this chapter with an explanatory note on my usage on the notion of self and on how I look upon the link between roles and selves. In line with Catherine Casey's definition, I conceive of self as a social construction that may be understood as a convenient fiction, a narrative construct that gives some coherence and continuity to a process of mind-body sensations, conscious and unconscious experiences and meaning-making (Casey 1995: 3). Accordingly, a sense of self provides us with an experience of agency, continuity and coherence over time. Within this interpretation the self is not a fixed entity having a "hard core", but a fluid locus of one's experiences, or in other words a pattern of constituent events and processes of multiple experiences of selves (I here presume that the self always has many faces and thus is plural in nature)<sup>31</sup>. Mead's basic thesis, that mind and self are formed within the social, communicative

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<sup>31</sup> Talking about the self is fraught with difficulty. The notion is highly contested and rests on an unresolved debate on self as either a fixed irreducible "solid" entity (e.g. Descartes, Leibniz, Kant) or as a "fluid" and multiple social construct (e.g. Mead, Taylor, Elias, Foucault, Giddens) (See Bukitt 1991 for an elaborated discussion). Not only is the self interpreted in various ways, but the term is also often used as an equivalent of the notion of identity or personality.

activity of the group/community, lays out the foundation for this dissertation's understanding of roles at work. He gives the following definition of the social self:

*"The self which consciously stands over against other selves thus becomes an object, an other to himself, through the very fact that he hears himself talk and replies. The mechanism of introspection is therefore given in the social attitude which man necessarily assumes towards himself, and the mechanism of thought, insofar as thought uses symbols which are used in social intercourse, is but an inner conversation"* (Mead 1913: 145 in Burkitt 1991: 38).

Mead's social self has two sides (or faces): the "me" and the "I" which are continually in dialogue as they emerge together in the social act of role-taking. The "me" represents the objective presence of the self within the group. It is the unique identity a self develops through seeing itself/its form in the attitudes others take towards it, i.e. by taking the roles (attitudes) of others. The "I" is the subjective and spontaneous attitude of reflection, which makes possible the inner conversation between the responses to others, on the one hand, and self-consciousness on the other (ibid.)<sup>32</sup>. Hans Joas very precisely captures the two faces of the social self when he states that the "me" is the individual as an object of consciousness, while the "I" is the individual as having consciousness (Joas 1985: 83 in Burkitt 1991: 38). The central point here is that for Mead, social interactions of role-taking are a necessary condition for the emergence of the self. From this angle, a person's self is built out of multiple social roles, that is of multiple loosely integrated processes of ongoing role-taking based on inner conversations between the "me" and the "I". According to Mead, there are as many selves as there are social roles. However, this does not mean that a self is no more than any particular situationally enacted social role<sup>33</sup>. Rather, it implies that the sharing of meaning (significant symbols) through role-taking is essential to the development of the self. My overall reason (or starting point) for bringing the notion of role back in is precisely this premise that the sense of self centrally involves the ability to role-take with a wide variety of others.

Notwithstanding this premise, why turn to role theory, a tradition which was popular during the mid-twentieth century, but after sustained criticism (mainly due to conflicting views, definitions and lack of conceptual integration within the tradition of role theory) came to be seen as flawed, and substantially fell out of use in the decades that followed? And, why go back to an outdated concept such as roles, when discussions of identity and the quest for exploring and understanding the post-modern subject and its identity (at) work clearly dominate the debate within today's research field(s) of becoming, working and organizing in contemporary Western societies (See for example Giddens 1984, 1996; Bech 2002; Bauman 2004; Sennett 1999; Casey 1995; Wenger 2004). My answer is two-

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Sometimes the notion of self is even combined with these terms (e.g. such as in Giddens' notion of self-identity). As a consequence the term carries many different meanings and is generally imprecise and elastic in its application (Burkitt 1991; Casey 1995). In this dissertation, I will not go into a detailed discussion of the notion of self.

<sup>32</sup> A more thorough description of Mead's figure of "taking the role of the other" is presented later on.

<sup>33</sup> In this respect I agree with Goffmann's way of making a distinction between the person (self) and the situationally defined role, while he at the same time stresses that this distinction is a social product in itself. In addition he comes up with three arguments as to why a continuous self should be distinguished from a situated defined role; 1) The acknowledgement of the distinction between person and role, i.e. the basic assumption that in any particular role performance the performer has a continuing role biography beyond that performance. 2) The acknowledgement of the continuity of the individual's life, which ensures a "traceable life". And 3) the fact that people are able to distance themselves from some of the activities, events and roles in which they are involved by defining them as insignificant to the personal self (Branaman 1991).



fold. First of all, because I do believe that role theory - if being revisited – (still) has a lot to offer in understanding how organizational members (re)shape themselves and their surroundings through their everyday practices of work and organizing in co-creative ways. Secondly, because I believe that, although identity theory acknowledges that identity is constituted by myriads and hybrids of social relationships, it tends to portray individuals as having one or only a few often dichotomized identities, such as, for example, a work identity, a personal identity or an organizational based social identity. Consequently, the identity approach often seems to understate how selves/identities are constructs of diverse social practices of role-taking rooted within various communing relationships (e.g. work communities, family, friends, political interests groups, social movements, virtual networks, blocs, communities of taste, leisure activities and so on). The identity approach thereby tends to neglect how a person's identity is built out of various social roles (i.e. ongoing processes of role-taking). Thus, although role theory and identity theory are largely rooted within the same theoretical landscape (e.g. symbolic interactionism) and therefore in many ways overlap, it is my argument that the identity approach lacks the analytical concepts with which to capture and understand how diverse micro practices of ongoing role-taking actually unfold and contribute to people's everyday processes of becoming, working and organizing. These are the main reasons for my return to the field of role theory. By bringing roles back in, it is my ambition to develop an analytical framework that is particularly sensitive towards exploring how the sense of self involves the ability to role-take with a wide variety of others (e.g. ones colleagues). Additionally, this framework seeks to further our understanding of how organizational members manage to continuously (re)shape and (re)combine their work roles through their everyday interactions at work, and of how these ongoing processes of role enactment are vital for the co-creation of contemporary work practices of belief and doubt. From a theoretical perspective I next address the workings of roles.

## **THE ROOTS OF ROLE THEORY AND ITS TWO TYPICAL STREAMS**

The role of roles is a key issue in sociological theory. Among sociological scholars it is commonly argued that roles are the most rudimentary forms of social organization and the most basic building blocks of all systems/relationships of social organization (Turner 1990; Hage and Powers 1992). However, role theory is certainly not the prerogative of sociologists. As a theatrical metaphor, the notion of role has been used to analyze (understand) social life since the time of the ancient Greek theater (approx. 534 BCE) – more than 2000 years before August Comte (1798-1857) coined the term sociology and thus “formally” founded the discipline (1819) (Andersen and Kaspersen 2000).

Tracing the roots of the role concept, the etymology of today's word of role originates from the Latin word *rotulus*, which refers to “the roll of paper on which an actor's part is written”. Later (1606), based on the French word of *rôle*, the notion was defined as a “part played by a person in life” or more broadly as a “part or character one takes” (Polzer 2009). A more recent but also very open definition is offered by Biddle, who describes roles as “*those behaviors characteristic of one or more persons in a context*” (Biddle 1979: 393 in Hage and Powers 1992: 5-6). Despite the concept's etymological roots, within the field of role theory, the concept of roles has been adopted and interpreted in quite different ways by diverse branches of sociology as well as anthropology (see e.g. Ralph Linton 1936; Erving Goffman 1959; Ralph H. Turner 1956). The first systematic use of the

notion of “role” is found in the work of George Herbert Mead (Mind, Self and Society 1934).

Overall, most versions of role theory agree that social expectations are the major source or driver of roles, and that these expectations attached to particular social positions are learned and recognized through experience. Accordingly, role behavior is commonly seen as a consequence of actors following and/or enacting patterns of interactions based on common expectations such as e.g. rules, norms, beliefs or preferences in social life<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless the similarities seem to end here, since there is great disagreement among the perspectives when it comes to interpreting and analyzing the actual workings of the expectations underlying everyday role behavior. Are these expectations cultural and structurally given or continually negotiated? Are roles grounded on individual performance rather than collective expectations or vice versa? Are they to be understood as fixed expectations or emergent outcomes and so on? These questions are just a few examples of the various perspectives on the nature and workings of roles that characterize the field of role theory.

Two overall theoretical streams divide the debate within role theory: 1) the structural-functionalistic approach and 2) the alternative social psychological approach rooted within the traditions of symbolic interactionism. While the first gives a functional account of roles situated within a social system, the second highlights the interactions and emergent processes involved in role-taking, role-making and role-playing within everyday life. The former conceives of roles as prescribed by structural conditions. The latter regards roles as something continuously being negotiated and performed in dynamic ways through the course of social interaction.

## **THE ROAD TO A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING THE WORKINGS AND RESHAPING OF WORK ROLES**

It is not my aim to provide an extensive account of the functionalist and interactionist understandings of the role of roles, but to more eclectically carve out how they have respectively contributed with important insights into the shaping and workings of roles. In the following sections, the respective conceptualizations of role behavior in the two approaches are identified as “prescribed work roles” and “negotiated work roles”. I discuss the underlying dynamics of both these role-images, and depict how they respectively conceptualize the link between roles, communing and work organizing practices. Further, I also seek to identify how the understandings of roles as either functional or negotiated both encompass a set of shortcomings. Shortcomings, which I suggest, to a great extent may be overcome by combining insights from the two perspectives instead of treating them as opposed and conflicting. Additionally, I argue on behalf of an understanding of roles that treats the distinctions between the two overall perspectives not as exclusive, but as complementary - that both may constitute important building blocks for exploring and analyzing the shaping and reshaping of contemporary roles at work. Recombining insights from both approaches, I eventually therefore introduce the concept of “situated work roles” as this dissertation’s analytical concept for understanding the ongoing making (and remaking) of work

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<sup>34</sup> The field of role theory displays confusion about whether expectations about behaviors associated with social positions are based on norms, rules, tradition, beliefs, preferences etc. (Hindin 2007). I will not go into a detailed discussion on these controversies. Let me only state that from my point of view, these categories are not exclusive. Mutual expectations about role behavior may be shaped by them all. Whether it is norms, preferences or rules that primarily seem to trigger these expectations inevitably depends on the specific situation and context at play.

roles<sup>35</sup>. In order to highlight the processual nature of roles I additionally introduce the notion of role(-ing).

Introducing the notion of *situated work roles*, I first explain how the notion integrates insights from the two presented “classic” role-images and incorporates the processes of role-taking, role-making and role-playing (as three supplementary modes of role-performance) within one analytical framework. Secondly, I propose an understanding of *roles as resources* shaped by both structural conditions and ongoing (re)negotiations in the flow of everyday social encounters. Thirdly, I suggest that roles conceptualized as “*social objects*” allow for an analytical acknowledgement of the dynamic relationship between structure and agency of role enactment. Yet in order to examine the reshaping dynamics and fluid nature of contemporary role-performance, neither the functionalistic nor the interactionistic interpretation of role theory adequately address the issue of role change (e.g. also pointed out by Turner 1990). As a fourth and last step on my road towards designing an analytical framework, I therefore turn to Hage and Powers' (1992) theory of *role redefinition* in order to develop a set of analytical tools for understanding how situated work roles are being reshaped and recombined in multiple and complex ways within today's landscape of work and organizing.

Bringing together these different perspectives on the workings of roles, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of when and how work roles are shaped and reshaped in co-creative ways within work organizing practices characterized by the ability to generate belief and doubt. Which roles and role-figurations become possible within these organizational settings? How are they negotiated and redefined? Which forms of communing practices underpin these role formations (processes of role(-ing))? In what ways do these emergent roles facilitate the ability to maneuver within and across collaborative communities? And how do they enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt? These are some of the questions I wish to pose for the analysis in Chapter 5. For the time being, let me first turn to the meaning of roles according to the structural-functional tradition of role theory.

### **STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL ROLE THEORY: PRESCRIBED WORK ROLES**

The structural-functionalistic perspective focuses upon roles as rather fixed institutionalized expectations of normative rights and obligations. It is argued that these roles exist because they serve a function necessary for the survival of the society as a whole. Major exponents of the structural-functionalist approach are the American anthropologist Ralph Linton (1893-1953) and the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-1979).

#### **A glimpse of functionalism**

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<sup>35</sup> Although I draw on theoretical works of both the functionalist and interactionist tradition in building up the dissertation's analytical understanding of the role of roles within post-bureaucratic work organizing practices, my approach is mostly aligned with and thus informed by symbolic interactionism. Consequently, functionalist role theory is more briefly discussed than the theoretical insights of symbolic interactionism. In my review, I particularly focus upon the interactionist perspective on role-taking, role-making and role-playing. I argue that these three concepts reflect important analytical aspects of role performance, which when treated as supplementary perspectives offer a promising framework for analyzing the dynamics of contemporary role enactment.

Functionalism as a sociological paradigm was developed in the beginning of the 20th century. The anthropologists Bronislaw Kaspar Malinowski (1884-1942) and Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) are the founding fathers of functionalist theory. However, the paradigm is mainly associated with sociologists such as Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton. In short, functionalism is about the structure and workings of society. The perspective stresses that society is made up of (interdependent) parts that work together in order to fulfill the functions necessary for the survival of the society as a whole. According to the functionalist view, behavior in society is structurally determined as it is the rules, regulations and values of society that guide behavior in terms of roles and norms. Functionalist theory is based around three key “beliefs” or assumptions. 1) Firstly, that society is a system consisting of interdependent parts, with a tendency towards equilibrium. 2) Secondly, that there are functional requirements that must be met in a society for its survival (e.g. reproduction). And 3) thirdly, that “things” (human as well as non-human) exist because they serve a function. It was Talcott Parsons who later on introduced the term structural functionalism (1950s) in order to emphasize how social functions should be understood in terms of (deduced from) the social structures of the entire social system (read: society). Although Parsons’ idea was to develop a more voluntaristic theory of social action - in contrast to, for example, Herbert Spencer’s more utilitarian and evolutionary version of functionalism - his theory remained genuinely grounded within the paradigm of functionalism. Structural functionalism does therefore not reflect a break with functionalism, but rather a continuation of the paradigm highlighting the social structures and social relations as fundamental for the functional analysis of social action.

Andersen 2000; Hollis 1996; Coser 2002.

This perspective conceptualizes *roles as prescribed patterns of behavior* associated with a given status. Status, according to Parsons, is the position obtained by an actor within a stable social system; role is the way an actor in a given social position is expected to act (Parsons 1951 in Andersen 2000). Accordingly, Linton describes role performance as putting “the rights and duties which constitute a status into effect” (Hilbert 1981: 208). Hence, a typical structural-functionalistic account of roles would be to identify a status (e.g. that of a teacher, a citizen or a production worker) within a social system and then seek to describe the typical set of rights and duties associated with the ideal type of this position, as it is these socially based expectations of rights and duties that constitute the role. Following this line of reasoning, any given actor possesses a number of statuses (e.g. mother, translator, team coordinator, swimmer etc.) each harboring its own role(s). Together these different statuses create a distinct role-set (i.e. the total sum of expectations of rights and duties associated with the given statuses) which bring a bundle of different mutual expectations (i.e. different orders of mutual expectations) into play. In addition, functionalist role theory typically assumes that actors through socialization are taught these mutual expectations (manifested in rules and norms) and that they through their conduct conform to them as well as influence others towards conformity for and adherence to these rules and other forms of regulations (rights, duties, norms, tradition etc). The belief is that such rules and regulations help organize the relationship between members of society. According to the functionalist view, actors are in this way socialized into roles and behaviors, which fulfill the needs of society (Andersen 2000). It is therefore further argued that roles (understood as

prescribed rule- and norm-governed behavior) produce conformity and a collective social order within the social system. In sum, the structural-functionalistic approach emphasizes that the function of roles is to produce firmness and a stable social order. Richard A. Hilbert very precisely captures this functionalist idea of the social order of role performance in the following way:

*“Statuses, in turn, interlock, their occupants playing their cultural prescribed roles, complementing one another. Thus just as members of a football team, each playing a unique position, harmonize action to produce an effective whole, so members of society, each playing roles appropriate to his or her statuses, produce stable social order”* (Hilbert 1981: 2008).

## THE “DYSFUNCTIONS” OF FUNCTIONAL ROLE THEORY

The criticisms of functional role theory question the functionalistic rather harmonic understanding of roles as prescribed behavioral “ordering machines” that serve the effective whole of society. Some of the main criticisms stem from the fact that not all roles are associated with status positions, that roles may not necessarily be associated with functions, and that roles do not only reflect expectations but also cognitive, spontaneous and unintended processes as well. Furthermore, to view role behavior solely as a consequence of actors following rules or norms that are structurally given and prescribed by status positions within a stable social system implies a rather static, structural determinant and thus very passive conception of the shaping and reshaping of roles. In addition, it is problematic that functionalist approaches assume that systems are stable and that norms are always shared. As a result, this tradition often tends to promote equilibrium and social order rather than change. It is for instance characteristic of Parson’s work that it ends up presuming system integration rather than accounting for it as an emergent outcome (cf. the system of latency in Parson’s AGIL-scheme) (Parsons 1951; Elster 1979). Functionalist explanations can therefore be criticized for being unable to account for social change and conflict as well as for containing no sense of agency. Accordingly, in the functionalist conception of roles, human beings are often seen as over-socialized actors or mere puppets acting as their role requires, and thus only being able to reproduce the status quo (Wrong 1961). Said differently, within the universe of functionalist role theory we tend to become “cultural or social dopes” that unproblematically internalize the norms and values of society as we seem to act on them without any resistance/opposition to the socialization of the accepted norms.

A further major criticism directed at functional (role) theorists concerns the teleological character of functional analysis and its method of explanation. Durkheim was one of the first functional theorists that proclaimed that the determination of a function is necessary for the complete explanation of a phenomenon (Durkheim 2000). However, the functionalist method of explanation is problematic because attempts to describe a social phenomenon solely through its effects do not explain the cause of those effects<sup>36</sup>. What is missing within the functional explanation is an account of the feedback

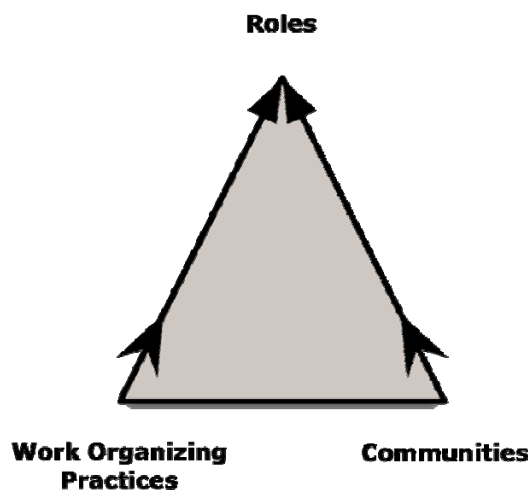
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<sup>36</sup> Let me clarify the problematic aspects of the functional method of explanation. When functionalists explain the existence of for example a certain role with reference to how it creates integration (i.e. with reference to its function) - the typical order of explanans and explanandum is reversed. In this way, the existence of a specific role (i.e. the usual explanandum) is used to explain the integrative effects of the role (i.e. the explanandum is here used as explanans), while an account for how the effect of integration continues to cause the existence of the role (i.e. the actual explanans) remains unexplained. To explain social patterns of experience (such as roles or norms) with reference to only the function they serve for society is therefore rather insufficient (Andersen 2000; Elster 1979).

mechanism which clarifies/explains how the effect of, for example, a certain work role causes the role and stabilizes it over time. While such mechanisms are known in biology, it is not at all plausible to assume that such general feedback mechanisms are at stake within social life (Andersen 2000). Consequently, functional explanations of social phenomenon are criticised for having limited explanatory power in respect to clarifying what actually explains the existence of social phenomena - such as for example the genesis, continuation and change of distinct work roles within contemporary organizational life.

In summary, role theory embedded within the tradition of structural functionalism suggests that roles are rather fixed and institutionalized expectations being shaped (and reshaped) by the social positions and normative structures within the social system. Within this view, work roles are seen as prescribed patterns of behavior determined by the structural setting in which they are embedded. The viewpoint thus presents a rather static and structural deterministic perspective on the workings of roles. Accordingly, the perspective conceptualizes the relationship between roles, communing and work organizing practices in a one-directional or mono-causal way. Roles are shaped by the status positions and formal structures of a given work organizing practice as well as the everyday micro structures, informal expectations and behavioral norms of a given work community within such practices. In figure 3.1, the arrows illustrate how the structural functional approach consequently looks upon work roles as the output or dependent variable of role communities and work organizing practices.

**Figure 3.1:**  
**Functional Prescribed Work Roles**



Next, I discuss the contrasting social-psychological perspectives, focusing on the interactions in which people come to play and constantly negotiate their roles, rather than describing the place of these roles in the social structure.

### **INTERACTIONIST ROLE THEORY: NEGOTIATED WORK ROLES**

The social-psychological approach suggests that role enactment consists of more than passively

following prescriptions associated with a given status. Instead, roles are conceived as emergent outcomes that are never fixed and given, but always negotiated in processes of interactions/transactions of everyday life. This stream of role theory directs analytical attention towards people's active parts in the interpretation, performance and negotiation of roles. It consequently highlights the dynamic aspects of roles as constructed and strategic lines of conduct. The approach takes its point of departure from within the traditions of pragmatism (e.g. George Herbert Mead 1863-1931) and symbolic interactionism (e.g. Herbert Blumer (1969) and the dramaturgical orientated approach of Erving Goffman (1922-1982)).

Symbolic interactionism includes a variety of different “sub-traditions” united by one common concern, namely to explore the ways in which meaning and social order are created and recreated through symbolic interaction. Profoundly inspired by the work of Herbert Mead, the symbolic interactionist perspective views the mind, self and society as mutually (re)shaped through the streams of human interactions that constitute social life. The way in which the self emerges as a mindful social product (through everyday interactions always characterized by unstable outcomes) is consequently the most basic unit of analysis within this tradition.

Accordingly, Herbert Blumer, the leading figure of symbolic interactionism, states that society *is* symbolic interaction (Blumer 1969/1998: 78). He further stresses that symbolic interactionism rests on three premises: that human beings act toward things (e.g. social roles) on the basis of the meanings the things (e.g. social roles) have for them; that meaning of such things (e.g. social roles) derives from the social interaction with others; and that these meanings are handled in and modified through interpretative processes (Blumer 1969/1998)<sup>37</sup>. In light of Blumer's overall premises, social roles may be conceptualized as meaningful “wholes or gestalts” (i.e. comprehensive patterns of behavior), constructed and reconstructed in the course of social interaction.

### **A Glimpse of Symbolic interactionism**

On a general level, symbolic interactionism is characterized by four key assumptions reflecting four respective foci points.

First of all, the tradition stresses that human beings are symbol-manipulating creatures and thus (in contrast to all other animals) capable of constructing culture as well as making and remaking (shaping and (re-shaping)) history. It is the production and emergence of these patterns of meanings that are central to this approach. According to the interactionist viewpoint, meaning is always emergent, fluid, ambiguous and contextually bound (R.S. Perinbanayagam 1985/ Signifying acts). The prime concern is therefore to study how people give meaning to their selves, to their

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<sup>37</sup> Blumer describes the three premises in the following way. “*The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that the human being may note in his world – physical objects, such as trees or chairs; other human beings, such as a mother or a store clerk; categories of human beings, such as friends or enemies; institutions, as a school or government; guiding ideals, such as individual independence or honesty; activities of others, such as their commands or requests; and such situations as an individual encounters in his daily life. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters*” (Blumer 1969/1998: 2).

bodies, feelings, life trajectories, situations, events and the wider social worlds in which they take part. Secondly, symbolic interactionism assumes that the social world is dynamic and dialectical. Situations are always encounters with unstable outcomes, and thus never fixed and framed by rigid structures. Accordingly, attention is directed towards analyzing and understanding the processual and emergent dynamics of social interaction, and in particular the meanings that unfold through these encounters. Thirdly, symbolic interactionism highlights the social world's interactive and genuine social character. In this light there exist no such things as a solitary individual (*homo clausus*), because human beings are always connected to and shaped by/through/with others (both in a particular and generalized sense). And finally a fourth characteristic of the symbolic interactionist approach is to constantly search for the patterns or forms of social life (i.e. the generic social processes) underlying the interactions, symbols and processes of people's everyday experiences. An example of this search-strategy could be to detect whether and how common role processes and role figurations may be at work within seemingly disparate setting or groupings (among different professions, family types or organizational forms) and in this way to develop an understanding of the underlying patterns of role behavior.

Harste and Mortensen 2000; Blumer 1969; Joas 2002.

Based on these insights, it is the interactive, interpretative, performative and rather contingent dimensions of roles that become central according to this stream of role theory. In particular, attention is given to how people come to take on the roles of the other (role-taking), construct their own roles (role-making) and play their particular role(s) (role-playing). These theoretical figures represent different modes of role performance and lay out the foundation for the symbolic interactionist understanding of the workings of roles.

### ***Role-Taking***

According to Mead, roles are learned through social interaction, and the notion is intimately linked to his concepts of the mind and the self. Mead conceives of roles as the basic building blocks in all social acts and thus as a precondition for human reflexivity and self-formation<sup>38</sup>. In addition, he speaks of roles as the “individual” acts that each participant must carry out to ensure a social act's completion (Mead 1934)<sup>39</sup>. Mead's understanding of role stems from the insight that humans have the reflexive capacity to see themselves as others see them (i.e. to take on the attitudes of others, and thus to view oneself as an object and make judgments about the kind of person one is and modify one's behavior accordingly) (Hage and Power 1992). This insight is especially emphasized in his

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<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein Goffman suggests that role: “is the basic unit of socialization. It is through roles that tasks in society are allocated and arrangements made to enforce their performance” (Goffman 1961: 35/ Lemert Branaman)

<sup>39</sup> In this way roles operate hand in hand with attitudes, which he defines as the preparation or readiness to perform our specific roles within a multitude of unfolding social acts (Mead 1934: 178-186). The distinction between attitude and role in Mead's work is not always clear. He often seems to use the terms synonymously and ascribe to them the same meaning. However his overall argument implies that an attitude is a tendency to act toward a particular category of objects, while a role is made up of attitudes. Thus, when we seek to identify a particular attitude of some other person, we do so by placing ourselves in that other's position and imaginatively reviewing that other's role until the attitude in question is identified. Taking the attitude of the other is therefore always part of a role-taking process (Coutu 1951; Turner 1956).



concept of *role-taking* reflecting the capability to interpret another's gestures in order to determine their dispositions and likely course of action and to adjust one's behavior accordingly. Said differently, it is by role-taking that we become able to imagine the other's responses to our own behavior and to use this anticipation to guide our own line of conduct (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969/1998; Athens 2007; Hindin 2007)<sup>40</sup>. Simply put, roles are seen as social objects constructed on the basis of on-going interactions of role taking. These processes of role-taking are essential to human intelligence as well as indispensable from the production of the self. I will not go into the full complexity of the aspects of role-taking and the social self (as they have been discussed in the chapter's former section on *social selves*). What can be stressed here is Mead's central point about how the self inserts itself into the social act through role-taking. This capability of taking the roles/attitudes of the others requires reflexivity which, according to Mead, emerges in the very social act. He describes the link between mind (reflexivity) and role-taking in the following way:

*"...the whole nature of intelligence is social to the very core – that this putting of one's self in the places of others, this taking by one's self of their roles or attitudes, is not merely one of the various aspects of or expressions of intelligence or of intelligent behavior, but is the very essence of its character.....[Intelligent behavior] is simply this ability of the intelligent individual to take the attitude of the other, or the attitudes of the others, thus realizing the significations or grasping the meanings of the symbols or gestures in terms of which thinking proceeds; and thus being able to carry on with himself the internal conversation with these symbols or gestures which thinking involves"* (Mead 1934 /1967: 141).

It is against the backdrop of these inner (but genuine social) conversations of gestures and symbols that the mind (and self) emerges as a continuous process through people's engagement in social acts. Mead stresses how this communicative act of role-taking is founded during childhood and how we as adults continuously become part of society by these processes of imaginative and reflexive role-taking<sup>41</sup>. His understanding of role-taking reflects a process of socialization which is not determined by fixed scripts of behavior, but triggered by social encounters of role-taking which are dialectical and unstable in character. Mead's concept of role-taking is therefore not only orchestrated by "free" and voluntary will, simply because any form of self-control is also a form of social control. Summing up, from an interactionist point of view, the anticipated responses of others co-shapes the way we behave and thus take, make and play with roles.

### ***Role-Making***

In continuation of Mead's line of thoughts but more explicitly, Ralph Turner stresses that role-taking is never about mere passive adjustment to the social attitudes of others, i.e. to what in Mead's

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<sup>40</sup> Mead's figure of "taking the role of the other" represents in this way a basic explanatory concept in relating the individual to the social context of her/his actions.

<sup>41</sup> Additionally, he speaks of the self including three stages of development reflecting how people gradually learn to take on the roles of the others and thus to imitate, adapt to, confirm or modify them in creative ways. In the first stage, children interact or "play" with others and hereby become able to take on the role of the other (simple imitation). In the second stage, the infant becomes sophisticated enough to play multiple roles, first successively then playing several roles at once. Through this "game" the child must learn to understand the behaviors of other people and reflect on them in order to play their own roles. Once the child is able to understand and internalize the roles of multiple others, the child becomes able to interact with groups and the society in a more general and abstract sense. It is in this third stage that the ability to take the role of the generalized other is developed (reflexivity).

terminology could be called the constraining structures of “the generalized other(s)”, because the process of role-taking always embodies a spontaneous and active dimension (cf. the “I” in Mead’s “me and I” figure)<sup>42</sup>. Introducing the notion of *role-making*, Turner more overtly emphasizes this dimension of how people actively make and remake their own roles through human reciprocal relationships. According to Turner (and Mead), we do not internalize the attitudes and role expectations of others at face value. On the contrary, Turner states that we at all times construct our own distinct roles within the loose framework of very general roles connected to a given behavioral setting (e.g. the general associated roles of being an employee or boss within post-bureaucratic organizational contexts)<sup>43</sup>. Although every situation is marked by some loose shared expectations of role behavior, it is Turner’s point that within these general frames there is room for creativity and authenticity in role behavior. Accordingly, he argues that we inevitably interpret and negotiate the process of role-taking in distinct ways (i.e. make our own distinct roles as e.g. employee or mother and play at them in particular ways). As a result, people make their own unique relationships or versions of the roles they perform (i.e. they always *role take* as well as *role make*). In this way the notion of role-making conceptualizes the actor as one who actively creates and recreates his or her role(s) as she or he progresses through social interaction (Hilbert 1981: 208). According to Turner, this progression of role-making unfolds as a continual testing and re-testing (negotiating and re-negotiating) of inferences about the roles of other participants to the interaction (Turner 1990)<sup>44</sup>.

### ***Role-Playing***

In particular, Goffman focuses upon the dynamic and creative aspects of how roles are actively created and played out, and upon how these processes of *role-playing* impact on the performer and his/her audience (Goffman 1959, 1967). In Goffman’s theoretical universe, attention is given to the “dramaturgical” aspects of role performance and to the multiple ways in which roles are played out in different behavioral settings/interaction orders<sup>45</sup>. Goffman suggests that roles are a social product in two senses. Firstly, roles are a product of the performances that individuals put on and actively play out in social situations, and secondly, roles arise as a result of the publicly validated performances. In his work he shows how this dual image of the production of social roles (and

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<sup>42</sup> Consistent with the paradigm of symbolic interactionism, Turner too highlights that roles are the creation of participants to social action and therefore subject to constant re-creation (Turner 1990).

<sup>43</sup> Goffman introduces the concept of *behavioral setting* in order to pinpoint how quite similar understandings often apply to widely dispersed settings. Factories, airports, hospitals, restaurants and so on are all examples of social settings that sustain an interaction order which is extended in space and time beyond any particular social situation that occurs in it. In this way a behavioral setting represents a kind of “standing behavior pattern” which always frames and co-shapes the regulations and expectations that apply to a particular situation of role playing. Turner’s framework of loose shared expectations of role behavior resembles Goffman’s notion of behavioral setting (Goffman 1983).

<sup>44</sup> In addition, Turner shows how people in the “act” of role-taking and role-making typically monitor each other’s anticipated responses presuming that these responses signal a coherent role, while role behaviors in practice often are performed in highly inconsistent ways. These everyday adjustments to and redefinitions of the experienced inconsistencies in role behavior trigger, according to Turner, an ongoing reinterpretation of people’s role-performance and thus contribute to the creative and spontaneous dimensions of the role-making process (Turner 1990).

<sup>45</sup> Goffman defines social role in the following way: “*When an individual or performer plays the same part (i.e. pre-established pattern of action/ we could also call them routines) to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise. Defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status, we can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons*” (Goffman 1959: 27).

sense of self) is a basic feature of all forms of the social interaction order. Said differently, according to Goffman, the self (and the social roles it is built on/made of) is the mask the individual wears in social situations, but it is also the human being behind the mask who decides which mask to wear (Lemert and Branaman 1997). In the next quote Goffman addresses the role-playing “deciding” human being behind the mask as he suggests that any distinctive face-to-face or imaginative interaction is characterized by the fact that:

*“Once individuals — for whatever reason — come into one another’s immediate presence, a fundamental condition of social life becomes enormously pronounced, namely, its promissory, evidential character. It is not only that our appearance and manner provide evidence of our statuses and relationships. It is also that the line of our visual regard, the intensity of our involvement, and the shape of our initial actions, allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose, and all this whether or not we are engaged in talk with them at the time. Correspondingly, we are constantly in a position to facilitate this revelation, or block it, or even misdirect our viewers” (Goffman 1983: 3).*

In this way Goffman points out that individuals do not only take on and make roles through social encounters, since they are also strategically able to mold and manage their appearances in distinct and purposeful ways. He therefore emphasizes that individuals are constantly able to play out different roles, to juggle with their various roles, as well as to manage and use their impressions and role performances in deliberate and/or manipulative ways (Goffmann 1961: 36-40 in Lemert and Branman 1997)<sup>46</sup>. Hence the arena for role-conduct which Goffman sketches (in *Role Distance* originally published in *Encounters*) is one where individuals dynamically play out roles and act as jugglers and synthesizers as they manage to play multiple roles simultaneously and thus fulfill one function while also being engaged in others. With Goffman’s words all interaction orders reflect such arenas in which individuals constantly twist, turn, and squirm in their different roles, even when allowing themselves to be carried along by the controlling definition and general behavioral scripts of the situation (Goffman 1961). Framed by this interpretation, roles are seen as negotiated images of self, which are constantly created, played out and recreated in social encounters as people perform and experiment with their role-parts in the play of social life. But are people always able to shape their roles in creative and strategically manipulative ways freed from the constraints and limitations of the situation and social expectation of others/society? The idea seems doubtful even from a symbolic interactionist point of view.

Additionally Mead, Turner and Goffman emphasize that individuals are never able to freely choose their roles (and thus to build up their images of self without constraint) since their doings are always socially situated. Consequently individuals are permanently constrained to define themselves and their roles in congruence with the expectations, statuses, norms, traditions, culture, behavioral settings and relationships which are an integral part of any social (situated) order. Goffman particularly acknowledges how we as human beings are bound by social structures and therefore never play out our roles freely detached from the social norms and expectations of the social

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<sup>46</sup> As an example, people may embrace their roles fully (role embracement) and play out the details of their roles thoroughly, while they at other times may perform their role-parts with distance, showing that they are much more than the single role they play (role distance). Or they may play roles cynically as a way of managing the outcomes of the situation displaying what Goffman names 'impression management' (i.e. the process in which individuals in the presence of others intentionally strive to present and image of themselves in particular ways) (Goffmann 1961: 36-40 in Lemert and Branman 1997).

situations we engage in<sup>47</sup>.

### **SOME CRITICAL REMARKS**

Despite the three theoretical thinkers' awareness of the fact that roles as social constructs are always confined and constrained by the norms and social structures of society, the social-psychological approach of role theory has commonly been criticized for neglecting the contextual and structural determining conditions of the social realm. Given symbolic interactionism's emphasis on roles as negotiated emergent outcomes and corresponding understanding of social life as a continuously changing flow marked by fluid interaction orders and creativity (cf. Blumer), this approach tends to overlook that individual behavior (also) is highly socially coded and socially determined. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault brilliantly illustrate the often limited space for unconstrained behavior and individual improvisation in their respective analyses uncovering the disciplinary nature of social norms, modern institutions and history in more general (Bourdieu 1978; Foucault 1988; Heede 1997). Another common criticism directed at interactionist role theory is its often little attention given to actors' expectations and to the structural constraints placed upon expectations and roles. As a result, the definitions and accounts of the emergence of expectations are fuzzy and lack consistency (Andersen 2000). Whether these expectations just generate, follow from or develop in the process of role-taking, -making and role-playing often remains blurred. Further interactionist role theory has received criticism for not adequately addressing the role of power. A last but significant criticism concerns the approach's rather narrow focus upon the immediate situations of social encounters and micro dynamics of interaction. While only giving attention to the situationally moment-to-moment interactions and everyday processes of role-formation within specific contexts, it becomes difficult to generalize empirical research on roles as well as to analyze the wider patterns of shared role expectations and behavioral settings across various contexts (Hage and Powers 1992). The weakness of such a micro-orientated approach is a missing capability to create theories and analytical accounts of macro-social phenomenon and to explore how these macro processes in reciprocal ways are linked to the daily performances and negotiations of roles within specific contexts, such as the context of contemporary work organizing practices within Danish manufacturing.

Summing up, figure 3.2 below illustrates the underlying logic of symbolic interactionist role theory although in a simplified manner. Within this view, roles are shaped and reshaped through people's everyday interactions in which they take on the roles of others, make their own distinct roles, play with them in strategic ways and thus constantly negotiate their roles through the course of social life. Negotiated work roles are in this light not seen as the output of the social structures of a given work organizational form or communing relationship at work. On the contrary, it is assumed that negotiated work roles continuously create social structures (such as distinct work routines, scripts for coordination, lines of control or norms for how to relate and create in a collaborative community) as they are being enacted and played out within an organizational context.

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<sup>47</sup> Although Goffman acknowledges the aspects of agency in role-playing, in his work he consistently seems to downplay the significance of the "self-acting" human being behind the mask. In Goffman's universe people are most often portrayed as social constructs shaped and determinant by the micro-structures of the social scenes they take part in, rather than as self-indicating creative role-players. Consequently he has been criticized for giving primacy to the structural constraints of social situations (rules, norms, tradition, culture etc) (Lemert and Branman 1997).

**Figure 3.2:  
Negotiated Emergent Work Roles**



The arrows in the figure highlight how the social structures of a work organizing practice or a work community, according to the interactionist perspective, are largely being shaped by the work roles at play in a particular behavioral setting. Under this interpretation, negotiated work roles are presumed to create structures rather than simply being determined by them.

#### **FROM OPPOSITIONAL TO COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES?**

The former discussion of the two major theoretical traditions of role theory lay out the basic foundation for this dissertation's analytical framework for understanding the reshaping of contemporary work roles. As shown in the discussions on prescribed and negotiated work roles, an agency-structure dilemma is manifested in the two classic perspectives within role theory. Most often the two approaches are claimed to emphasize contradictory views on role performance representing either a structural top-down or an interactionist bottom-up perspective on role behavior. However, it is my argument that their respective contributions to the conceptualization of roles (as shaped and determined by either social structures or interactions) should be treated as complementary perspectives on the workings of (work) roles instead of opposite approaches, since they analytically expose different aspects of the co-creation and reshaping of roles within social situated practices. Instead of focusing upon these differences as conflicting, I wish to recognize the areas of mutual concern and theoretical convergence in the two approaches. Accordingly, I argue that treating the two approaches as complementary perspectives permits a much more nuanced analysis on the working of roles. For instance, although the functional-structural understanding of roles equates roles with normative obligations and duties attached to identifiable positions and therefore tends to treat roles as though they were a kind of a job description (hereby presuming a preexisting “division of labor”), the tradition contributes with an analytical awareness towards the structural constraining dimensions of role behavior. Indicating roles as scripted behavior - as forms of preconceived interaction – draws attention to the fact that much of our everyday behavior is directed and guided by cultural frames, normative obligations or other structural conditions. In this way the functional role-perspective helps to acknowledge how even the most flexible and contingent

work roles are inevitably directed and guided by the (role) structures of the communing relationships and work organizing practice in which they occur. And, even though functional role-theory presumes more stability than warranted and neglects that norms rarely capture the exigencies of ongoing activity (McCall and Simmons 1978 in Barley and Kunda 2001: 89), the perspective also reminds us of the need for stability in any social encounter.

And likewise, although the interactionist perspective on roles tends to neglect or understate the structural conditions and constraining features of every day moment-to-moment interactions, a significant contribution of this approach is its focus on the processes of interactions by which roles are continuously enacted, reenacted and changed. Role performance understood as alternating processes of role-taking, role-making and role-playing highlights the social, reflexive and creative nature of the workings of roles. In particular, Turner's concept of role-making and Goffman's notion of role-playing emphasize individuals' creative capabilities to make and use roles in deliberate and strategic ways. In view of these conceptualizations, the interactionist role-perspective offers a much more fine-grained understanding of roles as continuous morphing processes driven and shaped by actors' everyday interactions. Within this "role-landscape" it becomes evident how even organizational prescribed work roles (e.g. those listed in the organizational charts or found in formal job descriptions) are being shaped and reshaped by organizational actors in distinct interpretive ways through the course of their daily encounters. All in all, there seem to be many complementarities and interdependent concerns between the two classic role-images. Consequently, I suggest that it is only by combining the two classic role-images that we can adequately account for how both structure and agency shape contemporary role-figurations at work. Nevertheless, the remaining question is how this call for theoretical convergence and supplementarity between the two perspectives is to be accomplished. How is a merger between the two perspectives possible theoretically as well as empirically? From my point of view, in order to do so, one important step is to create a conceptual frame that can acknowledge and account for the dual nature of structure and agency in role behavior. Below, I present this dissertation's attempt to develop a novel approach to role theory which seeks to merge the two perspectives at a theoretical level by acknowledging the dual nature of structure and agency in role behavior.

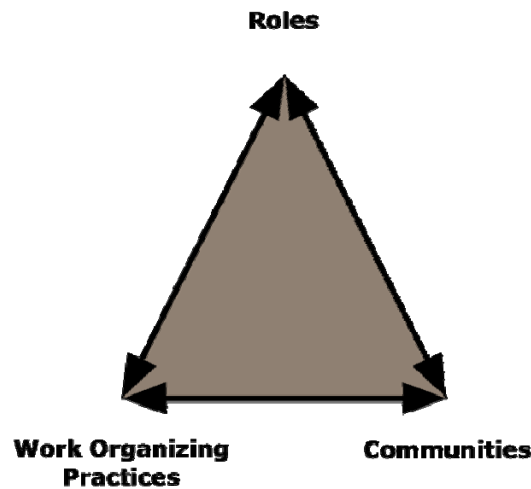
## **TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF SITUATED WORK ROLES**

Introducing the concept of situated work roles, I seek to develop an analytical frame which is capable of addressing both the structural constraining and the creative features of role performance. In the following sections, I elaborate on such a framework in four ways. First, I introduce the concept of situated work roles as an attempt to address the dynamic and interdependent agency-structure duality of social roles. Second, I propose an understanding of social roles as resources that allow people to create new practices/positions and establish social structures. Third, I suggest a definition of roles as "social objects" that in line with Mead's thoughts recognize the dynamic relationship between agency and structure of role performance and the genuine social character of roles. Finally, I present a set of analytical tools for understanding how situated work roles are reshaped/redefined within post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. It is my argument that these four conceptual takes on roles contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the workings of contemporary work roles and of how they enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

## SITUATED WORK ROLES – MICRO PROCESSES OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

As my starting point for developing the concept of situated work roles, I conceive of roles in line with Turner's definition: "*A social role is a comprehensive pattern of behavior and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with recurrent set of situations, which are socially identified – more or less clearly – as an entity* [to avoid any connotations of substantialism here I prefer the term pattern instead]... *and supplies a major basis for identifying and placing persons in a group, organization or society*" (Turner 1990: 87). By the same token, work roles may also be understood overall as situated comprehensive patterns of behavior used to pursue certain interests and to become part of a social setting(s), for example a specific team community or a broader context of experimenting work organizing practices. Bringing in the concept of situated work roles (role(-ing)), I accordingly wish to stress that, although work roles may be understood as emergent negotiated comprehensive patterns of behavior constructed and re-constructed in the flux of social interaction (cf. Blumer), they are always *situated* within concrete social practices and thus intimately bound to and structured by the communing relationships and work organization of these contextualized practices. I therefore argue that the *workings* of situated work roles are always co-shaped and framed by both agency and structure. Studying situated work roles rather than idealized and formal work roles or completely fluid "gestalts" of conduct, I seek to incorporate insights from both the structural-functional and the interactionist traditions of role theory in my analytical framework. Basically, I understand situated work roles (role(-ing)) as comprehensive behavioral patterns (understood as resources to create – I elaborate on the resource perspective later) that evolve through the interplay between role performance (of role-taking, role-making and role-playing), communing and work organizing practices. On the one hand, this interpretation acknowledges roles as dynamic relationships negotiated and renegotiated in the flow of everyday activity (through processes of communing/social encounters). On the other, this conceptualization of role also emphasizes the contextual structures and social scripts embedded in all forms of situated (work) practices. Such an understanding of roles makes it possible to study roles as relational behavioral processes, which always trigger some kind of situated integration of both agency and structure. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the interdependent relationships of situated work roles between roles, communing and work organizing practices.

**Figure 3.3:  
Situated Work Roles**



Under this conceptualization, situated work roles are reshaped in, by and through communing relationships (i.e. through taking the role of other(s)) as well as in, by and through the specific work organizing practices (i.e. through taking the role of “the generalized other(s)”). Likewise, situated work roles are simultaneously also reshaping the communities and work organizing practices in which they are embedded. The two-way arrows of the triangle point out these reciprocal dynamics of situated work roles and indicate the genuine interdependent relationship of agency and structure in social role behavior. From this standpoint a situated (work) role can be viewed as a social framework inside of which people develop and *organize* their actions. Accordingly, Blumer describes social organization in this way:

*“Structural features, such as...”social roles”, set conditions for their [i.e. peoples’] action but do not determine their action. People – that is, acting units – do not act toward social structure or the like; they act toward situations. Social organization enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations”* (Blumer 1969/1998: 88)

Social roles, understood as micro processes of social organization, are in light of Blumer’s words shaping the situation and being structured by it – in other words, situated social roles seem to create and organize agency as well as collective structures (e.g. new patterns of behavior, unintended consequences and so on as well as common interpretations, symbols, scripts etc.). But in what ways do social roles such as contemporary situated work roles actually create and organize agency and structure? In order to gain more insight into how these work roles organize interactions, and to develop a more specific understanding of the dynamic agency-structure duality of role performance in various work situations I propose in the next section a perspective on situated work roles, which conceives of roles as resources.

### **UNDERSTANDING SITUATED WORK ROLES AS RESOURCES**

The resource perspective on roles is most explicitly developed in the work of Baker and Faulkner, who introduce the concept of “role as resource” in their empirical analysis of the US film industry



(1991). Later Peter L. Callero has carried on and refined Baker and Faulkner's understanding of roles as resources on a more conceptual level in his article: "From Role-Playing to Role-Using: Understanding Role as Resource" (1994). The heart of Baker and Faulkner's conceptualization of roles as resources is 1) the explicit claim that roles are employed as tools in the establishment of social structure, and 2) the implication that human agency is facilitated and expressed through the use of roles as resources (Callero 1994: 229). Contrary to the structural and interactionist role-perspective which both assume that structures (whether these are seen as pre-existing or constructed in the course of action) direct and influence role behavior (i.e. roles are in both views seen to emanate from social structures), their main argument is that roles actually allow actors to create new positions and establish social structures. Thus instead of presuming that structures *are*/exist, they reverse the causal direction claiming that roles are used to create structures. They argue in the following way:

*"In conventional treatments of role enactment, a role is thought to be enacted from a position: a person first assumes a pre-established position and then behaves (or learn to behave) in a role-appropriate manner. Whether a role is considered to be static and stable, like a script, or something that is made and remade (Turner 1985), a role is usually thought to be enacted from a fixed preexisting position (e.g. Linton 1936, pp. 113-14). We reverse this process, arguing that roles are used to create positions and their relationships (i.e., social structures) (Baker and Faulkner 1991: 281)".*

According to Baker and Faulkner, positions are therefore not preexisting abstract structures determining role behavior, but particular social structures at a particular time which are created by concretizing (abstract) roles into real positions through interactions (Ibid.). Roles are in this light able to shape positions as they are understood as abstract classifications that generalize across social structures. In short, roles are "concretized" in action and used to enact particular positions<sup>48</sup>. Baker and Faulkner's "trick" in arriving at this definition is to connect roles and positions by enactment. The significant consequence of this distinction between position and role is that roles are not seen as an output of one's position in the social structure<sup>49</sup>. Rather, it is Baker and Faulkner's point that roles are to be claimed and used before they are enacted as positions. As an example, it is not the position as a teacher that makes the role of a teacher, but the bundle of enacted roles such as lecturing, advising, grading, conducting study groups, teaching specific courses, organizing new courses and so on which constitute the particular position. Once claimed and enacted, the role as teacher (i.e. the bundle of universal roles which are maintained independently of the unique actor) is used to create a particular position in the social structure and to aid in establishing a network of multiple positions<sup>50</sup>. In sum, roles are seen as resources to pursue interests and enact positions.

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<sup>48</sup> This understanding is precisely the opposite of the classic functional understanding of position or status as prescribed social structures.

<sup>49</sup> In a similar vein, Turner emphasizes that role refers to behavior rather than position, so that one may enact a role but cannot occupy one (Turner 1956: 317).

<sup>50</sup> According to this view, social structure is consequently not defined by a normative system of roles, but by the concrete network of multiple enacted positions (Callero 1994: 229).

When roles are interpreted in this manner, it becomes evident how they may be used in many other ways than as position enactment in a narrow sense, for instance as a resource for obtaining access to other types of resources. Accordingly, Baker and Faulkner conceive of a role as a resource in two senses. First, roles define and signal a person's social self and enable others to classify, understand and anticipate them (cf. Mead's concept of role-taking). Here, role is a resource used to claim membership in a social community (i.e. a person without a role is like a person without a community). Similar to Swidler's interpretation of culture as a tool kit (1986), Baker and Faulkner hereby emphasize that role is something that is *used*, for example as a resource to bargain and gain membership, acceptance, prestige and so on in social communities (e.g. within a work team). Second, role also works as a resource to gain access to a variety of resources as it provides people with the means – cultural, social and material resources – to pursue their interests. In view of that, Baker and Faulkner state that: *"A role is the nexus of these resources and the key necessary to access them"* (Baker and Faulkner 1991: 284). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Randall Collin's respective work, they define cultural capital as a type of role resource which largely refers to symbols, ideas and reputation (e.g. business symbols, reputation for success, the mastering of cultural norms and codes for suitable conduct), while social capital is a resource for role-action that is found in the structure of relations among people (e.g. social networks for getting access to information, decision making, planning etc.). As the third type of resource, material capital consists of physical assets such as facilities and work tools (e.g. tools of production, machines, work offices and additional work specific equipment and so on), as well as other material artifacts and technological devices being part (and co-constituents) of any particular context/environment. Baker and Faulkner's key point here is that these forms of capital are often accessible only through roles. As Callero puts it: *"One must have access to a particular role, such as screenwriter, to gain access to certain types of capital (e.g. financing, studios, symbols)"* (Callero 1994: 230). Roles are in this manner used to provide the institutional means to compete and negotiate over (cultural, social and material) resources within social life. As a result – and contrary to both the functional and interactionist role perspective – the issue of power and struggle (within an environment of always scarce resources cf. Karl Marx 1870; Bourdieu 1978) is central to the resource perspective. Drawing on the work of Elias (1939), one understands how roles (interpreted as micro figurations of interaction) constitute relations of power that form patterns of interdependencies by which power is tilted in favor of some and against others. Human interaction/relating is therefore always about constraining and enabling each other at the same time. Power is in other words an enabling constraint in all role relationships (Elias 1939). Recognizing roles as tools used in a competitive power struggle to get access to and control over various resources further gives attention to how roles are used to establish and organize social structures. Roles conceptualized as resources can consequently limit and structure one's options, stabilize social interaction, create distinct power-relations, organize enduring patterns of behavior, and constrain behavior through e.g. the denial of access to other roles. However, according to the resource perspective, any type of social structures, be it interaction rituals, roles, work culture, bureaucracies or other suppressive (organizational) structures, are never accepted as inevitable, but viewed as the very product of role use, i.e. as negotiated social constructions. One important implication of the focus on roles as resources is that roles hereby become a vehicle for agency (in line with the interactionist role-image). Rather than limiting and controlling our action, the resource perspective argues that roles make action possible at the same time as they establish social structures and thus also provide stability and continuity (in line with the functional role-image). This perspective on

roles is highly parallel to Anthony Giddens' perception of structure as a "duality" consisting of rules and resources, and his theory of structuration, which recognizes that social structures simultaneously control action and are reproduced by action (Giddens 1984). Very similar to Baker and Faulkner's argument (which seems to rest on the shoulders of Giddens' theory although no reference is made to his work), Giddens argues that structures are rules and resources that enable as well as constrain action. He accordingly points out that:

*"the structural properties of social systems exist only in so far as forms of social conduct are reproduced chronically across time and space. Structure in this sense is "carried" in reproduced practices and relationships that have become stabilized"* (Giddens 1984: xxi).

This recognition of the interdependence between action, structure and role, first of all, offers a unique potential for addressing the agency-structure dilemma underlying the workings of roles among people within contemporary work organizing practices of belief and doubt, which continuously must balance between the need for constant role-change (agency) as well as for continuity and predictable patterns of role behavior (structure) in order to be able to innovate and co-create in dynamic ways. Secondly, and as a direct continuation of the former point, this recognition also facilitates an understanding of situated work roles as resources being used to organize work practices of co-creation in distinct ways, i.e. as "tools" to create and structure communities of co-creation at work. And thirdly, an acceptance of the highly intertwined relationship between action, role and structure also directs analytical attention to how work roles as resources emerge and gain their distinct features from the social communities and broader work organizing practices in which they are embedded. Hence, the resource perspective offers a unique analytical frame for exploring the recursive links between work roles, communing and work organizing practices and the dynamics of co-creation that emerge from this interplay.

Summing up, instead of taking social structure, position and role as given, Baker and Faulkner view the production of social structure as problematic. They reverse the structural-functional explanation of roles, arguing that roles are used as resources for establishing positions in social structures. Viewing roles as resources that enable people to make agency as well as structure possible, Baker and Faulkner's role perspective opens up for a more specific understanding of the dynamic and interdependent relationship between agency and structure within the context of today's organizational work practices of co-creation. Drawing on Giddens' understanding of social structure as something which is not "out there" as a fixed guideline for conduct, but which constitutes outcomes that emerge through action and thus only exist as long as they are reproduced in the course of social interactions, makes it possible to analyze how social structures (such as resources (reflected in the three forms of capital), rules, routines, schemas, social scripts etc) constitute important building blocks in all role performance<sup>51</sup>. Within this interpretation role performance always both constrains and is enabled by action. This conceptualization further allows for an

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<sup>51</sup> The workings of a language illustrate this conceptualization of structure. That is, a language only exists as long as it is continuously produced and reproduced through our communicative acts. Moreover, while language enables communication, it at the same time also constrains (and structures) communication in distinct ways (cf. not being able to speak the language of the country you visit or just to experience the limiting nature of words, e.g. when you feel a lack of words with which to fully express yourself in relation to some spectacular or very extreme emotional experience).

understanding of how role performance, based on constant interactions of role-taking, role-making and role playing in work contexts of fluidity and flux not only may trigger change and creativity but also provide stability and continuity. Understanding situated work roles as resources moreover makes it possible to analyze work roles as “tools” to construct and organize work practices of co-creation. In addition, various processes of role enactment may, within the resource perspective, also be explored as role patterns which are created and shaped in the social communities of distinct work organizing practices. Acknowledging and analytically grasping the dual nature of structure and agency in this way, the resource perspective overcomes many of the shortcomings of both functional and interactionist role theory. However, in order to adequately incorporate this dual understanding of structure and agency into the analysis of the reshaping of work roles within post-bureaucratic organizational forms, a definition of role which is consistent with the resource perspective is needed. For that purpose, in the section below I (re)turn to Mead’s conceptualization of roles and notion of social objects.

### **SITUATED WORK ROLES AS RESOURCES ARE GENUINE SOCIAL OBJECTS**

In Callero’s work on a conceptual refinement of the resource perspective (1994), he rightly points out that, in order to adequately analyze the workings of roles as resources, we need a definition of role which is consistent with the understanding of roles as resources and which recognizes and captures the dual nature of structure and agency in role enactment. In short, we need a definition of role as a resource, which is neither structurally determinant in a traditional sense or completely agency-based. I do believe that Mead’s view on role-taking complements the resource perspective in this respect. As noted earlier, Mead states that in order to take on roles and develop a self, we must be able to assume the attitudes/roles of “others” in the social act. Furthermore, our assumption of their attitude must also affect our own attitude and thereby have an effect on how we actually perform our role in the social act (Mead 1934; Athens 2007). Taking the role of the other thus reflects a process of “self and other-objectification” through which people “internalize” the social world around them (become an object) and by these transactions develop a social self (become a subject). Following Mead’s line of thoughts, these transactions of role-taking are based on a genuine interplay between structure and agency, since the “me” is always taking against the “I” of the self and vice versa. Two important points arise from Mead’s figure of role-taking. The first is that the genuine interplay between structure and agency underlying the act of role-taking makes self-reflection possible and thus involves the comprehension of meaning, i.e. the creation of common symbolic meanings such as social objects (cf. that symbolization (common meaning) is what constitutes objects according to Mead) (Mead 1934)<sup>52</sup>. The second point is that Mead hereby shows how roles - through the act of role-taking - become social objects, which on the one hand make action possible (i.e. operates as a resource for the creative “I”) and on the other establish social

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<sup>52</sup> According to Mead, it is through these acts of role-taking that significant communication renders the reflexive organization of social act possible. In respect to the formation of comprehensive meaning and process of symbolization he further states that: “*Symbolization constitutes objects not constituted before, objects which would not exist except for the context of social relationships wherein symbolization occurs. Language does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created*” (Mead 1934: 78). Objects are thus given meaning based on the socially constructed definition arising out of contact with objects, and this meaning exists totally within the social situation. For Mead, meaning is given to symbols or gestures and this is the heart of the creation of the social creature.

structures (i.e. operate as a resource for the other-determined “me”). Roles are, in light of these two points, genuine social objects. If we further relate Mead’s conceptualizations to the resource perspective on roles, it becomes evident that the meaning of roles, as well as how they are used as resources in specific situations, are being negotiated in the social acts of role-taking and that roles in this way take on the form/enter the world as social objects. Asserting a definition of roles as social objects is therefore not opposed to the resource perspective. Instead, it is my argument that Mead’s notion of role-taking and his view on social objects qualify the resource perspective by stressing the inherent social character of roles. From my point of view, his conceptual frame on the workings of roles encompasses an interpretation of role understood as a resource to create agency and structure, which not only is consistent with the resource perspective’s acknowledgement of the interdependent relationship between structure and agency, but at the same time offers a more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics of role performance. Consequently, I will combine the understanding of roles as resources with a Mead-inspired definition of roles as social objects and jointly use these perspectives as a conceptual bridge for linking agency with structure in my analysis of the (re)shaping of situated work roles, communing, work organizing and co-creation within contemporary organizational life.

But what are the implications of claiming that roles are social objects? Inspired by Callero’s work, I suggest that four characteristics of roles in particular evolve from the understanding of them as social objects<sup>53</sup>. The first is that roles as social objects are assumed to be “real”, meaningful features of the social world: *“That is, roles are real insofar as they are recognized, accepted, and used to accomplish pragmatic interactive goals in a community”* (Callero 1994: 232)<sup>54</sup>. Another feature is that roles are social objects which are ultimately used to construct the self (cf. e.g. Meads and Goffman’s account of roles as the “social fabric” of which the self is made/constructed/shaped). As a third characteristic roles have a practical/interactive nature as well as a symbolic/cognitive dimension, i.e. they must equally be enacted at the level of interaction and shared at the cognitive level. Put differently, roles are practical projects of everyday life (i.e. both interactional and discursive accomplishments) (Coupland et al 2008). In this way, roles are both to be understood as concrete interactions in time and space, which have an “actual” existence in that they are observable as they are enacted in particular encounters. And roles must also be understood as shared, abstract cognitive representations, discursive “typifications” (Schutz 1970) or “meaningful wholes or gestalts” (Turner 1985), which help to guide action. The fourth feature is that roles conceptualized as social objects are therefore much more than a bundle of expectations. The argument I wish to stress here is that although meaning is said to be essentially for social interaction and the construction of objects (Mead 1934), roles are also practical “objects” that are interactionally at stake. Thus, I suggest that practical, material, emotional and cognitive interactive processes shape the way we create and respond to roles. In other words, within this view, roles are a bundle of transactional routines of cognitive, emotional and material “ingredients” constructed and reconstructed through everyday

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<sup>53</sup> Identifying these four characteristics, I mainly draw on Callero’s definition of roles as cultural objects. His definition is grounded in the work of Mead. Callero uses the term cultural object as a synonym for social object, although social object is more consistent with the language of Mead (Callero 1994). I use Mead’s original term.

<sup>54</sup> This first characteristic of roles as social objects resembles in many ways Blumer’s three premises of symbolic interactionism, which stress the significance of meaning production as we act on the basis of the meanings things/objects (e.g. social roles) have for us.

interactions and therefore not only behavioral expectations living their life at only the cognitive level. Defining roles in this manner, I do not neglect that behavioral expectations is a significant component of role enactment. However, in many cases a role (e.g. the role of a team worker, sales person or manager) evokes a complex mix of feelings, images, materiality, impulses and so on that goes far beyond behavioral norms. Hence, I suggest that roles as social objects are shaped by at least four components encompassing 1) concrete interactions and “actual” enactments and “doings” at the practical level of interaction 2) symbolic representations as well as shared expectations on the cognitive/verbal level, 3) emotions on the non-verbal level (we could call it emotive communication) and 4) artifacts and bodily experiences at the material/physical level. The various ways in which these role-components or role-ingredients are combined and recombined through ongoing interactions of role-taking, -making and -playing depend on the context, i.e. on the distinct situated (work) practices of life in which they are shaped and reshaped.

Taken together, the four general characteristics of roles defined as social objects contribute with a set of analytical “tools” or focal points to guide the study of situated work roles. In my interpretation, the first analytical focal point directs attention to analyzing roles as “real” socially meaningful patterns of behavior. The second analytical “tool” focuses on how roles are used (as resources) to construct the self. The third suggests that roles should be analyzed as having a practical and a symbolic dimension. And the fourth analytical “tool”, derived from the above discussion, calls for analyzing how work roles (as transactional routines) are shaped and reshaped by practical, cognitive, emotional and material “ingredients” in the course of social interactions. As I see it, these four analytical focal points together permit a nuanced investigation of the social dynamics of contemporary situated work roles at both the practical, material, cognitive and emotional levels of interaction. In this analysis, I consequently make use of all four analytical focal points in order to fully analyze the complex and often rather subtle micro dynamics of the shaping and reshaping of today’s multiple and continuously changing work roles. All in all, the resource perspective combined with the above interpretations of roles as social objects lay out this dissertation's conceptual frame for exploring how organizational members create and use their situated work roles as resources to produce and reproduce co-creative practices of becoming, working, learning, organizing, monitoring and innovating at work.

## **THE RESHAPING OF SITUATED WORK ROLES**

Until now the discussion has primarily focused upon the shape/character and the shaping of work roles, while little attention has been paid towards gaining an understanding of the reshaping or redefining “mechanisms” of role enactment. Although most symbolic interactionist inspired perspectives on roles recognize that they are part of a dynamic and fluid process and are thus seen as having an unpredictable and forever changing nature, very few studies explicitly deal with the issue of role change (Turner 1990 and Hage and Powers 1992 are exceptions). However, in order to comprehensively explore the nature and workings of contemporary situated work roles, it is further necessary to address and analyze how they are redefined and in what ways they are combined and recombined into complex role-figurations<sup>55</sup>. In the same vein, it is Goffman’s claim that the model

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<sup>55</sup> Hage and Powers use the term role-set to describe the list of roles with which a given social position is directly linked (Hage and Powers 1992: 9). An example could be how the role as team coordinator or project manager not only involves

of man according to the initial (structural-functional) role perspective is that of a kind of holding company of several roles, whereas it is of future concern to find out how the individual runs this holding company (Goffman 1961). In the following, I therefore attempt to incorporate the issue of role change into the analytical framework as I reflect upon role redefinition and the ability to *run* (i.e. to take, make, play out and shift between) multiple situated work roles in dynamic and co-creative ways.

What makes roles change? Shortly said: the flux of social life. When roles, according to the paradigm of symbolic interactionism and its processual thinking, are interpreted as social acts, they are consequently seen as dynamic and fluid processes – or rather temporary states of flux - having an unpredictable and forever changing nature. In this light, one relevant question to be posed is when and in what ways role relationships are redefined. Clearly, the redefinition of role relationships has always been ubiquitous because, as Hage and Powers’ put it: *“movement through the life cycles makes it necessary for people to reconfigure their relationships as children grow and adults gray”* (Hage and Power’s 1992: 112). Additionally, they argue that ongoing processes of change in role definitions constitute a fundamental dynamic of social creativity at work in social life. In fact, they describe role redefinition as the true locus of social creativity. Based on their analysis of Post-industrial Lives (1992), Hage and Powers seek to understand the meaning of the post-industrial transformation for our work roles and personal relationships.

It is their thesis that society within the last decades has moved out of the industrial era and into the post-industrial era in which a growing complexification has reduced the utility of role scripts and prescribed work roles<sup>56</sup>. As a consequence, roles are growing more complex and more demanding – not least within the world of work:

*“The knowledge explosion is making for a diverse world in which people are increasingly aware of interdependence and contingencies. Roles are changing in the process; these changes manifest themselves with special clarity in the world of work, where routine activities are being taken over by machines, and the roles that remain are made more complex by the addition of tasks involving information search and decision making in the face of uncertainty”* (Hage and Powers 1992: 67-68).

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the particular role but is intimately linked to a set of other roles, e.g. the role of colleague, coach or project account manager. However, in order to emphasize the power relations underpinning these role-sets and the increasingly interdependent relationships of contemporary role enactment at work, I will instead most often use the term role-figuration to describe the way roles are linked to or rather bound-up in other role relationships.

<sup>56</sup> Overall, Hage and Power’s attempt to explain the underlying dynamics of role redefinition by examining how post-industrial role relationships contribute to the development of new knowledge and the changing of society, and vice versa how growth in knowledge and rapidity of technological change are transforming the micro level of social roles via the process of complexification. Hage and Power insist on combining an agency- and structure-based perspective throughout their analysis. Accordingly, they claim that it is not enough to describe role redefinition as a micro process, since the broader structural context influences (and is influenced by) the process as well. Consequently, within their view, both social structural factors and interaction dynamics influence the actual propensity for social relations to evolve in a more fluid, redefining and creative way. Nevertheless, here I must emphasize one critical remark. That is, since Hage and Powers do not develop an understanding of roles that explicitly acknowledges and is consistent with the dual nature of structure and agency in role enactment (they stick to a rather conventional and structurally biased definition of roles as social expectations), it becomes difficult to see how they may manage to actually mediate the structure-agency dilemma within an empirical analysis.

Against the backdrop of these identified general changes in role relationship, Hage and Powers ask which kind of selves will be needed for a “successful” life in post-industrial society. The answer they provide is that people in post-industrial societies - characterized by complex institutions, specialized markets, complex occupational roles and other institutional arrangements - need creative minds and complex selves with the ability to entertain different roles simultaneously and *to continuously handle change in the definition of social roles* (Hage and Powers 1992: 82-83)<sup>57</sup>. Accordingly, they argue that for people the changes associated with post-industrial society mean frequent moves from one social role to the next, accompanied by constant redefinitions of continuing roles, and that this implies a large number of social roles and corresponding complex selves with the capacity to renegotiate and redefine such increasingly multifaceted social roles. If we go along with Hage and Powers’ thesis, the question is how this ability to constantly redefine roles is developed and “nurtured” within today’s world of work and organizing. Moving towards a theory of role-redefinition, Hage and Powers provide a useful framework for understanding processes of role redefinition.

Inspired by the pragmatic way of thinking - in particular Dewey’s thoughts on how problematic situations (any situation is according to Dewey inherently doubtful and thus problematic) trigger inquiry which invokes self-reflection and the possibility of change (Dewey 1938) - Hage and Powers suggest that role redefinition involves four different dimensions of social creativity (i.e. our everyday ability to invent solutions to the problems we face as well as to learn about new strategies from one’s surroundings through processes of borrowing/imitation). These are: problem recognition, thinking up strategies for change, implementation of solutions, and conflict resolution. Accordingly, in my analysis, I broadly define role redefinition as a process of role change based on all four creative dimensions, which are continuously triggered by the problematic situations people encounter through the flux of social life. Hage and Powers stress that: *“Roles can more easily be redefined when their scope of activities is greater, when there are higher autonomy and power, when activities are less prescribed, when there are many role relationships in the role-set....”* (Hage and Powers 1992: 120). I likewise suggest/expect that the more people (and thus “roles of others”) organizational members come into contact with through the performance of a particular work role, the more they are able to take on new roles, redefine old ones and develop multiple and more complex role-figurations.

All in all, by relating the notion of situated work roles to Hage and Powers’ understanding of role redefinition as a vital locus for social creativity, my aim has been to contribute to the development of an analytical framework for the exploration of the redefining mechanisms of role enactment. I hereby hope, theoretically as well as empirically, to shed some more light on the question of how work roles are actually redefined within the context of everyday work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

## SUMMING UP

In this chapter, I have explored the role of roles at work from different theoretical perspectives. The purpose has been to establish an analytical framework for understanding how work roles are being

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<sup>57</sup> They also emphasize that a complex self (which is built on various social roles) can look at situations from more than one point of view, and therefore can be more creative in envisioning solutions to problems and more effective when enacting those solutions cooperatively with others. (Hage and Powers 1992: 82).



shaped and reshaped and how they may enable the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt. Taking departure within the structural-functionalist and symbolic interactionist streams of role theory, I have identified two classic role-images: “prescribed work roles” and “negotiated work roles”. Discussing the underlying dynamics of the two role-images, I have further attempted to show how they both contribute with important building blocks for studying the workings and reshaping dynamics of work roles. Against the backdrop of this call for theoretical convergence between the two perspectives, I have introduced the concept of situated work roles as an attempt to develop an approach to role theory, which seeks to merge the two “classic” approaches of role theory by four conceptual takes on the role of roles. That is by: 1) acknowledging the dynamic nature of structure and agency in role behavior 2) understanding social (work) roles as resources to create new practices as well as social structures, 3) recognizing roles as genuine meaningful social objects, and 4) viewing role redefinition as ongoing processes of social creativity triggered by the problematic situations organizational members encounter through their everyday work life. In the table below, the dissertation's analytical framework for exploring situated work roles is summarized. It is important to stress that I do not conceive of this conceptual frame as representing definite and fixed prescriptions of what to see or of what will show in the analysis. On the contrary, I regard it as a sensitizing framework that guides my inquiry into and “mapping” of the workings of contemporary situated work roles among organizational members in Danish manufacturing companies. In this way, the framework represents a line of analytical coordinates for my research, as it tentatively suggests some overall directions for understanding the nature of contemporary work roles (role(-ing)) and of how they may facilitate the co-creation of (communing relationships and) work organizing practices able to both believe in and cast doubt on exiting practices in order to continuously develop organizational resources in innovative ways. Table 3.4 provides an overview of the dissertation’s conceptual take on contemporary work roles within the realm of Danish manufacturing.

**Table 3.4: A conceptual frame for exploring situated work roles**

- **Situated work roles** are understood as **negotiated comprehensive patterns of interaction**/behavior recurrently used to pursue certain interests and to become part of a social setting(s) at work – for instance a team community or a particular work organizing practice.
- It is the assumption that situated work roles emerge through an interplay between role performance (of role-taking, role-making and role-playing), communing relationships and work organizing practices within a situated context, and thus always trigger/produce a situated integration of agency and structure. Accordingly, situated work roles construct and **organize interactions** in distinct ways.
- Situated work roles are interpreted as **resources to create both agency and structure**, i.e. as resources that enable as well as constrain action. Work roles as resources are used to claim membership in social communities at work as well as to gain access to a variety of resources (cultural, social and material resources) as they provide organizational members with the

means with which to pursue their personal and collective interests.

- Based on the act of role-taking, situated work roles are seen as **meaningful social objects** having both a practical and a symbolic character. In this way they are shaped and reshaped by both 1) concrete interactions at the practical level of interaction, 2) symbolic representations and shared expectations on the cognitive level, 3) emotions on the non-verbal level, and 4) artifacts and bodily experiences at the material/physical level.
- Situated work roles are viewed as dynamic processes of interaction – as **temporary states of flux** – having an unpredictable and forever changing nature. They constitute relations of power and form figurations (interdependencies) of unequal power balances, i.e. roles are always bound-up in relations of power.
- The redefinition of situated work roles is seen as **processes of social creativity** involving four different dimensions: problem recognition, thinking up strategies for change, implementation of solutions, and conflict resolution. These redefining role processes are continuously triggered by the problematic situations organizational members encounter through their everyday work life.

In Chapter 1, I discussed how changes in organizational design seem to be closely paralleled by a metamorphosis in the character of role relationships that link people together. Accordingly, in this chapter I have developed an analytical lens in order to explore the co-creation and nature of work roles that enables work organizing practices of belief and doubt. What has not been addressed so far (at least not explicitly), is the nature, form and significance of the communing relationships that link organizational members together within post-bureaucratic highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices. However, when work roles are seen as genuine social products (c.f. Mead) attention must also be given to the relational bonds and communing ties they are embedded within and shaped by. What kind of communing relationships unfold within these work organizational practices, in what way are they linked to situated work roles and how do they influence the workings and redefining mechanisms of work roles? I believe that these questions are necessary to address if we are more fully to understand the co-creative dynamics of contemporary work organizing practices. As noted earlier, in their analysis on post-industrial lives, Hage and Powers ask which kind of selves will be needed for a successful life in post-industrial society. Instead (or rather additionally), in this dissertation I wish to ask which communing relationships at work make constantly reshaping role-figurations possible. And which kind of communing relationships are needed for the co-creation of work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The next chapter takes up this question. From a theoretical perspective it focuses upon the nature, forms and significance of contemporary communities at work.

## CHAPTER 4

### FROM COMMUNITY TO COMMUNING

#### REVISITING COMMUNITIES THAT CONNECT...AND CO-CREATE

Observation point: In this chapter I turn to the notion of community and the question of how present-day communities within the world of work and organizing may be analyzed and explored. The chapter suggests an analytical framework which changes focus from community to communing. Thus, the recursive interplay between the dissertation's thematic coordinates, work roles, communing and post-bureaucratic work organizing practices is on the following pages looked upon through a discussion of the relational character, implications and co-creative aspects of community. My analytical object here is the co-creative relations of communing in contemporary work life.

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about how we interact and connect with each other in a variety of social situations in the corporate arena and through these connections create communities at work. The overall aim is to develop an analytical framework for understanding the co-creation and nature of communing among organizational members in firms such as Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., a framework that may guide my exploration of (whether and) how their communing relationships enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt (and vice versa). I develop such a frame by introducing the notion of communing together with four analytical takes on communing. Based on these analytical takes I suggest that communing (at work) should be explored: 1) as a nexus for collaboration and rivalry, 2) as something that never unfolds in isolation but vis-à-vis other communing relationships, 3) as relationships that are made up of vast variety of ingredients and as 4) relational bonds that are both articulated and unarticulated. In Chapter 6, I draw on this frame analyzing how communing relationships among organizational members are co-created and how they shape work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

My basic outline with which I approach this task of conceptualizing the life of community among organizational members is very well captured by John G. Bruhn's broad description of how and why we engage in processes of communing:

*"As human beings we reach out to create systems of relationships. We form various kinds of communities that embrace our diversity and uniqueness as well as our membership. We need social connections in order to survive. We continuously seek out relationships and change them as we age and our needs change. As our collective needs change we modify our culture and its social institutions, which, in turn, shape our individual lives"* (Bruhn 2005: ix).

Accordingly, it is my thesis that our connectedness and social infrastructure in today's world of work and organizing shape our work roles and work organizing practices in distinct, co-creative ways. The focus here is on how to understand and study these shaping dynamics of community.

Throughout this chapter, Robert Nisbet's quest for community (1970/1953) is replaced by a quest for a reconceptualization of community, given that existent community definitions seem inadequate

to acknowledge the many diverse and continuously changing modes of today's communities at work. My purpose here is to advance our understanding of and concepts for studying the multiple communing connections and competing demands of interdependence among organizational members of post-bureaucratic work organizations. Accordingly (and as already stated earlier), my line of argument contests the claim that we have experienced a loss of community<sup>58</sup>. Community has not disappeared from the scenes of social life; rather, our ways of connecting have been transformed as societies have become more differentiated and more complex over time. I therefore claim that in today's societies as well as within our diverse organizational contexts, community is certainly present, but in new and various forms, and that we as a result need a new conceptual agenda for an analysis that recognizes the dynamics and implications of these new images and actual experiences of community. Said differently, it is my assertion that we need to reconstruct our understanding of community in order to grasp and acknowledge the dynamic nature and multiple connecting ties of the current communing relationships at work, as well as how they co-shape the topography of work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt within today's organizational contexts. This chapter aims at providing such a reconstruction by identifying four typical dogmas of community and replacing them with four alternative takes on communing.

### **APPROACHING THE LIFE OF COMMUNITY: A PITCH OF THE CHAPTER'S STRUCTURE**

As my point of departure, I share with Charles Tilly the world view that we live in a relational world (Tilly 1998), and my analytical approach towards understanding the actual experiences and co-shaping dynamics of communing within the case companies underlying this study is grounded on this belief. It is my assumption that substantial insights into the life of contemporary communities at work can be gained by two analytical "steps": first of all, by acknowledging the relational and dynamic nature of (work) communities, and secondly, by looking at how they are linked to work roles and work organizing practices in distinct organizational contexts. Contrary to many existing studies on community which more often than not focus attention on a single community (Bell and Newby 1974), the analytical approach I suggest in this chapter is not to look at communities in isolation. Instead, I argue that we need to focus on how work communities, as relational settings, are linked to and co-shaped by other communities and on how they are bound up in wider organizational structures of multiple communing connections. Additionally, I argue that an adequate analysis of these interdependent relational settings requires a focus on how the various communities at work shape (and are shaped by) the everyday processes of role enactment and "lived" work organizing practices.

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<sup>58</sup> In contrast to this view the stories of a growing individualism and a simultaneous loss of community are many. A few examples: Thomas Wolfe's *The Era of Me* – describing the "me generation" as a cohort of "zealous individualists" devoted only to the project of themselves (Wolfe 1976). Christopher Lasch's notion of the narcissistic self – proclaiming that a "culture of narcissism" today have carried the logic of individualism to the extreme (Lasch 1979). Robert Putnam's "bowling alone world" and declaration of the "death of Civic America" – pointing to America's declining social capital (Putnam 2000). Amitai Etzioni's description of the rising antisocial consequences of excessive individual liberty (Etzioni 1996). Richard Sennett's "Der flexible Mensch" – highlighting the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism such as rising individualism, loss of community and the corrosion of character (Sennett 1999). Accordingly also, Bellah et al.'s in their book *Habits of the Heart* claim that: "*In the course of history, the self has become ever more detached from the social and cultural contexts.....[and that] We insist, perhaps more than ever before, on finding our true selves independent of any cultural and social influence, being responsible to that self alone, and making its fulfillment the very meaning of our lives*" (Bellah et al. 1996: 55, 150). This radical form of individualism the authors see as a threat to society because it promotes isolation and increased fragmentation (Bellah et al. 1996).

When selves and roles, as I have illustrated in the previous chapter, are seen as social products always embedded within communing relationships, the issue of how communities support and/or counteract the (re)shaping of particular work roles and work organizing practices becomes a relevant focal point.

The chapter should accordingly be seen as a search for analytical tools designed to explore this issue of how communities support/counteract the (re)shaping of situated work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt, and of which forms of communities facilitate dynamic work organizing practices of multiple and constantly redefining work roles. As I have argued above, conceptualizing and exploring community in this way presupposes a conceptual frame, which acknowledges the relational algebra and co-creative links between situated work roles, communing relationships and post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. My purpose in this chapter is to contribute with a line of suggestions for the development of such a frame. Hence, it is my hope to contribute to the construction of a new language and analytical lens for exploring the nature, form and significance of the communing relationships that connect organizational members in co-creative ways, and thus enable them to take on multiple roles, play with them and redefine them and their other resources at hand towards human and organizational growth.

In the sections to come, I elaborate on such a framework for understanding how contemporary communing relationships connect and co-create in today's corporate arena in four ways. First, I track down some of the common characteristics of community in order to provide a preliminary understanding of the basic connotations that cling to the notion. Second, I discuss some of the older and more current meanings of the community concept in order to grasp the variety of interpretations permeating the concept. My aim is hereby to become better able to cut myself loose from them (in particular their static, dichotomistic and romantic undertones). This cut enables me to more freely recombine insights from these past and present interpretations of community, when I in the following sections move on towards building up this dissertation's heuristic conceptualization of communing at work within today's practices of corporate work. Third, I identify four dogmas about the life of community within the literature on community studies. Showing how each of them seems rather inadequate for empirically capturing the connecting dynamics and co-creative aspects of the communing relationships that unfold among organizational members within contemporary worlds of work and organizing, I use these assumptions as points of departure for a reformulation of the community notion. In its place, and as already mentioned, the dissertation introduces the notion of communing based on four alternative analytical takes. Before addressing the four dogmas, I provide an outline of the common meanings and past and present theoretical conceptions of the term.

## **WHAT IS AND WHAT DOES COMMUNITY DO?**

Apparently, a simple two-layered question of seven words, which however on second thoughts turns out to be comprehensive and rather complex, since there is no single agreed definition of what community *is* or *does*. Consequently, the figurations of people which are studied under the label of community vary a great deal. As an example, a study on the areas of agreement among the many existing conceptions of community has uncovered no less than 94 definitions of the term (Bruhn 2005). In my eyes, this confusion over the concept chiefly results from the fact that community can

usually only be described, not defined, and be experienced, not generalized. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed upon that, although communities vary, as do the individuals who are members of them, community implies relationships between people that go beyond casual acknowledgement. These relationships are typically described as closer than casual ones, because the members of a community share some common goals, beliefs or values that result in a degree of mutual commitment and sense of belonging among them. Another common feature (or myth?) of community is that it creates positive feelings. As Bauman stresses: *“It feels good: whatever the word ‘community’ may mean, it is good ‘to have a community’, ‘to be in a community’”* (Bauman 2001: 1). However, besides these positive connotations that seem to characterize the notion of community, which meanings does the word more precisely carry?

In his classic definition Robert Nisbet gives us a substantial suggestion. According to him the word community encompasses:

*“...all forms of relationships which are characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time. Community is founded on man conceived in his wholeness rather than in one or another of the roles, taken separately, that he may hold in the social order. It draws its psychological strength from levels of motivation deeper than those of mere volition or interest, and it achieves its fulfillment in a submergence of individual will that is not possible in unions of mere convenience or rational asset. Community is a fusion of feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, of membership and volition. It may be found in, or be given symbolic expression by, locality, religion, nation, race, occupation or crusade”* (Nisbet 1967: 47-48).

Community is, in this light, understood as relations characterized by intimacy, emotional depth, reflection, commitment and social cohesion over time. Furthermore, community is (usually) related to a certain locale or context and described as being shaped by tradition as well as volition. But what kind of significance do we ascribe to community? Or in other words: what does it more accurately do? Lee and Newby suggest that: *“the longing for community....symbolizes a desire for security and certainty in our lives, but also a desire for identity and authenticity”* (Lee and Newby 1995: 52). Within this view, the significance of community is linked to the formation of self (identity) as it is seen as a source for identification. Lee and Newby elaborate on this link by describing community as a sense of identity between individuals (Ibid.: 57)<sup>59</sup>. Envisaging community as a form of collective identity addresses the sense of “we-ness” of a group of people and stresses the shared attributes which they coalesce. This “feeling” or “knowing” of belonging and identity invoked among members of a community (e.g. the sense of working together toward a common goal or participating in an event that depends upon everyone’s efforts), which Lee and Newby emphasize in their definition, encompasses, according to McMillan and Chavis (1986) four aspects or “ingredients”: the sense of membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and a shared emotional connection (in Bruhn 2005). So rooted, what a community *does* is to provide members with a sense of identity based on these four “ingredients”. In concert with Mead's perspective on the social self and the relational approach of American pragmatism, which stresses how selves/identities reside in relations with the other, you-me and them-us, the above understanding conceives of community as the raw material out of which people construct their social selves and the multiple roles on which these selves are built.

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<sup>59</sup> This sense of identity or “we-ness” between people emerges even though, in some cases, their mutual identification may never have resulted from any personal contact (Lee and Newby 1995).

From this defining angle, a broad variety of relationships inside (and outside) the realm of work such as the organization in itself, a work team, a gang of colleagues, quasi professional units and project groups all represent forms of communities (understood as different nets or connections of reciprocal social relations) which serve as raw materials for organizational members to gain a “feeling” or “knowing” of membership and to get access to a variety of resources (social, cultural, material) through processes of role-taking, role-making and role-playing<sup>60</sup>. Accordingly, a great deal of research indicates how work provides people with a sense of membership and thus represents a vital source for their identity (and work role) formation (Pettinger et al 2005; Casey 1995). Later I will unpack this argument in more detail, since it bridges the link between work roles and communities in a reciprocal manner, supporting the dissertation's overall analytical take on the dynamics of co-creation between roles, communing and work organization. Continuing the search for further insights into the forms and (historical) meanings of community, I now turn to some of the classic and more recent conceptions of community.

## PAST AND PRESENT CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY

As a sociological construct, community is heavily grounded in the classic work of Ferdinand Tönnies and Emile Durkheim. First and foremost, Tönnies’ distinction between the two contrasting kinds of social life: *Gemeinschaft* (community or partnership) and *Gesellschaft* (association or society) (Tönnies 1974/1887) forms a cornerstone within modern sociological conceptions of community. For Tönnies, these forms of connecting relationships represent two ideal-types of community which must be understood on the basis of how they are rooted in people’s subjective lives<sup>61</sup>. He accordingly views “the social” as something meaningful and determined by will. *Gemeinschaft* rests on “*Wesenvillen*” (a type of will that covers the intelligence of the basis of all existence and is commonly translated as “natural will”). This community form exists by the subjective will of the members: “*The very existence of Gemeinschaft rests in the consciousness of belonging together and the affirmation of the condition of mutual dependence*” (Tönnies 1974: 69). According to Tönnies, this form of will refers to our unreflected acts driven by feelings, common practice or faith, and it is characterized by expressing our general being, identity and endeavors in life as a whole. Based on this type of will, community connotes the simple, familialistic, intimate, private way of life where members and the social roles they fulfill are bound together by common traditions, shared language, feelings, values etc. Examples of this prototype of community are the family, religious groups or work communities based on shared feelings, or in other words, communities that are small-scale, “organic” and close-knit and which are an integral part of people’s identity and personal life. As opposed to this form of community, *Gesellschaft* rests on a more instrumental and purposeful type of relationship based on “*Willkür*” or “*Kürville*”(a type of will which conveys the sense of freewill

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<sup>60</sup> Talking about the inside and outside of, for instance, the realm of work and organizing, a system, a network or a community is in itself a problematic distinction which reproduces a dual “world view” and assumes boundaries instead of acknowledging and exploring how they constantly may be negotiated, transgressed and rebuilt in every situation of social life. Therefore the inside-outside distinction should only be seen as an analytical construct.

<sup>61</sup> Actually, Tönnies does not use the term ideal-type himself. I however use the term because it very well captures how he describes the two types of mutual relations between individuals of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (1887).

or free choice and is commonly translated as “rational will”)<sup>62</sup>. This type of will is built on rational self-interest - a calculative reflection of means in relation to ends – and gives rise to a form of community where: “reference is only to objective fact of unity based on common traits and activities and other external phenomena” (Ibid.: 67). Gesellschaft-communities arise when people connect as conscious purposeful exchange-partners pursuing their interests and thus designate a form of community which individuals choose by their (rather) “free” and “rational” will. An example of this form of communing relationship is contract-based alliances such as business groups, work contracts and collective agreements (Falk 1996; Andersen 1990). Within this interpretation, Gesellschaft represents a lifestyle of self-interest, competitiveness, formal relationships and rather pre-defined social roles.

A common criticism of Tönnies’ Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft polarity is that it reflects a rather static typology of a past and a present way of communing. At least in its initial version, it reveals a discontent with the increasing urbanization and industrialization and a certain longing for a return to an earlier stage in the development of societies. Consequently, for Tönnies community was primarily seen as a symbol of a past and better age (Elias 1974). However, although Tönnies links his distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft to the development of modern society (the radical shift from pre-industrial to industrial society) and romanticizes the former form of community, he also (on some occasions) suggests that societal life should be seen as a continuous dialectic between “Wesenvillen” and “Wilkür” (i.e. between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft) (Falk 1999). When seen in this light, communities at work within today’s world of work and organizing may well rest on both forms (or dimensions) of community. For example, does present day work life both create a context for close-knit and feeling-based relations among colleagues and for relationships based on contractual ties and self-interest among organizational members? Another example is how team spirit at the same time may be grounded in collective commitment as well as in an employment contract or economic system of incentives.

Emile Durkheim (who was a contemporary of Tönnies) also observed the industrialization of Europe and developed a theory of community based on two contrasting types: *mechanical solidarity* and *organic solidarity*, representing two different forms of societal integration. Durkheim relates the two community forms to the pre-industrial and industrial society, but as in Tönnies’ conception, they do not exclude each other. Rather, they appear simultaneously, but in different degrees within different societies at different periods of time<sup>63</sup>. Mechanical solidarity is a solidarity sui generis that binds the individual directly to society and is based on a strong collective conscience (conscience collective) (Durkheim 2000: 120; Gunieriusen 1996). This type of solidarity is particularly present in traditional communities such as small towns and family units where people are united by shared customs, rituals and beliefs and where people’s social bonds result from their likeness and close-knit relations. According to Durkheim, mechanical solidarity that derives from similarities is at its

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<sup>62</sup> To translate “Kürville” as “rational will” is not unproblematic (read: rather misleading) since Tönnies viewed all will as in some sense rational. In other words, rationality takes on many forms and is therefore as much present in Gemeinschaft as in Gesellschaft (Tönnies 2001/1887: xliiii).

<sup>63</sup> In contrast to Tönnies, Durkheim saw community as more than its context or setting. While Tönnies romanticized a type of place (the traditional and familialistic life in villages) and conceived of social change as destroying a good thing, Durkheim stressed the importance of the characteristics of relationships and how social change shapes and reshapes them in different contexts and times (Bruhn 2005: 32).



maximum: *“when the collective consciousness completely envelops our total consciousness, coinciding with it at every point. At that moment our individuality is zero”* (Durkheim 1984: 84). In contrast, organic solidarity is not a constraint on individuality. On the contrary, it is individualizing as it is based on individual differences and linked to the division of labor in industrial society. Due to the greater differentiation of industrial societies – especially occupational specialization (typical of modern cities) – people became more dependent on each other to meet various needs. Thus, it is Durkheim’s point that the division of labor creates a social order of mutual interdependencies, i.e. a moral order based on differences and mutual needs. Essential for this type of solidarity is that it takes over the function of the conscience collective of traditional communities (integration) and at the same time enables people to have greater freedom and choice (differentiation)<sup>64</sup>.

The central point is that Durkheim hereby introduces an understanding of community which, contrary to Tönnies’ conceptualization, allows for (is based on) integration as well as differentiation. In other words, an understanding acknowledging that, although modern industrial life is more complex and creates new problems, it also provides for greater individual development as well as for new forms of social involvement and communing relationships. In this way Durkheim’s organic solidarity points towards (what I will call) “an individualizing solidarity” which implies an “organic” form of communing relationships founded on the interdependence of specialized roles. However, regardless of the fact that Durkheim with his concept of organic solidarity actually introduces a form of community which, created by the complex division of labor wrought by capitalist development, enables people to simultaneously build up their individuality and connecting integrative bonds, present conceptualizations of community largely seem to connote the Gemeinschaft-like characteristics of community.

One reason for this is, according to Elias, that Tönnies and Durkheim tend to reduce their respective two types of community to static types (of a past and a present form of being bound to each other) instead of focusing on how they co-exist and are (re)shaped differently in different contexts and times. Another reason is that ever since Tönnies’ opposed his romanticized beliefs and ideals of Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, the use of the term community has remained associated with the: *“hope and the wish of reviving once more closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to the past”* (Elias 1974a: xiii). Bauman’s book “Community – Seeking Safety in an Insecure World” certainly illustrates the romantic Gemeinschaft-like undertones that obviously also today cling to the concept. On the first page Baumann provides us with the following description:

*“Community is a “warm” place, a cosy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day. Out there, in the street, all sorts of dangers lie in ambush.... In here, in the community, we can relax – we are safe, there are no dangers looming in the dark corners (to be sure, hardly any “corner” here is “dark”)*” (Bauman 2001: 1).

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<sup>64</sup> Durkheim describes organic solidarity in the following way: *“Whereas the other solidarity implies that individuals resemble one another, the latter [organic solidarity] assumes that they are different from one another. The former type is only possible in so far as the individual personality is absorbed into the collective personality; the latter is only possible if each one of us has a sphere of action that is peculiarly our own, and consequently a personality... Indeed, on the one hand each one of us depends more intimately upon society the more labour is divided up, and on the other, the activity of each one of us is correspondingly more specialized, the more personal it is”* (Durkheim 1984: 85).

Turning towards the research field on work and organizing, the Gemeinschaft-like features of community also seem to dominate this landscape. For example, Sverre Lysgaard's classical field study *Arbejderkollektivet* (The Worker's Collective (1985/1961) discusses how solidarity is established among factory workers on the background of, and as a reaction to, company control through labor management (i.e. they establish an informal collective as a reaction to the formal organizational arrangements). Within this study the heart of the worker's collective is their common subordination to and dependency on the company. In this case, the worker's community is characterized by strong ties built on mutual identification due to their *sameness* in status, salary and so on, and it is expressed through common norms and informal roles for conduct, attitudes towards management etc. Also more recent studies, such as Etienne Wenger's empirical work and focus upon employees' communities of practice (1998), tend to replicate the familiar, homogeneous and rather *harmonic* connotations of community. Against the backdrop of these three interpretations, community is seen as a shelter against an insecure world (Bauman), as an informal complement to the formal organizational arrangements based on the workers' sameness/common conditions (Lysgaard), or as shared practical experiences shaped through rather harmonic and close-knit relational work settings (Wenger). It is remarkable how all three definitions connote the characteristics of Gemeinschaft, such as cosy and "warm" social bonds, unity of purpose, harmony and so on, whereas the fact that community might not necessarily be associated with only this type of communing relationship is absent/is overlooked in the three conceptualizations.

Taking this "celebration" of the Gemeinschaft-like characteristics into account, one may be led to conclude that the concept of community is outdated in that it does not address the complex interdependencies and more fluid nature of people's connecting relationships within today's networked and projective economy. Grabher and Maintz reach such a conclusion and sum it up in the following way:

*"The very notion of "community" connotes with a level of persistence, homogeneity, and familiarity that appears rather alien in the current context of a relentless reshuffling of organizational arrangements and personal affiliations. The notion of community evokes a sense of order and coherence that particularly seems absent in industries which are driven by short cycles of temporary projects"* (Grabher and Maintz 2007).

However, informed by the empirical material underlying this dissertation (presented in the subsequent chapters), I do not believe that Grabher and Maintz's conclusion delivers an accurate description of the role of community within current post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. My belief is built on two key arguments. First of all, if we keep in mind that the concept of community carries other meanings than Gemeinschaft-like characteristics, I do not agree that community has become alien in these contexts. On the contrary, what has become "alien" is rather our way of describing and analyzing how people within these current organizational contexts are bound to each other through a variety of complex communing relations. Secondly, recalling Durkheim's point about how social change shapes and reshapes the characteristics of relationships in different contexts and times, I do not think that community has been worn out, but that our ways of communing and creating (also) close and feeling based connections at work have changed concurrently with the wider social changes in the corporate arena. It is accordingly my argument that community/communing, far from being alien in the context of post-bureaucratic work organizing

practices, is central to their co-creation. Central because today's communing connections serve as important raw materials for the formation of constantly shaping and reshaping situated work roles. Taking this into account, the challenge is how we may become better able to investigate the community aspects of current communities (communing relationships) at work. Below, I elaborate on a framework for studying these community aspects by addressing and subsequently reformulating four typical dogmas of community.

### **FROM FOUR DOGMAS OF COMMUNITY...**

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that in this thesis community is not approached as having an essence or solid structure which can be captured by an objective definition or description. Rather, I propose to follow Wittgenstein's advice and seek the use of, instead of the lexical meaning of community. This implies understanding community by seeking to "capture" people's experience (and use) of it – and thus to first and foremost ask: what does community appear to mean to its members, how is it used, transformed and reproduced through people's social interactions within today's world (of work and organizing)? In this way, the thesis does not assume that communities are *per se*. Instead it looks at how communing relationships are being shaped and reshaped in the course of social action within a specific context, namely the realm of Danish manufacturing companies experimenting with novel forms of work organizing practices of belief and doubt premised on increasingly criss-crossing collaborative relationships. Thus, my attempt is not to analytically describe the forms and structures of contemporary communities at work from a fixed external vantage point, but to penetrate these structures of communing by looking *outwards* from their very core, i.e. from the practices (of everyday relating) in which they are continuously shaped and reshaped within today's realm of work and organizing. In order to prepare for this task, it is my argument that we need to acknowledge the relational nature of communities as well as to clear away some of the older static and romantic connotations that cling to the community concept. I attempt to do so by identifying and debunking four myths or rather typical dogmas of community. The typical dogmas are: 1) a conception of community as only composed of harmonic and equal collaborative relationships, 2) to mainly study communities in isolation, 3) to look at community as only a matter of trust and long-lasting ties, and 4) an understanding of community as simply articulated forms of sociality. Based on a relational – highly eclectic theoretical - approach, I redefine and transform them into four heuristic takes on communing which will guide the analysis in Chapter 7 of how present communing relationships at work connect and co-create and how they enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

### **...TO FOUR HEURISTIC TAKES ON COMMUNING**

My overall take on the concept of community is to approach it within a relational framework grounded in the theoretical work of Norbert Elias, one of the most consistent relational thinkers so far. The crux of Elias' theoretical position is an understanding of social life as the intended and unintended outcome of human purposeful action and an emphasis on its relational and processual character. Like Mead, he suggests that one can only become an individual human being within a network of interdependencies with others. Therefore his approach implies an understanding of human beings as genuine interdependent, forming figurations or networks with each other that connect the psychological with the social (i.e. habitus (personality structure) with social relations),

and which are always moving, changing and developing (Elias 1970/78; Kaspersen 2008). In contrast to, and as a replacement of, the image of humans as *homo clausus* (found within the tradition of methodological individualism, e.g. Max Weber's notion of the individual), i.e. as having a closed personality, Elias calls attention to:

*"The image of man as an "open personality" who possesses a greater or lesser degree of relative (but never absolute and total) autonomy vis-à-vis other people and who is, in fact, fundamentally orientated toward and dependent on other people throughout his life. The network of interdependencies among human beings is what binds them together. Such interdependencies are the nexus of what is here called the figuration, a structure of mutually orientated and dependent people. Since people are more or less dependent on each other first by nature and then through social learning, through education, socialization, and socially generated reciprocal needs, they exist, one might say, only as pluralities, only in figurations"* (Elias 1974b: 213-14).

By the same token he suggests that, in order to understand the "personality" of individuals, one has to start from the structure of the relations between them (Elias 1974; Krieken 1997: 62). Elias' relational perspective carves out two crucial points when it comes to studying the workings of community. First, it shows that an enquiry into the structure of interdependencies that bind members of communities to each other (and to people without) is necessary in order to fully grasp the dynamic and processual nature of communing. Second, it proposes that the analytical key or gateway to understanding the "personality" (and thus the many roles) of individuals is by focussing upon the structures of interdependencies that connect and disconnect them. Here, structure does not refer to something that exists outside and above people. On the contrary, within an Elias interpretation, structure refers to specific processes and dynamic patterns of interdependencies between people. Said differently, it denotes the varying ways in which human beings are bonded to each other, e.g. in the form of various types of communities, of classes, of nation states and so on (Elias 1974: xviii). The decisive point here is that the community concept, qua Elias' relational approach, is transformed from a rather static and heavily ideological biased concept (c.f. e.g. Tönnies and Durkheim's conceptualizations) into a *codeword* for specific structures of human bonding whose common features change according to the wider societal changes and traits of development. Thus, for Elias, it is the ties that bond and connect people which are the primary object of study. According to Elias they are, in fact, the very stuff of historical change:

*"What changes is the way in which people are bonded to each other. This is why their behaviour changes, and why their consciousness and their drive-economy, and, in fact, their personality structure as a whole, change. The "circumstances" which change are not something which comes upon men from "outside": They are the relationships between people themselves"* (Elias 2001(1987): 37).

It is against the backdrop of Elias' relational conceptualization of community and associated understanding of change that I move below towards addressing four typical dogmas of community for the purpose of reformulating them into four alternative heuristic takes on communing. Proposing these four alternative takes, the intention is to become better able to analytically explore organizational members' actual experiences and daily use of communing within current organizational life, and in continuation hereof to investigate how experiences of communing are

linked to work roles and work organizing practices in co-creative ways within the contexts of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

## **DOGMA 1: CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNITY AS ONLY HARMONIC AND EQUAL RELATIONSHIPS:**

### **1. ALTERNATIVE TAKE: COMMUNING: A NEXUS FOR COLLABORATION AND RIVALRY**

Bringing the older connotations that cling to the notion of community into the open is a necessary step in order to break free of them. As I have shown in the previous discussion on past and present conceptions of community, the Gemeinschaft-like characteristics of community persistently seem to stick to the concept. Within this conceptualization the term is primarily associated with harmonic and equal relationships and, as Elias puts it: *“the hope and wish of reviving once more the closer, warmer and more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages”* (Elias 1974a: xiii). However, I do believe that we need to move beyond the use of community as merely a term of “cosy” and harmonious sentiments based on egalitarianism and of praise for an ideal past (or present) to fully grasp the workings of contemporary communities at work. But how is it at all possible to move beyond a condition of community studies in which untested conventions and ideals easily determine what one perceives as significant? According to Elias, one important step on that road is to disentangle sentiment and structure in the study of community, and thus to avoid the typical confusion of statements about ideals (and sentiments) and statements about structures, a confusion which community research for a long time has suffered from. There are of course numerous reasons as to why the attribution of harmony and egalitarianism to the community concept still dominates the scene of community studies.<sup>65</sup> In continuation of Elias’ thoughts, a general one seems to result from mistaking the absence of “formal” structures of differentiation, e.g. formal hierarchies of authority and power within team work, for the apparent absence of differentiation as such. But while a community may lack formal structures of leadership, its members may constantly enact and mark out differences at a more tacitly recognized level. The point here is that, although the means and experiences by which people mark out and recognize differences in status, professional position and so on may often be concealed from the “immediate surface” of social behaviour and masked beneath ideals of equality or other social norms, the display of differences are nevertheless at stake. Thus, despite the ideals and myths of community, people's experiences, sensitivity towards and strategic use of mute expressions of differences seem to be part of all communing relationships. Additionally, Anthony P. Cohen very precisely coins the problem of the common myth of egalitarianism repeatedly perpetrated throughout the tradition of community studies in the following way:

*“The complaint we should make against this claim of egalitarianism is not that it is incorrect or empirically unwarranted, but that it is inadequate. It rarely distinguishes among equality as an ideology (“We should all be equal here”), as a rhetoric (“we are all equal here”), and as pragmatism (“We behave as if we were all equal here”). None of these should be confused with a description of actual social relations”* (Cohen 1995: 33).

Continuing with Elias and Cohen’s lines of thoughts, debunking the myth of communities as havens of pure harmony and equal collaboration therefore presupposes a shift from treating the concept of

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<sup>65</sup> Here I will not discuss the many reasons in detail. Instead I refer to Cohen 1995 and Chapter 8 in this thesis for a further discussion of this issue.

community as a term where sentiment dominates the vision of structure to one aimed at giving social relations and their dynamic structures priority over sentiments. Such an alternative take on communing requires an enquiry into the structure of interdependencies, which binds people to each other<sup>66</sup>. Accordingly, when it comes to exploring the actual experiences and use of communing within the organizational landscapes of my study, the analysis will in particular be guided by two questions: 1) What are the specific interdependencies between organizational people who form with each other that kind of figuration we call community as distinct from other types of figurations? 2) How and why do these characteristic communing bonds change (or stabilize) when the work roles and work organizing practices change (or stabilize), or within a broader perspective, when the structures of the wider organizational context and society transform?<sup>67</sup> To approach communing by focussing upon the interdependencies and bonding of people, one other observation is necessary. That is the acknowledgement of how the interdependencies between people are completely neutral features of communities (or societies); i.e. they are neutral in terms of collaboration and conflict as they can give rise to either. Said differently, collaboration and conflict are different but supplementary ways of handling problems that arise when people become interdependent, more interdependent or interdependent in different ways than earlier. In this light, collaboration and conflict (e.g. rivalry over some kind of object) are not oppositional contrasts, but interwoven forms of relationships both working as integrative forces in social life<sup>68</sup>. Elias describes the implications of such a shift in perspective in the following way:

*“Seen as stationary conditions, conflict and co-operation appear as antagonistic and incompatible. Seen as episodes in a process of changing reciprocal dependencies, they emerge as different ways of handling problems, particular of power problems, inherent in that process”* (Elias 1974a: xix).

The quote also draws attention to the issue (and inevitable presence) of power relations in all communing relationships. From a relational perspective, power is not something which one possesses; it is not an amulet possessed by one person and not by another, but a structural characteristic of all human relating (Elias 1978). Power reflects the fact that people depend on each other in a great variety of ways which limit the scope of their choices and their everyday actions. For example, the moment we enter into a relationship (e.g. as team members or partners) we constrain and are constrained by others at the same time as we of course also enable and are enabled by others. Viewed in this way, power is understood as an enabling-constraining relationship of interdependency. How the power balance within a particular relationship is tilted in favour of some and against others depends on the relative need they have for each other (Stacey and Griffin 2005: 5). Like Elias, I therefore suggest that our interdependent relationships are never merely harmonious, but always both collaborative and conflictual. Accordingly, it is my argument that it is the simultaneously collaborative-consensual and conflictual-competitive relating between people that

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<sup>66</sup> Please keep in mind that, according to Elias’ relational approach, there is no structure without agency and vice versa. Thus structures do not refer to something that exists outside and above social interaction/transaction – instead they are constantly produced and reproduced in the course of social interaction.

<sup>67</sup> While I have reformulated these two questions to fit the empirical world of my study, they originally derive from Elias’ outline of a dynamic theory of social bonding (Elias 1974b).

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 8 for an elaborated discussion on collaboration and conflict as mutual integrative forces or rather reciprocal ways of interaction (usually) found in all social encounters.

forms/creates the very social infrastructure of all communing relationships. Understanding communities (as well as organizations) as processes of human relating – i.e. as chains of interdependencies which bind people to each other – therefore involves the assumption that collaboration and conflict (rivalry) are always present as supplementary ways of handling the synergies and problems of human bonding, even within the most equal and harmonious types of communities. For instance, several examples from the case studies show how collaboration and rivalry are often interweaving within team communities. One very simple example is how friendly rivalry games over who is the most often being recruited to new projects or contests of social reputations seem to contribute to a sense of “we” among team workers. Additionally, an ideal of equality and highly collaborative bonds among organizational members within their team communities seem to do the same. From this viewpoint the traditional dogma of approaching community as havens of only harmonic and equal collaborative relations appear as too narrow and incompatible for exploring the dynamic workings of community. Alternatively, I propose an analytical take on communing as a nexus of relations for both collaboration and rivalry which acknowledge and thus are openly concerned with the specific interdependencies and power balances which connect (organizational) people and bind them to each other in various communing relationships through their everyday work experiences.

## **DOGMA 2: TO STUDY COMMUNITIES IN ISOLATION**

### **2. ALTERNATIVE TAKE: COMMUNITY NEVER COMES ALONE**

Within community research another common dogma is to study communities in isolation and as a consequence to treat them analytically as rather static “entities”<sup>69</sup>. Also in our everyday talk and perceptions of community (at least my own), communities are typically conceived of as fairly autonomous, internally self-organized and stable groups of people (“systems” of social bonding) - say, a nation, a village community, an ethnic minority, a gang of activists, a group of friends, a work team and so on. However, when looking at communities in isolation, it becomes difficult to explain how they change and in what way they are demarcated, i.e. how the boundaries of a community are in fact constructed (as opposed to just assuming them to be). As a way of avoiding these problems, it is my argument that we need to stop treating communities as if they exist in a vacuum. For that purpose, I suggest a second alternative take, namely one on communities (communing relationships) as inseparable from their relational context. This shift of perspective implies that communities are not assumed as fixed and independent “entities”, but as always embedded in social relations. Within this view communities (just like situated work roles) are articulated and constituted in social relations and thus they can never be “given” in isolation. Partly paraphrasing Cassirer, one can say that, in terms of relations, communities only gain their whole being in ideal community with each other (Cassirer 1953 in Emirbayer 1997: 287). Hence, community never comes alone. The phrase is definitely rather self-evident. Nevertheless, it focuses upon community as a relational setting, and

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<sup>69</sup> The fact that this is a typical dogma within the field of contemporary work studies is for instance indicated by Beth A. Bechky as she states: “*there is little discussion in the literature about the interaction between separate communities and the difficulties of sharing knowledge across boundaries... Authors who examines occupational communities tend to limit their analyses to the practices of a single community*” (Bechky 2003: 314). In a similar vein, Brown and Duguid address the tendency to study communities in isolation within the community of practice approach by stressing: “*Indeed, if regarded as a community at all, any but the smallest organization should probably be regarded as a “community of communities of practice”*” (Brown and Duguid 2001: 203).

thus in a very clear-cut manner directs attention to its relational character and embeddedness in larger webs of communities and flows/nexus of interdependencies.

Informed by Elias' figurational approach, communities may in this way be explored as constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting relationships of social interaction – in other words as relational settings of interdependencies or socio-spatial networks of power (cf. Michael Mann's notion of societies), in which boundaries are never fixed, but constantly constituted in and through processes of human relating (of both integration and differentiation) (Kaspersen and Gabriel 2008).

Investigating communities within the frames of static polarities, such as in Tönnies and Durkheim's respective dualistic typologies, it becomes difficult to remain sensitive towards these ongoing dynamics of communing. I therefore argue that these static typologies are inadequate to explore how communities (understood as relational settings) may continuously develop and change through processes of human bonding without any absolute break from one community type to another. Inadequate also when it comes to exploring how these changes in the ways people connect (for instance at work) are intimately bound up to processes of development and change in the wider organizational and societal structural characteristics. Accordingly, Elias describes static typologies as:

*“highly inadequate conceptual devices which evade the main issue: they leave no room for the understanding and explanation of the continuous process, of the development in the course of which one type of society transformed itself into another, and still transform itself into another under our very eyes ”* (Elias 1974a: x).

Whether the talk is about societies or communities, Elias' basic point here is that communities always have structural characteristics which bear the stamp of the specific societies (and organizational practices) within which they form themselves (and vice versa). In this light, communities at work are highly co-shaped by, for instance, the wider societal setting, the particular work organizing practices and the everyday practices of role enactment within a specific organizational context. Hence an analytical take on communing which takes account of the wider organizational and societal developments seems helpful to more adequately investigate the development of communing relationships within today's world of work and organizing. Such a take implies a shift from focussing on only the intra-relational dynamics of communities to a focus also on the inter-relational dynamics between them. Additionally, I believe that a relational approach to understanding the workings of communing are best suited for offering such a wider perspective.

Recalling my ambition to focus on the experiences and use of community, how it is then that community in practice expresses a relational idea or rather a relational practice? In this respect, I agree with Cohen that a reasonable interpretation of the basic experience/use of community seems to entail two related suggestions: first of all that the members of a group of people have something in common with each other, and secondly that this “common” shared experience distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of putative groups (Cohen 1995: 12). Community, then, seems to involve simultaneously both similarity and difference and thus expresses a genuine relational idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social “figurations” of human interdependencies. Recognizing these ongoing interactions/transactions (Vergesellschaftung in Simmel's words 1998) of imitation and differentiation underlying all forms of communing brings us back to the question of demarcation, because what in fact determines this kind of distinction? What



kind of boundary marks it? And how are such community boundaries constructed through people's everyday experiences? As Kaspersen and Gabriel very precisely point out, the problem of boundary setting also raises another question: how can we demarcate a relational setting (e.g. the figuration we name community) when social life is conceived of as interdependent social relations? In other words, if we demarcate a set of social relations with boundaries (and thus treat them as some kind of a matrix of transactions), what sort of ontological status do we give it? What becomes the unit of analysis? How do we characterize what is inside the boundary without ending up treating it as an "entity" or "substance", which is exactly what a relational perspective wishes to avoid? Again Elias' relational approach – in particular his concept of survival units - offers an answer to these problems.

According to Elias, the first unit of analysis to be studied is the relational binding of human beings in social groups. The point of departure is therefore not the single individual or the man-woman relation (family) or (wo)man-nature relation (subject-object), but the relationship between survival units, since human beings are always embedded in competing groups in constant struggle for survival (in both a material, emotional and symbolic sense) (Kaspersen and Gabriel 2008)<sup>70</sup>. A survival unit is a particular form of figuration and its function is that "it knits people together for common purposes - the common defence of their lives, the survival of their group in the face of attacks in common on other groups" (Elias 1970: 138 in Kaspersen and Gabriel 2008). Thus the survival unit is a condition of existence for all human beings and cannot be conceived of outside a relationship to other survival units, since:

*"The internal arrangements in each group are determined to a greater or lesser extent by what each group thinks the other might do next.....Their function for each other is in the last resort based on the compulsion they exert over each other by reason of their interdependence. It is not possible to explain the actions, plans and aims of either of the two groups if they are conceptualized as the freely chosen decisions, plans and aims of each group considered on its own, independently of the other group. They can be explained only if one takes into account the compelling forces the groups exert upon each other by reason of their interdependence..."*(Elias 1970: 77 in Gabriel and Kaspersen 2008).

For that reason a survival unit is a genuine relational concept. It never exists in isolation. On the contrary, it is always embedded in a web of more survival units, and thus constituted in the very relationship to other survival units. In terms of the demarcation problem and the ontological status of social relations (such as a community-figuration), Elias hereby points out two crucial points. First of all he shows that demarcation arises out of the relationship, that the boundaries of a survival unit are generated in a confrontation with other survival units. This point is very much in line with Hegel's conceptualization of the mutual struggle of recognition (based on the master-slave relationship) in which the individual becomes an individual only when he/she appears in a social relationship with another individual (this goes for the state-state relationship as well). In a parallel way, Elias stresses that the relationship between survival units is a confrontation which creates identities (roles) and boundaries. What in particular is interesting here is that Elias in this way illustrates how the boundaries within this relationship are created from the "outside", because the survival units are demarcated by the "other", not by the members of the survival unit itself; in fact it

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<sup>70</sup> I will not go in to a detailed discussion of Elias' notion of survival unit and the form of primacy he gives it as a state-state relationship over other types of figurations, but refer to Elias 1970/1978 and Kaspersen and Gabriel 2008 for an elaborated discussion.

is the very relationship that constitutes the survival units (Ibid.: 21). In a similar vein, I propose that, in order to grasp and acknowledge the fluid boundaries and dynamic nature of the communities at work in current organizational life, we need to focus on how the various communing relationships among organizational members (e.g. an ad hoc team community) are continuously being mutually demarcated and co-created in the confrontation with other communities within the wider organizational context (such as other team communities, development groups, projects, management teams and so on). Simply put, we need to study how they are co-shaped through a mutual struggle of recognition between other communities and of how these diverse practices of communing are monitored within current post bureaucratic work organizing practices of belief and doubt

Secondly, by letting the relationship between survival units be the unit of analysis, Elias is able to develop a relational framework that avoids the substantialist trap. Focussing on social life as a process of interdependent and interweaving relational bonds between human beings, he demonstrates a second crucial point, namely how motivations and affective bonds such as gratification (which may be seen as parallel to Hegel's recognition term and Bourdieu's notion of social honor) are properties of social relations, not a drive only attributed to the individual. As Kaspersen and Gabriel express it: *"None of the concepts has any meaning outside the relation. The mutual process of gratification or a constant struggle of recognition keeps the figurations very dynamic and fluid"* (Ibid.: 11). Hence, according to Elias' relational approach, relationships are not treated as "entities", but as having a processual structure since they are always embedded in figurations of human interdependencies characterized by shifting power balances. Likewise, I suggest that communities are to be understood as a processual structure (i.e. as communing) that gain their meaning, use and boundaries in relationship to other communities through ongoing interactions/transactions of imitation and differentiation (or in other words, through struggles of recognition based on both collaboration and competition).

Framed by the conflictual relational perspective outlined above, communing becomes a conceptual tool with which to analyze how organizational members' communing practices are shaped by both intra-relational and inter-relational interdependencies within and among groups of people. Additionally, the concept makes it possible to analyze how communities (at work) are constituted in relationship to other communities and how they are linked to the wider organizational setting, the particular work organizing practices or the everyday enactment of situated work roles among organizational members. Moreover, the community concept also becomes a tool for studying how the participation/engagement of organizational members in and across multiple communities simultaneously involves interactions of both similarity and differentiation. Last but not least, to recognize that community never comes alone further paves the way for studying how the confrontation between communing practices continuously creates new boundaries within and among work communities which keeps them dynamic, and how these distinctions (boundary marks) at the same time facilitate the co-creation of specific situated work roles and work organizing practices. For instance, in their empirical study of photocopier repair technicians (1997), Brown and Duguid, show that career and work role changes of one sort or another will often take people out of one community and into another, leaving them with an understanding of both. Such people are then in the position to become translators or boundary spanners between the two by creating a link

between them. Here I will, however, add to Brown and Duguid's observations that becoming part of other communing relationships at work does not necessarily imply leaving one's former one. On the contrary, it may in fact result in membership of multiple communing relationships hereby creating more continual and substantial overlaps between them. Such multiple memberships do not only co-create links of interdependencies but also more complex forms of communing which cut across and overlap diverse "communing worlds".

In sum, one can say that this second take on communing focuses upon the relational dynamics of human interdependencies within and across the boundaries that frame them, and thus takes into account the larger web of communities and wider organizational landscape of multiple communing connections in which they are embedded. A take which also makes it possible to explore whether and how these communing practices are linked to and (maybe in fact) are monitored through the everyday processes of role enactment and "lived" work organizing practices. And of how these communing practices may enable and/or constrain the co-creation and reshaping of specific situated work roles connected to work organizing practices of belief and doubt. An example is how work organizing practices based on team work and formalized team roles in several of the studied case companies facilitate specific communing relations within and among teams. Commonly, in these organizational settings a set of formal roles has been designed and implemented within each work group as a way of developing and monitoring the formation of situated work roles that in particular give rise to communing practices of distributed mutual learning, experimentation and ongoing search routines (these roles often change between employees from time to time). Furthermore, the different "role masters" are typically encouraged to meet with "fellow-roles" of their own kind from the other teams in order to exchange experiences and ideas, which strengthens the bonds between team communities and thus enables the formation of communing relationships across basic work teams. In this light, the use and "institutionalization" of a distinct set of work roles among team communities may be seen as a "tool" to co-create and monitor collaborative communities of mutual learning, not only within the frames of each basic team, but also across them, hereby creating a larger web of communing practices throughout the wider organizational setting. Another example from the observation point of communities, is that the communities which the employees engage in (experience and make use of) through their every day work practices provide them with a diverse landscape or reservoir of potential resources for their role-taking, role-making and role-playing. For instance, Jane, a team worker in Health Ltd., describes these resources of team working in the following way: *"Due to our work practice in co-managing teams you are constantly "forced" to meet new people [from other teams and departments], and the more people you get to know, the stronger you become yourself"* (Interview Jane, team worker). Studying communities in isolation lacks the ability to recognize the inter-relational dynamics between team communities which Jane points to in her quote. The fact that she in the quote indicates that being a member of several communities at work seems to be a source of both personal strength (individuation) and of social integration within the wider organization may consequently only be recognized if we start taking seriously that community never comes alone.

### **DOGMA 3: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY AS A MATTER OF MAINLY THREE INGREDIENTS: MORAL SENTIMENTS, CLOSE BONDS AND TRUST**

#### **3. ALTERNATIVE TAKE: COMMUNING IS MADE UP OF A VAST VARIETY OF INGREDIENTS**

Those community thinkers who are bound to a traditional idea of community, namely the *Gemeinschaft*-like form, tend to see community as primarily made up of three core ingredients: shared moral sentiments, strong ties characterized by physical proximity and a form of trust in which members have a high degree of confidence in their expectations of the behavioral patterns of others. These three ingredients are not only present in Tönnies' description of *Gemeinschaft*. They also appear as central signifiers of community in Durkheim's notion of mechanic solidarity, in Nisbet's classic definition and in many of our present-day community concepts (Wenger 2004; Grabher 2004a; Grabher 2004b). The third dogma I wish to address and subsequently reformulate is to understand community in light mainly of these three ingredients. I do not argue that these ingredients are insignificant. Rather, it is my point that as conceptual tools, they are too narrow in scope to analyze the multiple, overlapping and often changing shapes of communities within the realm of post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. The combination of these three ingredients is mainly associated with very structured and stable communities with powerful mechanisms of socialization and a high degree of homogeneity. However, empirically such forms of community are not fully characteristic of the connecting ties and coordinating infrastructures of today's work organizing practices (Casey 1995; Pettinger et al 2005; Coupland 2005). Work practices in which various forms of communing simultaneously seem to be at stake, with some of them being characterized by personal intimacy and moral commitment (e.g. the social bonds between team members which over the years have built up mutual loyalty, clear-cut moral codes/behavioural norms or even developed their professional relationships into friendships), and some of them being highly grounded within a local context (e.g. a work unit or local company site) based on close and long lasting bonds (e.g. between a team or an informal group of colleagues). While others may be characterized by more impersonal and fluctuating ties triggered by, for example, functional (e.g. professional) interdependencies among organizational members carrying out different work tasks, performing supplementary (or conflictual) roles in temporary ad hoc teams. Or they may rely on purely strategic rational action (being instrumentally rational in Weber's terminology) denoting more *Gesellschaft*-like bonds of interdependencies. Yet some may be temporary and at the same time characterized by affective bonds based on specific work projects or company events (e.g. a company picnic or programme of training), and others may be centred on purposeful connections tapped into networks of larger communities of collaboration and rivalry across company sites or between business partners. Empirically, this list seems diverse and endless.

Clearly, all these empirical traces of communing designate that communities at work seem to come in many shapes. Nevertheless, if it is accurate to say that the empirical landscape of community connections within current organizational life actually reflects such a mix of various communing connections (e.g. hybrids of mechanic and organic forms of relating), many of them are unattainable to address and explore if community is only understood as a matter of moral, close ties and trust. As an alternative to sticking to the traditional and rather narrow *Gemeinschaft*-idea of community, I therefore suggest a take on community which acknowledges that moral sentiments, close bonds, and trust are important but not exclusive ingredients of communing. I unfold this take by elaborating on

how each of these three ingredients of community is not exclusive. Against this backdrop, I sketch out an analytical frame for capturing how the fabric of community is made up of various ingredients. A frame that investigates the *various* ingredients of communing by first and foremost looking at the relational forms of interdependencies it comprises.

### ***On The Matter of Moral Sentiments and Communing Connections***

One dominant ingredient of community according to traditional community concepts is moral sentiments based on shared, rather fixed values and strong, long-lasting ties. Analyzing the mechanisms of social cohesion in different contexts and times – e.g. how the division of work in modern times creates organic solidarity and a new moral order – Durkheim demonstrates that moral sentiments are an integral part of all forms of community. By the same token he also illustrates that moral orders may be shaped by various factors such as tradition and work division. I likewise believe that forms of moral obligation always bind and connect people in communing relations. However, this does not imply that moral sentiments – as an ingredient of community – may only rely on common values, close bonds and ties of continuity. Bauman and Ulrich Beck’s respective thoughts on contemporary forms of moral are very illustrative examples of this latter view. They both suggest that, whereas moral sentiments in pre-industrial society to a much greater extent were framed by religious values, tradition and rather stable and homogeneous community models, an emerging moral diversity and autonomy today characterizes contemporary (late-modern/post-modern) life. In this life people are forced to fulfill personal freedom and solidarity at the same time (in a dialectic relation) and thus to master the opportunity to exercise genuine moral choice within diverse communities, to take responsibility for the consequences of those choices, and to constantly maneuver within and between various communing relationships of diverse moral orders. As Bauman describes it:

*“The denizens of the postmodern era are, so to speak, forced to stand face-to-face with their moral autonomy, and so also with their moral responsibility. This is the cause of moral agony. This is also the chance the moral selves never confronted before”* (Bauman 1995/2002: 43).

Linked to this new moral autonomy is the emergence of a precarious freedom, but also, according to Beck, of a more socially responsible and engaged individualism, i.e. a new moral orientation towards the “we” that may create “something like a cooperative or altruistic individualism”<sup>71</sup>. It is precisely this concept of altruistic individualism that points towards a form of moral obligation in late modernity, but which does not rest on tradition or personal intimacy, but on a reflexive and reciprocal form of solidarity. A solidarity which binds people to each other in communities, based on mutual interdependencies and an inherent altruism that is reflexively orientated towards individuals as well as the institutions of society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Seen from such a perspective, a moral order is always present in any communing practice, whereas the particular moral order may have various sources/foundations and thus take on different shapes. Yet again, this does not imply that moral sentiments are the only ingredients of community. Community, I argue, comes

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<sup>71</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim describe the contours of this “new” form of morality in the following way: “...these new orientations towards the “we” create something like a cooperative or altruistic individualism. Thinking of oneself and living for others at the same time, once considered a contradiction in terms, is revealed as an internal, substantive connection. Living alone means living socially” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 162).

in many forms and is made up of many other relational ingredients such as sharing a common purpose, the co-shaping of distinct roles among its members, the everyday communication and enactment of communing routines, rituals, ongoing processes of creating social cohesion through collaboration and rivalry and so on. I therefore think it is time to stop treating moral sentiments as *the* dominant ingredient of community. My alternative take is not to abandon this issue, but to look at the fabric of communities in much broader relational term. Accordingly, such a take on the matter of moral sentiments and community within the world of work does save room for the aspect of morality. It attempts to recognize the occurrence of diverse (and often simultaneous) forms of moral commitment by empirically tracing how organizational people are bound to each other in various ways, creating different chains of interdependencies and patterns of reciprocal orientations and obligations (sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflictual depending on the situational context). A take which seeks to explore how these patterns of interdependencies may reflect different (moral) orientations towards the “we(es)” among organizational people.

### ***On the Matter of Close Bonds: Community With and Without Propinquity***

Close bonds are another central ingredient of community. For example Nisbet defines community as something primarily associated with personal intimacy and close bonds. However, this definition generates a set of analytical limitations as well. Let me here mention two of these and subsequently relate them to the empirical world of my study.

Firstly, following Nisbet’s definition, the concept of community is assumed rather than investigated. Yet it seems quite counter-intuitive to let the ingredients of community be pre-defined instead of treating them as something to be explored – as the object of social enquiry. Why start a social enquiry at all if you have already decided what the social world (or ingredient(s) of community) is made up of? Consequently, I believe it is more promising to start this analysis by focusing on how people actually relate through their everyday practices and, as Bruno Latour suggests, to follow the traces left behind by people's activity of creating and dismantling communing relations (Latour 2005). Exploring the ingredients of community in this tentative way enables a much more inductive and heuristic approach, which acknowledges that relating to one community or another is an ongoing process made up of uncertain, controversial and ever shifting ties. These ties can be fragile and temporary as well as close and long-lasting, depending on the situational context.

A second limitation of focussing on community as primarily made up of close bonds is to conceive of communing relations as something only given expression by physical proximity or some kind of locality. As a result, those communities that have been constructed from, for example, computer mediated communication rather than from physical proximity (like for instance virtual teams) are excluded from the defining landscape of community. The modern nostalgia of community often criticizes this form of deterioration of community in contemporary society (Bellah et al. 1996). But why interpret these new electronic mediated communities as a loss of communing ties, when they may in fact provide broader and useful new opportunities for connecting bonds? In other words, connecting bonds of communing which do not necessarily replace people's close bonds and everyday face-to-face interaction, but supplement them in dynamic ways. In view of that, I agree with Webber (1970) when he states that there can be “community without propinquity” (Bruhn

2005: 23). Not least through computer mediated communication today, we can create various new spaces for communing. As Bruhn writes, today:

*“We can customize our social contacts and move from place to place without having physically travelled. We can participate in interactive communities that are not of common location, but of common interest. Virtual communities...., are passage points for collections of common beliefs and practices that unite people who are physically separated”* (Bruhn 2005: 213).

In the same way, I argue that these virtual environments are valuable as communing places where we acknowledge our connectedness, interdependencies and individual diversity, just like locally rooted communities with more physical appearances. Although virtual communities to a much larger extent than local communities based on close bonds can cross “traditional” boundaries such as those shaped by space and time, they too provide us with a sense of belonging – a sense of “we”. It is also my assumption that whether it is strong or weak ties that characterize communing relationships, they all represent a resource for role-taking, role-making and role-playing. Said differently, role performance (at work) emerges out of various social encounters; frequent face-to-face contacts or connecting ties mediated by new media are all different types of relationships that may enable self-reflection and self-transformation and thus all constitute significant ingredients of community.

Within today’s world of work and organizing, computer mediated communication in particular have created new opportunities for communing relations across traditional organizational borders; just think of how numerous organizational members of MNCs are tapped into networks of multiple work communities around the globe. This development also characterizes the Danish manufacturing companies in this study. Within this empirical world, both managers and employees within the case companies commonly take part in virtual teams staffed by members from different countries. Sometimes these “world-wide” team communities are long-lasting and characterized by close collaboration; sometimes they are assembled on an ad hoc basis for the duration of a specific task or project. Sometimes the members of these communities meet one another face to face on a regular basis; at other times they primarily connect and exchange words and ideas through computer bulletin boards and other connecting technological devices. However, despite their different shapes of connectedness, what is characteristic of all these communing relationships is that the sense of community and experience of membership first and foremost seems to be rooted in the actions of its members, not in whether their relationships are with or without propinquity. In fact, many of the employees participating in virtual team communities express the opinion that they may often feel more connected to their team members abroad than their colleagues sitting next door or just a few desks away. Such statements indicate that communities are not only made up of relationships characterized by personal intimacy and close bonds within a certain locality. Rather, it seems that the social infrastructure of today’s communities at work is much more diverse, that they are strongly supported by computer mediated forms of communication, and that a common purpose (more about this below) seems to be pivotal for the feeling and experience of connectedness in contemporary organizational life.

Now let us turn to the third dominant ingredient of community, namely trust. Again, the purpose is to show how this concept is in no way exclusive when it comes to understanding the workings of contemporary communities at work.

***On the Matter of Trust: Trust Matters... But so do Action and Purposeful Connections at Work***

Most of us are connected to numerous and often very different types of communities, even more so when both our real-life and virtual interactions/transactions are included. It is typically said that the core fabric of all these communities is made up of trust. Trust is the glue that holds them together. However, all our communing connections are not only based on trust. Distrust, power, shame, pride, materiality, communication, meaning, collaboration, rivalry, love, hate, and purposefulness - you name it! - they all may form the basis for communities. As with Latour's description of the group, I hence propose that communities should not be understood as silent things (e.g. as harmonic islands of trust), but rather as the provisional product of a constant uproar made by various ingredients created through the millions of contradictory voices (and experiences) about what communing is, how it is accomplished, reproduced, who pertains to what and so on (Latour 2005). From this point of view trust is only one of many coordinating elements of community. But what *does* trust more accurately account for in our communing relations - and vice versa?

Fundamentally, we need to be able to rely on others. Trust is the willingness to act on the basis of such reliance. One can say that trust is the expectation that people will interact honestly and cooperatively to benefit each other. In this way community gives a basis for this confidence by establishing and enforcing such mutual expectations so that: *"when I do something I have some idea of how you are likely to react, and how it will all come out"* (Heckscher and Adler 2007: 13). It is these reciprocities within a community that create/build trust. When members of a community experience trust it helps them to reach a consensus about assigning value to its resources and to achieve mutual goals through shared practices. These resources exist in all forms of relationships, e.g. in friendships, work teams, organizations, institutions etc. As discussed in Chapter 3 they are used to accomplish certain tasks and certain situational (work) roles. One example is the socialization of children so that they learn to master the many roles in life. Another is the formation of specific work roles as part of the development of a new product or service, e.g. a device for a medical analyzer.

However, on the matter of trust and community, the sources of trust are most often associated with Gemeinschaft-like characteristics of community such as strong ties of personal intimacy and continuity. Yet again, I wish to de- and re-construct this narrow conception. I do not question that trust is important for building up and prospering from the resources embedded in our communing ties. When there is trust among people communing ties flourish. Neither do I question that communities are always established on some form of trust because reciprocity is of central concern for all practices of communing. What I do question is how the Gemeinschaft-like community concepts tend to see trust as the only glue of community and how they primarily see trust as made up of only strong communing ties<sup>72</sup>. I elaborate on these two objections below.

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<sup>72</sup> One other tendency of the modern nostalgia of community is to highlight continuity as a presupposition for communities of trust. The argument goes like this: since it takes time to build up trust, continuity is a key ingredient of community. However, drawing on such an understanding of community as bonds of only continuity, it is difficult to see



Drawing on the traditions of American pragmatism and relational perspective of Elias, trust is not seen as the basic building blocks of community. Rather, it is action – i.e. the ongoing meaningful interaction/transaction between people - that is said to be the basic social glue. While theorists centred on *Gemeinschaft*-like definitions of community would claim that shared values, tradition, strong ties and trust are the core coordinating elements of communing relationships, more recent theories grappling for a concept of community in modernity (e.g. the ones rooted within the tradition of John Dewey such Heckscher and Adler 2007) emphasize purpose as the key coordinating element. Here, attention is given to how we always interact and thus connect for a purpose. Seen from this view, the defining principle of communing is what people do for each other, not their experience of trust or particular moral orientation. Analytically, to focus on these purposeful connections seems especially fruitful when the object of research is organizational life in which goal-rationality and economic reasoning evidently frames the majority of organizational members' communing relations. Accordingly, in my analysis I wish to draw attention to the purposeful actions that connect employees and managers within the case-companies and to explore how their joint activities and common purposes may create communing ties of various kinds. Integrating such a focus seems useful in order to more closely explore how the social infrastructure of communing may in fact be coordinated not only by trust and shared values but also by purposeful connections.

Another objection is that trust may only rely on strong ties. It is commonly assumed that those persons who have strong relationships with others will be more likely to share and exchange resources and build up trust than those who have weak relationships. Such a view easily ends up dividing human relationships into either “high-trust” or “low-trust” communities (or in a broader perspective, societies), based on strong or weak ties, hereby linking trust to mainly strong ties and neglecting how different types of relationships may often be mixed within the same relational setting<sup>73</sup>. Still, the work of Granovetter (1973) clearly illustrates how close relationships do not necessarily indicate trust, and that high trust can even sometimes be dysfunctional, so people with weak ties can also generate social cohesion and trust (Bruhn 2005). From my point of view, it is therefore necessary to develop a somewhat more sophisticated and fine-grained understanding of how trust may be based on different kinds of relationships (e.g. weak as well as strong ties) and on a variety of values (e.g. honor, duty, collegiality, interdependent contribution etc).

Adler and Heckcher have taken some interesting steps in that direction, suggesting that different bases of trust characterize today's corporate arena. Drawing on the classic community thinkers Tönnies and Durkheim, they argue that three forms of community characterize our world of work and organizing: 1) *Gemeinschaft* community in the shadow of hierarchy where trust is based on values such as loyalty, honor, duty and status deference, 2) *Gesellschaft* community in the shadow of

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how we may become able to recognize and explore alternative shapes of today's communing relationships at work. What if the experiences of community are not always characterized by continuity? Hence, I disagree on the view that community may only flourish where there is continuity and trust. On the contrary, I argue that communing relationships may also be temporary and momentary and based on, for example, brief encounters and weak and fluctuating relationships. Outlining my forth and last alternative take on community as both articulated and unarticulated forms of sociality, this issue will be further discussed.

<sup>73</sup> Consequently, the view tends to reproduce a traditional dichotomic way of thinking of communities discussed earlier in this chapter.

the market where trust is based on self-interest, integrity, competence and conscientiousness and 3) Collaborative community as a new emerging dominant principle of social organization within corporate life where relations of trust are based on values of honesty, interdependent contribution, collegiality and reciprocal concern (Heckcher and Adler 2005: 17). At this point I will not go into a detailed description of how they define these three forms of communing or raise the (relevant) question of why they end up operating with only these three types. The point I want to stress here is that Adler and Heckcher's three-fold distinction provides us with a sophisticated analytical frame for understanding how trust within today's work organizing practices may be based on various relationships as well as value orientations.

At this juncture it is time to sum up and by doing so also to introduce the dissertation's third alternative take on community in a more coherent way. A take which conceptualizes communing as connecting relationships of interdependencies, made up of more than moral sentiments, close bonds and trust.

In contrast to those who represent the modern nostalgia of community and talk about a loss of community, morality and social cohesion in modern society, I think we – the field of community studies - should move beyond the traditional and rather narrow interpretation of community which mainly interpret the concept as a matter of moral sentiments, close bonds and trust. By such a “move” and change of perspective we become better able to study, learn from and help further develop the many diverse forms of communing relationships which seem to unfold and flourish within today's social world(s). Focussing on just one of these worlds, namely the world of work and organizing within manufacturing companies, this dissertation takes a step in that direction. Instead of reproducing the third dogma outlined above and thus sticking to and reproducing a narrow conceptualization of community, it seeks to contribute with an analytical framework for exploring the various communing connections within today's world of work and organizing by means of analyzing their various relational forms of interdependencies.

### **HOW ONE STAYS SENSITIVE TOWARDS THE VARIOUS INGREDIENTS OF COMMUNITY**

Is it at all possible to keep the various ingredients of community an open question while studying them? Following in the footsteps of Elias' relational approach and choosing his method of making enquiries into the interdependencies which bind people to each other as my “analytical mantra”, yes, I do think such openness is obtainable. Accordingly, I suggest an approach towards understanding contemporary communities at work which continually raises the question of what binds people to each other and forms the foundation of their interdependencies. Such a perspective begins the analysis by investigating the experiences of relational forms of interdependencies among organizational people and how these diverse patterns of interdependencies create different communing relationships. To single out the relational forms of interdependencies as the analytical starting point makes it possible afterwards to trace the ingredients of community in a much more nuanced and tentative way. Thus, the analytical frame I suggest is structured in two steps: the first is to identify the form(s) of interdependencies that mainly seem to connect a group of people within a given organizational context. The second step is to more closely analyze which ingredients their particular communing relationship is made up of, be it moral sentiments based on tradition or

altruistic individualism, close bonds, virtual ties, trust, purposeful connections, rivalry, habitual behaviour, loyalty, face-to-face interactions and/or the striving towards status and recognition etc. A simple example may help to demonstrate my approach. Just picture how a group of friends and a group of business partners are bound to each other through different forms of interdependencies. In the first group affective bonds most likely dominate; in the second economic ties probably first and foremost characterize the interdependencies of the group. Despite their different character, the two forms of interdependencies each reflect a communing relationship. These two communities may additionally be “flavored” by various ingredients of community such as personal intimacy, weak ties or goal-rationality and strategic self-interest. How they are precisely “flavored” is an empirical issue, whereas this analytical approach provides us with a map to empirically trace 1) the relational form(s) of interdependencies they are based on and subsequently 2) the many other ingredients they are to comprise. Such an analytical lens allows for a nuanced and tentative take on how today’s modes of communing at work connect and co-create by studying both the functional interdependencies that underpin them and the particular ingredients of community these interdependencies are further shaped by.

But what do I more accurately mean by relational forms of interdependencies? Naturally, within and among our communing relationships, great varieties in different relational bonds (forms of interdependencies) take shape and constantly reshape how we are connected to each other. The challenge lies in how to analytically grasp this variety. Once more, I turn to the work of Elias in that he conceptually draws attention to how people are bonded to each other in diverse ways. Accordingly, he views human bonds in terms of both impersonal interdependencies (e.g. increasing job specialization, which makes people more and more dependent on each other) and personal (affective) interdependencies (e.g. the emotional bonds between people) (Elias 1978: 134-152). According to him, affective bonds are the most elementary forms of social bonds, though he suggests that there are many other types with similar functions:

*“People need each other, are directed towards and bonded to each other as a result of [i.a.] the division of labour, of occupational specialization, of integration into tribes or states, of common sense of identity, and their shared antagonism for others of their hatred and enmity towards each other”* (Elias 1978: 175).

Elias' distinction between affective and impersonal bonds (which can be either of economic, political or organizational character) offers one way of studying the variety of interdependencies in today’s communities at work. Yet his distinction is very broad and general, and he is not very precise on the specific qualitative characteristics of these types of bonds (Ibid. 134-157). I therefore suggest a more differentiated analytical take on the relational forms of interdependencies, one built on Elias' distinction that adds to it as well. To better trace the different relational forms of interdependencies that underpin and drive our communing life at work, I analytically distinguish between five different forms: technical, economic, professional, political and social/affective interdependencies<sup>74</sup>. These five forms are identifiable in the following way:

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<sup>74</sup> Naturally all five forms of relational bonds are social. The category for the affective/social relations should be seen as synonymous to Elias’ affective relational bonds.

**Table 4.1 Relational forms of interdependencies**

- Technical relations refer to the forms of interdependence among organizational members due to the actual work process, the division of labor, the system of operation; i.e. in more general terms the way organizational people are bound to each other due to the specific technical design and set-up of the production system and organizational layout.
- Economic relations cover those forms of interdependencies initiated by economic reasoning (action) within organizational life; e.g. production targets, performance pay and other forms of economic systems of incentives among organizational members.
- Professional relations refer to the kinds of interdependencies among organizational people due to occupational specialization, an ongoing need for knowledge sharing, professional exchange of know-how and so on.
- Political relations (status and power) reflect the forms of interdependencies occasioned by the unstable power balances and related “trials of strength” among organizational members; e.g. the formal authority structure or the informal power-games and striving for status and power relations within and between units or team communities.
- Affective (social) relations include the types of personal interdependencies resulting from affective bonds, such as feelings of fellowship, mutual commitment, rivalry, shame, shared experiences of social cohesion and reciprocity, happiness, fear or a sensed team spirit among organizational members.

It is important to stress that this five-fold distinction, of course, is a rigid analytical distinction. In practice the five forms of interdependencies are intertwined in complex webs of relational dynamics within any community figuration. But by virtue of this analytical perspective, it is my ambition to explore whether and how the relational patterns of interdependencies among organizational members create different “wes” (i.e. community figurations) as they are conditioned and formed by different constellations of the five different forms of relation. Empirically, it is not possible to fully identify these constellations and to grasp their complexities. Analyzing the communities at work as they unfold within the case companies I will, however, seek to identify some of the most significant relational forms of interdependencies which characterize the organizational members’ everyday experiences of work and organizing, in particular their role performances and traces of co-creation within this landscape. Once having identified these relational forms of interdependencies as the first analytical step, it becomes possible to analyze the various ingredients of community they additionally and more particularly are shaped by. This second step paves the way for exploring how these forms of interdependencies may be characterized by various types of relations (e.g. close, fragile, long lasting, weak bonds etc.). It also enables an analysis of how these different types of communing relationships may create different moral sentiments, purposeful connections, sources of trust and so on depending on the form(s) of interdependencies of the relationship in focus. In this way, it makes possible an analysis of how today’s community connections may be constituted by various

ingredients, those which are not limited to the traditional Gemeinschaft-like characteristics of community. Such an analytical approach treats the ingredients of communing not as predefined, but as something to be tentatively explored within a relational framework.

#### **DOGMA 4: TO UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY AS ONLY ARTICULATED FORMS OF SOCIALITY**

##### **4. ALTERNATIVE TAKE: COMMUNING AS BOTH ARTICULATED AND UNARTICULATED SOCIALITY**

Concerning the question of which sorts of communing relationships are involved in “work”, the fourth and last dogma I wish to discuss, re-formulate and then integrate as part of this dissertation's analytical take on community is the understanding of communing relationships/interdependencies simply as articulated forms of sociality. Alternatively I offer an understanding of communing as both articulated and unarticulated forms of sociality. Such an understanding enables an analysis of whether and how more unarticulated forms of communing at work - such as being enrolled by the same sense of humour, the feeling of sharing the same work rhythm or corporate spirit, or the common taste for a particular way of “performing” the role as a “good” team-mate – may serve as raw material for the shaping and co-creation of situational work roles (based on role-taking, -making and -playing) within contemporary post-bureaucratic work organizing practices.

Using Hegel’s dialectic of recognition as my point of departure, I begin by briefly discussing how both cognition and (practical-based) experience may be seen as integral parts of any communing practice. Drawing on Wenger’s notion of communities of practice, Habermas and Simmel’s respective understandings of sociality and Michel Maffesoli’s reflections on contemporary forms of communities based on sentiments and aesthetics, I then go on to suggest that cognition and experience represent two supplementary “dimensions of being”. It is my point that these two dimensions reflect two forms of sociality: one that is articulated, and one that is not. Further, I argue that both sociality forms serve as raw materials for organizational members' role-taking, role-making and role-playing. Along the way I exemplify how the two forms of sociality seem to be at stake within contemporary organizational life. I conclude with some comments on the importance of recognizing also how the more unarticulated forms of communing among organizational members appear to be pivotal for their sense of belonging, their role-formation and organizational commitment.

An understanding of experience as both cognitive and practical is far from being a new “invention”. Such an understanding has for instance clear theoretical traces back to Hegel’s dialectic of recognition. Let us therefore have a brief look at his “figure” of recognition. In the chapter “Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness, Lordship and Bondage/Master-Slave” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that:

*“SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or "recognized"”* (Hegel 1807: 229).

Hegel’s basic point here is that self-consciousness is not autonomous (as Kant claims). On the contrary, Hegel suggests that it always implies a social relationship. In other words, consciousness cannot by itself (i.e. alone) become self-consciousness by way of some Munchausen-trick, since it is

dependent on the recognition of others. Consequently, it is only through relationships with others that the individual is able to be self-consciousness (this line of thought is strongly reflected in the works of Mead and his concept of role-taking, cf. Chapter 3). Differently put, it is thanks to our relationships of recognition that we as humans discover ourselves as social beings, and thus our dependence and independence as selves (Hegel 1991(1830); Bernild 2003). Hence the dialectic of recognition mirrors a “figure” of human creation/formation/development. According to Hegel, this “model” of self-consciousness (or rather self-realization) is enabled by cognition, reasoning and reflection. However, in his early Jena writings, Hegel is more oriented towards a practical philosophy. At this point he emphasizes how recognition is closely linked to the issue of intersubjectivity and the connection between cognition (reflection, realization) and experience. The simple fact that one cannot learn to swim before one jumps into the water very clearly illustrates this inherent connection. Hereby, Hegel calls attention to how the cognitive realization of an experience (such as learning to swim) presupposes the very experience (Wind 1998). This aspect of practical experience is in particular present in Hegel’s work when he links the dialectic of recognition to the practice of work, stressing that it is through the practical activity of work that self-consciousness (the spirit) becomes realized, i.e. that human beings (read: self-conscious selves) are created.

Informed by Hegel’s theoretical universe, I analytically argue that relationships of recognition do not only rest on cognition but also on experience. Instead, they open up for both cognitive and experienced-based processes of human formation (e.g. role performance). Further, it is my point that these two types of human formation draw on two forms of sociality: 1) the cognition-based relationships draw on forms of articulated sociality, 2) the experience-based relationships on forms of unarticulated sociality. Theoretically these two types of relationships reflect two completely different understandings of human creation (formation) and of the social. According to the first perspective, which up until today has dominated the field of identity studies, human formation is based on cognition and reflection enabled by communicative and rational interpretative interactions (cf. Descartes’ maxim: *Cogito, ergo sum* or Michel Foucault’s concept of self-knowledge). Here the individual becomes self-conscious (i.e. a self) through an articulation of his/her interpretation of the self in dialogue with others. Such a perspective takes its point of departure within an understanding of the social – of sociality – as something articulated, i.e. as communication and interpretation (cf. Habermas 1981; Charles Taylor 1989). According to the second perspective, human formation is (also) based on sentiments, taste and aesthetic experiences enabled by bodily and unarticulated practical experiences of “self and otherness”. Within this view the individual (also) becomes a self through a transgression of the individual into the social. These transgressions are transitory and emerge within situations of co-presence and interdependence in which people have experiences in and with the social. They are triggered by processes of identification with, for example, sentiments, humor or common taste (e.g. in respect to music, sport, fashion, work ethic), and thus they take place at a much more unarticulated level. Through such practical and bodily experiences the individual so to speak momentarily loses his/her individuality, i.e. he/she transgresses or outgrows his/her own limits in and with the social and thus “returns” as a more experienced and hence unique individual. Within this perspective the social is understood as something unarticulated, i.e. as a sentiment, a taste or as the “basis of meaning” which we take for granted and thus do not articulate (Simmel 1971; Maffesoli 1996).

Distinguishing between these two forms of sociality is of course a rigid analytical take, whereas in practice they both form part of any communing relationship<sup>75</sup>. Therefore, the articulated and unarticulated forms are to be seen as two interdependent dimensions of sociality. A simple analogy of the interplay between articulated and unarticulated sociality is how the words (i.e. the stuff we articulate) and the empty spaces between the lines on a written piece of paper (i.e. the stuff we take for granted and do not need to articulate but which nevertheless constitutes a background of possibilities for the meaning of the words) each carry a dimension of meaning which presupposes the other. However, analyzing in what *ways* and to which *degree* they are articulated makes it possible to study whether and how experiences of both articulated and more unarticulated forms of community may characterize the world of work, what significance they are ascribed and how they in different ways may be used as raw material for organizational members' role-taking, role-making and role playing. Moving closer to such an analytical take on communing, the work of Wenger may help to illustrate my argument.

### ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS OF COMMUNING

Wenger's notion of community of practice (1998) focuses upon how employees through their actual everyday work practices create communities at work. He does not explicitly make a distinction between articulated and unarticulated communities himself. Yet he emphasizes that communities of practice may have different (and simultaneous) expressions. Accordingly, the notion draws attention both to how employees think of and create meaning through their community of practice and to how they bodily experience these communing relations at a more practical and non-reflexive level. Thus, on the one hand Wenger shows how a community of practice serves as a frame for creating meaning and a common understanding of work among its members. Seen from this viewpoint, it is through discursive (articulated) processes that employees continuously negotiate and make sense about what is significant, meaningful, what is ok to talk about, what is not and so on within their community of practice. Such processes of common sense-making based on the actual work practices create social cohesion as they provide the members with a sense of "we-ness" and a common ground of identification. Within this view a community of practice is articulated through a common language, tools, documents, symbols, predefined roles etc. On the other hand, Wenger also shows how a community of practice moreover manifest itself through, for example, bodily gesticulation, implicit relations, basic assumptions, sentiments, habits, i.e. many more unarticulated processes based on experience rather than cognition and discursive interactions (Wenger 1998). This may explain why members of a community of practice seldom overtly reflect upon their practice or necessarily discuss it before it changes. Within this view, the non-discursive aspects of relating at work such as the actual (often taken for granted) activities of work, the sentiments among organizational members, their common (or diverse) taste and so on are also seen as important aspects of community creating social cohesion and a sense of belonging as well. Seen in this light Wenger's notion of community of practice demonstrates the idea of how the experience of

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<sup>75</sup> I often equate sociality with community, which is not incorrect but rather imprecise. Overall I understand sociality as the universal social dimension we as human beings are embedded within and connected through, whereas I see community as a more limited/restricted form of sociality. Put differently, we cannot "step out" of sociality, it is not in our hands to choose it or not (that is unless we die!), while communities are something we (more or less freely) may step in or out of and which consequently encompass an imaginary or manifest boundary between "us" and "them" and thus imply an element of inclusion/exclusion. Despite these defining elaborations, I will however continue to sometimes use the terms rather arbitrarily.

community can be more or less articulated. However, while he in this way brings us one step closer to recognizing how today's communing relationships may have different (simultaneous) expressions, he does not offer a theoretical framework for understanding how the experience of communing may be both articulated and unarticulated. In order to better grasp these two basic expressions of communing at an analytical level, I now turn to Habermas, Simmel and Maffesoli.

### **ARTICULATED FORMS OF COMMUNING AT WORK**

The very corporation and its organizational structures, activities and so on may serve as an overall example of an articulated form of sociality (communing) at work in that it represents a collective of interdependencies, a community of organizational members with explicit objectives and values such as profit, efficiency and professional competence. Likewise may the teams in which organizational members take part during their work or the sense of community which employees experience participating at a workshop or a trainee programme be seen as articulated forms of communing because they are constituted through dialogue, and are articulated and based on reflexivity and rational action. Additionally, all these articulated forms of communing enable and constrain the role performances of organizational members in distinct ways, as they provide them with a template or guiding horizon of how to behave, think and feel. Accomplishing a more nuanced conceptualization of these articulated expressions of communing and their impact on the (re)shaping of work roles, I shall briefly draw on Habermas' understanding of the social as communication.

The basic idea in Habermas' theory of communicative action is as follows. When people through language engage in a process of achieving mutual understandings, they are created as human beings by which they simultaneously become a self (attain a personality/identity), a member of a society and of a culture. According to Habermas, personality, culture and society are resources for the world we "always already" are present in. He terms this the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). These resources are a prerequisite for communication to happen, at the same time as communicative action also sustains the lifeworld. In addition, Habermas stresses that communication is built on rationality, i.e. a rationality based on an inherent goal of mutual understanding which is immanent in our language and which only can be triggered through our communicative actions in the sphere of the lifeworld (Habermas 1981)<sup>76</sup>. This is the reason why communicative actions coordinate action towards social integration and solidarity and take on the form of explicated knowledge or rather articulated forms of sociality according to Habermas. His central point here is two-fold: firstly, that the social is to be conceived as communication, as a communicative community founded on interpretation. In this way the social is understood as explicit mutual understanding and thus as articulated agreement (Hammershøj 2003). Secondly, that the ability to develop a personality, create an identity and build up (work) roles is genuinely dependent on the existence of such communicative actions.

Although Habermas, inspired by the work of Alfred Schütz, pictures the lifeworld as a reservoir for all our implicit and evident knowledge (i.e. as a totality of all that we take for granted – a totality of givens – cf. Schütz's definition of the social as our lifeworld characterized by the common-sense

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<sup>76</sup> Habermas' line of thoughts rests on the argument that all speech acts (language) have an inherent telos – the goal of achieving mutual understandings, and that human beings possess the communicative competence to bring about such understanding, cf. Habermas' counterfactual ideal speech situation (Habermas 1981: 211-).



world of everyday) and emphasises how it constitutes a stock of knowledge for our communicative actions, he anyhow tends to neglect the unarticulated dimension of the social. The problem is that his conception of the social as articulated mutual understanding links the social (only) to language in a way that makes unarticulated forms of sociality become secondary. One can therefore claim that the lifeworld's unarticulated forms of sociality are only seen as a mere presage/preliminary stage for articulated sociality and therefore do not count as "actual" sociality. As mentioned, I believe that an understanding of the social as constituting only communication and articulated communing relationships is too limiting for an analysis of the (re)shaping dynamics and consequences of roles and communing within contemporary work organizing practices. Although focussing on the components of knowledge (explicit and tacit) Polanyi's quote: "*We know more than we can tell*" (Polanyi 1966: 4) very well depicts the limits of understanding sociality as only articulated communication (or in Polanyi's terminology as only explicit knowledge)<sup>77</sup>. It is my assumption that the co-creative and (re)shaping dynamics of relating, becoming and working among organizational members within such organizational contexts is additionally influenced and shaped by more unarticulated and non-verbal (tacit) forms of connecting and communing. Nevertheless, Habermas' understanding of how articulated forms of communing shapes who we are/become, the roles we enact and the society and culture we at the same time become part of offers a nuanced framework for analyzing the workings and significance of articulated forms of communing within the case companies of my study.

Despite the above critique regarding the tendency to only acknowledge communing relationships as articulated forms of sociality, communicative, interpretative and cognitive-orientated forms of communing certainly play a significant role within the realm of contemporary corporate life. A simple but illustrative example is how today's managerial templates and post-bureaucratic forms of work organizing to a great extent are founded on explicit communication and articulation of shared values, corporate culture, symbols and so on. Another example is how the sociality and its specific communing relationships in a company are often strategically being articulated through, for example, the explicit communication of the company's common objectives, through storytelling and the recording of a distinct organizational identity, the narration of a set of core values or through statements and documents about the company's visions, beliefs, corporate social responsibility and so on. By creating such narratives, companies signal "who they are" and "how they want their organisational members to relate and behave" at work. All these corporate initiatives, I argue, illustrate how companies often very directly seek to articulate their forms of sociality and communing relationship in strategic ways. Also, when it comes to the everyday work, experiences among organizational members in articulated forms of communing seem to play a significant role given that teams, project groups, a "lunch-gang" of colleagues, the soccer club at work etc. are all explicit and articulated in terms of their form and content. A final example is how educational courses and training programs focused on the development of organizational members' skills and competences also represent articulated forms of sociality at work through which they gain

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<sup>77</sup> Polanyi's distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge does not reflect two kinds of knowledge. Instead, he argues that knowledge always has an articulated and an unarticulated dimension – dimensions which are interdependent. His distinction is in many ways similar to my analytical distinction between articulated and unarticulated forms of sociality. However by only focusing on knowledge Polanyi's approach does not fully acknowledge the experience-based and bodily dimension of being a self. Consequently it does not allow for an analysis of how unarticulated experiences of "self and otherness" may be sparked by bodily sentiments, tastes and aesthetic experiences.

knowledge about themselves and their work and thus also capabilities to create new work roles and/or reshape their existing ones.

Yet, as already stated, it is my argument that engaging in and becoming a self (constituted by various situational roles) through communing relationships is never merely “a mode of understanding” based on cognition, dialogue and articulated mutual understandings. It is also “a mode of being” rooted in practical sensual experiences, bodily sentiments and other unarticulated forms of relating. I am therefore in search of an analytical framework which takes into account that communing relationships are of both minds (souls) and bodies. Let us therefore have a closer look at how more unarticulated forms of communing may be understood and analyzed.

## UNARTICULATED FORMS OF COMMUNING AT WORK

Prior business experiences by organizational practitioners as well as managerial and organizational research findings have shown that a strong corporate culture and the creation of an esprit de corps and commitment among organizational members today are essential for organizational success and competitiveness. As an example, Tools LTD very directly states that one of the central keys to their success is the creation of a sense of community: “One of the most important ingredients is the feeling of togetherness and community” (Tools LTD’s website). Obviously, the creation of a common feeling of community is not only a communicative and cognitive process. Corporate initiatives towards establishing such feelings of togetherness, a corporate culture, mutual commitment and so on are also accomplished through social company events, team-building, creative workshops, employee-clubs (e.g. gourmet and wine clubs, fitness clubs, cinema clubs etc), parties and other spectacular experiences. The physical design of space and the interior in organizations may also help to facilitate such sentiments of togetherness. In my eyes, these various forums for communing do not only manifest themselves as articulated sociality. They also encourage and facilitate the creation of more unarticulated communing relationships among organizational members who often choose to participate in these communities not because of any rational logic or reflexive reasoning, but rather because of a “passional logic” informed by their taste, sentiments or aesthetic orientations<sup>78</sup>. The question is how these unarticulated expressions of communing at work can be conceptualized, explored and analyzed. In the following, I seek some answers to that question by introducing Simmel’s notion of sociability and Maffesoli’s notion of sociality/the affectual nebula.

Simmel’s notion of sociability gives some insights into the workings of unarticulated forms of communing. According to Simmel, sociability is the pure essence of association that which is left when interests, special content and more “serious” dimensions of social interaction are removed. He describes this form of relating in the following way:

*“One may speak of an impulse to sociability in man. To be sure, it is for the sake of special needs and interests that men unite in economic associations or blood fraternities, in cult societies or robber bands. But above and beyond their special content, all these associations are accompanied by a feeling for, by satisfactions in, the very fact that one is*

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<sup>78</sup> I here use Maffesoli’s notion of “passional logic” in a very broad sense in order to connote the unarticulated and bodily experiences that also animate and shape our lives. Maffesoli’s basic idea is that a “passional logic” always animates the social body and informs our daily life and thus allows for a structuring or regeneration of community (Maffesoli 1993: 1-2/ The Shadow of Dionysus).

*associated with others and that the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others”* (Simmel 1971: 128).

For Simmel, sociability is disconnected from the more purposeful and articulated aspects of life<sup>79</sup>. Instead, it is a “social game” in itself, whereby interactions with others are devoid of serious and rational intent, being a “play-form of association” (Ibid.: 130). In its pure form sociability therefore has no end, no content and no result outside of itself. In sociability, talking is an end in itself and the content of the conversation is irrelevant. In other words, what is significant is not what is talked about, but the talking itself. Hence, a communing relationship which at first glance seems to be articulated and driven by calculative interests beneath the surface may also imply forms of sociability. As an example, it might not always be important for a group of team colleagues whether they chat about their kids, a TV show, politics or work related stuff during their breaks, but rather that they talk together, because the world of sociability is simply about being together here and now. According to Simmel, it arises as an impulse triggered by a spontaneous atmosphere of for instance joy, relief, vivacity and so on (just think of the feeling of being part of the same atmosphere of humor among colleagues or friends). Engaging in such cheerful atmospheres may be interpreted as a form of transgression of the individual into the social, as it offers a momentary freedom from or abolition of the seriousness of life (e.g. individual interests, special needs, rational calculation or other cognitive and articulated purposeful interactions). One can say that sociability therefore is a form of sociality which takes place not on the premise of the individual, but on the premise of the social in that it is constituted above and beyond individuals’ special needs and interests. As Simmel puts it, we consequently:

*“...enter into sociability purely as “human beings”, as that which we really are, lacking all the burdens, the agitations, the inequalities with which real life disturbs the purity of the picture, it is because modern life is overburdened with objective content and material demands”* (Ibid.: 133).

In line with Simmel and Gert Hammershøj (2003), it is my assumption that we also in today’s so called late-modern world experience a need to transgress ourselves into forms of sociality which are not articulated and “burdened” with content-specific issues and constant self-reflexivity. Simmel’s notion of sociability offers a gateway to explore if this is actually the case. Within the frames of this dissertation it provides me with a tool to analyze how organizational members’ communing relationships may also be characterized by sociability and what significance is ascribed to it within today’s world of work and organizing. Maffesoli’s concept of “the affectual nebula” points to another unarticulated form of sociality beyond the level of conversation. He thus offers a

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<sup>79</sup> I disagree with Simmel when he disconnects sociability from the seriousness of life (e.g. our purposeful action, contractual associations and articulated rational relationships). First of all, in this way he tends to end up in the same oppositional dichotomic-trap as Tönnies and Durkheim. Instead, I argue that associations of interests and sociability may often intertwine and be simultaneously at stake among a group of people. Another point is that sociability at work quite often may embody an instrumental aim in contributing to organizational growth/success. For instance, it may contribute to the creation of a rather inclusive and homogeneous social ambience among organizational members supporting the company’s branding strategy, service profile and need for commitment. Sociability in organizational life may also create affective sociable ties among organizational members as well as with customers hereby contributing to a “warm” and “cosy” company atmosphere which may enhance their feelings of loyalty and connectedness to the company (See for example Pettinger (2005) for an empirical analysis of some of these instrumental effects of sociability).

supplementary analytical tool with which to recognize and explore these articulated forms of communing at work.

In his book 'The Time of the Tribes' (1996) Maffesoli stresses that we have dwelled so often on the: *"dehumanization and disenchantment with the modern world and the solitude that it induces that we are no longer capable of seeing the networks of solidarity that exists within"* (Maffesoli 1996: 72). As a corrective response to this "blindness" he calls attention to our "post-modern" ways of communing and seeks to comprehend the new form(s) which sociality takes today through the concept of neo-tribalism. Neo-tribalism is understood as an "affectual nebula", i.e. as tactile relationships which create a diffuse union based on feelings, taste and aesthetic experiences<sup>80</sup>. In contrast to the communicative and cognitive-orientated definition of sociality, for Maffesoli communing is first and foremost based on "the materiality of the being together", hereby emphasizing how experiencing the other is the basis of the community, even if it leads to conflict. Additionally, he suggests that it is our senses that form the substrate of the acknowledgement and experience of the other, i.e. from the affective, feeling dimension of life springs the "meeting of minds"<sup>81</sup>. Like Simmel, he operates with two modes of sociality: one (the social) that favours rational and contractual associations (here the social takes form as a strategy and a finality), and another (the sociality) that places emphasis on the affective, feeling dimension and unarticulated aspects of the social (here the social is a mass in which communing relationships are crystallized, haphazard, ephemeral and hazily drawn). According to Maffesoli, the latter form of sociality is becoming more and more predominant in our time. He gives the following characteristic of this type of sociality and the neo-tribalism it gives rise to:

*"A characteristic of sociality: the person (persona) plays roles, both within his or her professional activities as well as within the various tribes in which the person participates. The costume changes as the person, according to personal tastes (sexual, cultural, religious, friendship), takes his or her place each day in the various games of the theatrum mundi"* (Ibid.: 76).

A central point here is that in Maffesoli's sociality it is less a question of belonging to a gang, a family, a particular professional group, or a community than of switching from one group to another. As an example, many of the organizational members I have interviewed prefer to be part of various projects and ad hoc teams rather than belonging to just one team, profession or department. Additionally, several of them emphasize how these distributed bonds and dispersed feelings of connectedness are important for the development of skills, new work roles, the feeling of commitment and the sense of being part of something "bigger" at work. Likewise, in sociality, the essential element is to be able to wander between various "tribes" and perform different roles within and between them. This sociality-form therefore creates what Maffesoli calls wandering mass-tribes reflecting new forms of communing (and consequently also new dynamics of role-taking, -making

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<sup>80</sup> Examples of such tactile relationships are raves or other spectacular musical mass events, a major soccer game, fashion trends such as grunge, today's yoga hype (in the West), or other mass collectives based on communing relationships of taste and aesthetic orientations.

<sup>81</sup> This view is very much in line with Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on our bodily existence: "...if the body is the minimal medium for our feelings and actions, if it is what cannot be detached from us, not our property but nevertheless something that is our own, then conversely, it is the body that gives substance, for us, to outside objects, through contact, apprehension, the senses. It is always the starting point for something to occur" (the quote is translated by Hennion in Hennion 2004: 7).

and -playing) characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal. These communing relationships are characterized by shared sentiments, tastes and other aesthetic experiences. People do not choose to participate in these communing forms because of a rational articulated logic, but because of an elective sociality informed by their tastes and aesthetic orientations<sup>82</sup>. Tribalism is for that reason a sociality form building upon the exercise of taste and aesthetic experiences. Within this view taste is not conceived as a passive social phenomenon – as a passive game of social differentiation, but as a reflexive activity of critical amateurs who actively use their taste and distaste to mark out social differences and form distinct identities (roles). As Hennion states: “*Taste is produced, not given; it is “tentative, “to be made” through what happens, and not the recording of and external reality*” (Hennion 2008: 8). Hence, taste is seen as a productive “asset” which is accomplished through communing relationships (a collective) and which accordingly implies an engagement by the body that tastes within the very same communing relationships (collective).

As with Simmel’s sociability, Maffesoli’s sociality rests on a paradoxical understanding of individuality. Participating in these “tribes” of shared tastes and/or sentiments, the individual momentarily loses his/her individuality, i.e. he/she transgresses into the mass (e.g. the experience of melting together in a mass of fellow fans at a concert or soccer game), and through this experience returns as/becomes a more unique and enriched self. In such “social settings” the self and its related roles are not (merely) shaped through communing relationships of cognition and reflexivity, but through occasional and diverse bodily and unarticulated experiences of mutual tuning triggered by, for example, a common taste or shared (mass) feelings. Although Maffesoli’s sociality form and the “mass-tribes” it gives rise to at first hand seem rather distant from everyday corporate life, it is my assumption that these unarticulated forms of sociality are also present in today’s world of work and organizing. In order to give some empirical weight to these rather abstract formulations, today’s post-bureaucratic forms of team- or project-based work organizing practices typically rely on communing relationships characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal. Moreover, these forms of communing are not only articulated, but may also be based on common sentiments (e.g. a team spirit) and personal tastes (e.g. a shared taste for how to work, behave, do business with customers and so on within a project team). Additionally, within such collaborative communities, the ability to redefine and recombine organizational resources in renewing ways through co-creation in and across teams or projects may also be influenced by the presence of more informal and occasional communing relationships at work based on organizational members’ sentiments and taste. Maffesoli’s concept of sociality makes it possible to study whether and how such unarticulated communing relationships of taste and sentiments unfold among organizational members, the meanings which are ascribed to these more diffuse unions at work and the ways in which they constitute raw materials for the shaping and reshaping of situational work roles.

While Simmel’s concept of sociability calls attention to how unarticulated forms of communing can evolve from conversations (i.e. from articulated forms of relating), Maffesoli’s sociality concept addresses the forms of communing which evolve and take place beyond conversations and the level of dialogue. It is in this sense that I use their concepts as supplementary analytical tools for exploring the experiences and diverse workings of unarticulated forms of communing at work.

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<sup>82</sup> A taste is also distaste (Bourdieu). Likewise is elective sociality an ability to select/deselect according to personal taste and aesthetic experiences.

Empirically, both unarticulated forms of communing seem to occur within the post bureaucratic work practices of this study. Overall, it looks as though they provide organizational members with various practically based experiences of togetherness, creating new roles of relating and a sense of belonging and commitment that not only is directed towards the organization as such, but also towards the diverse collaborative communities they form part of through their everyday work activities.

All in all, the dogma I have addressed in this chapter is to primarily acknowledge communing relationships as articulated forms of sociality, a dogma which dominates the field of community studies as well as our everyday talk about communing. It is conversely my argument that communing relationships in (organizational) life are comprised of both minds and bodies. That is, they encompass two modes: 1) “a mode of understanding” based on reflective cognition and communicative (articulated) forms of relating and 2) “a mode of being” based on unarticulated forms of relating characterized by sensual experiences, bodily sentiments, shared taste, and aesthetic orientations. Accordingly, I have suggested an alternative take on communing as both articulated and unarticulated forms of sociality. Turning towards Habermas, Simmel and Maffesoli’s respective conceptualizations of sociality, my objective has been to develop an analytical framework which takes into account both modes of communing. A frame which enables an analysis of whether and how both forms of communing relationships unfold within today’s corporate arena, what significance they have, and how they may serve as raw materials for organizational members’ role performances and ongoing role redefinitions.

## SUMMING UP

In this chapter, I have looked at the nature, forms and significance of communing from diverse theoretical lenses in order to develop a comprehensive analytical framework for exploring the “use” and modes of communing among organizational members within post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. In other words, work organizing practices characterized by the ability to collaborate across various organizational boundaries, to continuously redefine and recombine organizational resources for further co-creations and to distribute intelligence and authority throughout the organization, hereby facilitating an organizational “habitus” of both belief and doubt. I have identified and debunked four myths or rather dogmas of community with the purpose of redefining them into four alternative takes on communing. The typical dogmas are: 1) a conception of community as only composed of harmonic and equal collaborative relationships, 2) to mainly study communities in isolation, 3) to look at community as only a matter of trust and long-lasting ties, and 4) an understanding of community as simply articulated forms of sociality. Based on a relational approach, I have redefined and transformed these four dogmas into four heuristic takes on communing. Accordingly, I suggest that communing (at work) should be explored: 1) as a nexus for collaboration and rivalry, 2) as something that never unfolds in isolation but vis-à-vis other communing relationships, 3) as relationships that are made up of a vast variety of ingredients and 4) as relational bonds that are both articulated and unarticulated. This analytical frame will guide the analysis in Chapter 6 *on the co-creation of communing at work* among organizational members within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Informed by this theoretical framework I will more precisely explore 1) the experiences and meanings of communing among organizational members within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., 2)

the modes of communing that are being shaped and reshaped within these organizational contexts and 3) how their communing relationships facilitate the co-creation of work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

## FRAMING THE ANALYSIS:

### TRACING THE BUSINESS OF CO-CREATION BETWEEN WORK ROLES, COMMUNING AND WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES

Point of observation: After the theoretical and quite abstract discussions in the previous chapters on the role of role(-ing) and communing at work I now return to the empirical field of my study. In the next three chapters my aim is to put the theoretical concepts derived in earlier chapters into play with the everyday experiences of work and organizing among organizational members within two Danish manufacturing companies, Tools Ltd and Health Ltd. Both case companies are characterized by highly collaborative, re-shaping and laterally accountable work organizing practices of belief and doubt (cf. Chapter 2). Situating my analysis at the interface between this empirical landscape and the dissertation's sensitizing conceptual frame, I wish to explore the co-creation and nature of work roles and communing relationships that enable these work organizing practices and vice versa. Thus the overall analytical object within the following chapters is the co-creation of work roles, communing and work organizing practices.

#### RE-INTRODUCING THE ANALYTICAL LANDSCAPE

For the sake of clarity, let me start the analysis by briefly reintroducing the dissertation's analytical approach first outlined in Chapter 1. Informed by the empirical landscape of highly collaborative, re-shaping and laterally accountable work organizing practices within the realm of Danish manufacturing, I have identified the dissertation's analytical landscape by asking: what is the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enables such work organizing practices and vice versa? Addressing these three relational analytical concepts I have further asked: how are work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices co-created? Finally, what co-creative dynamics generate their interplay? By asking these questions the dissertation contributes to an inquiry into the micro-dynamics and consequences of co-creation at work in contemporary firms. In short, it is a study of the co-creative recursive links between work roles, communing and work organizing practices within concrete organizational contexts.

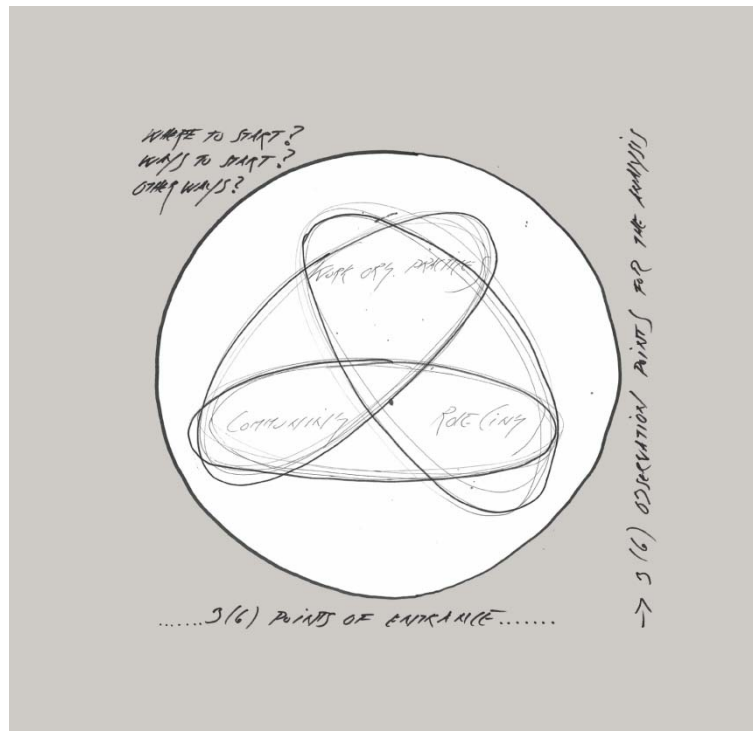
The analysis is structured in two parts. The first part unfolds in Chapters 5 to 7 (entry 1-3) and the second in the following "chapters" based on three separate papers reflecting different traces/stories of the co-creation of business. The first part of the analysis focuses upon the co-creation of work roles, communing and work organizing practices and investigates *the business of co-creation* between these three sensitizing concepts. This part of the analysis is primarily based on empirical material from the two mini ethnographies conducted in Health Ltd and Tools Ltd., i.e. the two "core" case companies of my study. The second part of the analysis illuminates the co-creative dynamics that emerge from the relational interplay between the three concepts. It thus illuminates *the co-creation of business* that takes shape within Danish manufacturing companies experimenting with post bureaucratic modes of work organizing. This part of the analysis draws eclectically on empirical material from all seven case companies underlying my study.



Throughout my analysis, the comparison mainly takes place at the level of role configurations and communing among organizational members instead of focusing on company level: the firm is not in focus as such, although the analysis brings together the building blocks of the firm and its activities. In other words, the analysis seeks to understand company dynamics by focusing upon the level of everyday work organizing practices among organizational members. Thus in part one of the analysis, I do not systematically compare Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Instead, I treat the two case companies as representing one joint empirical “reservoir”. As they both experiment with the development of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable organizational work practices, I only highlight specific differences between the firms when they are most significant for my analytical perspective. Also in part two, the analysis is primarily focused on comparing at the level of work organizing practices, although in Chapters 9 and 10 I also make particular comparisons at the company level.

### MAPPING THE ANALYTICAL LANDSCAPE

The analytical landscape is framed by the thematic coordinates: work roles, communing and work organizing practices. Its focus is upon the co-creative dynamics between them. Figure A1 below illustrates the relational character of this landscape.



**Fig. A1:** Analytical coordinates: work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices  
Unit of analysis: the co-creative dynamics between these points.

Each side of this relational triangle gives analytical leverage to the point. By understanding the combination of two, we see how the third emerges. In other words, each of these points is enmeshed in a series of recursive loops with the others: work roles cannot exist without communing relationships and organizing practices, and so on. Analyzing the co-creative dynamics of this triangle (relational triad) therefore implies a genuine recursive and highly circular process which allows for

multiple ways of opening and structuring the analysis. Put differently, like a revolving door the analytical field has no fixed starting points or, for that matter, final end points. Consequently, each of the triangle's three interrelated analytical coordinates may serve as points of departures for the analysis. Each of them invokes a distinct analytical perspective and order of proceeding within the empirical landscape. Approaching the analytical landscape of work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices by means of this relational triangle, it is possible to identify six points of departure for the analysis. The entry points are listed in Table A2 below:

<b>Table A2: Point of entry: ↓</b>				
<b>Analytical perspective: ⇒</b>	<b>1.</b>	WR	C	WOP
	<b>2.</b>	WOP	C	WR
	<b>3.</b>	C	WR	WOP
	<b>4.</b>	WOP	WR	C
	<b>5.</b>	WR	WOP	C
	<b>6.</b>	C	WOP	WR

*WR = Work Roles, C = Communing, WOP = Work Organizing Practices.*

The table illustrates how the analysis of one component in the triangle, in terms of the combination of the two other inter-related (and thus mutually defined) components, allows for six analytical perspectives. Consequently, the six entry points respectively involve a discrete analytical perspective, i.e. “an order of seeing and interpreting” the analytical field. For example, “the order of seeing and interpreting” the analytical landscape through entry 1 is to start the analysis by looking at work roles. The next step is to analyze how work roles relate to communing. Finally, we are left to explore how the relationship between work roles and communing shapes work organizing practices. In this way the entry points impose a particular direction and structure on the analytical eye. However, if one looks at the combinations as a recursive two way street, the six perspectives may be reduced to only three. In the table the three perspectives are highlighted by different shades of gray.

Exploring work roles, communing and work organizing practices by using these 3 (reduced from 6) analytical entry points does not result in six different stories. Rather, it is the same story being told from 6 different entry points, each of which opens a particular analytical perspective. Each of these perspectives enables certain aspects of the story to become more visible than others, thus supplementing each other in reciprocal ways. Just as the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts - and the parts are bigger than the whole (Gadamer in Lübcke 1996; Latour 2007) – this dissertation’s circular analytical landscape contributes with analytical perspectives (i.e. distinct insights) into the same empirical scenery that are not mutually reducible. On the contrary, as distinct parts, these perspectives all contribute with a unique illumination of the whole scene. Hereby they add different views and layers to the story on how work roles, communing connections and work organizing practices are co-created within the context of Danish manufacturing companies. As a result, the choice of entry point(s)/analytical perspective(s) is arbitrary. Maneuvering within such an analytical

landscape means that the choice of analytical entry points ultimately must be informed and defined theoretically and/or empirically.

### **DEFINING THREE ANALYTICAL ENTRY POINTS**

In this study both the empirical landscape and theoretical frame outlined in Chapters 1-4 have guided my choice of entry points and applied perspectives. My overall research question; *How are work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created – and what do they co-create*, places work organizing practices at the core of the analysis. However, given that in this dissertation I explore these work organizing practices by asking about the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enables them and vice versa, I have chosen the following three entry points to open and structure my analysis:

#### **Entry 1 - On the co-creation of situated work roles**

How are work roles co-created and how do they shape communing relationships and work organizing practices of belief and doubt among organizational members?

#### **Entry 2 - On the co-creation of communing at work**

How are communing relationships co-created and how do they shape work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt among organizational members?

#### **Entry 3 - On the co-creation of work organizing practices**

How are work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-created and how do they shape communing relationships and work roles among organizational members?

“Walking” through these three entry points and exploring the empirical stories that emerge from these analytical perspectives in fact illuminates all six analytical entry points. The basic difference between my three analytical “walks” is that the spotlight on the coordinates in the triangle changes and thus they shift position between foreground, middle ground or background, depending on the entry point in focus. Accordingly, the first entry point has work roles as a foreground, meaning that the primary focus of analysis is on the co-creation, nature and workings of work roles, while the co-creative dynamics of communing and work organizing practices are explored through the lenses of the role perspective. Within this view, communing appears as middle ground, whereas work organizing practices are treated as background. As for the two other entry points focusing upon communing and work organizing practices, the same fore-, middle-, and background structure will also run through and guide these two parts of the analysis. The aim hereby is to enable separate in-depth analysis of the three analytical coordinates and at the same time stay sensitive towards an exploration of their relational character and the co-creative dynamics between them.

I finalize the analysis with an exit (a conclusion) that discusses and sums up the core findings and implications in respect to the co-creative dynamics between work roles, communing and work organizing practices within the empirical world of my study.

## CHAPTER 5

### ENTRY 1 – ON THE CO-CREATION OF SITUATED WORK ROLES

As shown in Chapter 2, facilitating work organizing practices of belief and doubt are at the heart of Danish manufacturing and their ability to generate growth. On this analytical “walk” I ask about the nature of the work roles that enables these work organizing practices. I thus place the work roles being performed by the organizational members of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. in the foreground of the analysis. My guiding analytical script is how the co-creation of work roles and communing relationships among them shape (and enable) work organizing practices of belief and doubt. By applying this analytical perspective, I hope to contribute to a micro-based understanding of how the co-creative interplay between work roles, communing and work organizing practices allows for organizational doubt and belief and thus the ability to constantly recombine and reorganize organizational resources (human and non-human) for further co-creations. In order to achieve such an understanding, we need to understand the micro-dynamics of this interplay. That is, of how everyday work roles, communing and work organizing practices emerge and affect each other. Entry 1 therefore aims to illuminate 1) how situated work roles are co-created through communing relationships of organizational members and 2) how this co-creative interplay enables and shapes their work organizing practices to generate belief and doubt. In trying to accomplish this aim, I will proceed in the following way.

I start out by mapping the role-figurations of two organizational members. Taking these individual stories as my point of departure, I *firstly* analyze in what ways work roles become enacted and articulated within concrete organizational contexts. Through this close-up perspective on everyday role-performance, I demonstrate that work roles - despite occupational differences - appear as situated negotiated patterns of “doing and saying” that organize a given work practice in both stabilizing and transformative ways. *Secondly*, I integrate other empirical stories on role(-ing) and identify four general characteristics (recurrent observations) of how roles are shaped and reshaped. Hereby I illustrate that 1) contemporary roles at work are genuine co-creations sparked by ongoing encounters of organizational members, 2) that they operate as micro modes of organizing giving rise to structure as well as agency, 3) that work roles are (re)shaped according to the resources they give access to and 4) that they are (re)shaped by both discursive and practical interactions. Based on these empirical insights I next, and *thirdly*, move on to identify some general aspects about the reciprocal nature of work roles and communing in order to understand how these two analytical coordinates may affect the ability to develop work organizing practices of belief and doubt within the case companies. Before presenting these empirical observations of the workings of work roles, I begin with some reflections on my ways of constructing and making use of the empirical material underlying my analysis.

#### ***Ways of producing empirical knowledge of the workings of roles....***

Empirically I have traced the workings of situated work roles among organizational members by means of methods: 1) I have observed what and how work roles are performed (in so far as they manifest themselves through concrete activities among people at work) within real workplace contexts, and 2) I have asked organizational members to tell me about their work roles and everyday

activities related to accomplishing their work. Confronted with the fact that work roles (as well as our sense of self or identity) most often “live their life” at the non-discursive and practical level – and thus may be difficult to articulate in an interview situation - I have drawn on both the interviewees’ spoken words and graphic illustrations in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of their subjective experiences, articulations and meanings of work roles. Starting with the observation that “to draw is to see”, interviewees were asked to sketch their work roles and the communing relationships they become part of due to these roles. I first gave them a piece of paper with a circle representing one ordinary workday and instructed them to recall their workday the day before. I then asked them to list within the circle the different work roles they had performed during that particular day. In this way the assigned task was to tell me about their work roles while visualizing them for me at the same time. After having illustrated the work roles they “took on, made and played with” the day before – i.e. from the time they showed up at work in the morning until closing time - I asked my interviewees to sketch the communing relationship they felt a part of due to their work roles listed in the circle. The output of this “methodological experiment” is ten pictograms and ten underlying interviews reflecting different traces of the co-creation of work roles and communing relationships within distinct work organizing practices. The pictograms and interviews are used as equal and supplementary empirical sources in the following analysis that begins with a close-up of two of the pictograms. I have selected Jill and Matt’s pictograms because these illustrations, despite the differences in job positions and work activities, reflect two stories about the workings of roles which “capture” some general characteristics of all ten pictograms and their underlying spoken tales.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO JILL AND MATT'S WORLDS OF WORK ROLES**

The two empirical stories of Jill and Matt presented on the following pages demonstrate that even though organizational members of Health. Ltd. and Tools Ltd. have different job ranks, activities and individual role figurations – working as either “worker” or “manager” – they all perform a multitude of roles that require (and enable) the ability to develop, plan, execute and coordinate. Thus in contrast to former rigid and specialized work divisions highly influenced by Taylor’s production principles (Taylor 1912) and Fayol’s hierarchical style of management (Fayol 1916), Jill and Matt’s work roles typically involve a continuous integration of both managerial and executing work activities among both workers and managers. The two empirical stories illustrate how this close integration between planning and execution unfolds at the level of individual role performance. Accordingly, Jill’s story shows that workers continuously take on roles as collaborators, coordinators, negotiators and innovators. Matt’s story shows how workers feel authorized and even encouraged to question and disrupt organizational routines and recombine resources across the organization, as he for instance collaborates with and reaches into the R&D or export department to change the way things are done, or confronts his co-workers with new ideas on how to improve their practices. In this way Jill and Matt’s role figurations seem to enable work organizing practices premised on a high ability to coordinate complex communing collaborations, to disrupt and redefine routines when necessary and to distribute authority and intelligence through processes of mutual involvement. Jill and Matt’s pictograms are presented in figure 5.1, while their empirical stories follow subsequently.



- Quality control responsibility (process employee)
- Coordinator (planner)
- Documentation responsibility
- Capacity responsibility
- Stock responsibility
- Technical responsibility
- Education and training responsibility
- Environment responsibility
- Information and IT responsibility

Jill and her team colleagues are encouraged to shift between these roles on a regular basis and to be able to perform as many of them as possible as a way of enhancing their skills and securing the highest degree of functional flexibility. Currently, Jill is in charge of stock and thus accountable for gathering information from her team mates about which components and other materials are needed for running the production of medical analyzers. She therefore also continuously communicates and coordinates with colleagues from stock and logistics in order to provide the needed products to secure the work flow in her team. Jill describes this institutionalization of a role division within her team and the distributed authority/accountability that goes with it in the following way:

*“It’s cool that we are free to decide when to do what. And it’s also great being responsible for many different work tasks. In the co-managing team of which I am part, we perform the roles alternately, that is, we are all continuously performing the roles as planner, coordinator, etc. I really appreciate alternating between the roles because then I am not only producing and producing. I’m forced to do a lot of different things. And I can participate in all kinds of tasks and try out roles. If you are really into quality, then you can work with quality... Most often we’ll go about it by trial and error, and talk with each other about how to do it. We draw heavily on each other’s experiences” (Jill5)*

After the meeting and her daily correspondence with the stockroom tracking the right supplies from stock, Jill takes on a new work role together with her colleague Anna. Together they constitute a mini-team which has been assigned the task of testing and helping develop a brand new type of analyzer. The mini-team also includes two engineers, Bo and Nick from the development department. In close collaboration and dialogue with Bo and Nick, Jill and Anna assemble and help test the new analyzers. Their work form is highly collaborative and experimental. Jill likes to take part in such collective and highly tentative search processes. She tells me it is satisfying but sometimes also stressful to be part of this small development group. In particular, when the same error or problem occurs again and again with one of the analyzers, she finds it difficult not to blame herself for not doing her job properly. “In these situations it is great to have Anna around. We support each other a lot and that really helps me re-find my self-confidence and keep up the good spirit”, she says. After lunch Jill talks to Nick about a particular technical problem with one of the modules that is part of a new analyzer. Then she picks up a batch of pipettes at another department. Here she chats with some of her former team mates. Jill tells me that she sometimes works in other departments if they are short on staff and that she often trains colleagues in handling new work

processes. In the afternoon, all three co-managing teams in Jill's unit have their weekly branch meeting with Kim who is head of department. They comprise 27 team members and gather around the tables in the coffee-break area of their unit. During these meetings they plan and coordinate future production tasks and discuss general issues within and between the three team communities when needed. At the end of the day Jill talks with the convener about a colleague having personal problems at home. This conversation is part of her role as member of the board of union representatives in Health Ltd. Jill informs me that she used to work as a shop steward. Although she quit the job several years ago, she is still very involved in the board's work and an active member of the health and safety committee. We are almost finishing up the interview when Jill starts to tell me about the social ties and friendships she experiences at work. She describes to me how in her team, people often meet socially (sometimes people from other teams also participate). For example, they frequently meet for dinner, go to the cinema or arrange a picnic. Some of them also go to the gym together, attend courses at night or just spend time together privately. Of course, not everyone participates in these kinds of social activities, and often work colleagues do not relate as friends. However, for Jill and many of her colleagues, the role of being and making friends at work nevertheless seems to be a central part of their working life. Taken together, the way Jill experiences her work roles today as opposed to earlier is summed up in the following quote:

*"My work roles have changed a lot. Earlier, I would arrive in the morning and take up where I left off the day before; the foreman would give me a job sheet, and I would go the shelves to pick up my job. When I had finished I would hand over the sheet to him and he would give me a new one. I didn't have to think. I didn't have to make any decisions – well perhaps in terms of quality – but not in the same way. Nor was I responsible for what I was doing. I am now. And I am also better informed. I am continually updated. Today the foreman's role is in the background. He is not the one who is keeping you informed. It is the other way round. That's how it is now. I find it ten times better than before" (Jill6).*

In sum, Jill's story clearly reflects how her world of work has changed radically over the years. Whereas information and orders were flowing top down before, now it is the worker, like Jill, who gives information to the foreman, who is in control of the production process and who is in charge of continuously innovating work routines and products. Consequently, her story shows that being a worker in Health Ltd. today requires (and enables) the ability to take on, make and play with various roles which are both managerial and executing. Accordingly, during an ordinary work day she performs and constantly shifts between a wide range of work roles, such as the role as collaborator, executor, coordinator/ planner, developer/innovator, negotiator, advisor and friend as she interacts with her colleagues. Although Matt is managerially responsible for a sales team, his work roles are in many ways similar to Jill's.

## **A FIGURATION OF VARIOUS CONNECTING ROLES IN MATT'S WORLD OF WORK**

I am interviewing Matt, who works as a middle manager in the sales department of Tools Ltd. Like Jill, he has been informed about the theme and purpose of our interview before we meet. As we chat and introduce ourselves over a cup of coffee, I likewise instruct him to draw a pictogram of his work roles and communing relationships at work while we speak. Matt is in his late thirties and has worked in the company for almost three years. He has a diploma in business administration. Matt



was in the military before joining Tools Ltd. He has also worked in the procurement department as well as in the R&D unit of a large Danish corporation for several years. In the military he was trained in management. Ever since, he has tried to cultivate his managerial skills and not to become a specialist within one certain field. Matt tells me: *"I prefer to play the role as generalist instead, because it enables me to engage in and work with a lot of different stuff"* (Matt9). Listening to Matt's work experiences, a general feature crystallizes, namely that he has continuously reused, redefined and recombined skills and work roles developed in one job function in his new job situations (between the companies he has worked for as well as within them). In this way his work roles have been continuously shaped and reshaped in renewing ways. Besides this red thread in his career trajectory, Matt also explains to me that he sees his different work roles in a cross organizational perspective, meaning that they are never only orientated towards his "own" specific work field of internal and external sales. In his own words Matt expresses it like this:

*"Looking at my working day, many of my roles are, in principle, outside my field of work as I am interfering with everything else. Some find it positive, while others find it negative that I am interfering with e.g. something that others in the marketing department are responsible for undertaking ... I am interfering with their field of activity because it is also part of my role as I have to market this sales division in Denmark, but many of my ideas are just as much addressing levels of concern... and therefore I can't help but get involved with their work, present ideas and say well if you had done this instead... what would have happened... wouldn't that have been to our advantage?"* (Matt3).

Talking about his work day and work roles, this pattern of interference seems to be characteristic of the way Matt takes on, makes and plays with his many different work roles. He tells me that yesterday his day began by talking, negotiating and coordinating with the marketing department about a marketing plan concerning a new tool and service solution. In this case his work role was to act as negotiator and mediator between sales and marketing, combining the interests of the two departments in order to optimize the company's overall growth. As Matt continues to describe his day and plot his work roles into the circle, the same role pattern seems to be reproduced when he later has a meeting with the R&D department, visits one of the production teams, addresses a problem about the ITsystem or talks to some of the people responsible for quality control about a new idea. Within all these encounters, Matt tells me how he typically interferes, collaborates, negotiates and coordinates with his colleagues in order to achieve certain purposes. These four roles as interferer, collaborator, negotiator and coordinator appear to be central building blocks or resources in Matt's role-figuration which he continuously develops and draws on throughout his everyday work activities/situations. Involvement, being a maker (initiator), idea development and the search for improvements are also characteristics that Matt emphasizes describing his work roles and connecting interactions in Tools Ltd. He reflects on these modes of role(-ing) in the following way:

*"Perhaps I should sometimes lean back and say, well I have sufficient tasks in process. Now I need to finish some of them. But I can't help thinking: what is next? And then I have to find someone who can help pick up some of what is in process. And then I have to start moving as I can tell from my own sales organization that it helps to motivate others... creating success and motivation for them – that implies*

*that I am continuously working on creating improvements and changes, creating new paths, new possibilities..." (Matt8).*

While Matt pours himself another cup of coffee, he goes on to tell me about how taking on and playing out the roles as initiator and optimizer in search of innovative ideas and improvements is not only oriented towards his own sales department and the company's sites in Denmark. Quite often he also communicates and exchange ideas and knowledge with his colleagues from the company's foreign affiliates:

*"Last year our department grew by 25%. We thus met our objectives which were higher than those of the company. But we have colleagues abroad who find it more difficult to meet the objectives, and I can't help interfering and involving myself in how our sister companies around the world may be able to perform like us... For example I have just proposed to one of my managers that we organize a forum for sales managers in the three Nordic countries in order to integrate and exchange experiences and in that way learn from one another..." (Matt7).*

Although Matt's drive to interfere and engage in a multitude of work matters is rather extreme, (compared to most of the organizational members that I have interviewed) his stories about a concrete work day nevertheless illustrate a central point: by enacting his many work roles, Matt becomes involved in and thus connected to various and often wide-ranging communing relationships of criss-crossing collaborations (this pattern is the same among his colleagues). Collaborative communing practices, by virtue of Matt's various role enactments, become more overlapping and integrated. Another characteristic of Matt's work role experiences is his ability to reuse skills, specialized tool concepts or service solutions developed in one context (e.g. together with a customer, a partnership of suppliers or industry sector) within new markets targeting other sectors or specific customers. Accordingly, he tells me how he frequently creates and participates in ad hoc teams focused on such tasks, exploring and figuring out how to recombine and innovate existing knowledge and products within new contexts. These ad hoc teams may, for example, include colleagues from the export or R&D departments. Towards the end of our interview, Matt talks about the managerial challenges he experiences at work and of how he plays the role of manager and of being managed – often at the same time. Matt outlines his way of tackling this balance between managing and being managed in the following way:

*"For me it is about sitting down and finding out how I would like to work and then get started; sitting on your hands waiting for the boss to return to discuss and coordinate with him does not move anything. We rarely meet, which means that I don't really know if he recognizes the way in which I am managing things, but as I feel that he lets go of more and more responsibility within my field of activity, I conclude that that's the way it should be" (Matt14).*

According to the above quote, Matt prefers to take on the role of managing oneself (self-management). He clearly appreciates the ability to maneuver in a landscape of distributed authority, to be accountable and not least to be recognized for his achievements (e.g. the roles he perform). Performing all these different roles (articulated and outlined during our interview), Matt becomes connected to (and part of) a wide set of collaborative communities which often criss-cross

departmental borders, that are often created on an ad hoc basis, and which often transgress the boundaries of his local organization (read: the local context of his workplace site) integrating costumers, other partners, sister affiliates and so on in joint co-creative work processes. In sum, Matt's pictogram (cf. figure 5.1) in a very concrete way visualizes the multitude of work roles in his world of work and the various criss-crossing and highly overlapping communing relationships he engages in and develops through these roles. These connecting ties shape and reshape his role-figuration in distinct ways. Participating in these different communing situations during one work day, Matt does not only move between various work role activities; he simultaneously also shifts between different power relationships as he sometimes performs the role as manager, sometimes as co-manager, and yet at other times is the one being managed.

Summing up, what do these two individual stories of Jill and Matt tell us about the role of work roles within contemporary organizational life? They first of all demonstrate that organizational members at all levels *perform various roles* that require (and enable) the ability to innovate, plan, execute and coordinate. Secondly, and in continuation hereof, their stories show that a continuous integration of managerial and executing roles characterizes both Jill and Matt's role figurations. Despite their differences in job rank, work activities and so on they all *engage in roles as collaborators, coordinators negotiators and innovators*. In this way Jill and Matt's role figurations enable a much more collaborative, criss-crossing and mutually involving mode of work division and coordination than that typically seen within traditional bureaucratic work organizations. Consequently, highly hierarchical and compartmentalized work organizing practices based on a rigid work division between manager and worker, planning and production, innovators and non innovators seem to have been replaced by much more integration and interaction between these different sources of knowledge and accountability within the organizational landscape of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Jill's story illustrates that workers take on roles as collaborators, coordinators, negotiators and innovators. Through these roles they all become part of ongoing search processes and work practices where information and innovations flows "from below". Matt's story demonstrates that workers feel laterally accountable and are often encouraged to question and disrupt organizational routines, roles and rules as well as to recombine resources across the organization for further innovations, as he, for instance, collaborates with and reaches into the R&D or export department to readjust or change existing work routines. And thirdly the stories illustrate that, although Jill and Matt's work activities and experiences of role performance are rooted within two different job positions and organizational contexts (i.e. Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.) and in many ways also differ, they seem to *enact and articulate their work roles in similar ways*. This last point is elaborated in the next section. Altogether within this viewpoint, Jill and Matt's role figurations seem to enable work organizing practices premised on a high ability to engage in and coordinate complex communing collaborations, to disrupt and redefine routines when necessary and to distribute authority and intelligence through processes of mutual involvement.

## **THE ENACTMENTS AND ARTICULATIONS OF WORK ROLES IN JILL AND MATT'S WORLD OF WORK AND ORGANIZING**

My intent in this and the next sections is not to depict analytically the particular work roles of Jill, Matt and their colleagues creating a typology of the roles they perform at work. Instead, my aim is to

search for the underlying nature of their role performances, asking how their work roles are 1) enacted and articulated, and 2) shaped and reshaped through their everyday work activities. In this way, I will try to “grasp” the evolution and modes of work role(-ing) among organizational members and to trace in what way their work roles shape communing relationships and work organizing practices of belief and doubt in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.<sup>83</sup> I identify three characteristics typifying the nature of Jill, Matt and their colleagues' work roles. They are 1) situated and performed in various shapes, 2) shaped and reshaped through interactions and 3) negotiated and renegotiated through ongoing interpretative processes.

Describing a concrete work day, the way Jill, Matt and their colleagues at first typically address and articulate their work roles is by referring to a particular work activity and the enactment of a particular work function. For example, Jill writes down the role “to produce” in her pictogram while she tells me about how she and Anita produce (assemble and test) the medical analyzer they are responsible for. Likewise, Matt writes “external management” in the circle and tells me about his role as sales manager and the work functions attached to this job position. Similar examples from the other interviews are: *“In my job my role is to find new distributors and expand our sales network”* (Helle2); *“I am in charge of developing new product and service solutions, that is my number one role”* (Mikkel2); *“My work roles are to plan and coordinate the production flow in my team, and then of course to produce...”* (Ivan1). Thus, informed by the empirical material of the ten pictograms and the conversations they stem from, work roles seem first of all to be enacted through concrete work activities related to a distinct job position or work situation. Secondly they seem initially to be articulated as functional patterns of behavior associated with a given job position/activity. In other words, the organizational members of Health Ltd and Tools Ltd characteristically start to describe their work roles as work activities and obligations serving certain functions necessary for either the team or organization's survival and growth. Thus, at first glance, their enactments and articulations of work roles seem very much in line with the functional role perspective.

However Jill, Matt and their colleagues' individual stories of their work roles (role(-ing)) also reveal that their enacted job positions and the work roles (that underpin the positions) are never fixed and given as such, but encompass emergent outcomes continuously negotiated in the course of everyday work. Characteristic of their stories is that *first* of all they perform various work roles which are all situated within concrete work practices and involve some kind of communing relationships. For example, in carrying out his duty to develop new export markets (work practice), Matt takes on the roles as initiator, collaborator and interferer (work roles) and interacts with other organizational members (communing relationships) to recombine the firm's organizational resources in order to co-create new products and solutions for new markets. The empirical glimpses of a typical work day in Jill and Matt's worlds of work days, previously presented, clearly illustrate how their role figurations are constituted by myriads of roles and communing encounters.

A *second* characteristic is that the work roles (processes of role(-ing)) of organizational members seem to be shaped and reshaped through processes of interactions in which they take on work roles, make

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<sup>83</sup> Although the analysis continues with a close up perspective on Jill and Matt's experiences of work roles, all ten pictograms and their underlying stories are integrated in the analysis.

their own distinct roles and sometimes play with them in strategic ways. For example, Jill and Matt engage in role-taking (i.e. in taking on the roles of the generalized other) when they perform their work activities. In performing these activities (and the roles they enable) they must continuously reflect upon, interpret and readjust to their colleagues' actions. Interacting with their team members, managers and so on in this way, they use their colleagues' anticipated responses to guide their own actions and line of conduct. As an example, Jill describes how she talks to Bo and Nick from her mini development team in order to become better at assembling and testing the new analyzers. In this situation she shapes and adjusts her roles as “assembler”, “tester” and “co-developer” according to her colleagues' knowledge and responses. Processes of creative and active role-making also seem to be an integral part of Jill, Matt and their colleagues' work life. Matt's drive to interfere and initiate new ideas and projects and to engage in various unique relationships at work serves as an ideal example of role-making. Likewise, the other organizational members in my study indicate that they often actively create and recreate their own distinct and authentic roles at work. When it comes to role-playing, the empirical stories moreover reflect that role(-ing) at work is frequently used strategically as a way to mould and manage one's roles/appearances in purposeful ways. For example, many of the interviewed organizational members emphasize that they have often deliberately used their former work roles as a gateway to obtain and develop new roles and opportunities in their work.

A *third* characteristic is that people within the work organizing practices of Health Ltd and Tools Ltd seem constantly to negotiate their work roles through their everyday interactions at work. More precisely, the empirical stories illustrate that while they perform their roles, they simultaneously try them out, experiment with them, interpret them, reconstruct them, model them, search for new ones and so on through the many encounters and situations of relating that constitute their work day. Through these encounters they continuously negotiate and renegotiate their roles, hereby producing a common understanding of the roles at play (and of the roles that may emerge in the future). Seen in this light, their work roles seem to be shaped and modified through ongoing interpretative processes (based on both their bodily interactions (doings) and mental/discursive interactions (sayings)). Interpretative processes which, according to the experiences of Jill, Matt and the other organizational members, are at all times at stake when they interact/transact at work.

Summing up these three characteristics: work roles appear 1) to be situated and performed in various shapes, 2) to be shaped and reshaped through the interactions of organizational members and 3) to be negotiated and renegotiated through ongoing interpretative processes. Consequently, Jill, Matt and their colleagues' accounts of the various tentative and changeable work roles that enable their job positions and concrete work activities do not seem to represent fixed and prescribed patterns of behavior. On the contrary, their work roles seem to emerge through their everyday “doings and sayings” and thus to be both enacted and articulated as negotiated comprehensive behavioral patterns continuously constructed and reconstructed through interactions (bodily, mental, discursive, emotional) with other organizational members. Jill, for example, addresses this ongoing negotiation of roles in the following way: “In my team we always talk about how to run a new production process, plan who is doing what....and learn from each other's experiences while we work” (Jill6,7). In a similar way, Carl from Tools Ltd. indicates how work roles are negotiated in processes of everyday work. For instance, when a new development team is created:

*"It is often something about defining and distributing some roles. Like textbook project management, some perform certain tasks and are responsible for this and that. That is perhaps what we are really practicing here just in a very informal way. We discuss and agree when something must be finished, such as next Friday, meaning that you have to do that and you have to do that. We look at one another, people nod, and then we start..." (Carl8).*

Even the more formalized roles such as the set of "pre-defined" team roles in Health Ltd seem to be interpreted and performed in quite different ways, depending on which team member is responsible for the particular role at a given time and in a given situation. Instead of a fixed set of institutionalized expectations, these formalized roles rather reflect a negotiated pattern of behavior. This pattern may be seen as a set of doings and sayings organized by a pool of practical understandings, an order of behavioral "rules", emotional "norms", structures of accountability and routines of coordination. When being articulated and enacted, this behavioral pattern becomes negotiable and thus stabilizing and transformative at the same time. Hence, informed by the empirical landscape of Jill and Matt's worlds of work, the work roles within these organizational contexts do not simply appear as prescribed functional patterns of interactions, but as situated, negotiated, meaningful patterns of doings and sayings that organize a given work practice in distinct ways.

In the next sections I zoom out from the close-up perspective on Jill and Matt's pictograms<sup>84</sup>. My purpose is to distill some recurrent observations of how their work roles are in fact being shaped and reshaped.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE SHAPING AND RE-SHAPING OF WORK ROLES**

Exploring the empirical traces of the shaping and reshaping of work roles in my study, I have identified four recurrent observations. I have already addressed the first of these in the former section: namely that work roles are continuously shaped and reshaped through the everyday interactions of organizational members. Since they are being shaped through these interactions they are not only relational in character but also co-creations sparked by the ongoing social encounters of organizational people. In short, they become co-creations. Often the reshaping of work roles are triggered by problematic work situations such as taking on a new work task, experimenting with the development of a new tool or service or experiencing a conflict or disagreement in terms of how to handle a work process. All these situations produce some kind of doubt, uncertainty or disagreement that triggers organizational members to question and interpret their role performances. Such situations in particular seem to make Jill, Matt and their colleagues reflect upon their existing work role(s) and thus become able to reshape and readjust their roles according to the problematic work situations they face, e.g. to reshape their role performance so they become better at handling new work tasks, at tackling disagreements or at experimenting with new work procedures or technical machinery. Within this view, being engaged in work practices of various work roles seems to trigger the ability to question and doubt one's own work roles because the multitude of roles activate

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<sup>84</sup> In other words, I move up one level of abstraction as I more explicitly integrate all ten pictograms, the ten underlying stories as well the study's other empirical material.

organizational members to raise an “I” against “me”, in Mead’s words. In this way the multitude of constantly shaping and reshaping work roles among Jill, Matt and their colleagues facilitate the co-creation of communing practices of ongoing reflexivity.

Secondly, work roles seem to organize the many interactions at work within the work practices of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Within these contexts it seems that work roles both enact (shape) the (work) situation at the same time as being structured (shaped) by it. Analyzing these micro processes of social organization, the empirical material on the one hand points out that the organizational members create and make use of their roles as a way of developing and organizing their actions (in this case they co-create comprehensive behavioral scripts through their interactions that enable them to act in certain ways, e.g. to perform the role as initiator, interferer, team mate, coordinator etc). On the other hand the material also points out that organizational members continuously adjust their role performances according to the particular situation and context they engage in (in this case their role scripts provide them with a set of collective structures that guide and constrain their actions in certain ways, e.g. to perform the work roles required in order to handle a meeting professionally with a customer or to be able to take on the role(s) necessary for being part of an ad hoc development team). Therefore the shaping and reshaping of work roles seem to rest on a paradox in that it gives rise to both agency and structure. Yet, interpreting work roles as micro modes of organizing does not imply that they are merely instrumental organizers used to achieve particular goals (e.g. order, stability, a work task, a predictable carrier pattern, a coordinating infrastructure, etc.) among the organizational members of my study. Listening to their stories of role-taking, -making and -playing, work roles are also experienced as ways of being and relating in the world that enable them to become, develop, perform, collaborate, and change through their practices at work. This analytical observation points towards the third recurrent observation.

By exploring the working of roles through a perspective that conceives of roles as resources, a third general observation is that work roles “provide” organizational members with the means to pursue interests and enact positions (i.e. bundles of enacted roles that together constitute a particular position) in their job. These resources seem to be accessible through the organizational members' work roles. Performing their various work roles they gain resources that enable them to carry out work in certain ways, to achieve purposes, to get access to new challenges, to control relationships, to be recognized as a distinct organizational member and so on. The list is endless. Moreover, analyzing the work roles of Jill, Matt and their colleagues, these resources seem to be both cultural (e.g. to know how to behave suitably), social (e.g. to be able to collaborate, plan, coordinate) and material (e.g. to have access to equipment, tools of production, communication medias, finance etc) in character. As an example, it is Jill’s role of being responsible for stock that enables her to develop her ability to coordinate with, or learn the rules and “codes of conduct” of her colleagues in the stockroom. From this point of view, situated work roles become shaped and reshaped according to the resources they give access to. Two common features are significant in this respect. First, describing their work roles during an ordinary workday, the organizations' members seem to use their work roles as resources to claim membership and take on a position in the communing relationships they engage in through their role performances. Notably, during the interviews they often referred to the communing relationships and connections to other organizational members as a way of describing and articulating their work roles. Secondly, through their various enacted work

roles, organizational members gain access to resources that enable them to continuously develop their skills and competences. Jill and Matt's work trajectories and transformative work roles illustrate this point.

A fourth recurrent observation is that work roles are shaped and reshaped by the discourses (e.g. ideas, values, cognitive structures), the habitual practices (e.g. daily interactions, doings), the physical (e.g. bodies, "things" and their use), and emotional (e.g. states of emotions, motivations) practices of organizational members. Observing and interviewing the organizational members in both case companies demonstrated that their work roles clearly do not only manifest themselves through their discursive activities, but also through forms of practical, bodily and emotional activities. Routinized modes of behavior work roles therefore seem to consist of and thus be shaped and reshaped by all these elements that are interconnected to one another within Jill, Matt's and their colleagues' actual practices of working and organizing. Analyzing roles as genuine social objects offers an understanding of how the processes of role(-ing) among organizational members triggers them to reflect upon their own and others' actions and thus to produce common meanings/understandings of their roles and practices. Within this view roles are seen as projects equally enacted at the level of interaction and the level of cognition (i.e. they are being shaped by both interactional and discursive accomplishments).

As a very basic example, the work roles as initiator and mediator which Matt takes on, makes and plays with when he interacts with people from the marketing department, encompass a practical/interactive and symbolic/cognitive dimension, as he both acts towards and talks with his marketing colleagues. More precisely, his role performance involves all the four above activity components. First, it encompasses concrete interactions at the practical level as he goes to the marketing department, directs himself to his colleagues there and engages in face-to-face encounters with them. Second, it implies communicative and discursive activities as he discusses, verbally negotiates and exchanges ideas and expectations with them, thereby creating common symbolic meanings about the situation and the roles being enacted. Third, it involves physical/material appearances such as his own and his colleagues' bodily experiences and activities as well as the artifacts and their use which form a part of these encounters (e.g. bodies, outfits, pencils, tables, coffee cups, computer screens and other technical devices etc). And fourth, it evokes feelings (impulsive, motivational, strategic etc), rules and emotional management or what Arlie Hochschild terms "emotional work" (Hochschild 1983). Although this emotional dimension is difficult to trace empirically (not least in my empirical material), Matt's enthusiasm and motivations for interfering and collaborating with his colleagues indicate that emotions play a central role when he performs his various work roles. Listening to Matt's story, it seems that the roles he enacts are constantly shaped and reshaped by all four dimensions of social interaction.

Based on these four recurrent observations. I argue that contemporary work roles appear 1) as genuine co-creations sparked by the ongoing encounters of organizational members, 2) operate as micro modes of organizing and give rise to structure as well as agency, 3) are (re)shaped according to the resources they give access to and 4) "materialize" through both a discursive, practical, physical and emotional level. One significant feature which stems from all this is that the great variety of work roles which Jill, Matt and their colleagues take on, make and play out trigger them to

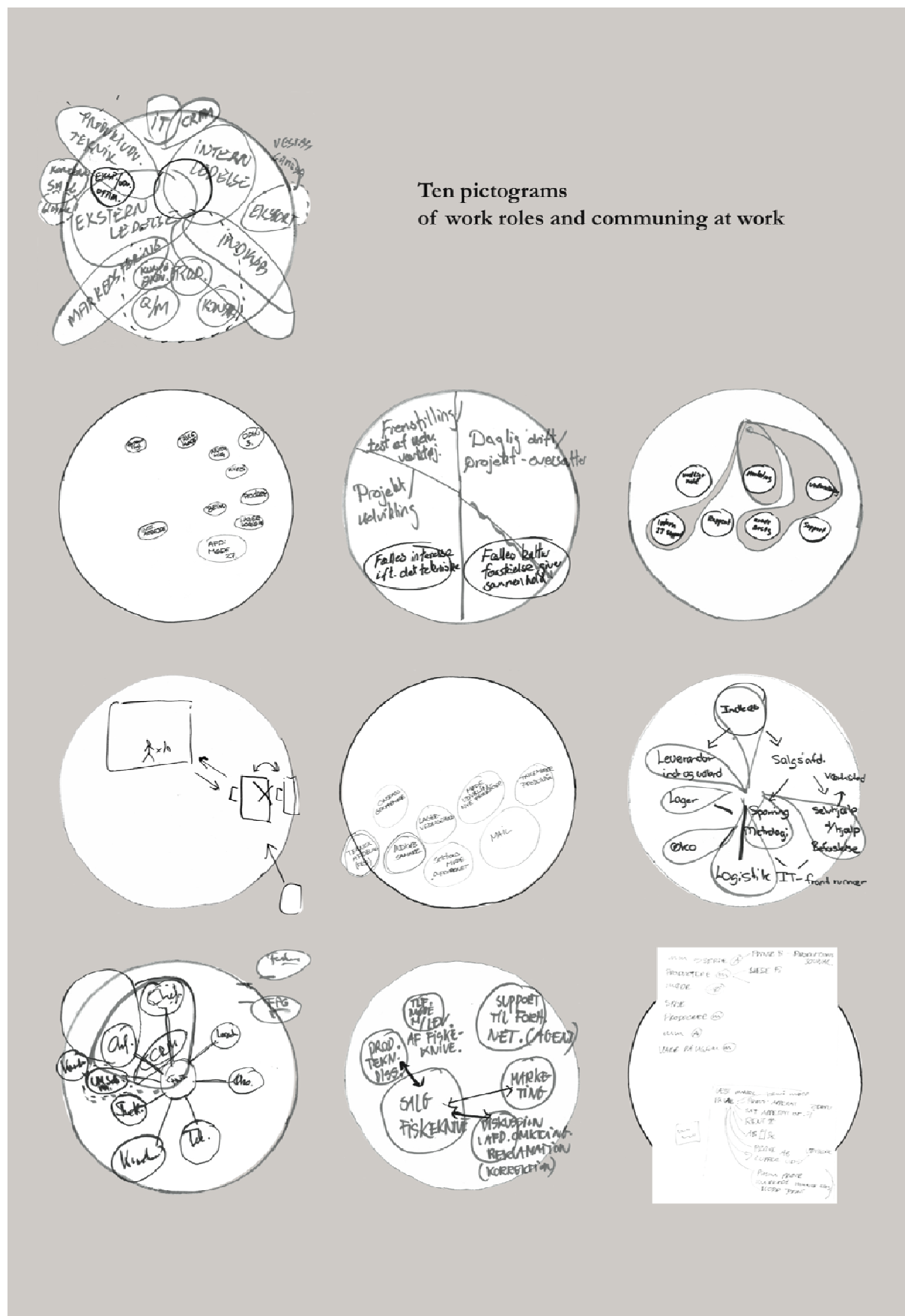


constantly reflect upon their own role(s) “in use” in light of their own and colleagues' many other work roles. The diverse work roles among organizational members do not therefore only give them access to various resources to pursue their interests and cultivate their qualifications and competencies; the co-existent of a variety of work roles also spurs continuous processes of reflexivity. Hereby the multitude of work roles facilitate communing relationships and work organizing practices in which organizational members become able to question, confirm and/or recombine existing roles, rules and other organizational routines. Within this view, the assemblage of many different work roles generates a capacity to both belief and doubt among Jill, Matt and their colleagues. Another significant feature is that the more work roles Jill, Matt and their colleagues engage in, the more work roles they seem able and motivated to try out. Hence their various situated work roles seem to be cumulative in character as they provide access to resources for further reflexive role-formations.

### **THE RECIPROCAL NATURE OF WORK ROLES AND COMMUNING**

During my analytical walk through entry 1, I have touched upon how the work roles of Jill, Matt and their colleagues relate to communing in a mutually constituent way. Their stories of a typical workday demonstrate that work roles (e.g. Jill's role as co-developer of new analyzers) involves a set of connecting ties (e.g. Jill's communing relationships with Anita, Nick and Bo in their mini team) which both shape and are shaped by their processes of role(-ing) (e.g. how Jill's everyday encounters with Anita, Nick and Bo co-shape her roles **and** how her role performance co-shapes the way they relate and bond in the team). Informed by these empirical observations, work roles and communing seem to be simultaneously co-created through the ongoing interactions of organizational members. In this section I look more closely at the reciprocal nature of work roles and communing (and work organizing) in Health Ltd and Tools Ltd.

A look at all ten pictograms in figure 5.2 gives an overview of the mapping of work roles performed during a typical workday by ten organizational members. Moreover the pictograms reflect their mapping of the communing relationships in which they feel enmeshed due to their work roles listed in the pictogram. The drawn circles around each named role symbolize the connecting ties and interdependencies that each entails. Thus, the inscribed lines encapsulating the various work roles within the pictograms very concretely visualize the recursive link between processes of role(-ing) and communing at work.



**Fig. 5.2:** 10 pictograms of work roles and communing at work.

So what do the pictograms actually tell us about the reciprocal nature of work roles and communing relationships? Seen through the lenses of the role perspective, a gaze at the ten pictograms first of all very basically reveals that organizational members perform many work roles and that these are various in character. Secondly, that they invoke various communing relationships and thus tap into (and often reach across) many communing relational settings. Linking these observations with the spoken tales (i.e. interviews) about role(-ing) moreover reveals three common characteristics. Thirdly, that the various work roles of organizational members create chains of interdependencies within and across their communing relationships. Fourthly, that their work roles change through their situated interactions at the same time as they also generate continuity in both time and space<sup>85</sup>. And fifthly, that organizational members' work roles vary in scope and temporality (i.e. some dominate more than others, some are temporary, others more long-term etc). The five aspects of the nature of work roles (and communing) are summarized in table 5.3 below.

<b>Table 5.3: Work Roles</b>	
1)	Are multiple and various in character
2)	Invoke various communing relationships
3)	Create chains of interdependence within and across communing relationships
4)	Generate continuity and change/belief and doubt
5)	Vary in scope and temporality

Seen within the lenses of a community perspective, the five aspects also provide information about the nature of communing among Jill, Matt and their colleagues. Accordingly I have also observed that:

- 1) As work roles are multiple and various in character, so are the communing relationships they shape and are shaped by.
- 2) As roles invoke various communing relationships, so do these communing bonds enable various work roles that cut across them in overlapping ways.
- 3) As roles create interdependencies, so do communing relationships become more interdependent.
- 4) As roles generate continuity and change, so do the communing relationships they are embedded in.
- 5) As roles vary in scope and temporality, so do organizational members' communing relationships.

These empirical observations, derived from Jill, Matt and their colleagues' stories, all indicate that work roles and communing appear as simultaneous co-created outcomes negotiated and shaped through their everyday work organizing practices. Consequently, I argue that the nature of work roles and communing seems highly reciprocal, not only theoretically, but also empirically.

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<sup>85</sup> As I see it, this paradox is due to the fact that as negotiated meaningful "gestalts"/patterns of behavior, work roles have an unpredictable and forever changing nature. However, because they are constantly negotiated meaningful patterns of behavior, they also invoke continuity, that is a continuity of being constantly negotiated within situations. Role performance therefore also invokes repetition, reproduction and stability in our behavioral patterns.

Acknowledging the reciprocal nature of role(-ing) and communing at work makes it possible to understand more closely the micro dynamics among organizational members at the level of work organizing. For instance, how work roles and communing may enable and shape work organizing practices to generate belief and doubt. Earlier I showed that the performance of and shift between a multitude of interdependent work roles seem to trigger Jill, Matt and their colleagues to continuously reflect upon their own roles (i.e. to raise an “I” against “me”) in light of a multitude of others (work roles). In this way organizational members’ various work roles do not merely “equip” them with a set of behavioral “rules” and routines that organize their interactions into recurrent (and thus rather stable) behavioral patterns. Instead, I argue that engaging in a wide range of work roles also enables them to question and readjust their “sayings and doings” at work. The reason why is because the multitude of their own and others’ roles invoke the creation of a “generalized other(s)” which activates reflection and thus enables them to generate self-doubt as well as self-belief (cf. Chapter 3). In this light, one central strength of having many work roles is that they provide organizational members with the resources and capacity to cast doubt on their existing roles and routinized practices. And to use these resources and capacity as “a gateway” to further develop old roles and/or take on, make and play with new roles and through these processes become part of new, collaborative communing relationships. As a result, performing multiple work roles also involves the engagement in various communing relationships of ongoing reflexivity. In sum, the many work roles and communing bonds among Jill, Matt and their colleagues therefore seem to trigger organizational reflexivity and dynamic collaborations of belief and doubt within and across their diverse work practices. It is therefore my argument that the co-creation of various highly interdependent work roles (and communing relationships) among organizational members at all levels facilitates the development of work organizing practices based on habitual routine-breaking (mental and bodily) activities geared toward exploring and exploiting organizational resources (e.g. ideas, “things” and their use) for further innovative co-creations. In entry 2 and 3 I elaborate more on this issue.

## **MAIN ANALYTICAL FINDINGS**

On this analytical walk my aim has been twofold. Firstly, to explore the co-creation and nature of situated work roles among organizational members within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Secondly, to explore whether and how these situated work roles (and the communing relationships they invoke) enable the formation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt. I have tried to accomplish this aim by analyzing how everyday situated work roles become enacted and (re) shaped at the micro level within concrete organizational contexts. Summing up, the analysis provides three main findings. First, unlike traditional bureaucracies composed of centralized authority structures, highly specialized jobs and many formalized and pre-defined work roles creating a clear division between managers and workers, planners and executors, innovators and non-innovators etc., the various work roles of Jill, Matt and their colleagues – despite differences in occupation and job rank - all seem to require (and enable) the ability to plan, coordinate, execute and innovate. In this way, contemporary work roles seem to closely integrate the dimensions of “planning” and “execution” at the level of everyday work practices. Furthermore, Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ work roles are not prescribed but rather appear as ongoing negotiated patterns of “doings and sayings” which stabilize while regularly transforming their work practices. In this light, contemporary work roles seem to enable much more collaborative and mutually involving modes of work organization than the rigid

work division and routine coordination of former more bureaucratic organizational forms. The second finding is that contemporary work roles appear 1) to be genuine co-creations, 2) to operate as micro modes of organizing giving rise to both structure as well as agency, 3) to be (re)shaped according to the resources they give access to and 4) to “materialize” as transactional routines at a discursive, practical, physical and emotional level. Based on these four observations, the analysis demonstrates that work roles are cumulative in character as they give access to resources for further reflexive role performance. And third, the analysis shows that the co-existent and co-evolution of various interdependent work roles among organizational members spur processes of reflexivity, which simultaneously invoke communing relationships of ongoing reflexivity at work. Accordingly, the analysis of entry 1 concludes that the co-creation of many different interdependent situated work roles (and communing relationships) is an important building block in the development of work organizing practices of belief and doubt with the capacity to continuously reorganize and recombine “old” and “new” organizational resources towards future growth.

## CHAPTER 6

### ENTRY 2 – ON THE CO-CREATION OF COMMUNING AT WORK

The relationship between work roles, communing and work organizing practices will now be seen through another entry point: how organizational members interact and connect with each other in the corporate arena and through these connections co-create multiple communing relationships at work. This section also focuses upon how organizational members' communing relationships enable them to develop work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt. This analytical walk is presented in three stages entitled: a sense of communing, modes of communing and organizational patterns of communing. Entry 2 starts out by studying the experiences and meanings of communing among organizational members within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. The second stage identifies some general characteristics of how communing is shaped and reshaped within these organizational contexts. At the third stage I move on to discuss how distinct organizational patterns of communing facilitate the co-creation of work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

Entry 2 uses these analytical observations to understand the experience and significance of communing at work within contemporary organizational life. My aim is also to analyze whether and how organizational members' communing relationships may facilitate the development of collaborative, re-defining and accountable work roles and work organizing practices. Hence, the section asks: what do communing relationships appear to mean to organizational members? How are they co-created, used and (re)shaped through their everyday interactions? Finally, in what ways do their patterns of communing facilitate the co-creation of work roles and work organizing practices that are able to continuously generate belief and doubt? Asking this line of questions, the section demonstrates that organizational members continuously engage in and develop various modes of communing relationships and as a result become able to interact and co-create (e.g. ideas, things and their use) within and across highly complex collaborative work orders. The central analytical findings of entry 2 are that organizational members through the engagement in various modes of communing relationships learn to collaborate and compete with a wide range of colleagues, that they become able to continuously reflect upon and re-define their work roles and that they learn to take and share responsibility on the basis of mutual involvement. In sum, the findings indicate that contemporary communing at work (e.g. within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.) appears to be a vital asset for both human and organizational growth, not least because it enables dynamic work roles and highly collaborative work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

#### ***Ways of producing empirical knowledge of communing at work...***

How do Jill, Matt and their colleagues relate, connect and co-create to accomplish their work? This question has guided my study of communing at work. More precisely I have asked them to tell me about their experiences of communing and to concretize these experiences with some examples of their interactions in the course of everyday work activities, i.e. who they connect with while performing their work roles, and how, where and why they engage in these communing relationships through their daily work organizing practices. During my fieldwork I observed how organizational members connect and assemble through their work. I traced how Jill, Matt and their colleagues

interact and co-create in order to carry out their work by virtue of reading about, visiting, interacting with and being present in their worlds of work. Thus, the ten interviews and pictograms about role(-ing) and communing play a central role in this part of the analysis. However, entry 2 also extensively draws on additional empirical material (interviews, field notes and documents) from Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd (and the other case companies in my study)<sup>86</sup>

## **A SENSE OF COMMUNING**

During this stage I analytically seek to understand contemporary communing relationships at work by exploring the experiences, meanings and use(s) of communing among organizational members. My former analysis on the recursive links between role(-ing) and communing as well as the pictograms presented in figure 5.2 demonstrate that experiences of communing relationships are ongoing and various among organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Consequently, any attempt to generalize about these multiple connecting relationships implies an unjust but indispensable simplification of the actual experiences and complex bonds of communing at play in everyday organizational life. That said, I have identified a set of common features by analyzing these various experiences of communing. Asking Jill, Matt and their colleagues about their experiences of communing, they typically refer to:

- A sense of belongingness among colleagues, e.g. their team mates
- The experience of doing and achieving something, of sharing a common purpose together with their colleagues, e.g. working on the same task or project to produce and develop a certain product/service, to aim for a sustainable work environment, performing better than other teams, departments, sister affiliates.
- The experience of sharing the same values, of being part of something bigger, feelings of being “of the same kind”, e.g. to appreciate the same behavioral norms, to share common beliefs or to feel embraced by an esprit de corps on the job.

These three empirical traces of communing experiences are largely in line with the general theoretical definitions of communing discussed in the first part of Chapter 4, which describe community as a sense of membership, identity and mutual commitment. However, the empirical material that is being presented in this section further indicates that communing is more than a fusion of feeling and thought (c.f. Nisbet’s definition), since the actions and purposeful doings of Jill, Matt and their colleagues also connect them in various ways. The everyday work situations in which they interact and connect for different purposes (i.e. engage in purposeful actions) also, significantly, seem to generate experiences of communing. I therefore argue that the everyday practical doings and purposeful connections, feelings and thoughts of belonging at work are essential for communing relationships among organizational members.

In addition, Jill, Matt and their colleagues all emphasize how communing bonds give them a “feeling”, “knowing” and “practical experience” of membership which enables them to pursue their interests, to build up, maintain and develop their skills and competences and to explore new

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<sup>86</sup> In short, the empirical bricks underlying the analysis in entry 2 are therefore made up of talk, observation and company specific documents.

possibilities and challenges in their job. In this way, their communing relationships seem to facilitate the enactment and development of multiple roles. However, none of the interviewed organizational members experience communing as something that simply creates good feelings and enables positive dynamics. Instead, they are quite aware of the negative aspects of communing, such as the constraining forces and implications of being interdependent within a team community. Throughout my interviews I have asked organizational members: what does community at work mean for you? Below Anna and Ben elaborate on my question. While Anna's quote illustrates how communing relationships are characteristically associated with a sense of membership, Ben's quote exemplifies how communing is also typically associated with experiences of joint work activities and purposeful actions. Moreover, their quotes respectively show how communing is experienced and ascribed meaning as both enabling and constraining:

**Anna, what does community at work means for you?**

*"Community means a lot to who I am. It means quite a lot. If I don't feel that I am part of the community, if I don't feel that I have a role in the community, then I don't function... It has something to do with self-respect. If you feel that you are part of the group, then you feel included. Then you are much better able to take initiative and voice your opinion, and yes, take initiative and be in the forefront. Whereas if you don't feel accepted and respected in the group, then you are disinclined to take initiatives, because you are not taken seriously and recognized; they are not listening to you with the same ears, and therefore it means a lot to me. If you all the time have to fight to be listened to, well then you don't feel like saying I have a good idea. The community gives me self-respect..." (Anna – team worker in Health Ltd. A1).*

**Ben, what does community at work means for you?**

*"Well, in my opinion community here is something about working together toward a common goal. Here, in particular among the senior people, there is strong emphasis on being social, and we must have our common coffee breaks, etc. For some time I felt that I spent more time on coffee breaks than on actually getting some work done – it is ok with such a relaxed common atmosphere, but when I go to work it is to work. And there are still some that find it difficult to swallow when I tell them... my job now is very independent... previously when I worked in the store room it was different. If we did not all work, we would not be able to complete what we had to complete, but many of the workers had a relaxed attitude toward this. The worst is that at one time or the other it rubs off on you if the others are firmly seated half the day – then you also do it. The community becomes something that kills all the good energy" (Ben – team worker in Health Ltd. B1).*

Anna's experience and sense of community address the link between work roles and communing within the context of work (organizing practices) in a very basic manner. According to Anna this link enables (or at least embodies the potential for) the very formation of self-respect, initiatives, meanings, recognition, disrespect, ideas, self-confidence, exclusion/inclusion mechanisms and so on among organizational members. In fact, Anna points out how all these issues become possible due to her communing relationships. Within this view her ideas, meanings, initiatives, feelings of self-respect and self-confidence, experiences of recognition, her sense of inclusion or exclusion are co-created through her communing practices. Following Anna's line of reasoning, it is her experience of belongingness within communing settings that provides her with the means and resources to become, act and feel in certain ways at work. From this perspective, relationships of communing



among organizational members seem to constitute a reservoir of resources which for instance enables them to build up self-respect, develop ideas, take initiative, cultivate agency and develop and perform their work roles in dynamic ways. Whereas Anna's quote focuses upon the enabling "face" of communing that triggers and facilitates distinctive initiatives and agency among organizational members, Ben's quote calls attention to the constraining "face" of communing. According to Ben, this "face" of communing restricts organizational members' actions and kills their creative initiatives and the good energy among them. From this perspective, communing relationships are also experienced as structuring constraints that hinder certain actions and opportunities for expressions. In this case they impose a structure of status quo and stability. As an example, some of the organizational members describe how their respective team communities often appear as a battlefield of diverse and competing interests in which a few alpha males (or females), "the majority" or "the grip of habit" easily tend to rule and dominate the scenery<sup>87</sup>. However, whether their communing relationships are experienced as enabling or constraining, they all seem to serve as raw material for the ability of organizational members to take on, make and play with various work roles.

When experienced as enabling, communing relationships are typically seen (and used) as sources for mutual learning, knowledge sharing and emotional energy. For instance, according to Jane, being a member of and acting within communing relationships at work makes it easier to help each other, to solve problems and to learn from her colleagues. It also makes work much more fun. In her own words:

*"Community is important, it makes my everyday life easier, because if I have problems I don't find it difficult to turn to someone for help... we use and learn much from one another... And I also think that it should be fun to go to work, it shouldn't merely be a matter of sitting here producing these rotten blanks... that would be unbearable. The other day, for example, we were all sitting here producing the same blanks all the time, and it was evident from our eyes that we were totally frustrated. Then I said to Laila: let's have a break and go to the staff room where there are other people talking about something quite different. Let's have some fun to get back some energy" (Jane, team worker in Health Ltd.)*

It is not only Jane that highlights how communing practices trigger learning and positive emotional energies. Her colleagues also seem to make use of communing in the same respect. Listening to their stories, they all engage in various communing practices through their everyday work activities that shape what they do, who they become and how they interpret what they do. Participating in these social practices of communing seems to be experienced both as a kind of action and as a form of belonging that invokes processes of ongoing learning (and re-learning) among organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.<sup>88</sup> Seen in this light, communing relationships seem to be experienced as arenas for learning, i.e. as social arenas in which the production of meaning, knowledge sharing, exchange of ideas, experimentation and so on continuously are co-shaped through the everyday interactions and connections of organizational members. Likewise, Jane's

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<sup>87</sup> The way organizational members experience the character of their communing relationships seems to be influenced by various factors. I will not go into a detailed exploration of these factors within this analysis. Broadly speaking, the composition of organizational members within a team, their distinct work organizing form and style of management seem in particular to influence the character of communing relationships.

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 8 for an elaborated discussion and analysis on learning within and between team communities.

experiences of communing as forms of relating igniting that spark of emotional energy and make work more fun seem to be reproduced in the other empirical stories of communing.

Taken together, the experiences, meanings and use(s) of communing within Jill, Matt and their colleagues' worlds of work seem to be shaped by three main features. First of all, that communing commonly is experienced both as a sense of belonging and as a practical logic of connecting for a purpose. Secondly, that communing both seems to enable and constrain the interactions and role-figurations of organizational members<sup>89</sup>. And thirdly, that communing experiences facilitate learning processes and emotional energies<sup>90</sup>. From these close-up glimpses of the actual experiences of and ascribed meanings of communing among Jill, Matt and their colleagues, I next turn to analyzing the modes and patterns of communing within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

## THE MODES OF COMMUNING FIGURATIONS

### *- A relational passage in comprehending contemporary modes of communing at work*

In this second stage of my analytical walk, I look at the various modes of communing that bind Jill, Matt and their colleagues to each other at work. Informed by the theoretical take on communing in Chapter 4, I explore the modes of communing by analyzing 1) the loci of relating (i.e. where organizational members connect), 2) the underlying structures of interdependencies (i.e. the processes and patterns of interdependencies between organizational members) and 3) the communing ingredients (i.e. their communing characteristics) that shape and give them their particular mode at work. Based on Jill, Matt and their colleagues' empirical stories (and my observational field notes) on communing, I seek in this way to explore their actual ways of connecting and participating in communing relationships through their daily work activities. Hence, during this stage the analytical focus is upon where and how organizational members interact, collaborate, compete, connect and co-create with their colleagues, managers, clients and other partners through their everyday work practices and thus become interdependent in various communing ways. The analysis will be informed and guided by the four heuristic takes on communing developed in Chapter 4.

At the next and third stage of my analytical walk I trace the ways in which the particular communing modes are combined and recombined into distinct organizational patterns of communing through the everyday interactions (transactions) of Jill, Matt and their colleagues. Here, the aim is to analyze the recurrent patterns of communing that emerge within the study's empirical landscape.

### *Three basic shaping characteristics*

To study the communing relationships of Jill, Matt and their colleagues in light of the dissertation's relational approach, these relationships of interdependencies are (just like situated work roles) not assumed to be fixed and pre-defined, but shaped and reshaped through the ongoing interactions of organizational members. Moreover, understanding and analyzing these ongoing processes of communing through the lens of my four heuristic alternative takes on communing further implies that communing is explored as:

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<sup>89</sup> See entry 1 for an elaboration on the constraining vs. enabling features.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion on learning and communing.

- 1) A nexus for collaboration and rivalry
- 2) Something that never unfolds in isolation but vis-à-vis other communing relationships
- 3) Relationships that are made of a vast variety of ingredients
- 4) Relational bonds that are both articulated and unarticulated

Applying this analytical perspective within Jill, Matt and their colleagues' empirical worlds of work and organizing overall, three broad empirical observations emerge. As I see it, these observations reflect three basic characteristics of the shaping of contemporary communing at work. First and foremost, it becomes clear that communing relationships empirically appear within many contexts/loci of the studied organizations and that they gain their meaning, use, shape and boundaries in relation to other organizational communing processes. Accordingly, they do not simply unfold inside the physical boundaries of the two local company sites of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. Quite often they cut across these local boundaries integrating sister affiliates, customers, suppliers and other partners into the figurations of communing among organizational members (I further elaborate on this observation in the next section) (cf. item/point 2). Secondly, although Jill, Matt and their colleagues' communing relationships seem to be highly collaborative, they sometimes also tend to be driven and shaped by rival forms of bonding (cf. item/point 1). And thirdly, Jill, Matt and their colleagues' widespread communing relationships within and across organizational divisions are based on and thus structured by various forms of relational interdependencies which are further being shaped by distinct communing characteristics/ingredients. The way they are shaped depends on the concrete context and work situation. While most of these communing relationships primarily seem to be articulated, organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. also seem to engage in unarticulated forms of communing as they for instance joke and chat with each other during work, participate in social gatherings with their colleagues or share the same taste for experimental work, collaborating with international partners or doing business together (cf. item/point 3 and 4)<sup>91</sup>. These three observations (shaping characteristics) give some overall and very general insights into the life of communing within contemporary organizations; they do not, however, address where and how communing relationships are actually shaped and reshaped through the everyday work activities of Jill, Matt and their colleagues. This analytical focus I address next.

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<sup>91</sup> To empirically explore the unarticulated forms of communing within my study has been a challenge. Firstly, experiences of sociability, of sharing the same taste, of feeling embraced by distinct sentiments or aesthetic experiences and so on take place at the non-discursive level and thus are difficult to articulate in an interview situation. Secondly, it may also be difficult to observe and actually get a feel of these forms of communing as a researcher. Although I have spent several weeks performing site visits, observing and interviewing organizational members about their worlds of work and organizing my role as researcher and outsider with limited access to and knowledge of the research field is inevitable. As a result, insights into the subtle and unarticulated forms of relating among Jill, Matt and their colleagues have been more difficult to trace empirically. Nevertheless the empirical material embodies several stories on how not only articulated but also unarticulated forms of communing unfold and play a central role among organizational members. However one lesson learned for (my) future research on the nature and workings of unarticulated forms of communing is that such explorations require extensive in-depth investigations based on participant observation as well as interviews.

## IDENTIFYING THE DISTINCT MODES OF JILL, MATT AND THEIR COLLEAGUES' COMMUNING FIGURATIONS

Three dimensions of communing have structured my analytical exploration of the various modes of Jill and Matt and their colleagues' communing relationships. The three key facets of communing are: The loci of relating, the most significant relational forms of interdependencies, and the most prominent communing ingredients.

As my point of departure, I have traced the communing relationships among the organizational members by asking where and how they actually interact and connect with their colleagues – creating an overall map of their communing relationships<sup>92</sup>. On the basis of this map, I have *first* compared and synthesized their various communing associations. Working through the empirical material I have categorized the communing relationships according to their loci (i.e. the organizational settings in which the practices of relating take place). Guided by the distinction between technical, economic, professional, political and affective forms of interdependencies developed in Chapter 4, I have *secondly* identified the relational forms of interdependencies constituting the communing relationships (i.e. the most significant/dominant forms of bonds that characterize the particular communing figuration). Subsequently, and *third*, I have identified the most prominent communing characteristics/ingredients that give content to the various communing relationships of Jill, Matt and their colleagues. It is by way of these three key analytical dimensions of communing that I on the following pages attempt to trace the various modes of communing figurations within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

### ***- Revisiting Jill and Matt's worlds of work roles and communing***

In order to achieve a nuanced look at the modes of communing at work, I return to Jill and Matt's pictograms and individual stories. I do so because their experiences of communing (and role(-ing)) in general resemble their colleagues' ways of connecting and participating in communing relationships at work. Thus, I again use their empirical stories and concrete experiences of communing and role(-ing) to illustrate some general characteristics of the modes of communing figurations that unfold within the work organizing practices of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. In table 6.1 I have identified Jill and Matt's modes of communing by interpreting their empirical stories in light of the three analytical dimensions of communing. In this way the tables give an overview of the various loci, relational forms, communing characteristics and distinct modes of Jill and Matt's communing relationships<sup>93</sup>. The identified modes are not in any way exhaustive. The tables simply provide a snapshot of the most typical communing relationships within Jill and Matt's respective work practices - derived from their stories of an ordinary workday.

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<sup>92</sup> Also in this section the ten interviews and pictograms focused on role(-ing) and communing play a central role. Yet the study's other empirical material (interviews, field notes and company specific documents) are also included in this and the subsequent parts of the analysis.

<sup>93</sup> While the modes of communing in Table 6.1 are listed in the first column, they should in fact be listed in the last, since they are the output of a three-step analysis. My reason for this table structure is merely to give the reader a more immediate feel of the nature of communing relationships within Jill and Matt's work lives. The names of the various modes of communing listed in the table are in vivo terms (in vivo phrases) picked from the stories of Jill and Matt. However in some cases, I have used my own words to synthesize their experiences of communing, such as "a professional we" or "a global we".

Table 6.1 presented on the next pages gives a detailed overview of the various modes of Jill and Matt's typical communing figurations. Subsequently, I treat some of the communing modes individually to illustrate the analytical findings that will be discussed later.

TABLE 6.1 JILL AND MATT'S COMMUNING FIGURATIONS				
MODES OF COMMUNING	JILL AND/OR MATT	LOCI (OF RELATING)	MOST SIGNIFICANT RELATIONAL FORMS OF INTERDEPENDENCIES	MOST PROMINENT COMMUNING CHARACTERISTICS/ INGREDIENTS COMMUNING BASED ON....
“a corporate we”	Jill	Health Ltd	Affective relations, economic relations The sense of “we”-ness is founded on an “us” (we the firm) against “them” (other firms and competitors) structured by intra- vs. inter- organizational interdependencies of rivalry and collaboration.	A common purpose, a sense of identity, a feeling of being part of something bigger, common values, a shared taste for a distinct corporate culture, unarticulated sentiments of similarity, membership and commitment.
	Matt	Tools Ltd		
“a professional we”	Jill	The production division	Professional relations The “we” of the production division as opposed to the administrative division/or the “we” of the sales division opposed to the company's other divisions. It is structured by intra- and inter-relational interdependencies of differentiation and similarities between divisions and professions.	Feelings of similarity, the experience of doing something together (a practical logic), a professional rational logic, a distinct identity as workers opposed to academics/or as sales persons opposed to production workers, constructors, accountants etc. “We are a distinct tribe...sales persons are of a special kind”
	Matt	The sales division		
“a place of belonging”	Jill	Basic unit	Technical and professional relations The “we” feeling within Jill's basic unit takes shape in opposition to the other basic teams creating inter-relational dynamics of rivalry over which unit performs best, generates better economic results or uses their professional skills and competences in innovative ways. Collaborating with “outsiders” across units also contributes to a distinct communing relationship within one's basic unit.	Bonds of proximity and trust, a feeling of familiarity, a sentiment of belonging to a distinct tribe, feelings of trust and mutual interdependencies
	Matt	The external sales department	Professional, economic, technical relations A feeling of membership among a unique team of players opposed to the other sales teams. Structured by interdependencies due to the internal work division of external sales and its external interdependencies (e.g. towards the rest of the organization, costumers or other external partners)	
“a sense of family and fellowship”	Jill	Co-managing team	Technical, professional, economic, political and affective relations The “we” is opposed to other teams and the wider organization constituting a home-base for Jill and her team mates. It is often described with words such as family and fellowship.	Close bonds, high level of trust, face to face interactions, purposeful connections, everyday doings and sayings, conflicts/power struggles, articulated forms of sociality e.g. everyday conversations, meetings, discussions about work, private matters etc, sociability, a sense of team spirit and a shared taste of how to work.
“a sense of partnership”	Matt	The management team of sales	Economic, political and professional relations A sense of “we” between equals striving for a common goal (economic surplus, improved sales figures and the development of a professional sales team) opposed to the employees of sales, foreign sales offices etc.	Purposeful connections, feelings of equality/being alike, bonds of power relations, shared values and ideals, discursive practices and communicative action.
“me, you, us and them”	Jill	Mini development team	Technical and professional relations The “we” cuts across units. It is structured by multiple bonds of interdependence enhancing the integration of interactions, collaboration and knowledge sharing across organizational units and teams.	Purposeful connections, temporary close bonds and discursive practices/articulated forms of sociality
“us and our partners”	Matt	Customers, suppliers	Economic, professional and technical relations Creating partnerships and alliances with customers and suppliers generates “we” feelings and bonds of interdependencies, which transgress the “local” boundaries of the organization, and extends its network of communing relationships.	

<b>“a collaborative we of search practices”</b>	Matt	Ad hoc collaborations and development projects	Professional, technical, economic relations This sense of “we” cuts across the more permanent units and teams creating various chains of interdependencies throughout the organization (e.g. with R&D, marketing, production, construction, export). Although they are often more short-term, these communing relationships overlap permanent units/teams and thus enhance organizational interdependencies making them more complex and wider in scope internally as well as externally (i.e. longer and more complex chains of interdependencies among organizational members)	
<b>“collectives of learning”</b>	Jill	Training and education	Professional relations Through work Jill becomes part of various communing relationships focused on training and education. While some unfold within her team, others cut across teams and units, others take place off-site and yet others are virtual in character	Articulated relationships, sometimes long term, sometimes fluctuating. Bonds of proximity but also occasionally virtual in character (e.g. e-learning/internet, virtual conference meetings)
	Matt	Training and education	Professional relations Through his work Matt becomes part of various communing relationships focused on experimentation, training and education. Some unfold within his sales division (e.g. training of younger staff), others cut across divisions and teams, others take place off-site (e.g. with customers, in collaboration with research institutions, formal education etc.) and yet others are virtual in character (e.g. knowledge sharing and problem solving with staff from foreign sales offices)	
<b>“getting enrolled in new worlds”/ “interfering in new worlds”</b>	Jill	Exploring a JOB2	Professional relations Working temporarily in another team or unit paves the way for new “we”-feelings which transgress traditional team boundaries and widens the bonds of collaboration and professional interdependencies between teams	Purposeful actions, temporary bonds, trust building and articulated connecting relationships.
	Matt	Within/ across established collaborative “communities”	Professional, technical, economic relations Due to his role as “interferer” Matt becomes tapped into various interdependent relationships structured by both collaboration and rivalry which enhance integration across organizational divisions	
	Matt	Sister affiliates, international sales units etc.	Professional, political, economic relations This sense of “we” is founded on bonds of interdependencies between Matt's local communing relationships and international colleagues and partners abroad facilitating collaborative communities across national boundaries	
<b>“the sharing of common interests”</b>	Jill	Workers association	Political relations This sense of “we” is opposed to the managerial level and thus structured by relations of rivalry and collaboration workers and managers	Purposeful connections, overt bonds of power relations, shared values and ideals, discursive practices and communicative action.
<b>“social connections”</b>	Jill	Social arrangements and activity clubs	Affective relations	Both articulated and unarticulated forms of relating, close bonds, sometimes fluctuating, sometimes long lasting, sociality, common aesthetic orientations (e.g. working out, going to the theater, taking cooking courses), sharing the same taste for movies, hanging out, going dancing etc
	Matt			
<b>“bonding closely”</b>	Jill	Friendships	Affective relations	Intimate relationships, face to face interactions, high trust
	Matt			

## SYNTHESIZING THE MODES OF JILL, MATT AND THEIR COLLEAGUES' COMMUNING FIGURATIONS

What common insights into the workings and modes of communing can be drawn from Jill and Matt's respective communing connections outlined in the previous table? Although the modes of their communing figurations are various and distinct, comparing them, I have synthesized their experiences of communing according to the three basic shaping characteristics outlined earlier: *the loci of relating; the forms of interdependencies and the various ingredients* that shape their communing relationships in distinct ways. The analysis hereby seeks to explore the communing experiences among Jill, Matt and their colleagues that give the three basic characteristics real substance.

### LOCAL AND DISTRIBUTED COMMUNING FIGURATIONS

Firstly, as shown in the table, communing at the micro level - among Jill, Matt and their colleagues – takes place at many different organizational levels ranging from the firm level to intimate relationships between only a few organizational members. Accordingly, for instance, the table illustrates that whereas “a corporate we” is a mode of communing typically connected to the *firm level*, “a professional we” or “a place of belonging” are more linked to the level of Jill and Matt's *basic units*. And while “a sense of family or partnership” is typically related to their *basic teams*, the modes of communing such as “a collaborative we of search practices”, “getting enrolled in new worlds” or “me, you, us and them” take place at the level of *ad hoc teams* sometimes even including “external” partners such as suppliers and costumers. And yet other modes of communing such as “social connections” and “bonding closely” are rooted within the organizational level of *small informal groups*. Informed by these empirical observations, communing never unfolds in isolation but takes place within and across various organizational settings (e.g. sites, basic units, basic teams, professions, informal groups etc.). Moreover, the table demonstrates that communing relationships often transgress the local boundaries of the organization by integrating external partners, suppliers, and sister affiliates into the communing figurations among organizational members. Within this view, contemporary, highly collaborative, reshaping and laterally accountable work organizing practices (e.g. within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.), seem to be underpinned and facilitated by various criss-crossing collaborative relationships and complex communing orders at the micro-level.

The subsequent question becomes: how are work organizing practices with hardly any centralized hierarchical coordination actually facilitated by these local and distributed communing figurations? Participating in both local and distributed communing figurations, Jill, Matt and their colleagues seem to become able to collaborate with a wide range of other organizational members. Moreover, they seem to become more able to manage themselves and take responsibility for their own (and their colleagues') actions through these collaborative processes of involvement. Thus, through being members of various communing relationships, organizational members seem to create a system of mutual commitment and distributed accountability which helps monitor their work organizing practices in highly flexible and distributed ways on the basis of mutual involvement and reciprocal adjustment. In addition, engaging in a wide range of communing relationships that cuts across organizational divisions seem to trigger Jill, Matt and their colleagues to constantly reflect upon, readjust and develop their work roles according to the various communing relationships they become part of through their everyday work activities. In this way, communing encounters at work seem to enable processes of ongoing role definitions and redefinitions.



Overall, informed by the empirical worlds of Jill, Matt and their colleagues, local and distributed communing figurations seem to facilitate their work organizing practices in three central ways. First they enable organizational members to collaborate. Second they enable them to take and share responsibility on the basis of mutual involvement. And third they enable them to constantly reflect upon, redefine and further develop their situated work roles according to the various communing worlds they engage in through their work. Empirical observations of these both local and distributed communing figurations are illustrated in table 6.2 below (the examples are extracted from table 6.1):

TABLE 6.2 EXAMPLES OF LOCAL AND DISTRIBUTED COMMUNING FIGURATIONS			
SHAPES OF COMMUNING	LOCI (OF RELATING)	MOST SIGNIFICANT RELATIONAL FORMS OF INTERDEPENDENCIES	MOST PROMINENT COMMUNING CHARACTERISTICS/ INGREDIENTS COMMUNING BASED ON....
<b>“a place of belonging”</b>  Jill	Basic unit	<b>Technical and professional relations</b> The “we” feeling within Jill’s basic unit takes shape as it is opposed to the other basic teams creating inter-relational dynamics of rivalry over which unit performs best, generates better economic results or uses their professional skills and competencies in innovative ways. Collaborating with “outsiders” across units also contributes to a distinct communing relationship within one’s basic unit.	Bonds of proximity and trust, a feeling of familiarity, a sentiment of belonging to a distinct tribe, feelings of trust and mutual interdependencies
<b>“us and our partners”</b>  Matt	Customers, suppliers	<b>Economic, professional and technical relations</b> Creating partnerships and alliances with customers and suppliers generates “we” feelings and bonds of interdependence, that transgress the “local” boundaries of the organization and extend its network of communing relationships.	Purposeful connections, temporary close bonds and discursive practices/articulated forms of sociality
<b>“me, you, us and them”</b>  Jill	Mini development team	<b>Technical and professional relations</b> The “we” cuts across units. It is structured by multiple bonds of interdependence, enhancing the integration of interactions, collaboration and knowledge sharing across organizational units and teams.	Purposeful connections, temporary close bonds and discursive practices/articulated forms of sociality
<b>“a “global” we”</b>  Matt	Sister affiliates, international sales units etc.	<b>Professional, political, economic relations</b> This sense of “we” is founded on bonds of interdependence between Matt’s local communing relationships and international colleagues and partners. It facilitates collaborative communities across national boundaries	Purposeful actions, temporary bonds, trust building and articulated connecting relationships.

### COMMUNING FIGURATIONS OF DIVERSE FORMS OF INTERDEPENDENCIES

Secondly, Table 6.1 provides insights into the diverse forms of interdependencies that characterize Jill and Matt’s modes of communing. It shows that communing relationships at work are conditioned and shaped by different forms of interdependencies, i.e. some bonds are more dominant than others. It also indicates that both collaboration and rivalry characterize all these forms of interdependence. Accordingly, whereas some communing connections among Jill, Matt and their colleagues primarily result from affective bonds such as feelings of fellowship, closeness and mutual commitment with a *Gemeinschaft*-like character, others are based on professional forms

of interdependencies due to occupational specialization or the need for knowledge sharing. Moreover, technical and/or political forms of interdependencies dominate some. Yet others are Gesellschaft-like in their character, being mainly rooted within chains of interdependence initiated by economic factors.

The table also indicates that Jill, Matt and their colleagues become able to take part in, juggle and prosper from these various relational forms of interdependence through their everyday work activities. Tying this observation to my overall analytical triangle, the ability to shape and reshape work roles as well as work organizing practices therefore seems to rely on the ability of organizational members to co-create communing relationships based on diverse forms of interdependence. More precisely, their ability to perform various work roles and engage in continuously redefining work organizing practices seems to be nurtured and cultivated by their ability to engage in, shift between and (re)combine various forms of interdependence, thereby co-creating chains of communing figurations. From this perspective, the co-creation of such chains of multiple communing figurations at work seems to enable organizational members to develop role-sets of diverse qualifications and competencies which are much more varied (i.e. encompassing both generalist and specialist roles) than the rather fixed, narrow and often highly specialized work roles of traditional bureaucratic work organizing practices. Empirical traces of these communing figurations based on different forms of interdependence are illustrated in Table 6.3 below (the examples are extracted from table 6.1):

TABLE 6.3 EXAMPLES OF COMMUNING FIGURATIONS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF INTERDEPENDENCE			
SHAPES OF COMMUNING	LOCI (OF RELATING)	MOST SIGNIFICANT RELATIONAL FORMS OF INTERDEPENDENCIES	MOST PROMINENT COMMUNING CHARACTERISTICS/ INGREDIENTS COMMUNING BASED ON....
<b>“a corporate we”</b>  Jill	Health Ltd	<b>Affective relations, economic relations</b> The sense of “we”-ness is founded on an “us” (we the firm) against “them” (other firms and competitors) structured by intra- vs. inter-organizational interdependencies of rivalry and collaboration	A common purpose, a sense of identity, a feeling of being part of something bigger, common values, a shared taste for a distinct corporate culture, unarticulated sentiments of similarity, membership and commitment
<b>“collectives of learning”</b>  Jill	Training and education	<b>Professional relations</b> Through work Jill becomes part of various communing relationships focused on training and education. While some unfold within her team, others cut across teams and units, others take place off-site and yet others are virtual in character	Articulated forms of relationships, sometimes long term sometimes fluctuating. Bonds of proximity but also virtual in character (e.g. e-learning)
<b>“a sense of partnership”</b>  Matt	The management team of sales	<b>Economic, political and professional relations</b> A sense of “we” between equals striving for a common goal (economic surplus, improved sales figures and the development of a professional sales team) opposed to the employees of sales, foreign sales offices etc.	Purposeful connections, feelings of equality/being alike, bonds of power relations, shared values and ideals, discursive practices and communicative action.
<b>“bonding closely”</b>	Fellowship	<b>Affective relations</b>	Intimate relationships, face to face interactions, joking, the feeling of inclusion, high trust

Matt			
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### COMMUNING FIGURATIONS MADE OF VARIOUS INGREDIENTS

Thirdly Table 6.1 illustrates that the communing relationships of Matt and Jill are made up of various ingredients. Additionally, some are being shaped by bonds of proximity and intimate bonds, some by more temporary and fluctuating bonds, some by virtual ties, others by a common set of values, a common purpose, discursive practices or more unarticulated forms of relating based on aesthetic experiences, encounters of sociability or the sharing of a particular taste of how to interact, become and play one's roles at work. According to this observation, not only do the various shapes of communing figurations serve as raw materials for the organizational members' role performance (cf. Entry 1), they also shape the work organizing practices in distinct ways, e.g. enabling a team structure of both long- and short-term team communities, facilitating collaborative work communities of high trust and face-to-face interactions or paving the way for practices of working and organizing through virtual collaborative communities.

This analytical perspective indicates that, as communing figurations are increasingly based on various ingredients at work, the work organizing practices that frame them will become increasingly more complex, interdependent and collaborative (and rivalrous/rivalrous). In addition, the many diverse communing bonds among the organizational members of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. seem on the one hand to enable them to believe and feel trust in what they do through ongoing affirmations of their various communing bonds; their communing relationships, on the other, also appear to make them able to question and cast doubt on their existing work routines and practices through ongoing experiences of disruption/denial of their many communing bonds (Scheff 1997). From this point of view, the more and various communing bonds (of diverse ingredients) at work, the more organizational members seem to become able to both believe and doubt. Empirical observations of the various ingredients of communing among Jill, Matt and their colleagues are illustrated table 6.4 below (the examples are extracted from table 6.1).

TABLE 6.4 EXAMPLES OF COMMUNING FIGURATIONS MADE OF VARIOUS INGREDIENTS			
SHAPES OF COMMUNING	LOCI (OF RELATING)	MOST SIGNIFICANT RELATIONAL FORMS OF INTERDEPENDENCIES	MOST PROMINENT COMMUNING CHARACTERISTICS/ INGREDIENTS COMMUNING BASED ON....
<b>"a professional we"</b>  Matt	The sales division	<b>Professional relations</b> The "we" of the sales division is opposed to the company's other divisions. It is structured by intra- and inter-relational interdependencies of differentiation and similarities between divisions and professions.	Feelings of similarity, the experience of doing something together (a practical logic), a professional rational logic, a distinct identity as sales persons opposed to production workers, constructors, accountants etc. "We are a distinct tribe...sales persons are of a special kind"
<b>"a sense of family and fellowship"</b>  Jill	Co-managing team	<b>Technical, professional, economic, political and affective relations</b> The "we" is opposed to other teams and the wider organization constituting a home-base for Jill and her team mates. Often it is described with words as family and fellowship.	Close bonds, high level of trust, face to face interactions, purposeful connections, everyday doings and sayings, conflicts/power struggles, articulated forms of sociality e.g. everyday conversations, meetings, discussions about work, private matters etc, sociability and a sense of team spirit and a shared taste of how to work.

In sum the three empirical insights into the workings and modes of communing among Jill, Matt and their colleagues indicate that the communing figurations of organizational members 1) are local as well as distributed, 2) are based on diverse forms of interdependencies structured by both collaboration and rivalry, and 3) are made up of various ingredients such as purposeful connections, sentiments, trust, close bonds, shared values, temporary forms of relating and so on. These analytical findings largely confirm the dissertation's four alternative theoretical takes on communing. Additionally, they add detail to the three shaping characteristics of contemporary communing at work identified earlier in entry 2. Overall, the analysis indicates that communing relationships between organizational members of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. facilitate the co-creation of highly collaborative, redefining and accountable situated work roles as well as work organizing practices. Firstly, the analysis shows that local and distributed communing figurations seem to enable organizational members *to collaborate*, to take and *share responsibility* on the basis of mutual involvement and to constantly reflect upon, *redefine* and further develop their situated work roles according to the communing relationships they are part of. Secondly, the analysis indicates that communing figurations of diverse forms of interdependence seem to enable the shaping and reshaping of *multiple situated work roles*. Engaging in different forms of interdependence (economic, political, technical, professional and social) enables organizational members to develop role-sets of diverse qualifications and competencies which are far more multiple (often combining generalist and specialist roles) than the rather prescribed, narrow and highly specialized work roles typically associated with traditional bureaucratic work divisions. And thirdly, the analysis indicates that communing figurations made up of various ingredients pave the way for *complex, interdependent and collaborative (and rivalrous/competitive)*<sup>94</sup> *work organizing practices*. In addition, ongoing experiences of either affirmation or disruption of communing bonds at work seem to enable organizational members to believe in existing work practices (routines, rules etc) as well as to continuously cast doubt on them. Both modes of being (*to believe and to doubt*) are necessary conditions for their ability to develop, improve and innovate through everyday work practices.

The next and last analytical stage identifies some general patterns of communing derived by mapping the modes of Jill and Matt's (and their colleagues') communing figurations.

## ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS OF COMMUNING

Analyzing the loci of relating, the forms of interdependencies and the particular ingredients of communing indicate that, not only are the modes of both Jill and Matt and their colleagues' communing figurations numerous, they are also quite similar (cf. Table 6.1). Comparing these communing modes shows that, although Jill and Matt's communing processes of relating differ in some cases (just as their situated work roles do), they also often take on similar shapes (and underlying structures). Thus, despite Jill and Matt's differences in job position and work activities, the modes of communing that characterize their worlds of work are in fact quite parallel. In this section I look more closely at how Jill, Matt and their colleagues' similar modes and ways of communing create distinct organizational patterns of communing. By organizational patterns of communing, I refer to how communing figurations of organizational members are combined and coordinated. Introducing this concept, I am interested in analyzing the combination and coordination of organizational members' communing figurations and the ways in which they form

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<sup>94</sup> I use rivalrous and competitive as synonyms.

recurrent patterns of communing at work. While I touch upon this issue here, entry 3 about work organizing practices continues the analysis on the organizational patterns of communing with Health Ltd. and Tool Ltd.

An examination of the similarities between Jill, Matt and their colleagues' communing figurations yields two basic patterns. The first is that Jill, Matt and their colleagues' respective communing figurations typically are a) multiple b) overlap and c) emerge at all organizational levels. For example, Jill and Matt's communing relationships are not restricted to a single isolated group of organizational members (such as colleagues in their basic department or team). Instead, their communing connections are multiple and involve a wide range of organizational members. Another example is how Jill's experiences of "a corporate we", her "sense of family and fellowship" within her co-managing team or her feeling of membership in "collectives of learning" are not exclusive. The same is true for Matt. On the contrary, their communing figurations are most often overlapping and mutually reinforcing. Yet another example is how Jill and Matt's communing relationships unfold at all organizational levels, encompassing close bonds of friendship as well as an abstract sense of "a corporate we" directed towards the firm. This pattern of communing seems to be a general characteristic of organizational members' communing relationships within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

The second characteristic pattern of communing is that Jill, Matt and their colleagues seem to draw on both permanent and temporary communing relationships at work. For example, their experiences of "a corporate we", "a professional we", "a place of belonging", "a sense of family and fellowship" are all built on quite long-term relational bonds. Characteristically, these modes of long-term communing are continuously combined with criss-crossing and much more fluctuating communing practices. Examples of the latter more short-term communing practices are the sense of "me, you, us and them" which Jill experiences within her mini development team, or Matt's experiences of being temporarily part of collective "search practices" or "collectives of learning" that generate feelings of "we"-ness that cut across permanent organizational divisions<sup>95</sup>. Such patterns of mixing permanent communing relationships with temporary forms of communing that transgress the boundaries of more permanent ties appear to be a recurrent characteristic within the organizational landscape of Jill, Matt and their colleagues. An example is how Matt's experiences of being part of collaborative search practices at work creates communing relationships that overlap and cut across his others communing figurations, which include several organizational levels and which also combine permanent and temporary communing relationships.

According to Jill, Matt and their colleagues' personal stories, the two basic patterns of communing influence their work roles and work organizing practices in dynamic ways. First of all, being a member of multiple and often overlapping communing relationships facilitates their ability to collaborate across various organizational boundaries and contexts. Secondly, the communing patterns also imply that their work roles are never prescribed but constantly negotiated (i.e. they are constantly confirmed or cast into doubt) through communing relationships. One central outcome of this ongoing role negotiation permeating organizational members' communing encounters is that

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<sup>95</sup> Another characteristic pattern is that Jill, Matt and their colleagues often experience feelings of friendship and fellowship through their work. Typically, these shapes of communing are based on close bonds as they are directed towards a few or very small group of colleagues.

contemporary work roles seem to be co-created on the basis of a continuous tension of belief and doubt. Thirdly, the workings of Jill, Matt and their colleagues *multiple, overlapping, omnipresent, long and short term communing relationships* also seem to enable (and call for) the distribution of authority and intelligence throughout organizational levels. In sum, the basic patterns of communing in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. seem to enable the co-creation of highly collaborative, redefining and accountable work roles and work organizing practices.

Zooming out from the organizational members' individual experiences of communing, I move up one level of abstraction. The next section addresses more broadly how recurrent organizational patterns of collaborative and rivalrous communing are coordinated and organized.

### **COLLABORATIVE (AND RIVALROUS) COMMUNING PRACTICES**

In the following I elaborate on the two basic patterns of communing outlined above. Overall, I ask how Jill, Matt and their colleagues' overlapping and ubiquitous permanent/temporary communing figurations are in fact coordinated and organized. I am, in other words, concerned with the issue of how the intra-and inter-relational dynamics of communing are coordinated within and across organizational communing settings (i.e. within and across Jill, Matt and their colleagues' diverse loci of relating at work). This analytical focus raises a new set of questions. For example, how do Jill, Matt and their colleagues maneuver and balance between memberships of multiple collaborative communing practices? How do they manage to be part of many communing worlds and simultaneously feel integrated? How do they avoid provincialism within these worlds and how do they prevent fragmentation? At the same time, how do they avoid too much integration, which might hamper the development of unique work roles and highly specialized local understandings?

Empirically investigating these questions within the organizational landscape of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., I have overall observed that Jill, Matt and their colleagues' processes of role(-ing) and communing seem to be more dynamic when they are engaged in several collaborative and rivalrous communing practices at the same time. In other words, the more organizational members not only engage in local intra-communing activities but also in inter-communing activities (e.g. across their local basic teams), the more they seem to take active part in their work, to develop various work roles and become integrated. However, engaging in these communing practices, organizational members also easily tend to develop different perspectives on work and the organization. In this process, they develop local understandings as a result of differences in knowledge and experience. The tendency to develop such local understandings, which easily result in provincialism and organizational fragmentation, is forever present within Jill, Matt and their colleagues' communing worlds. One central dilemma or challenge in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. is accordingly how to make room for the development of local insights and expertise and at the same time facilitate the coordination of these different local insights (and related resources) across the various communing practices that shape their work organizations. What patterns of communing might overcome this dilemma?

A situation where workers are engaged in multiple (often overlapping) communing relationships and combine permanent with more temporary forms of communing seems to generate modes of communing that deal with this dilemma in promising ways. Through their daily work activities, on

the one hand, Jill, Matt and their colleagues become part of distinct, quite permanent collaborative (and rivalrous) communing practices within which they construct meaning and knowledge about work, build up specialized situated work roles and develop a local outlook on the world (e.g. towards the wider organizational context). Jill, Matt and their colleagues' respective basic unit or basic team is an example of such communing practices. On the other hand, through their daily work activities, they also become part of various and often shorter-term, criss-crossing communing relationships. Jill's mini development team or Matt's collaborative search practices and partnerships with other organizational members or clients are examples of such criss-crossing and temporary communing practices.

Combining these two patterns of communing (permanent/local and temporary criss-crossing) seems to be central in order to avoid fragmentation between the various communing practices throughout the organizations and at the same time to facilitate the development of local and specialized knowledge. The co-creation of more fluctuating ad hoc communing relationships based on cross-collaboration and practices of sharing knowledge across the boundaries of e.g. basic units and teams seems to prevent the communing figurations of Jill, Matt and their colleagues from developing into separated islands of cohesion. Listening to respondents speak about work, the creation of such overlapping collaborative communing practices seems to be particularly central in the diffusion of their different perspectives and work practices. This effect also sometimes leads to the transformation of communing practices into greater or new innovative understandings of organizational products, services and work practices. In this way, the criss-crossing interaction and ad hoc communing practices across Jill, Matt and their colleagues' more permanent communing relationships seem both to enhance their knowledge of the internal organization of diversity (e.g. the existence of different practices, organizational principles, co-existing orders of worth) and their knowledge of the organization as a whole (e.g. a shared understanding of their organization's overall purpose and strategies or a common orientation towards the wider organizational context).

From this empirical perspective, the combination of long and short-term criss-crossing communing practices seems to offer a promising way of facilitating organizational differentiation as well as integration. Furthermore, organizational members' multiple (often overlapping, omnipresent, both short- and long-term) communing memberships seem to constitute a vital source for developing and performing differentiated work roles, for generating and distributing knowledge sharing and for creating social integration, not only within but also across communing settings. In Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. the outcome (of these two basic patterns of communing) seems to be the shaping of dynamic work organizations based on strong internal and external communing relationships (of collaboration and rivalry) where diverse, highly collaborative, redefining and accountable work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt are distinctive features. In entry 3 I look more closely at how these work organizing practices, based on various internally and externally collaborative (and rivalrous) communing figurations, are actually organized within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

## MAIN ANALYTICAL FINDINGS

This analytical walk has shown that the sense (i.e. the experiences, ascribed meanings and use(s)) of communing among Jill, Matt and their colleagues is shaped by three features. First of all, that

communing commonly is experienced both as a sense of belonging and as a practical logic of connecting for a purpose. Secondly, that communing both seems to enable and constrain the interactions and role-figurations of organizational members. And thirdly, that communing experiences facilitate learning processes and emotional energies. The walk has also illustrated that the modes of communing among organizational members are numerous, that they take place at many organizational levels and that they typically yield two basic patterns of communing, namely that contemporary communing figurations at work are 1) multiple/overlapping/omnipresent and 2) both permanent and temporary.

At the end of this analytical walk one central question remains: how do organizational members become able to act and co-create in such connectionist worlds of work and organizing? Although the question is ambiguous and thus encompasses several answers, the analysis suggests the following: organizational members significantly seem to become able to interact and co-create (e.g. ideas, “things” and their use) within and across their collaborative work orders by engaging in and continuously developing various modes of communing figurations at work. Through their communing relationships at work they learn to collaborate and compete (engage in rivalry) with a wide range of colleagues, they learn to continuously reflect upon and redefine their work roles and they learn to take and share responsibility on the basis of mutual involvement. These are the central analytical findings of entry 2. They signify that contemporary communing at work within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. appears to be a vital asset for both human and organizational growth, not least because it enables dynamic work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.



## CHAPTER 7

### ENTRY 3 – ON THE CO-CREATION OF WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES

So far I have examined the nature of work roles and communing relationships that seem to enable Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd's work organizing practices. I now place these work organizing practices in the foreground of my analysis. On my walk through this analytical entry I look at how they are *integrated, organized and managed*. Overall, I am interested in exploring how organizational members co-create work organizing practices of belief and doubt that may embrace and continuously cultivate various situated work roles and communing figurations towards continuous human and organizational growth.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd have shifted away from rigid organizational divisionalism and routine coordination towards innovative, continuously developing work organizing practices characterized by an ability to constantly redefine human and non-human organizational resources, to collaborate across organizational divisions and to distribute authority and intelligence at all organizational levels. Within such organizational landscapes, namely the diversity of local insights and work practices, the development of situated specialized work roles and heterogeneous complex communing collaborations etc. are seen as central sources driving organizational innovations and change. I wish to study how these local work practices, innovations and changes "from below" are in fact integrated, organized and managed through the everyday work organizing practices of Jill, Matt and their colleagues. I further wish to explore whether and how their work organizing practices enable them to engage in belief and doubt and thus to continuously develop their work roles, communing relationships and other organizational resources towards further innovative co-creations.

Accordingly, entry 3 has one main objective: to investigate how the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt among Jill, Matt and their colleagues takes shape by analyzing:

1. The integration of their diverse work organizing practices
2. The organization of their diverse work organizing practices
3. The management of their diverse work organizing practices

By focusing on these three dimensions, I hope to contribute to the foundation of a micro grounded and relationally based understanding of the co-creative dynamics of contemporary work organizing practices and the situated work roles and communing relationship they enable. In trying to achieve this objective, I will proceed as follows. First, I demonstrate how organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. integrate and continuously innovate their various work organizing practices in dynamic ways through the institutionalization of different team-based work forms. Second, I demonstrate how collaborative and rivalrous communing practices operate as vibrant organizing principles within and between basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams in both companies, which triggers organizational reflexivity and learning. Third, addressing the issue of managing work organizing practices towards continuous belief and doubt, I illustrate that three managerial principles in particular govern and underpin the co-creation of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally

accountable work organizing practices within Jill, Matt and their colleagues' worlds of work. On this analytical walk I also ask which characteristic communing relationships and situated work roles are shaped through the integration, organization and management of Jill, Matt's and their colleagues' diverse work organizing practices.

### ***Ways of producing empirical knowledge of everyday work organizing practices...***

Exploring the co-creation of work organizing practices, I have drawn equally on three empirical sources: talk, observation and documents. Tracing the everyday work organizing practices of Jill, Matt and their colleagues, I have typically asked: what do Jill, Matt and their colleagues do in order to accomplish their work? How do they coordinate and organize their work activities (vertically and horizontally)? What work routines, rules, roles and other common practices have they built up? How are their work activities organized and in what ways are they reproduced and changed? In my search for empirical knowledge about Jill, Matt and their colleagues' work organizing practices, I have also observed their actual work activities, how they collaborate and communicate together, relate to one another and in general connect in order to get their work done. In some cases, I "followed" workers through an entire day; others I spent only a few hours with, chatting and asking them questions while they were working. And further, I met (and learned from) others at meetings, during coffee breaks, over lunch and so on. I have also made use of company specific documents, brochures, satisfaction surveys and other internal evaluations, reports and company websites.

## **THE INTEGRATION OF DIVERSE WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES**

In Chapter 2, based on a comparative exploration of all seven case companies underlying this study, I identified three fundamental features characterizing their work organizing practices: the ability to redefine and recombine human and non-human organizational resources, the ability to collaborate across organizational divisions and the ability to distribute authority and intelligence throughout the organization. Addressing and describing these work organizing practices as a whole - i.e. as one homogeneous practice of work and organizing - is nevertheless empirically misleading, since each of the seven organizations evidently consist of a heterogeneity of diverse work organizing practices. While the three features pinpoint some general trends of contemporary organizational forms (and thus serve as informative analytical constructs), they easily draw attention away from the heterogeneity of diverse work organizing practices which also characterize today's organizational life. Accordingly, Brown and Duguid stress how, for instance, the identity and knowledge that people acquire when joining an organization, which might appear to be those of an organization as a whole, are more likely to be those of the particular practice through which the individual joins the organization (Brown and Duguid 2001: 201).

Consequently, they argue that, if regarded as a community, any but the smallest organization should be regarded as a "community of communities of practice" (Brown and Duguid 2001: 203). In the same vein I argue that organizations – e.g. Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. - respectively should be regarded as a "work organizing practice of diverse work organizing practices"<sup>96</sup>. The question I wish to explore in this passage of my analytical walk is how the diverse work organizing practices within

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<sup>96</sup> That said, due to their many similarities, analytically I continue to treat Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. as one empirical (merged) field in which I explore the common features of the diverse work organizing practices that unfold within the organizational landscape of the two case-companies.

Health and Tools Ltd. are facilitated and integrated at the same time. Is it at all possible to integrate diverse work organizing practices without limiting the organization of diversity?

As illustrated through the two previous analytical entry points, Jill, Matt and their colleagues' multiple work roles and communing relationships are often based on fundamentally different local work practices presiding over, for example, a particular division of labor, different forms of interdependence, a context specific common purpose, a distinct local understanding of the organization, specialized work routines and situated habitual knowledge. Yet at the same time Jill, Matt and their colleagues' work organizing practices also seem to be based on and integrated by a common orientation towards and feel for the organization's overall processes and strategies. The puzzle here is how organizational members through their work organizing practices in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. become able to embrace and cultivate this diversity of various and constantly reshaping work roles, communing relationships and local work organizing practices *and* simultaneously become able to coordinate and integrate them across organizational divisions.

In the last part of entry 2, I discussed how communing patterns based on combinations of multiple, often overlapping, ubiquitous, short- and long-term communing memberships seem to facilitate organizational differentiation as well as integration. In this part I look more closely into how the development and continuous reshaping of team-based work organizing practices within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. seem to enhance integration across diverse organizational work practices. Based on interview "extracts" and field note materials, I illustrate two empirical stories below of how organizational members seek to continuously integrate and innovate their diverse work organizing practices.

### ***Collaborative work organizing practices in the making***

The first empirical story is about the making and integration of collaborative, knowledge sharing and flexible work organizing practices across John and his colleagues' basic teams in one of the production units of Tools Ltd. The story is told by John, who has worked at the company for 14 years. Within the production unit he is one of three team leaders, each responsible for 2-3 basic teams. He says:

*"In the department/basic unit in which I am working there are about 45 technicians and three managers distributed in three basic teams. The three teams are working with the same machines, but the jobs differ. One basic team is responsible for re-grinding, another one for purely new production, and the third one performs both jobs, but all teams collaborate across basic team boundaries. We produce tools for various industries, and we are also sub-suppliers to some of our other basic units that are finishing the tools... Earlier, the boundary between work functions was much more rigid... that is no longer so, but a new boundary may easily emerge pertaining to what you are not working with... When I became team manager for new production I contemplated how to demolish that boundary..... (John: 3).*

*When we got the extension to the workplace I could line up the machines in one, long straight row. I thought that breaking down the physical boundaries might help a little, at least in terms of the workers getting closer to one another and beginning to spar, because the atmosphere was – roughly speaking: I don't talk to the guy over there as he lives in his own world, and aside from that he is a fool, because he once said something to me. It will always be like that. That is the human aspect of this. So I lined up the*

*machines in one long row – it looks good – it also has something to do with flow; also when we showed customers around here – you have straight aisles and a comprehensive view of it all, and you can see that it is part of our way of performing. Well, then I realized that it did not suffice to line up the machines next to one another – I kind of knew it all along, and at some point I began thinking along different lines. I didn't want to be the guy who just turned up scolding..... to get technicians to interact..., so I had to spar with them, saying: what are our possibilities here?.....(John: 3).*

*But giving them small clues is far from making things effective.... So what I did physically at that time was - there were twelve technicians – I did in several different teams what I am telling you about here. This is example 1 which I subsequently applied to the other teams..... The team consisted of seven production technicians and seven re-grinding technicians. They could not use each other as sparring partners. They were not on speaking terms. They did not know one another. Aside from that they perceived each other as fools. I gathered the team and said: This does not work. We have to be able to move capacity to where we have peak loads. It is of no help that I have so much new production – they are doing overtime - but the re-grinding guys can't assist, and aside from that they are clocking off at normal hours. That is not motivating and doing it that way adds to reinforcing the boundaries. I picked out a technician from each team – one from the production team and one from the re-grinding team – and said: For the next two months you swap functions, and you swap places, you swap machines, you swap everything – almost to the point where you swap your personal belongings stored in cupboards..... Then they swapped functions.*

*There were two things in this for me: first of all they had to learn a new job function, but the primary aspect for me was that they got to know one another. They had to use each other as sparring partners. They realized that they could use some of the knowledge and know-how that the competent re-grinding technician brought with him to production, they could use that in relation to certain aspects of their jobs – such as grinding a radius – the re-grinding technicians were better at this. They did it several times. And the same in new production where it was something with carvings – how to improve that? Suddenly they began using each other as sparring partners. And that was exactly the purpose of my entire endeavor – that they got to know one another. And then of course product development and know-how related to what is going on in the other team. But it is a long process. But we completed it. After two months, two new ones, then two new ones, etc. Then it worked. But I provoked them a bit saying: ..... one man must always be attending a training program – even one of the two swapping jobs – in order to keep up the qualities of getting to know one another, and then of producing. And it runs quite well, so we continued..... (John: 3).*

*I got some fantastic responses, because those who had earlier been fools – they were nice guys, and they were quite competent. When they needed a piece of good advice about something, they just went to ask the guy in new production, because now they knew him, and even by his first name. And they had also talked with him in private, and they may have joined him on a bicycle ride or in some other activity. Doing it this way resulted in an incredible spirit of team solidarity..... (John: 4). But it was still obvious that when one of the teams was busy, the other team did not find it natural to say, well let's go help them. I always had to be the mediator.....(John: 4).*

*But somebody gradually got the idea of this and began to mediate contacts across teams/basic teams: we are almost finished, would you like us to give you a hand? But there is still some mud-slinging as they*

*don't feel that everybody in the two teams participates on an equal footing. Some are holding back; there are those who prefer to clear their own shelves before offering to help those who are perhaps behind schedule. At some point I came to a conclusion and told them: you will be turned into one team. Now both production and re-grinding are referred to as one team. I don't care how you divide the work among yourselves, whether the re-grinders will continue re-grinding and those in production continue with their jobs. In effect they placed the shelves next to one another, meaning that the shelves with production and with re-grinding are placed next to one another, pieces with today's date are placed next to one another so that you can see – there is no more new production, now we have to turn to re-grinding, rather than beginning to take new production from the shelves below (John: 5).*

*But the interplay among these teams - to finish the story. The teams have got to know one another. They have learned each other's finer technical points and know-how. So now I can better manage peak loads. If one team is busy I can simply take three technicians from another team to help out. And the other way round" (John: 5).*

In my (interpretative) eyes, John's story illustrates an active and sustained engagement in the co-creation and coordination of collaborative work organizing practices based on mutual involvement and learning. Additionally, it demonstrates how the diverse work organizing practices within his basic production unit become integrated through the development of interdependent collaborations and mutual involvement within and across (formerly) separate work teams. His managerial experiences as team leader shows that the road towards facilitating dynamic integration across different local team work practices is long and often bumpy, but definitely enriching and productive. According to him, a coaching management style, continuous collaborations across organizational boundaries (physical, professional, authoritative etc) and the distribution of accountability and intelligence among team members has enabled a dynamic and flexible work environment of highly collaborative, mutually accountable and knowledge sharing teams in which diverse local team work practices are combined and recombined. Within this organizational landscape of diverse but integrated work organizing practices, different organizational world views, principles, competencies, work functions, logics and routines seem to co-exist in an active relationship of both collaboration and rivalry. Consequently, in Tools Ltd. (and also in Health Ltd.) the integration of diverse work organizing practices does not seem to eliminate the diversity between them. On the contrary, the integration paradoxically seems to organize this diversity in productive ways.

One reason for this is that organizational members of diverse team organizing practices (e.g. inside and across the basic teams of John's production unit) through their highly criss-crossing collaborative work activities become very much aware of their mutual interdependencies and roles as sub-contractors with other basic teams. Because of their interdependent relationships they are/become deeply dependent on each other's diverse (often very local and specialized) competencies, co-evolutions and continuous improvements. Hence John, Jill, Matt and the other organizational members' work practices most often seem to facilitate the organization of diversity instead of impeding it<sup>97</sup>. This organization of diversity - fostered by the integration and co-existence of various interdependent collaborative work organizing practices - seems to promote organizational knowledge sharing, reflexivity (belief and doubt) and adaptability in both case organizations. In light

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<sup>97</sup> I here also list Jill, Matt and their colleagues because their stories to a great extent echo John's.

of John's story, working towards the integration of (and constant "clash" between) diverse collaborative work organizing practices based on different local understandings, competencies and the we-feelings inspired by memberships, seems to enable the co-creation of "a work organizing practice of diverse collaborative work organizing practices" premised on reflexivity, mutual learning and high adaptability. In other words, John's story captures how the process of being confronted with different work organizing practices in different basic teams, when this diversity is legitimated, leads to a work organizing practice that is highly flexible and open to updating based on experience and mutual learning acquired during work.

### ***The institutionalization of shifting jobs***

The second story is about a permanent job (JOB2) arrangement in Health. Ltd. which invites organizational members to change jobs with colleagues across basic units on a temporary basis in order to learn new skills and competences that enhance the integration of their local work organizing practices and increase organizational flexibility. It is Mia, one of the shop stewards, who first tells me about the arrangement. The JOB2 arrangement was implemented 10 years ago. It means that organizational members within Health Ltd. are given the opportunity to and are expected to change jobs across units or teams. In fact, many have voluntarily been "expatriated" to a JOB2 more than once. The arrangement creates the conditions for acquiring new skills and competencies and increases the functional and numeric flexibility within the organization. Over the years the JOB2 arrangement has been re-adjusted several times. A committee of union representatives, managers and employees are in charge of managing and adjusting the arrangement generally, but the practicalities of job swaps are self-organized by the teams. The JOB2 arrangement is used in the following situations:

- Moving and adjusting capacity
- Employees' wishes for new challenges
- To ensure flexibility in relation to bottlenecks and key functions
- To currently expand the ability to change

(Source: Material from the JOB2 committee)

Mia describes the genesis and current scope of the JOB2 arrangement in the following way:

*"30% of the labor force move around in JOB2 every day. They do it on a voluntary basis and management has no influence. The JOB2 arrangement has existed since 1995. The idea emerged when we were closing down a spray factory. A works council conference focused on how we could create job security and decided that we in return had to do something about the flexibility... according to our job security agreement we must move... that is, use JOB2 actively" (Mia 13-02-07)*

According to most of the organizational members (workers and managers), JOB2 is a success. The "tool" increases exchange of people, resources, ideas and knowledge throughout the organization. It thus triggers reflexivity and integration across units and teams. In Durkheim's words, it helps to create a "collective conscience" and that enhances diverse collaborative communing relationships across units and skills. Moreover, it increases the adaptability of the organizational members. In this way new competencies and roles are assembled and mixed on an ongoing basis. The union representatives list the following advantages of the JOB2 arrangement:

- Employee capacity is movable within 24 hours
- Employees move on a voluntary basis to different units or different shifts
- Capacity within a production area can be increased by 10% within 24 hours
- Employees develop – personally and professionally
- Employees maintain abilities to learn
- Employees are kept in the labor market in spite of changed job conditions
- Employees feel more secure about change
- Job security creates pleasure, motivation and readiness to change
- Conflicts among employees can be solved without dismissals
- Culture and traditions are constantly affected
- Experience is exchanged across the organization.

(Source: Material from JOB2 committee)

Looking at the many advantages listed above and listening to Mia and her colleagues' experiences with changing jobs, it is obvious that the JOB2 arrangement is a very unique tool that is monitored by the employees without direct management involvement. The institutionalization of ongoing job shifts enables organizational workers to be involved in, learn from and innovate new local work organizing practices, develop new work roles and engage in new communing relationships. Moreover, it enables them to bring their experiences and new insights/understandings back to their basic team, thereby enlarging and enriching the "world view" of their local team organizing practices. The arrangement therefore seems to represent an "organizing tool" that facilitates the integration of diverse work organizing practices. In many ways the JOB2 arrangement provides the same highly collaborative and flexible work organizing practices as the ones described in John's story. However, at Health Ltd. they are initiated and facilitated by the union representatives.

Informed by the two empirical stories of John and Mia, the integration of diverse work organizing practices seems to enable organizational members to develop new work roles and communing relationships and thus to cultivate and expand their role-sets and bonds of interdependencies at work. Continuously being introduced to (and "thrown into") new local understandings of situated work organizing practices, organizational members cannot take their knowledge and habits of their existing work practices for granted. Instead, an ongoing and deliberate integration of diverse work practices seems to trigger their ability to continuously reflect upon their work practices and cast doubt on their existing routines and habits. Put differently, the mix of diverse collaborative work practices among organizational members seems to generate doubt - a doubt which provokes innovative inquiry and thus constructive organizational reflexivity. At the same time, the "clash" between diverse work practices quite often also produces self-belief and confidence. For instance, the confrontation and comparison of diverse skills and competencies enable organizational members to better acknowledge, realize and believe in their work roles, skills, competences, communing relationships and work routines. In this way, both the ability to doubt *and* believe tend to be enhanced by the integration and continuous mix of diverse work organizing practices among Jill, Matt, John, Mia and the rest of their colleagues.

Summing up, through the engagement in diverse work organizing practices, it looks as if organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. learn both to believe and doubt in what they do. Being equally capable of believing in and casting doubt on their “doings” and “sayings” at work, Jill, Matt and their colleagues more easily seem to avoid the grip of habit as well as the fragility of being without habits. This enables them to continuously reflect upon and reorganize their work organizing practices in renewing ways. According to their empirical stories, they likewise become more able to constantly develop and perfect their work roles, communing relationships and other organizational resources towards further innovative co-creations. For example, recall how Matt takes on, makes and plays with various work roles as he constantly reflects upon and seeks to reorganize his own as well as his colleagues' work practices towards future improvements. I address the organization and underlying organizing principle of these work organizing practices below.

### **COLLABORATIVE AND RIVALROUS COMMUNING PRACTICES AS CENTRAL ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES**

The organizational architecture underpinning Jill, Matt and their colleagues' various communing figurations (cf. Entry 2) is characterized by a highly flexible three-layered teamwork structure grounded on three basic loci of relating: their basic unit, their basic team and their respective ad hoc teams. Both in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. this three-layered structure of team communing characterizes the work organization. On the following pages I show how this structure enables the creation of collaborative (and rivalrous) communing relationships across organizational boundaries and the building of situational co-designing and reflexive teams – internally among employees or externally with partners (e.g. suppliers, sister affiliates) in both case companies. I argue that, within these two organizational landscapes, collaborative (and rivalrous) communing practices seem to be a central organizing principle of all three loci (forms) of team communing. Accordingly, I illustrate empirically how the work organizing practices of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. seem to be *organized* around this principle of communing. Moreover, I seek to show how the three-layered team structure paves the way for an organizational architecture, which highly supports the co-creation of situated work roles as well as work organizing practices of belief and doubt. Hence, in this section my analytical perspective will be directed towards the organization of three recurrent forms of team communing: basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

From an Elias inspired viewpoint, a firm (e.g. Health Ltd. or Tools Ltd.) may be seen as a unit struggling for survival against and vis-à-vis other firms through internal and external interdependent relationships of both collaboration and rivalry. Likewise, the individual firm may be seen as a community of sub-units, each struggling for survival and recognition. In Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. the **basic units** such as sales, production, marketing, construction etc. resemble such sub-units. Following Elias' line of thought, each of these sub-units/basic units – e.g. Matt's sales department – constitute a communing practice striving for recognition and survival vis-à-vis the other basic units in the organization. Accordingly, Jill, Matt and their colleagues' basic teams seem to be characterized by internal collaborations and rivalrous as well as external communing relationships (e.g. towards the other basic units or other organizational collaborative/rivalrous partnerships). For instance Jill, Matt and their colleagues are very much aware of both their own and the other basic units' performance results. Significantly, they seem to continuously reflect on, benchmark and improve their performances vis-à-vis the other basic units in the organization. Listening to their empirical stories,



it is apparent that strong professional bonds and feelings of pride towards their basic unit's specific work activities, competencies and performance results characterize their experiences of membership in these units. Consequently, the organization of communing practices within and across basic units seems to provide organizational members with a basic sense of belonging, an experience of long-term membership and a professional identity. In particular, organizing communing ties around a structure of basic units seem to enable Jill, Matt and their colleagues to develop local knowledge and expertise about work and thus to co-create and cultivate specialized work roles.

Each of these basic units within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. is divided into smaller **basic teams** also constituted by internal and external communing relationships. The basic teams' particular size, combination, work division, structure and appointment of team leaders/collectives of management depend on the unit's actual work functions, operations and work task. In Health Ltd. most basic teams are organized as co-managing teams of typically 8-15 organizational members, in which authority is distributed through a set of formalized team roles (cf. the matrix of nine roles in Jill's basic team). Once a month team members who are responsible for the same work role meet across the basic teams in order to exchange knowledge and collectively learn from best/worst practice etc. In Tools Ltd. a similar structure of basic teams unfolds in a less formalized manner without a fixed matrix of work roles.

Characteristically, the "we" experience in Jill, Matt and their colleagues' respective basic teams is based on strong internal bonds of collaboration (and rivalry), a high degree of mutual interdependence, ongoing dialogue and professional exchange of knowledge. Organizational members also describe their work practice and communing relationships inside their basic teams as a "place" for jokes, humor and camaraderie. Many depict the basic team as a home-base or a nuclear family. Yet the communing relationships between basic teams also contribute to the distinct we-feeling within them. An example is how inter-relational dynamics of rivalry between Matt and his colleagues' basic teams over who performs most innovatively or attains the best economic results trigger Matt and his team mates to reflect upon and adjust their own actions in light of the activities and practices of other basic teams. Another example is how purposeful collaborations between basic teams, such as the exchange of know-how among role-masters of the same kind (cf. Jill's formalized team roles), co-shape the "we" experience within basic teams: such inter-team activities facilitate learning across organizational boundaries and the development of a broader organizational view. Informed by Jill, Matt and their colleagues' worlds of work, the organization and coordination of such inter-team activities across more permanent and separate basic teams seem to be pivotal for the ability of organizational members to reflect upon and readjust their actions, doubts and beliefs in light of what (with a Mead-esque twist) could be called *the generalized other basic team*, i.e. the capability to reflect upon and change one's own team activities/actions in light of the anticipated responses of other teams. Organizing for inter-team communing relationships may in this light enhance organizational integration and create a dynamic system of mutual adjustment and commitment across more permanent team units.

Accordingly, it seems that the more Jill, Matt and their colleagues are engaged in inter-team activities and thus collaborative and rivalrous communing practices across formal team structures, work projects, professional boundaries etc, the more they reflect upon how to improve existing work routines, share responsibility and work towards common goals, and the more they are ready to take

part in co-design, continuous improvements and innovative change within and across their basic teams. Thus the broader the basic team's external communing interactions and its relations towards other teams are, the wider the community of teams, and the better able is the basic team to overcome many challenges that would often lead teams into the grip of habit, too entrenched routines, provincialism and self-satisfied behaviour. In sum, the organization of inter-relational dynamics of communing across basic teams therefore seems to be central to the development of work roles as well as work organizing practices that are able to constantly promote both belief and doubt.

Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.'s team based organizational architecture also consists of more provisional *ad hoc teams* which are continually constructed across basic units and basic teams (i.e. across their operations and functions) depending on required competencies and resources related to a given task or project. Hence, communing practices of organizational members from different basic units and teams and with different skills and competencies are assembled on an ongoing basis. This way of forming criss-crossing collaborative and rivalrous temporary team communing practices does not only unfold locally: the criss-crossing communing practices also transgress Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.'s local boundaries, thereby connecting and integrating other sites, sister affiliates, customers, suppliers and partners into the companies' communing relationships.

How these ad hoc teams are in fact initiated, created, managed, performed, finalized etc. varies tremendously. In brief, the exact "life-process" of these ad hoc based communing relationships operates in very divergent and often highly informal ways. In Tools Ltd. it is often the R&D or the construction department that initiate moves to form new ad hoc teams. The R&D basic team normally consists of only six-eight members, but temporary ad hoc teams of fifteen-thirty employees of diverse professional skills are sometimes formed to work on the same development project. The organizing form is very loose and organic in its structure (Burns and Stalker 1961; Burns 1963) It relies to a large extent on self-management and decentralized coordination among the basic units and basic teams. Typically, the basic teams decide for themselves who to "lend" and for how long (i.e. most often managers and employees make such decisions jointly). Commonly, either organizational members volunteer to join an ad hoc team or they are picked due to special skills or competencies. In Health Ltd. similar ongoing formations of ad hoc teams can be traced. Here, initiatives to form ad hoc teams are typically organized by management and union representatives who together have built up a unique tradition for collaborative co-management.

Despite great variation overall, the ad hoc teams in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. characteristically take on one of the three following forms:

- 1) Small short-term development teams (e.g. development of a new service, specialized tool or analyzer). Intra-organizational and inter-organizational communing relationships
- 2) Bigger more long-term development teams (e.g. development of products for new markets, new techniques and knowledge intensive innovations and solutions). Intra-organizational and inter-organizational communing relationships
- 3) Transnational-organizational development teams (e.g. setting up a foreign subsidiary or international collaborative projects with sister affiliates abroad). Intra-, inter- and transnational-organizational communing relationships

Jill's mini development team previously described is an example of a *small short-term ad hoc team* based on local intra-organizational communing relationships. Another example is how Matt and his colleagues often together with their customers form ad hoc teams in which they work on continuous cost reduction and production optimization. They do so by, for example, analyzing and optimizing key processes, or giving advice and guidance on machine and tool investments. They also offer guidance when customers introduce new products according to specific needs and contexts. As a result, production optimization in Tools Ltd (and Health Ltd.) is very much a continuous joint process, built on partnership of highly collaborative communing relationships.

*Bigger more long term development teams*, which to a greater extent transgress local organizational boundaries, are also a central trademark of both Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. This form of ad hoc team is not only based on close co-designing partnerships with customers, but also on collaborations with suppliers, knowledge institutions and other external partners focused on developing new technical solutions, products and markets. Jill, Matt and their colleagues' experiences of being engaged in collaborative search practices or collectives of learning (e.g. participating in an interdisciplinary team working on the development of a new coating technique) are examples of this form of ad hoc team. Another example is the construction of more long term co-developing communing practices with various external partners. For instance, Health Ltd. typically initiates a new customer relationship with an analysis of their customers' technical equipment testing work flows based on dialogue, collaborations and exchange of experiences. Often suppliers, specialized experts and/or public knowledge institutions are integrated and take an active part in the development team<sup>98</sup>. These more long-term external communing partnerships focused upon customers' continuous improvement of products, services, work practices etc. very much resemble the above described smaller ad hoc development teams. As they are both founded on intra- and inter-organizational communing relationships, the significant difference between them is merely in terms of duration and scope.

The third typical form of ad hoc team is *transnational* in scope, connecting the Danish local sites of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd with their sister affiliates and international partners. Matt's experience of "a global we" due to his collaboration with colleagues and partners abroad illustrates this form of ad hoc team. Another example is how a large number of organizational members have gained foreign experience being engaged in ad hoc teams setting up a foreign subsidiary. Yet another example is how Health Ltd., in collaboration with their foreign suppliers, sometimes trains their personnel by offering them an opportunity of working with and educating a team of organizational members at a foreign site, for instance when experimenting with new machinery, parallel production or the optimization of work processes. Likewise, in Tools Ltd. staff from their international sister affiliates frequently visit the Danish site as they participate in product development teams or are enrolled in trainee programs at the company's training center.

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<sup>98</sup> In Health Ltd. this approach is typically divided into three stages. First, process analysis of customer needs, testing environment, etc., to identify opportunities for process improvement. Second, design of solution to optimize customer testing environment, combining analyzers, IT systems and samplers. Third, provision of support in the form of training, QA, supplies of materials and technical support to ensure such degree of customer satisfaction that Health Ltd becomes an ongoing partner, helping customers save time and increase productivity.

The empirical stories of Jill, Matt and their colleagues show that these three forms of more temporary and fluctuating ad hoc based communing practices that criss-cross their basic units and basic teams involve significant collaborative and rivalrous dynamics. Engaging in such ad hoc teams, workers learn to take on new roles, enhance competencies and may even create novel working careers. According to Jill, Matt and their colleagues, organizing their work practices in this way has many advantages. For instance, they all describe how, in particular, the “clash” of different competencies and the close interaction between various work roles within ad hoc teams generate a common focus and ensure a joint commitment towards the wider organization beyond one’s basic unit and basic team. Another advantage is that, by participating in different collaborative (and rivalrous) combinations across their basic units and basic teams, they continuously interact, exchange knowledge and information with each other. This enables the gain of greater knowledge about colleagues’ work functions, competencies, work roles, common challenges and so on. Accordingly, many of the interviewed organizational members state how this integration of differentiated work roles and divergent competencies enables continuous learning triggered by both collaboration and rivalry (in Chapter 8 I discuss the learning dynamics of team communing in much more detail). It is Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ experience that these ad hoc work practices of co-creation not only make their work more fun and challenging, but also result in better innovative solutions and performance results. Therefore they all seem to have a common interest in engaging in, developing with, and learning from these forms of communing interdisciplinary activities. Although it may also be highly demanding and stressful to take part in these ad hoc teams, Jill, Matt and their colleagues highlight particularly how working together with other professions (production workers, engineers, technicians, sales representative, etc.), external partners and sister affiliates, strengthens their motivation and ability to learn, relearn and take on new work roles (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10 for an elaborated discussion of the organizational advantages and implications of the co-existence of various team-based collaborative orders within contemporary firms).

All in all, my analysis of the organizational architecture of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. has empirically illustrated how their work organizing practices typically encompass a three-layered team structure consisting of basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams. I have further shown how the work organizing practices within and between various basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams are continuously shaped and organized through both internal and external collaborative and rivalrous relationships. In sum, this section has shown that the basic units of organizational members structure work organizing practices because of their collaboration and rivalry with other units. The basic team recreates that same dynamic of collaboration, competition and confrontation within the basic unit. Finally, the ad hoc teams generate a collaborative, rivalrous and recombinatory process by bringing together practices and knowledge from individuals, teams and units who do not usually collaborate (and compete/engage in rivalry). Accordingly, I have argued that collaborative and rivalrous communing relationships – within and across various forms of team communing - serve as a vital organizing principle, which enables the co-creation of dynamic work organizing practices (and work roles) “from below”. Next, I examine the managerial aspects of Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ work organizing practices.

## MANAGING WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES OF BELIEF AND DOUBT

Looking at the various work organizing practices that unfold within and across Jill, Matt and their colleagues' basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams, it can be seen that they often seem to be governed and monitored with hardly any centralized hierarchical coordination. Asking the organizational members how they coordinate and divide their work activities between these three forms of team settings typically made them look bewildered, replying *"that's just something we do....we seldom think about it"* (Tim and Simon: 1). Clearly, most of them take their various criss-crossing and often fluctuating work organizing practices for granted. Without really noticing, they seem to monitor these criss-crossing collaborative team practices (of relational interdependencies) in a highly horizontal and flexible way on the basis of mutual involvement and reciprocal adjustments. The question is, what managerial principles (i.e. routinized management practices) make such radical distributions of authority and mutual accountability possible? How are these highly collaborative, constantly redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices actually governed? And what modes of management may enable them to continuously develop an organizational habitus of belief and doubt? In light of Jill, Matt and their colleagues' everyday work experiences, three managerial principles seem central in governing and underpinning their work organizing practices. These are: 1) a constitutional order of distributed authority, 2) templates for organizing continuous self-doubt (and belief), and 3) the co-creation of "a corporate we", i.e. a corporate based "generalized other" representing the collective voice of past and present significant others' organizational members. Of course, the three managerial principles are not exhaustive. It is appropriate to underscore here that many other principles are simultaneously at stake (e.g. charismatic leadership, specific bonus systems, coaching, career development, TQM and so on). However, these three principles seem to play a central role in the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt. I will demonstrate how they "materialize" in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd below.

### CONSTITUTIONAL ORDERS OF DISTRIBUTED AUTHORITY

The co-creation of work organizing practices able to continuously redefine (human and non-human) organizational resources, to collaborate across various organizational divisions and to distribute authority and intelligence throughout the organization, first of all, seems to be managed and facilitated by the development of a distinct "constitutional order" of distributed authority in each company. In Health Ltd. the constitutional order is based on a tradition for collaborative co-management between management and trade union representatives. In Tools Ltd. it is founded on a tradition for co-ownership comprising 85% of employees. Whereas I here provide a short description of these two constitutional orders, I refer to Chapter 9 for a more nuanced analysis of their nature and managerial prospects.

In Health Ltd. the development of a close partnership between the convener/shop stewards and top-/production managers forms a unique constitutional order of co-management. Simply put, union representatives have been integrated into the management structure. As a result, the roles of union representatives have changed from distributive - in favor of integrative - bargaining in exchange for an offensive up-skilling strategy. The convener describes the strategy like this: *"In the groups of shop stewards, we..... take care of the human dimension and make sure that the labor force in production is flexible and qualified"* (Crista 04-01-07). Consequently, the roles of convener and shop steward have

become directed towards a role as facilitators, problem solvers, mediators, change masters and motivators. This co-managing partnership manifests itself in a wide range of committees and work groups across units, departments, management levels, etc., i.e. arenas where the partners share information, discuss strategies, negotiate, evaluate options and draw on each other's knowledge and expertise in an ongoing process.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, and as already discussed, to coordinate and integrate collaborative work organizing practices within and across basic units and basic teams is an ongoing challenge, not least in Health Ltd. In this case, a unit-based system of incentives and a rigid division of work processes and responsibilities among basic units (which are spatially dispersed among diverse localities) and at the level of middle managers (who are responsible for each their unit) tended to enhance fragmentation and impede collaborative communing relationships across units. Consequently, the formal authority structure of middle managers in Health Ltd tends to limit the formation of more ad hoc based and spontaneous collaborative communing practices between units. In continuation hereof, both top-managers and shop stewards stress that one of their crucial ongoing challenges is to cultivate collaboration across units and a stronger common we-feeling in order to avoid organizational parochialism. More precisely, the constitutional order of co-management seems to represent a promising managerial "tool" with which to help counteract parochialism and prevent basic units from turning into desert islands living separate lives. When asked about the advantages of this order, organizational members in Health Ltd. highlight how the partnership has:

- 1) Helped to strengthen collaboration across units and teams.
- 2) Enabled the delegation of authority to teams.
- 3) Facilitated the creation of a better flow of information within and between teams.

As I see it, this has in return resulted in highly committed organizational members who - because they are directly represented at the managerial top-level through the convener and shop stewards - seem more keen to legitimize the strategy of top-management and take an active part in the company's ongoing reorganizations towards continuous improvements. In sum, Health Ltd's constitutional order of co-management appears to have facilitated the development of highly collaborative work organizing practices premised on various team communing relationships (and work roles) of co-creative dynamics.

A unique tradition for co-ownership comprising 85% of employees constitutes a distinct constitutional order in Tools Ltd. This means that approximately 500 employees are co-owners holding a significant amount of stocks (typically worth approximately Euro 100,000 each). The argument for becoming a co-owner is that by contributing to the overall performance of the firm, the individual organizational member works for his/her own benefit. The company explicates the purpose of their co-ownership scheme in this way:

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<sup>99</sup> Examples of such committees are: The Dialogue Group (shop steward and management meet regularly to discuss/inform about the internal staffing situation - who wants to be moved, who needs help, etc.. Coach group meetings (shop steward, department managers and section managers meet once a month. The shop steward often renders visible the need to think and work across boundaries, and though it seems contradictory, s/he is often the one coaching the managers in that respect). JOB2 committee (shop stewards and middle managers meet regularly in order to coordinate the change/swap of jobs among employees from different teams or units. The employees typically volunteer for a JOB2 themselves. Sometimes they are encouraged to take a particular job by the shop-stewards. (Field notes 08-01-07).

*“The reason for offering employees shares in Tools Ltd is a wish to make competent and loyal employees in all group companies joint owners of the company and in this way motivate commitment and interest in Tools Ltd...Through the employee share scheme Tools Ltd. is...ensuring that we make the most of all the employees’ resources” (source: Tools Ltd’s URL/website 02-01-07).*

All employees and managers are paid fixed salaries (within three salary levels: blue, white-collar and managers) and are all subject to identical profit-sharing, that is a similar nominal bonus based on the past month’s surplus compared to budgets. There is no discrimination between owners and non-owners, only absence due to sickness implies a reduction in bonus share. These arrangements reflect how it is the extended “we” of the entire company, not the individual unit, rank or unit, that is in focus. The beneficial outcomes of Tools Ltd’s order of co-ownership are job satisfaction, a high degree of responsibility towards colleagues, the workplace and the financial bottom line (Source: Field notes, documents and Tools Ltd’s URL/website 02-01-07). Organizational members in Tools Ltd. typically emphasize how the arrangement facilitates work organizing practices premised on lateral accountability (e.g. a high degree of involvement and mutual responsibility) and a strong commitment and willingness to collaborate and join hands. For that reason it seems as if Tools Ltd.’s managerial order of co-ownership obviates/renderers superfluous (or rather minimizes) the need for hierarchical coordination and bureaucratic organizational structures with highly formalized routines for collaboration across functional divisions.

Although the nature of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd’s respective constitutional orders of distributed authority are quite different – one primarily rooted within a political rationale of co-management, the other within an economic rationale of co-ownership - they seem to produce similar outcomes. Both constitutional orders enhance organizational collaboration, commitment and mutual involvement. According to the analysis above, both managerial orders seem to trigger aspirations for knowledge sharing and joint search practices within and across various work organizing practices. However, one central difference is that they address and seek to cope with two diverse organizational challenges.

In Health Ltd. the order of co-management chiefly aims at limiting organizational parochialism within basic units and among middle managers in order to facilitate collaboration across formal organizational divisions. Here, the challenge is to prevent fragmentation and “departmental ethnocentrism” triggered by the company’s formal authority structure and functional work division between basic units, i.e. to avoid a scenario where the middle managers, in particular, create fragmentation and lock-in situations between units. The co-managerial partnership between top-managers and union representatives seems to be an efficient way of tackling this challenge and thus enabling the formation of more criss-crossing and spontaneous collaborative work organizing practices. In sharp contrast, in Tools Ltd. the challenge is the opposite. There, the difficulty is not in an organizational structure generating fragmentation, but in coordinating and managing myriads of intersecting work organizing practices which are very fluctuating and organic in their structures. In this case, the constitutional order of co-ownership seems to enable an ongoing formation of work organizing practices that are loose and organic in their structures (of interdependencies), and at the same time facilitates the coordination and management of these often spontaneous and ad hoc based work organizing practices (more about this paradox in the next section). Taken together,

although the two constitutional orders of distributed authority are based on completely different managerial rationales and cope with different organizational challenges, they both seem to offer a set of interesting tools with which to enhance mutual involvement and the distribution of accountability. Consequently, they carve out alternative ways of managing various intersecting work organizing practices within contemporary organizational life. No doubt these two managerial principles are unique and highly context specific. However, while they may not easily be “transferred” to other organizational contexts, this does not mean that they cannot be of inspiration in other contexts and thus may carry the potential to become adopted and transformed into other worlds of work and organizing. As mentioned, I provide an elaborated discussion of the two constitutional orders in Chapter 9. Let me now turn to the second managerial principle that governs the work organizing practices of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

### **ORGANIZING CONTINUOUS SELF-DOUBT (AND BELIEF)<sup>100</sup>**

Another crucial challenge in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. is to manage and facilitate work organizing practices that continuously generate doubt (and belief) and thus become able to continuously explore and exploit organizational resources towards further co-creations and improvements. What managerial principles and organizational routine-breaking routines (Sabel 2007) may help keep such processes of continuous doubt (and belief) ongoing, i.e. processes that among Jill, Matt and their colleagues trigger a continuing search for innovative co-creations and improvements? In Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. the organization of such processes of continuous self-doubt (and belief) seems to be facilitated by the pragmatic use of various managerial templates.

Characteristically, organizational members in both companies (both employees and managers) are very much aware of the fact that organization of continuous improvements and innovative search practices is an ongoing and highly tentative process with no clear cut ends or final stages. Accordingly, the managerial templates in use are never regarded as representing a final solution or ultimate “organizational cure”. Instead, they are considered to be useful provisional managerial tools – a chain of experiments – which provide new experimental guidelines that nevertheless are always being readjusted, replaced or recombined with other existing or future modes of managing. Examples of managerial tools mentioned in interviews are co-managing team work models, staff development interviews, coaching, project management, optimizing planning tools, quality control systems, error detection systems, evaluation programs, distinct management philosophies such as total quality management and value based management and so on. I argue that all these tools (in one way or the other) aim at triggering self-doubt and reflection on how to improve work routines and work organizing practices. Simultaneously, they also aim at generating self-belief among Jill, Matt and their colleagues through, for example, the affirmation of their own and/or their teams’ skills, competencies, actions, the recognition and acknowledgement of well-functioning work routines and practices, positive performance results, best practices and so on. One significant example of organizing continuous self-doubt (and -belief) on the basis of and experimentation with specific managerial templates is the implementation of lean principles in Health Ltd.

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<sup>100</sup> I place self-belief in brackets since the section primarily focuses on how to organize for processes of continuous self-doubt. However, in my opinion self-doubt and self-belief are mutually interdependent and thus they always unfold simultaneously.



When the US multinational took over Health Ltd. the company was ordered to introduce and implement the new parent corporation's Lean principles<sup>101</sup>. The central mantra of 'Lean' is to slim down the organization by getting rid of all waste, and some of its critics have argued that some "waste" or slack is necessary for triggering innovation. Yet, Lean is also a technique that facilitates self-doubt, reflexivity and continuous re-learning - its rational being a constant search for improvements and for smarter ways of doing things. Lean is clearly a two faced "creature". From this perspective, Lean is not a fixed concept but a set of principles always being translated into a specific context. Health Ltd.'s "confrontation" with their US parent corporation's Lean model is no exception. This model has resulted in the introduction and implementation of a set of Lean principles throughout the organization. All basic teams are using classic Lean concepts, such as Kanban, Kaizen and Six Sigma, but the actual ways in which these principles are performed varies among different units and teams. This kind of diversity precisely illustrates that Health Ltd. deals with Lean in a very pragmatic and flexible way, trying to integrate the useful while deselecting bits and pieces. The following quotations demonstrate how organizational members of Health Ltd. cope with and mediate between the two faces of Lean in their daily practices:

*"We take from Lean what we can use... that is, we make it work within the specific unit ..... We are good at finding creative solutions when necessary" (interview Ian, teamworker).*

*"Lean is a two-edged sword..... it carries a good deal of advantages, but it also has certain dead angles when things are not working according to the plan – and they don't in nine out of ten cases! Therefore much of Lean is also highly irrational. For example, I don't understand the zeal for speed, for while speeding up the pace you make lots of mistakes, so in a long-term perspective running faster and faster is not quite as efficient as the Lean concepts and its logic of effectiveness pleads" (Interview Christa, union representative)*

*"The Lean system is good for revealing problems but there are no resources for resolving them" (Interview Anders, team worker).*

One lesson that seems to crystallize from within the realm of Health Ltd. is that it is very much the combination of and experimentation with diverse managerial templates that facilitates work organizing practices of continuous self-doubt and belief. In this light it is exactly the very mix of "a little bit of this and a little bit of that" that enables the organization and its members to doubt and believe and thus to move and grow continuously. The combination of co-managing team practices and Lean is no exception. In this landscape of confused managerial principles and work organizing practices, newness easily seems to enter the world since it gives rise to ongoing processes of recombining resources in innovative and productive ways. In Tools Ltd. the mix and highly pragmatic use of various managerial templates is likewise a distinctive feature. Here, the management has not converted to the Lean system of governance, but instead developed their own distinct principles. As one team leader puts it:

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<sup>101</sup> This "merger" of diverse work organizing principles in Health Ltd. did not result in the erosion of the company's former team structure of co-managing team communities characterized by a high degree of lateral accountability and intelligence. Not least because of the close partnership between union representatives and top managers, the company's former co-managing team model has become the central prerequisite for successfully implementing Lean principles.

*“We don’t call it Lean – but we have always been practicing Lean...it’s just about using one’s common sense...more than 15 years ago we started to work systematically with how we could become better at learning from our errors and continuously reduce production costs in the teams.....slim production, kaizen events, elimination of waste are just fancy words for something we have always done.....”*  
(Interview Sam, teamleader).

Whether managerial principles are named Lean, “common sense” or something different within the empirical world of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., they are all called upon and used in highly tentative ways to get processes of continuous self-doubt and reflexivity to emerge. Accordingly, the CEO of Tools Ltd. tells me how the core objective of their managerial principles is to make organizational members become better at remaining tuned to the way things are going as well as to the ways in which they may be improved, instead of how things used to be (Interview CEO1). Within this viewpoint, the use of managerial principles is never linear and prearranged, but reflects a long chain of experimentation aiming at making organizational people and their work organizing practices able and disposed to keep engaging in self-doubt (and -belief). In sum, the managerial experiences within both case companies indicate that the challenge of managing work organizing practices that trigger self-doubt, reflexivity and a continuous strive for co-improvements is not “solved” by implementing THE one managerial template. Rather, the challenge of organizing for continuous self-doubt seems to be tackled through an ongoing experimentation with various managerial templates. Through this process, a variety of managerial templates and principles are introduced, recombined and translated into already existing work organizing practices, and as they in this way meet and collide the process of organizational self-doubt and reflexivity continues.

### **NAVIGATING WORK ORGANIZING PRACTICES BY MEANS OF “PHANTOM COMMUNITIES”**

The third managerial principle that seems to govern Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd.’s work organizing practices is the co-creation of a “corporate we” among organizational members representing a sense and practical experience of membership of and identification towards a wider common “we”. As shown in entry 2, Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ sense of a “corporate we” is first and foremost founded on a “we” (the company) against “them” (other companies). Moreover, they typically describe this sense of corporate “we-ness” as a mode of communing characterized by the following ingredients: *a common purpose, a sense of identity, a feeling of being part of something bigger, common values, a shared taste for a distinct corporate culture, unarticulated sentiments of similarity, membership and commitment* “(cf. entry 2 Table 6.1). At this point the issue of interest is on the monitoring function of a “corporate we”: How is a “corporate we” promoted by the managerial level in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd? And how does it govern the work organizing practices of organizational members? The issue taps into the research field of organizational culture and of how culture controls the way people interact with each other (e.g. Schein 2005; Hofstede 1980). However, many studies on organizational culture often fail to give a comprehensive account of the recursive dynamics and intertwined relationships between the individual and the organization (self-society)<sup>102</sup>. On this matter, Mead’s concept of “the

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<sup>102</sup> A vast amount of research focused upon organizational culture and its governing/controlling mechanisms simply does not explain how exactly individuals co-shape the organization (and its distinct organizational culture(s)) - and vice versa - how the organization (and its culture(s)) simultaneously co-shapes individuals through their everyday interactions/trans-actions. As a result, we are most often left with cultural accounts giving explanatory primacy to either the individual or the organization instead of acknowledging (and exploring) how and in what ways they are reciprocal and mutually constituted.

generalized other” and Athens’ concept of “phantom community” (the latter attempts to develop the former) provide a much more fine-grained account of the reciprocal relationship of individual-organization (self and society). I will argue below that their works offer a line of helpful insights into how Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ experiences of a “corporate we” control and govern their actions and thus provides a monitoring function. Before I turn to their concepts, let me first attend to the issue of promoting a sense of “corporate we”.

In Chapter 4, I touched upon how managers of contemporary companies deliberately seek to encourage a sense of communing among organizational members by means of developing a work environment and organizational culture in which various articulated and unarticulated communing relationships may flourish. Also in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., the managerial level aims at promoting a sense of corporate “we-ness” and mutual commitment by means of, for example, distinct communication strategies (e.g. internal branding, storytelling, vision statements, identification of official corporate values), a distinct form of leadership (e.g. informal, inclusive, transparent, family based) a distinct form of physical design (e.g. logo, interior arrangement, location, physical layout), various social activities (e.g. company picnics, parties, clubs) educational training and many other forms of perquisites (e.g. health insurance, a home PC, discount schemes). All these initiatives invoke communing ingredients and thus contribute to the shaping of a distinct experience and sense of a “corporate we” among Jill, Matt and their colleagues<sup>103</sup>. In Tools Ltd. the corporate extended “we” is very much grounded on the ideals of a typical village, where everybody knows each other and their roles. Accordingly, physical boundaries have been demolished to create visibility, greater presence, and shorter communication channels among units and teams. Hence – just as in the traditional village community – Tools Ltd.’s physical surroundings allow for and facilitate the experience of proximity and connectivity among colleagues and knowledge sharing across functions and occupations. The unique ownership model also promotes a strong sense of “a corporate we”. In Health Ltd. the experience of an extended “we” among organizational members is particularly rooted within the ideals of a big family with long historical roots. Here, the collective corporate story is about a Danish family-owned company going multinational by developing excellent products and services. People at Health Ltd. often describe the company as their extended family and express pride and commitment when talking about its accomplishments and history. The takeover by the US parent corporation has invoked an even stronger sense of “we-ness” among organizational members in Health Ltd., very openly premised on a “we” against “them”/i.e. the new foreign owners. In both companies the sense of a “corporate we” very much manifests itself throughout the organizational members’ stories about their work. The importance of promoting such a collective community feeling, is highlighted in Tools Ltd. in the following way:

*“One of the most important ingredients is a community feeling in which we are all team players and in which management and employees share a common interest in the growth and earnings of the company. Structure,*

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<sup>103</sup> Clear-cut explanations for the construction of such a corporate extended we are not easy to find. Managerial initiatives are just one explanatory factor out of many alternatives. Leaving other alternative explanatory factors aside – such as history, culture, politics and economics – does not imply that they have no impact on the shaping of “a corporate we”. In my opinion all these factors certainly do. For an elaboration on these alternative factors, the great bulk of research on organizational culture as well as management studies contributes with interesting insights (Hatch 1991; Hatch and Schultz 2008; Kunda 2006)

*management and organization are based on cooperation, confidence in each other and common interests. Tools's interior arrangement, organization, ownership structure, pay system, etc., are based on this view as we are all responsible for our work, colleagues, quality, costumer service, etc" (Tools Ltd.'s Webpage 2008).*

Apart from differences in which particular ideals, beliefs, values, roles and rules shape the "corporate we" in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., management in both companies clearly works on promoting and supporting a distinct community feeling.

Regardless of how "a corporate we" is promoted by management, the interesting point here is in what way such a collective *community feeling* (feeling of communing) more precisely governs organizational members' work organizing practices. Exploring this issue, I draw on Mead and Athens' thoughts on the workings of "a generalized other". As I have also argued elsewhere, Mead's notion of "the generalized other" helps us to understand how our thinking (and becoming) takes place when we take on the role(s) of multiple others and hence assume the attitude of a "generalized other", or more broadly of an experienced "we" at large. Through this process we learn to understand and internalize the roles of others, i.e. to reflect upon, adjust and monitor our actions, thoughts and feelings according to the anticipated responses of others. In brief, assuming the attitude of a "generalized other" involves a socializing process in which we internalize the roles and rules of our sensed "we(-s)"/"community(-ies)". Mead hereby explicitly addresses the reciprocal relationship between individual and organization. Equally, I suggest also that organizational members learn to manage and control their actions according to the anticipated roles and rules of, for example, their sensed "corporate we" (i.e. the imagined attitudes and expectations of the wider collective at work). In order to clarify this point a minor digression on the notion of the "generalized other" is necessary.

Following Mead's line of thought, the sense of a "corporate we" among Jill, Matt and their colleagues may be interpreted as a corporate based "generalized other". Through experiences of membership and mutual identification towards the wider "corporate we" (respectively in Health Ltd. and in Tools Ltd.) they co-construct and internalize a set of common roles, interests, values, beliefs, power relations, rules, behavioral norms, habits and so on which guides and coordinates their actions at work. Obviously organizational members interpret, construct and relate to a "corporate we" in their own particular way depending on their biographies and personal histories. Nevertheless, notwithstanding individual variation, a "corporate we" enables the diffusion of a set of shared behavioral codes. I argue that a "corporate we" therefore invokes a mutual monitoring function among organizational members, i.e. a monitoring "system" where the everyday work organizing practices of organizational members are governed by the collective voice of a corporate based "generalized other". In this way, Mead's notion offers an account of how the experience of "a corporate we" influences and governs the actions and work practices of organizational members. However, as I see it, Mead's notion of the "generalized other" suffers from vagueness when it comes to explaining how communing relationships such as a "corporate we" and, in turn, the members themselves, are able to change and not only passively adjust to the existing roles and rules of their communing practice, i.e. a "corporate we". Said differently, Mead's account of how individuals create new maxims to change existing communal beliefs and practices, for example, to free up blocked organizational acts and routines, is rather inadequate. Let me elaborate on this critique.

As mentioned, it is Mead's basic point that we can only think (and become a self) through assuming the attitude of a generalized other. He moreover claims that creativity and new maxims are created when the "I" disregards and overrules the "me" that represents the community's (e.g. the corporate we's) attitude towards the individual's actions (Mead 1934)<sup>104</sup>. Yet he does not offer an explanation for what it is that, in fact, triggers the "I" to overrule the "me", i.e. for how we become able to change our current maxims and think outside the black box (of our generalized other). As Athens argues, this conceptual standpoint generates a problem, because if all our thoughts for the most part mirror every other member of our community (i.e. a generalized other) how is it then possible for people to have any original ideas and break free from the controlling grip of habit (Athens 2007: 147-148)? How is it under such conditions at all likely for organizational members to change the roles and rules of their "corporate we" and thus to avoid standardization of their beliefs and organizational work practices? In this light the monitoring function of a "corporate we" seems quite deterministic. By introducing the notion of a "phantom community", Athens offers a way of refining Mead's notion of the "generalized other". According to Athens, a "*phantom community*" refers to the audience of real or imaginary people whose conception or.... "picture" of communal life, especially our and other people's place in it, we always hold close to our hearts and usually take for granted" (Athens 2007: 150). A "phantom community" is in many ways similar to Mead's notion of the "generalized other", but differs from it on two dimensions: power and temporality. Athens' central critique of Mead's notion is that it neglects the issue of power and that it understates how a "generalized other" is always a "composite other" made up of various communing relationships (past, present and imagined future ones). Both these dimensions contribute to a more dynamic understanding of "the generalized other". First of all, social interactions inevitably create different power relations of super-ordination and subordination that we often come to take for granted over time. These unequal power relations trigger the construction of various "generalized others" (anchored in both the past and present) which may all influence the way in which we assume roles and develop new maxims differently. Hence the issue of power (in particular our different ways of enacting and taking power relations for granted) helps to explain how people within a communing relationship draw on various "generalized others" and thus become able to avoid being trapped in a similar mindset as everyone else participating in it. Secondly, Athens stresses that in contrast to the "generalized other" which springs "*from the attitudes of an individual's present corporal community, the phantom community usually springs from the biographies of individual corporal community members*" (Ibid.: 150). Hereby he calls attention to how our "generalized other(s)" has different temporal loci and thus may be shaped by (and directed towards) present communing relationships as well as past or future anticipated "phantom communities". Within this view, a "generalized other" does not represent one basic present form (as Mead suggests), but may take on both novel and customary forms. This implies that a "generalized other(s)" is/are a product of both our extemporaneous abstractions (anchored in the present) and of our distilled maxims of action that we merely take for granted and which are primarily anchored in the past. Athens nicely sums up his critique and refinement of Mead's notion in the following way:

*"Unfortunately, in explaining the operation of the generalized other in extant institutionalized social actions, Mead confuses the timing of their construction with the birth date of our composite others and, in turn, the maxims of action*

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<sup>104</sup> Mead also emphasizes how the creation of novel ideas and maxims to guide our practices in new ways may emerge from mulling over problems with our "generalized other" (an inner conversation between the "I" and the "me") (Mead 1934).

*that they embody. According to him, the composite other and its attendant maxims of action are always created solely from our on-the-spot abstractions and, thereby, are always produced in the present. His pivotal notion of a “generalized other”, on which he (1934: 152-64) believes that all mature selves operate, simply does not provide us with a suitable vehicle for our unspoken maxims of action to inter into extant institutionalized social actions. It operates on the mistaken presumption that these maxims always emerge from our contemporaneous abstractions, which we must be, by necessity, aware of all the time, rather than grounded on the taken-for-granted assumptions which we usually remain completely unaware of while using” (Athens 2007: 154).*

After this digression it is time to return to the empirical world of Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ work organizing practices and the monitoring functions of their “corporate we”. As Mead and Athens make clear, we learn to manage and control our actions according to the anticipated roles and rules of our “generalized other(s)”. Empirically, organizational members’ experiences of a “corporate we” very much seem to work as a corporate based “generalized other”, as they all seem to have internalized a set of shared beliefs, roles and rules which guide and coordinate their diverse work organizing practices in distinct ways. An example is how Jill, Matt and their colleagues all have pretty clear and identical ideas of how an employee working at the company should be (behave) at work. Another example is that they noticeably share a taste for the same values such as equality, willingness to join hands, mutual learning and responsibility. Many other common beliefs, ideas and values (roles and rules) are at stake in the two case companies. As I see it, they all operate as behavioral codes that govern Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ interactions.<sup>105</sup> Creating an extended corporate “we” feeling makes it possible to navigate according to a common guiding “line on the horizon” and hence it works as a central governing/monitoring system among them. It is significant how the development of such a “corporate we”/corporate based “generalized other” operates as a subtle but effective managerial principle in Health. Ltd. and Tools Ltd.

Summing up, in my view, Mead’s concept of the “generalized other” enables us to understand how and why the co-creation of a “corporate we” among Jill, Matt and their colleagues invokes a monitoring mechanism that coordinates and governs their work organizing practices (at both the individual and organizational level). But their empirical stories of a corporate “we-ness” do not reflect a world in which they are simply controlled and monitored by one and only corporate based “generalized other” created solely from their contemporaneous abstractions. Neither do they behave like mere copycats adjusting their maxims and work practices towards the very same and only “generalized other”. Rather, they seem to draw on different but overlapping “generalized others”. Additionally, Jill, Matt and their colleagues (as well as their situated work roles and communing relationships) do not seem to be trapped in a similar mindset or to be blocked by a too strong grip of habit. More characteristically, they seem to continuously question and change their work organizing practices in a highly coordinated and mutually adjusting way, which at the same time allows for individual creativity and innovative actions. I therefore argue that Athens’ notion of a “phantom community” provides a much more “realistic” account of the nature and daily operations of Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ experiences of a “corporate we”.

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<sup>105</sup> In other words, the codes represent a governing “regime” invoked and defined by the roles and rules “inscribed” in Jill, Matt and their colleagues’ “corporate we”.

Athens' emphasis on the impact of power relations and the dynamic co-existence of diverse forms of anticipated "generalized others"/phantom communities anchored in both the past and present (and imagined future) help to explain why the "corporate we(es)" of Jill, Matt and their colleagues does not control and standardize their actions, work roles and communing practices in a deterministic way. From this point of view, it is exactly because Jill, Matt and their colleagues' "corporate we" represents a diversity of "generalized others" that they do not become trapped in a landscape of blocked organizational acts and routines with no agency to innovate. Seen in this analytical light, Jill, Matt and their colleagues continuously coordinate and navigate their work organizing practices by means of a "corporate we" premised on various "phantom communities". Athens' conceptual framework further helps us to understand how their work organizing practices are governed by "a corporate we" which, because it is based on various generalized others/phantom communities, enables them to continuously believe and doubt. Consequently, their interactions and everyday work organizing practices are not governed by the roles and rules of their "corporate we" in a deterministic way. Rather their interactions, work roles and communing relationships are loosely framed and laterally guided by it. All in all, it is therefore my argument that the co-creation of a "corporate we" among organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd constitutes a third and vital managerial principle that governs their work organizing practices in dynamic and highly lateral ways.

In this last section of entry 3, I focused on the managerial aspects and challenges of facilitating work organizing practices of belief and doubt. I have identified how three managerial principles govern the various work organizing practices of Jill, Matt and their colleagues. Firstly, I have demonstrated that a distinct constitutional order of distributed authority in each company - based on co-management and co-ownership – offers a promising line of managerial "tools" with which to enhance collaboration, commitment, knowledge sharing and mutual involvement. Secondly, I have shown how the pragmatic use of various managerial templates very much enables the organization of continuous self-doubt (and -belief) among organizational members, exemplified by the implementation of Lean principles in Health Ltd. Thirdly, I have illustrated that the sense of a "corporate we" also operates as a dynamic managerial principle in both companies. Because the "corporate we" among Jill, Matt and their colleagues seems to be premised on different but overlapping "generalized others"/phantom communities it does not determine, but rather governs organizational members' actions, work roles and communing relationships in a rather self-regulating and loosely guiding manner. It is therefore my argument that all three managerial principles – derived from the empirical world of Jill, Matt and their colleagues – lay out the foundation for the development of highly distributed ways of managing work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

## MAIN ANALYTICAL FINDINGS

On this analytical walk my aim has been to study how the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt takes shape by analyzing the integration, organization and management of Jill, Matt and their colleagues' diverse work organizing practices. In addition, I have explored which characteristic communing relationships and situated work roles are enabled within this organizational landscape. The analysis contributes with three main analytical findings. First, it shows that organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. integrate and continuously innovate their various work organizing practices in dynamic ways through the institutionalization of different team-

based collaborative work forms. This further facilitates an integration of diverse work roles which enable organizational members to develop new roles and communing relationships and thus to cultivate and expand their role-sets and bonds of interdependencies. The analysis moreover indicates that the engagement in and continuous mix of diverse work organizing practices enhance the ability of organizational members to both believe and doubt in what they do, and thus to continuously refine and improve their activities at work.

Second, in addressing how the work practices in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd are organized, the analysis demonstrates that collaborative and rivalrous communing practices operate as a vibrant organizing principle within and between basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams, which triggers organizational reflexivity and learning among organizational members. Accordingly, the analysis illustrates that the organization of work within basic units structures organizational members' work organizing practices because of their collaboration and rivalry with other units. Their basic teams recreate that same dynamic of collaboration, competition and confrontation within the basic unit, while their ad hoc teams generate a collaborative, rivalrous and recombinatory process by bringing together practices and knowledge from individuals, teams and units who do not usually collaborate (and rival). The analysis therefore argues that collaborative and rivalrous communing relationships – within and across various forms of team communing - serve as a vital organizing principle, which enables the co-creation of dynamic work organizing practices (and work roles) “from below”.

Third, investigating the management of Jill, Matt and their colleagues' work organizing practices, the analysis shows that three managerial principles in particular seem central in governing and underpinning the co-creation of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices among organizational members within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. The first is a constitutional order of distributed authority based on co-management in Health Ltd. and on co-ownership in Tools Ltd. The second is the pragmatic use of and constant experimentation with templates for organizing continuous self-doubt (and belief). The third identified principle is the co-creation of a guiding “corporate we”, built on a pool of corporate based “generalized others”/phantom communities representing the collective voice(s) of past and present and other significant organizational members. The analysis argues that all three managerial principles contribute to the development of highly distributed ways of managing work organizing practices of belief and doubt. In this way the three identified managerial principles seem to offer a solution to the problem of stability in organic organizations, which Burns and Stalker feared lacked the rule and routine bounded structures of bureaucracy and therefore risked to wind its organizational members up in endemic conflicts and war of all against all (Burns and Stalker 1961). All in all, the empirical vignettes of work organization and management in entry 3 demonstrate how processes of integrating, organizing and managing “from below” facilitate the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt, practices that seem to enable and cultivate various situated work roles and communing relationships that support continuous human and organizational growth. These are the main analytical findings of entry 3.



## EXIT – ANALYTICAL CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in the preceding chapters has explored three core dimensions of the world of work and organizing - work roles, communing and work organizing practices. Together, these three dimensions serve as “entry points” toward understanding the foundation of the business of co-creation: the co-creation of work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt allows organizational members to productively interact and collaborate, to continuously redefine and re-combine organizational resources in renewing ways and to distribute intelligence and authority to all organizational levels in contexts where the pressure to innovate is high. The entries explore how each of these components are co-created by organizational members and how, in combination, they generate a unique setting that underpins the new organizational form that is addressed/explored in this dissertation: the learning organization. Together, these three dimensions allow organizational members to productively experiment, reflect, doubt (and believe), collaborate and engage in rivalry within and across their units and teams. This enables processes of co-creation that allow firms to continuously revisit and update their routines and thus build up learning organizations.

*Entry one* shows that work roles in organizations like Health Ltd and Tools Ltd all carry the responsibility to plan, coordinate, execute and innovate, in sharp contrast to work roles in traditional bureaucratic organizations. In this way the work roles among Jill, Matt and their colleagues combine the dimensions of “planning” and “execution” at the level of everyday work practices. Once the traditional boundary between these two spheres is removed, the empirical cases illustrate, work roles are not prescribed but need to be constantly re-negotiated. The analysis further shows how this opens the space for collaborative and mutually involved work roles. These work roles enable much more collaborative and mutually involved modes of work organizing than the rigid work division and routine coordination of former more bureaucratic organizational forms.

The second contribution of entry one is that contemporary work roles appear 1) as genuine co-creations, 2) operate as micro modes of organizing giving rise to both structure as well as agency, 3) are (re-)shaped according to the resources they give access to and 4) “materialize” as transactional routines through both a discursive, practical, physical and emotional level. Based on these four observations the analysis demonstrates that work roles are cumulative in character as they give access to resources for further reflexive role performance. Thus the more work roles organizational members engage in, the more work roles they seem able and motivated to try out. The analysis further illustrates that in particular the assemblage of many different work roles generates the capacity to both believe and doubt among organizational members. As a result of these features, such work roles generate work organizing practices that are at the same time stabilized and transformative because they are organized around questioning (based on belief and doubt) and negotiation. The analysis shows that the co-existence and co-evolution of various interdependent work roles among organizational members spurs processes of reflexivity, which simultaneously invoke communing relationships of ongoing reflexivity at work. These features of work roles, their co-creation and the interdependence of organizational members because of their work roles (and communing relationships) are a key component of the development of work organizing practices based on belief and doubt. Hence, the overall contribution of the analysis of work roles in entry one is to show that work roles in organizations like Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. are an essential

component of the ability to co-create work organizing practices of belief and doubt with the capacity to continuously re-organize and recombine “old” and “new” resources in the process of innovation.

In turn, *entry two* shows that the sense (i.e. the experiences, ascribed meanings and use(s)) of communing among Jill, Matt and their colleagues is shaped by three features. First, communing commonly is experienced both as a sense of belonging and as a practical logic of connecting for a purpose. Secondly, that communing both seems to enable and constrain the interactions and role-figurations of organizational members. And thirdly, that communing experiences facilitate learning processes and emotional energies. The entry also shows that contemporary communing figurations at work are 1) multiple/overlapping/omnipresent and 2) that some are permanent while others are temporary.

Organizational members’ multiple (often overlapping, omnipresent, both short- and long-term) modes of communing seem to constitute an important source for developing and performing differentiated work roles, for generating and distributing knowledge sharing and for creating social integration, not only within but also across communing settings. In firms like Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. the outcome seems to be the shaping of dynamic work organizations based on strong internal and external communing relationships (of collaboration and rivalry) where diverse, highly collaborative, redefining and accountable work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt are distinctive features. Communing is therefore of central importance because it enables organizational members to trans-act and co-create in today’s connectionist and highly collaborative world of work. The senses of communing that organizational members “carry” provide a stable space (even when the communing figurations are temporary) within which work roles can be redefined, and wherein organizational members can compete, engage in doubt, and share responsibility. Hence, contemporary communing at work within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. appears as a vital asset for both human and organizational growth – not least because it enables dynamic work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

After work roles and communing practices, *entry three* turns to the integration, organization and management of organizational members’ diverse work organizing practices. The central aim has been to understand how the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt occurs because these work practices are a central component of organizations that are able to continuously experiment, reflect, question and improve within and across various collaborative communities. It also investigated the communing relationships and situated work roles that become possible in the context of these work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The analysis generates three main analytical findings.

First, it shows that team-based collaborative work forms allow organizational members to continuously experiment with and innovate their work practices. These dynamic work organizing practices allow organizational members to develop new roles and communing relationships. The continuous mix of diverse work organizing practices supports organizational members’ ability to engage in belief and doubt and thus to continuously refine and improve their activities at work. Second, it shows that the organization of work within and between teams is based on collaborative and rivalrous communing practices. These dynamics exist within and between basic units, teams and

ad hoc teams. Collaboration and rivalry in and across these different sites enables the co-creation of dynamic work organizing practices (and work roles) “from below”. Third, the analysis identifies three managerial principles that seem central in governing and underpinning the co-creation of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices among organizational members: 1) a constitutional order of distributed authority, 2) the pragmatic use of and constant experimentation with templates for organizing continuous self-doubt (and belief) and 3) the co-creation of a guiding “corporate we”. I argue that these three principles underpin distributed modes of managing work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

In sum, entry 3 demonstrates how processes of integrating, organizing and managing “from below” facilitate the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt - practices that seem to enable and cultivate various situated work roles and communing relationships that allow organizations to search for better solutions, question existing practices, experiment with new ones and thus support continuous human and organizational growth.

Each of the three chapter entry points above explore one component - work roles, communing or work organizing practices – and then use that component in order to gain leverage and understand the ability of organizational members to successfully co-create the others. For example, entry 1 explores the nature of work roles, explains how organizational members co-create them, and how these work roles together with the communing relationships they invoke enable the forms of work organization present in the new organizational forms that are the subject of this dissertation. Because these components are interdependent and each permits an understanding of the others, their ultimate meaning/role becomes clear only when we consider them together. I therefore argue that the unique combination of work roles, communing forms and work organizing practices present in the Danish firms under study is the foundation of the business of co-creation. This process of co-creation - wherein organizational members are enmeshed in work roles that are constantly shifting and being redefined, workplaces where communing experiences foster a sense of belonging and common purpose, and work organizing practices that lead organizational members to constantly experiment and innovate through reflection, doubt (and belief), collaboration and rivalry – enables these organizational forms. It is exactly the co-creation of these 3 dimensions that promotes human and organizational growth and enables these firms to be dynamic, learning/search organizations based on an organizational “habitus” of belief and doubt.

This concludes the discussion of the business of co-creation between work roles, communing and work organizing practices. The next and last part of the dissertation (Chapter 8, 9 and 10) explores some of the co-creative dynamics that emerge from the relational interplay between these three analytical dimensions. Focusing on the wider “outputs” and implications of this interplay, this part of the dissertation addresses the question of what work organizing practices of belief and doubt co-create. In this way it seeks to more closely illuminate *the co-creation of business* that takes shape within Danish manufacturing companies experimenting with post bureaucratic modes of work organizing of belief and doubt. This part of the analysis is based on three papers which explore how new ways of team learning, managerial principles and modes of organizing towards continuous human and organizational growth are co-created within the firms under study. The first paper “Team Learning: Through the Relational Dynamics of Co-operation and Rivalry in Team Communities” explores the co-creative links between co-operation, rivalry and leaning within the structure of team

communities. The second paper “Managing Co-creation in and between Collaborative Communities” addresses how organizational members coordinate work in highly collaborative settings, and how they jointly develop management practices facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities. The third paper “Taking Teams Seriously in the Co-creation of Economic Agency: Towards an Organizational Sociology of Teams” investigates how teams mutually constitute each other and how they jointly may co-create the firm as a community of team communities. In this way each paper seeks to illuminate different aspects of the co-creation of business within the Danish manufacturing firms under study<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> All three papers are genuine work-in-progress. However the status of them is different. The first paper on team learning has been peer review and re-submitted. The second and third paper has not been submitted. A former version of the third paper has been presented as a conference paper. In this way the three papers are at different stages towards publishing.

## CHAPTER 8 – (PAPER I)

### TEAM LEARNING: THROUGH THE RELATIONAL DYNAMICS OF CO-OPERATION AND RIVALRY IN TEAM COMMUNITIES

#### **Abstract**

*In this paper I explore the constructive links between cooperation, rivalry, and learning within the structure of team communities. Drawing upon social learning theory, the main purpose here is to argue that both cooperation and rivalry are important triggers for mobilizing learning processes within and between teams. However, social learning theory tends to disregard the positive aspects of rivalry. Instead, I argue in this that rivalry is often critical for learning to take place, and I identify four recurrent stories of rivalry as a trigger of learning based on field studies of teamwork dynamics in firms. Consequently, this paper argues for the need to extend social learning theory beyond its rather harmonious learning perspective.*

*Key Words: Team Communities, Rivalry, Co-operation and Learning*<sup>107</sup>

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Within the field of team-study, researchers argue that the ability of teams to continuously learn, develop, and innovate is strengthened through the establishment of horizontal relations of co-operation. However, critics of teamwork often claim that this work form constructs an illusion of equality and harmony among team members, in which feelings of superiority and inferiority are abandoned in the name of an ideal of equality, co-operation and fellowship. Instead, they argue that embedded in the heart of teamwork is an inescapable tension between cooperation and competition (rivalry will be used synonymously in the paper – Sennett, 1998; Hocschild, 1997; Casey, 1998; Sinclair, 2002). While many of the critics highlight this tension as strictly negative and damaging for the work life of team members, it is argued here that the tension between cooperation and rivalry (if dealt with more explicitly on both a theoretical and practical level) is not necessarily negative. On the contrary, it may be what sets the agenda for elaborating on organizational means to construct the organization as a dynamic learning community of teams, and the individual team as a vibrant learning community within this community.

More precisely, this paper investigates 1) *how different team communities (team communing practices) produce/create intra- and interrelations of co-operation and rivalry, and 2) how these team-based constitutive practices lead to dynamic learning processes within and between teams*<sup>108</sup>. However, while aspects of learning through cooperation in teams have been discussed to a much greater extent within the learning literature as well as in team-studies (see for instance Wenger, 1997; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Hvenegaard, Jessen

<sup>107</sup> In this paper I use the term co-operation to denote what I in the rest of dissertation name collaboration. In short, I here simply treat the terms as synonymous.

<sup>108</sup> In this paper, team community is understood as a constitutive practice of organizing relations among team members and teams. Thus it is defined as a “relational setting”, constituted by both endogenous and exogenous relations. In this light, a team community is not just conditioned by internal relational patterns among its members, but also by virtue of its relations to other teams and the wider organizational context (Kristensen & Lotz, 2005). Furthermore, I will (often) use the verb form, team communing, to highlight the processual character of the notion of team community - hereby seeking to overcome what Elias calls the problem of “process-reduction” (i.e. the reduction of processes to static conditions) (Elias, 1978: 112). With this I wish to emphasize that the concept of team community does not represent a predefined fixed “entity” but reflects a relational concept which continuously is constituted (and reconstituted) in the very process of interaction (i.e. it is always articulated and constituted in social relations) (Emirbayer, 1997).

& Hasle, 2003), less explicit attention has been given to rivalry as a trigger for mobilizing learning processes. Consequently, rivalry and its impact on learning as a trigger of processes of change, reflection and re-creation, will be the primary focal point of this paper. My interest here lies in the impact of cooperation and rivalry on learning at both the individual and team level.<sup>109</sup>

This paper will proceed as follows: first, in order to explore the relational dynamics of rivalry, cooperation and learning in team communities, I will examine how teamwork and learning are related. Second, I will outline the learning perspective of the paper. Subsequently, I will turn to the concept of rivalry in order to explore how this phenomenon may contribute to learning and present four empirical stories of rivalry from the paper's two case studies. These are stories centered on *performing and making results, shifting roles, gaining skills and competencies, and striving for social reputation*. Finally, I will set out the findings and discuss how our understanding of rivalry as a trigger of learning can be advanced.

## BACKGROUND AND EMPIRICAL BASIS OF THE PAPER

This paper is part of a larger project which addresses the roles and productive energies of communing within contemporary team-based work organizing practices. In the larger study, the role of novel collaborative and communing practices in and between relational team settings, as triggers for learning, creative co-design, innovative change, and co-experimental governance are explored using qualitative case studies of seven Danish production companies. A puzzling paradox emerges out of this research about how the dynamics of team learning within and between teams seems to unfold empirically – since (contrary to the dominant picture of team learning as a primarily harmonious and consensus based process) not only equal relations of co-operation but also rivalry appear to have a positive effect on team members' aspirations and capacities to learn. Several of the team communities under study do not simply carry out a well-defined set of activities and routines but have also been delegated the responsibility for continuous improvements of work routines and innovative changes. Within such team-based relational settings, a reflexive practice of mutual learning is pivotal to the teams' ability to improve and innovate. As indicated, these reflexive team organizing practices apparently do not only emerge through cooperation, but also seem to be closely linked with internal relations of rivalry over who is the 'best' man (or woman) on the team, who is best at teaching others, who is ascribed recognition or given most credit; or with external relations of rivalry over which teams generate the smartest new ideas, improvements or best performance results. It is this (apparent) contradiction that sets the scene and is the driving force behind this paper.

I will address the contradiction empirically by using data from two case studies, which are still in progress. The two case study organizations, Train Ltd. and Tools Ltd. operate in the transport and steel industries in Denmark, and have around 10 years of experience with the team-based work model<sup>110</sup>. However, each company has developed its own form of team organization, thus representing two different relational structures of team communities (or team communing processes), in which distinct dynamics of co-operation and rivalry unfold<sup>111</sup>. The methods deployed

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<sup>109</sup> I will clarify my understanding of the reciprocal connection between the two levels later in the paper.

<sup>110</sup> The case study organizations are referred to by way of pseudonyms.

in the case studies include formal and informal interviewing, observations and secondary data obtained on specific information from each site. The selection of the two cases is strategic. They were chosen because they are particularly rich in information about the significance of rivalry and team learning. In light of my eclectic approach and the exploratory nature of this research, I have no ambitions of generalizing the “findings” from the two cases or delivering any solid conclusions about the nature of rivalry and learning. Instead, the aim in this is to pinpoint, both empirically and theoretically, some of the constructive links between cooperation, rivalry and learning in order to further our understanding of the productive forces of rivalry, a phenomenon which is habitually constrained by taboo in daily life and either neglected or treated implicitly within most learning perspectives.

### TEAMWORK AND LEARNING IN TEAM COMMUNITIES

This section will briefly outline how teamwork and learning are normally related or matched within team literature. Among team researchers, it is widely recognized that the conditions for learning are intimately bound up with work design. Teamwork is generally seen as one of the more favorable forms for work organization, when it comes to fostering learning within organizational contexts (Innnoflex Research Report, 2003). One of the central reasons for this is that the work form stresses factors such as worker autonomy, collaboration, and co-determination. Additionally, it involves a movement towards job enrichment instead of a Tayloristic division of work, the use of workers' knowledge, continuous skill development and the reintegration of conception and execution (Pruijt, 2002; Benders, 2006, 2002, 1999). In this way, the work model not only emphasizes the importance of formal training and instruction, but also the pivotal role of informal practice-based learning through cooperation, mutual reflection and continuous knowledge creation and diffusion among team members. Precise designs for teamwork, however, vary considerably; some team models offer very little by way of employee empowerment, autonomy and scope for mutual learning and diffusion of knowledge, while others enable autonomous reflection to a much greater extent and indeed autonomous reflection upon such actions through decentralization and empowerment (e.g. lean teams vs. socio-technical teams). Despite this variation, the outcome of teamwork is commonly linked to increased learning capacity and better competitiveness: in fact this trinity is often “lauded” as the overall rationale for the organizing practices of teamwork (Arnal, Ok and Torres, 2001; Hills, 2001; Gold, 2005).

In terms of learning, Peter Senge has argued that *“the rate at which organizations learn may become the only sustainable source of competitive advantage”* (Senge, 1990: 3). Yet, while the rate of learning is one thing, the way in which we actually learn in organizations is another. In my view, the latter concern is a precondition of the success of the former, if we wish to enhance our knowledge on how the learning rate - in other words the ability to learn, innovate and make continuous improvement in team organizations - can be improved. For instance, we may ignore important insights if we see learning in organizations solely as something that is always good, harmonious and consensus-based and which can only be activated and accomplished through managerial achievements (See for example Peter Senge, 1990; Kofman and Senge, 1990). Accordingly, we might blind ourselves, and not

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<sup>111</sup> Tools Ltd. produces cutting tools, nails, and nail guns and offers production optimizing consultancy services, tool management and education and training. The Danish headquarters employs approximately 500 people. Train Ltd. produces, rebuilds and restores trains. It is part of a multinational corporation within the transport industry and employs approximately 400 people.

discover central learning dynamics, if we stick exclusively to a socially-oriented but primarily non-conflictual perspective on learning, where learning is understood as the act of participation and interaction/transaction in communities of practice (See for example Etienne Wenger, 1997; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Silvia Gherardi, 2001). In the following, I shall briefly outline the paper's learning perspective and pinpoint how it attempts to contribute to existing perspectives on learning in team communities.

The understanding of learning that I propose in this paper can be traced back to the tradition of social learning theory (in this paper primarily represented by Wenger). This theoretical tradition has the practice-based forms of learning as its primary focus. Within this perspective, learning is conceived as an integral and inseparable part of social practice, and consequently experience is seen as the crucial source of learning (Gherardi, 2000, 2001; Kolb, 1974). It implies that "the learned" is a result of engaging in the actual process of interaction and performance. In this view, learning is never a "one (wo)man show", but a relational process of experiential engagement, always situated in practice, for example in the case of emerging communities of practice where learning through practice or learning-in-working is seen as the central model for learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991). According to Wenger, learning as social participation refers to the process of being active participants in the practices of social communities (e.g. team communities at work) and constructing identities in relation to these communities. He describes the learning process in the following way:

*"Participating... in a work team, for instance, is both a kind of action and a form of belonging. Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do"* (Wenger, 1997: 4)

Within this view, learning always takes place in a participatory (and hence social) framework, not in the individual mind (as a cognitive-learning perspective would stress). This kind of relational learning view does not imply a disregard of the individual, but a perception of the individual as part of a community (Elkjaer, 2000). In this sense, a distinction between the individual and the social (or team or organization) is no longer possible. The two dimensions are mutually constitutive. They produce each other and are therefore, simultaneously, products of each other, linked by a process of mutual formation (Bramming, 2006; Emirbayer, 1997)<sup>112</sup>. In this way, the learning process both embodies an "inter-cranial" and a "social" dimension, which are reciprocal and hence can only be separated at an analytical level.

The theory's focus on the practice-based forms of learning makes it well suited to exploring and understanding the learning dynamics within and between team communities. However, in my search for how both co-operation and rivalry may trigger the learning processes in teams, the social learning perspective tends to disregard one aspect: the notion of rivalry. Let me illustrate my point by listing Wenger's nine forms of relations that contribute to constellations of communities of practice:

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<sup>112</sup> Within a relational perspective, individuals, (team) communities or organizations are conceived as inseparable from their relational context. Mustafa Emirbayer elaborates on this by quoting Cassirer in the following way: "[Things] are not assumed as independent existences present anterior to any relation, but...gain their whole being... first in and with the relations which are predicated of them. Such "things" are terms of relations, and as such can never be "given" in isolation but only in ideal community with each other" (Cassirer in Emirbayer 1997: 287).



1. Sharing historical roots
2. Having related enterprises
3. Serving a cause or belonging to an institution
4. Facing similar conditions
5. Having members in common
6. Sharing artifacts
7. Having geographical relations of proximity or interaction
8. Having overlapping styles of discourses
9. Competing for the same resources (Wenger, 1997: 127)

A brief look at Wenger's list indicates that the character of relations is primarily described through terms like *sharing*, *having related*, *facing similar*, *in common*, and *overlapping*. Connotations that arise from this list relate to unity and harmony rather than conflict and rivalry. Only the last form of relationship – competing for the same resources – directs our attention to a potential conflict of relations: unstable balances of power, inequality, discord and rivalry within communities of practice. But all in all, it is cohesive, harmonious associations and images of learning that tend to dominate Wenger's theoretical universe. Quite contrary to Wenger's intentions (he does not neglect power and competition and several times emphasizes the conflictual nature of social practice), this shortcoming downplays the dynamic tensions and struggles within a (team) community and hence their potential impact on learning in such participation practices. The limitation of unifying intimations in both Wenger and Lave's approaches has been pointed out by several authors (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Bottrup, 2003; Gherardi et al., 1998; Henriksson, 2000). For instance, Contu and Willmott show in great detail that, although power relations are by no means a marginal element in Lave and Wenger's conceptions of situated learning (in fact, Lave and Wenger highlight that unequal relations of power should be included more systematically in future learning analysis), in their empirical illustrations of learning practices: *"a slippage occurs from a "theory of practice" that commends considerations of "relations of power"...to illustrations of situated learning that marginalize such considerations"* (Contu and Willmott, 2003). Additionally, in the following extract, Kristina Henriksson comments on how the unifying intimations reveal themselves in Wenger and Lave's empirical work:

*"Their examples from ethnographies of practices... express rather smooth socializing trajectories as individuals engage in practice, gradually align their actions to, and take habits and language of a larger collective. Although the authors argue analytically against romanticizing communities of practice... potentially bumpy community rides are to a large extent absent from ensuing illustrations"* (Henriksson, 2000: 11).

Pernille Bottrup criticizes their somewhat non-conflictual approach in a similar vein. Although in some points Lave and Wenger demonstrate that they have an eye for the potential power games involved in becoming accepted as a participant in the community, once they acknowledge a participant is accepted, they conceive of learning processes within a given community of practice as a rather harmonious and unproblematic mutual engagement – furthered by aligned action, trust, dialogue, cooperation and joint constructions of meaning (Bottrup, 2003). In this construction, learning seems to be a fairly harmonious trust-based form of adjustment to the community of practice. One decisive problem within such a perspective is that learning processes tend to reproduce the existing ones. A parallel shortcoming to this would be, for example, the limits of Argyris and Schön's single-loop learning or Senge's similar adaptive learning type (Argyris & Schön,

1996; Senge, 1990). Correctly, one could argue that such mere harmonious based adjustments never just reproduce the existing ones since any transactions (even the most harmonious communing practices) produce unintended consequences and thus never work quite as we imagine they should or will. Precisely because we constantly make incessant mistakes and through our interactions produce unanticipated consequences path dependency and the reproduction of existing social patterns (e.g. learning processes in a community of practice) will always remain provisional and contingent.

Indeed this is a crucial point about social processes that draws attention to how any (learning) situation always embodies the possibility for change (Tilly, 1998; Pierson, 2000). However, I do argue that, within primarily harmonious based communities of practice, it is more difficult to see how new routines, a constant redefinition of roles, beliefs and ideas or co-innovative change can flourish in an environment that praises unity and excludes the bumpy rides of communing in the name of harmony and passive adjustment. Over time, such social worlds often seem to rest on a “sticky” propensity to merely reproduce practice and hence kill creativity, since they abandon how diversity, conflicts, problematic situations or power struggles may also act as resources that spur processes of change, reflection and re-creation. These are processes that to a greater extent allow us to continuously recognize, reconfigure, recombine, redefine, re-create and reorganize for example ourselves, knowledge, ideas, technology, work tasks, routines, products, services etc. for further creation within organizational life. Learning in team communities is therefore more than mere processes of adjustment to the existent, because the teamwork model is often implemented with the very purpose of enhancing the abilities of organizations to innovate, challenge habits and routines and strengthen their readiness for change. Thus, a solely harmonious perception of learning is not very fruitful if one wants to explore how reflexive practices of mutual learning may facilitate the production of new ideas, the aspiration to come up with smarter ways of doing work, and creating a work environment where doubt and curiosity towards the existing work practice create the basis for innovative changes and continuous improvements. Accordingly, my argument in this paper will be to extend social learning theory beyond its broad and harmonious understanding of learning by illuminating how rivalry and not only equal relations of cooperation may trigger the learning processes within contemporary high performance team communities.

Another shortcoming within many social learning theories is that the actual learning processes and the concrete learning mechanisms are treated as ‘black boxes’. It is indeed liberating to see how these theories have allowed learning to enter the social field, and added social considerations to the usual (and often simplistic) focus on individual learning. However, the trade off for this often seems to be a very broad (and hence vague) conceptualization of learning. When these approaches define learning as something that takes place when we participate in and across communities of practice (or other social settings) the phenomenon becomes omnipresent and thus resembles the very process of socialization or participation in life. For instance, Wenger repeatedly describes learning as the act of living (Wenger, 1997, 2004). Consequently, learning tends to cover everything and nothing at the same time and therefore ends up as a very blurred concept/process within most practice based learning theories. Questions such as - how do we learn through participation? What triggers our actual learning processes? Or how are both action and thinking or mind and body involved in our collective learning practices? – thus become genuinely difficult to explore from a strictly social learning perspective. The work of the American pragmatist John Dewey, however, does confront

the questions of how we actually learn. In arguing for a new learning perspective that encompasses the “learning-aspects” of both co-operation and rivalry, I will later introduce and draw upon Dewey's understanding of learning and experience. In this way, I will place the “how” of learning within and between team communities at the core of my explorative approach. However, first I will turn to the concept of rivalry in order to explore how this phenomenon may contribute to learning.

### **APPROACHING RIVALRY: A PHENOMENON CONSTRAINED BY TABOO**

For many people (including me), the term rivalry has, at first glance, a rather unpleasant flavor. One reason may be that it points to conflict, struggles and unequal balances of power as an integral element of all human relationships. These connotations do not immediately correspond to present-day democratic values such as liberty, equality and solidarity (at least not within a Danish/European context). Cas Wouters describes the era after the Second World War as a period: “*of expanding interdependencies and rising levels of mutual identification, in which ideals of equality and mutual consent spread and gained strength*” (Wouters, 1998: 143). He argues that the ideal of equality allows for an informalization of our emotional life on the one hand, but on the other imposes a ban on expressing feelings of extreme inferiority or superiority, because such feelings do not “match” the equality-figuration of our time. He describes this avoidance in the following extract:

*“The insight that feelings of inferiority and superiority are inherently provoked by any status competition tended to be banned, and the same goes for the insight that part of any encounter or gathering is a ‘trial of strength’, a power and status competition. Thus, during the same period in which many emotions were allowed to (re)emerge into consciousness and public life...., simultaneously the emotions connected with triumphs and defeats were becoming ‘strange’ to the self”* (Wouters, 1998: 143).

According to Wouters, competition or rivalry, understood as trials of strength over power, status or success, exist as everyday occurrences and intrinsically provoke feelings of inferiority and superiority. Experiencing or displaying such feelings, however, have become extremely taboo and are consequently banished to the realm of imagination and sports, or hidden behind social and psychic fronts. In this light, the offensive connotations which cling to the concept of rivalry seem quite comprehensible. Although feelings of undisguised inferiority or superiority are banned from what Goffmann would call our front stage, they naturally do not vanish from social life. Instead, one's own demonstrations of distinctiveness, ‘trials of strength’ or what has in this paper been named as rivalry seem to become more indirect, subtle and hidden.

Despite the taboo face of rivalry in all aspects of our social life, relations of rivalry recur again and again. We know the trials of strength from school: Am I better? Are you better? The competition in children's games or between brothers and sisters. We know of rivalry at work, between colleagues striving for promotion, status or recognition. We compete in sport, and within our capitalistic market, competition is the basic ordering structure both in a structural and an ideological sense. The list of occurrences in which rivalry can make itself felt is endless. It illustrates that, even though social codes dictate the avoidance of inferiority and feelings of superiority, rivalry is an integral form of social interaction in society.

In the following, I will try to look more closely at the character of rivalry and its significance, in order to draw some general links between co-operation, rivalry and learning on a theoretical level. For this exploration I will draw upon three relational thinkers, the notion of conflict and John Dewey.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RIVALRY FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Grasping the character and significance of rivalry is by no means a clear-cut matter and is first and foremost something which must be determined empirically (since practice always gives words their meaning – cf. Wittgenstein). However, eclectically drawing upon Norbert Elias, Georg Simmel, and Johan Asplund I will first briefly identify some of the central features of rivalry before relating it to learning. First of all, Elias emphasizes that engaging in trials of strength over power balances is among the basic properties of all human relationships (Elias, 1978: 78, 175). Accordingly, Asplund describes rivalry as a form of elementary social interaction which is characterized by a struggle over some kind of object. The object can be either material or symbolic (e.g. resources, power, social prestige, status or success etc.), and is always characterized by scarcity. Thus the struggle cannot be understood without an object (Lind, 2001). This further implies that interactions of rivalry always embody a conflict, a basic tension between contrasts striving for the same object. In this way Asplund points to another central feature of rivalry, namely its always inherent conflict and connectedness to an object.

According to both Simmel and Asplund, it is misleading to view conflict as an obstacle to unity, contrasted to cooperation, which is seen to be an integrative and unifying force. Both argued that conflict is also a sociation, a form of interaction designed to resolve divergent dualisms. In this light rivalry does not always result in a break of social relations but can establish them as well (Asplund, 1972: 57; Asplund, 1989: 15-17). Additionally, Simmel shows that an ideal of a relationship free of conflict is not unifying but, on the contrary, disintegrative and counterproductive:

*“opposition gives us inner satisfaction, distraction, relief. ....It allows us to prove our strength consciously and only thus gives vitality and reciprocity to conditions from which, without such corrective, we would withdraw at any cost”*  
(Simmel, 1971: 75).

Consequently, conflicts or relations of rivalry seem rather to unite and increase the understanding and reciprocity between persons, instead of decreasing them in many cases. A third central feature of rivalry is thus its corrective and hence always collective character. To sum up, in Simmel's words, an absolutely harmonious relationship or group is empirically unreal, because there: *“exists no social unit in which convergent and divergent currents among its members are not inseparably interwoven”* (Simmel, 1971: 72). Therefore, both kinds of interactions may (usually) be found in any real situation. Following this line of thinking, cooperation and rivalry are not complete oppositional contrasts, but interwoven forms of interactions or relationships both working as integrative forces in social life, such as between the members of contemporary team communities.

How, then, does this relate to learning? The link I propose in this paper is as follows: Simmel's quotation about opposition highlights how we prove our strength consciously through situations of conflict and thus become aware of our reciprocity to conditions. He indicates that in this way we become able to reflect upon and be aware of “the other” as well as our own capabilities (and self).

Participating in such corrective relations, I will argue, reflects a learning process quite similar to Dewey's conception/description/understanding of how we actually learn. I thus turn to Dewey's notion of learning, according to which mere participation in practice does not create learning, because learning is a process of inquiry that includes actions as well as reflection, thinking and cognition (i.e. involves our head and body). In general he defines learning as a continuous reorganization and reconstruction of experience which takes place all the time in all social situations where people act, interact, reflect and think<sup>113</sup>. Learning (understood as reflective experience) unfolds in the transaction between the individual and the situations that she/he is part of (Elkjær, 1998)<sup>114</sup>. It always grows out of / is triggered by a situation where a person is in doubt or confused, i.e. facing a situation that is uncertain or problematic. It is a situation that makes a person stop, think, act and think again. In addition, Dewey argues that knowledge is constructed by making inquiries into situations of uncertainty; when we face such problematic situations our habitual actions are upset and it is exactly this provocative element in experience which creates the basis for new experiences. Thus, we gain new experiences as a result of inquiries into problematic situations (e.g. conflictual situations of rivalry). It is the sense of uncertainty that triggers our ability to inquire and hence our ability to learn and re-learn from experience (i.e. our actual learning processes) (For a very good discussion of this point see Elkjær, 1998, 2000; Shustermann, 1999)

Drawing on Simmel's and Dewey's thoughts, rivalry can be said to always embody or rest upon a situation of uncertainty, because of its inherent conflict (tension between contrast striving for the same object). It is so to speak forever grounded in a problematic situation that challenges existing habits and thus creates the basis for new (learning) experiences. Hence rivalry seems to provoke our former experience and thus trigger new learning processes. In this light it is namely the provocative or corrective element of rivalry that enables reflection upon former actions and practices in order to anticipate further consequences, act and think differently, change existing routines, or come up with new ideas. Relations of rivalry inevitably spur processes of inquiry into existing practices. Consequently, I argue that rivalry reflects a learning process that not only tends to reproduce the existent, but opens up for new experiences and change of habits. My argument is in many ways similar to the way in which social learning theory characterizes learning as the engagement in practice through participation, since rivalry as cooperation represents a form of active engagement in practice. However, the two analytical learning processes are different in one respect: the harmony-based learning process, found within social learning theory, tends to reproduce the existent, while the rivalry-based learning figure, proposed in this paper, tends to trigger innovation due to the inherent conflict (problematic situation) on which it is founded. Said differently, the conflict dimension of rivalry creates an urge to challenge the existent: an urge to experiment, reconfigure and redefine etc. which is not found (at least to the same extent) within learning processes through mere harmonious relations of cooperation. In the same way, any trial of strength or dynamic relation of rivalry can be seen as a learning-process that to a greater extent than learning through only cooperation, challenges the existent and thus promotes change and innovation. The sketched

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<sup>113</sup> Dewey more precisely defines what it means to learn from experience in the following way: "To learn from experience is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like..." (Dewey, 1916: 140).

<sup>114</sup> According to Dewey: "we never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in connection with a contextual whole. This latter is what is called a "situation"" (Dewey, 1938 as quoted in Elkjaer 1998).

Simmel-Dewey inspired learning-figure creates a vital link between rivalry and learning. It is not opposed to a traditional harmonious and collaborative-based social learning perspective. On the contrary, it deepens our understanding of *how* we actually learn, and what triggers our learning processes in the social situations or practices we engage in. The two perspectives are in fact complementary and should be integrated. Such a two-folded analytic learning-figure explicitly brings rivalry into the terrain of social learning theory. Hence it offers a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic links between cooperation, rivalry and learning, and thus extends social learning theory beyond its primary harmonious conception of learning.

Before I attempt to introduce some empirical examples of rivalry from my field studies (with the purpose of attaining a better understanding of rivalry and learning), one important qualification should [or “must”] be made.

The significance of rivalry is clearly not always positive. It has two integrated faces, so to speak: one constructive and one destructive. Simmel also emphasizes that conflict contains both positive and negative aspects (Simmel, 1971: 71). For instance, causes of rivalry and conflict such as hate, envy, extreme jealousy or greed most often work as dissociating factors and promote destructive forms of rivalry. Likewise, total indifference between two or more persons breeds negative conflict and makes constructive relations of rivalry impossible. Further to this, the consequences of rivalry are not always positive. Stress, inferiority, feeling worn out, etc. may often represent the negative, shadow sides of rivalry. Although the destructive face of rivalry is pivotal and needs to be taken into account and prevented, it is not the focus of my paper. My focus here is on the positive aspects of rivalry and its impact on learning. Consequently, one could claim that the stories of rivalry presented in this paper tend to be of the more positive kind. However, any choice is always also a deselection, and the mentioned limitation must be seen in the light of the paper’s purpose.

### **APPROACHING RIVALRY EMPIRICALLY – IS A CHALLENGE!**

To empirically study the dynamics of rivalry within and between team communities is a challenge. I asked the subjects interviewed to communicate their perceptions of and experiences with competition at work. In particular, I asked them to talk about concrete situations where they had experienced relations of constructive rivalry within their team or between teams. Their responses to my questions about rivalry were at first often negative: “*No, we don’t compete with each other – we are a team*” or “*I don’t know of any rivalry between colleagues*”. Given such answers, I tried to explicate the positive aspects of rivalry I was curious about: the friendly competition games, the need for recognition, discussions about status competition, as a trigger for coming up with new ideas etc. Some would call this “fishing for the ‘right’ answers”, but my explications helped to uncover rivalrous behaviors. Afterwards the interviewees talked much more freely about their experiences of rivalry in their daily work life. Nevertheless, the fact that rivalry is hampered by taboo is reflected in the interviews. Hence the empirical material is not full of heavy and detailed descriptions of rivalry. However, through a triangulation of interviews, observations and information specific to the site, I shall outline the dynamics of rivalry that I encountered during my empirical study.

## DYNAMICS OF RIVALRY FROM THE FIELD

To depict the distinct forms of team communities characteristic within the case studies, and to show how they create intra- and interrelations of co-operation and rivalry, three descriptive tools have been used to guide the first phase of analysis: *the team architecture* (the organizational design of the teams); *the team activity* (the actual work process and variety of tasks performed); and *the authority structure of the team* (encompassing the management form and the team's decision-making power)<sup>115</sup>. In this preliminary phase, I used these three analytical tools because they, in different (though also overlapping) ways, influence the relational setting of team communities (i.e. the pattern of relationships within and between teams). Additionally they pave the way for a new perspective on both the structural and processual elements of teamwork and learning. Using these frames to structure my field study, I traced the stories of how relations of rivalry seem to have a positive impact on teams and team members' learning processes within the case studies. From this basis, and as a second phase in the analysis, I condensed the stories of rivalry. Four stories or typical situations of constructive rivalry relations then emerged from the empirical material. These are stories centered on *performing and making results, shifting roles, gaining skills and competencies, and striving for social reputation*<sup>116</sup>. In the following pages, the four stories will be presented and some general conclusions will follow in the subsequent section.

## PERFORMING AND MAKING RESULTS

Team-based systems of incentives with a high degree of financial transparency are characteristic within both case-studies. According to team workers, these systems give rise to the dynamics of rivalry over performance results, and are particularly experienced between teams, thus furthering their ability to continuously reflect upon and improve existing routines.

The systems of incentives in the companies are directly designed for and targeted to create a competitive environment. For instance, Train Ltd's teams (typically consisting of ten skilled and unskilled workers of different professions) are created when a new contract (of say ten trains for Italy) has been concluded. This contract frames the tasks and the budget of the teams within a project. But within this frame, the team is free to find better and more profitable ways of producing the trains. If it does, it can keep 50% of the gains for itself, while the rest is transferred to the plant as a whole. Thus, the teams are not only responsible for the actual production processes, but are also drawing up and implementing the budget and are made accountable for their part of the project. Such an incentive-based team design encourages greater cost-consciousness and financial responsibility among the team workers, and the management stresses that it is the company's "*most important tool for involving our workers and creating a competitive environment*". In Tools Ltd., all employees

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<sup>115</sup> This distinction is inspired by Bacon & Blyton's study of high and low road team working (Bacon & Blyton, 2000) and Bacharach's dimensions of team theory (Bacharach, 2004).

<sup>116</sup> The stories will not be presented as case specific practices. Traits of the stories can be found in both case studies despite differences in work products, work organization, context etc. My intention in this paper is not to compare the two, but to use them equally and eclectically as the paper's empirical source. In addition to this, at the inter-relational team level, each team coordinator meets regularly with "others of their kind" from the other teams to share experiences and discuss problems connected to their roles. These inter-team activities or cross-team discussions enhance the workers' knowledge sharing, reflection, and the inter-relational dynamics of learning among the teams. In particular, these inter-team activities seem to facilitate the formation of team communities of highly reflexive practitioners. At this level, rivalry may also be at stake. However, at the moment, I need further empirical investigation/findings to support such statements.

are part of a bonus scheme through which profit sharing is based upon the previous months' surplus, and the employees are continuously informed about turnover, strategies, and the assessment of outcomes and other performance criteria. The key question here is to understand how these systems create the basis for constructive dynamics of (co-operation and) rivalry.

According to the team workers, their economic systems of incentives create opportunities and aspirations for both co-operation and rivalry. The teams' responsibility for the financial management of their area in particular, and performance-pay dependent on their abilities to yield profit, enables the workers to realize that their joint actions strongly affect the profits received by the team. In addition, a need for dialogue, close bonds of internal cooperation and daily knowledge sharing within each team is evident. In this way, I argue that team-based economic incentive systems seem to nurture ongoing inquiry and reflection on how to continuously improve performance. They also appear to further awareness of the joint daily practice in the team communities through, for example, relations of mutual commitment and cooperation.

Yet, performing and achieving good results as a team is not just a harmonious and unproblematic collaborative process, since the economic incentive systems also confront the team workers with choices about how to complete a given task, official performance targets, demands about effectiveness, or their ability to present the right competencies, as well as doubt about their own personal capabilities to match the very same demands. Facing situations riddled with uncertainty, the team workers' former experiences are provoked and their existing habits challenged. According to the team workers' experiences of rivalry, one key way to cope with such situations of uncertainty is to enter into trials of strength over the performance results they have achieved. Engaging in these relations of rivalry, the team workers make inquiries into (their) problematic situations, and thus gain new learning experiences (on, for example, how to perform better). Thus these situations seem to trigger relations of rivalry among the team workers that "force" them to continuously reflect upon their practice and improve performance results (i.e. to learn and re-learn). The high degree of financial transparency in the workplace seems, in particular, to produce an external rivalry between teams over performance results. For instance, the interviewed team workers were highly aware of both their own team performance results and that of the other teams. In addition, when asked about rivalry, they often mentioned that informal relations of rivalry among teams, such as in the case of competing for status (e.g. the desire to be the most successful team performers, the winners!) often gave rise to a "we" against "them" mentality and created the dynamics of a contest. These inter-relational dynamics of competing over comparative performance across teams are highlighted by the team workers as an important motivation for getting them to suggest smarter ways of working and striving for continuous improvement within the team communing practices.

## SHIFTING ROLES

Another story of rivalry emerges from the co-managing authority structures in the case companies. In Train Ltd., a formal set of co-ordinating roles has been institutionalized in each team, while the same tendencies can be traced in Tools Ltd., although on a more informal and unstructured basis. As a result, team members are responsible for different co-ordinating roles and this practice of taking on and shifting roles gives rise to the constructive dynamics of rivalry within team communities.



The management philosophy in both companies is that employee-initiated decisions and ideas are easier to sustain. Thus, the authority structures invite a high degree of “autonomy” and encourage the team workers to manage themselves and their problems in relation to daily practices, (e.g. planning, division of labor, purchase, absence, vacation). Consequently they are encouraged as well as expected to actively participate in managing the daily work processes and hence take on different roles, develop within them and learn from these engagements in their practice. As indicated, Train Ltd. has, to a great extent, formalized the processes involved in shifting roles. Accordingly, in each team the position of team coordinator is divided into three roles that members of the team perform in turn. Each team has an “overviewer”, who is responsible for staffing, consumption per hour, utilization etc., an “optimizer”, responsible for the current optimization and improvement of work processes, and a “group developer”, responsible for the proper functioning of the team’s social life.

Given that the team members perform the three co-ordinating roles in turn, they are all actively engaged in and share responsibility for the tasks and obligations required in the roles. Through this form of mutual cooperation the individual team member becomes better able to take on the roles of others and to reflect on these, and thus better able to contribute to new ideas and suggestions for improvements. Such forms of co-operative role shifting within teams seem to strengthen the intra-relational learning processes within the team communities. At the same time, learning tendencies of another kind are triggered, because the co-managing practice of shifting team coordinator roles introduces a new competition object up front, i.e. the status and success of being role master. Being thrown into new roles is experienced by the team workers as a challenge, but they also find this anxiety provoking, since it involves new situations of uncertainty and doubt towards one's personal ability to master the new roles. In order to perform these successfully the team workers must constantly reflect upon former experiences and routines. Furthermore, they must compare and correct the activities in their role in the light of former role masters or their colleagues’ expectations, at the same time as searching for, finding, and evaluating new and better ways to handle the responsibilities. Great learning potential seems to be anchored in these forms of team practices, since the process of shifting roles and/or taking on new ones inevitably embodies a problematic situation that creates relations of rivalry which trigger the team members’ aspirations and abilities to act and think in innovative and improving ways. According to the team workers, performing the different roles better than the worker previously in charge provides personal status, and thus gives rise to competition games over who is the best role master. Striving for recognition and success as a role master in this way strengthens aspirations to learn from previous well performing role masters, and to come up with new ideas and suggestions and actively take part in the team’s managerial tasks. Overall, this kind of co-managing practice seems to promote team communities of reflexive practitioners furthered by both co-operation and rivalry.

### **GAINING SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES – A PROFESSIONAL WORK IDENTITY**

Stories of rivalry in relation to developing and maintaining a professional work identity also recur in field interviews. In both companies, the technological context with regard to the layout of the production system and the nature of the tasks performed provide the setting for work processes requiring proximity, close bonds of co-operation and a constant need for a professional exchange of know-how. In effect, interdisciplinary collaboration, dialogue and professional exchange of

information characterize the daily activities of the teams. In Tools Ltd., according to the employees, you cannot be a part of the team community if you are not willing to continuously learn and teach others. A team worker put it in the following way: *“Here we are all equal, whether you are a new comer or one of the old ones we get the same salary – you can’t gain anything by keeping knowledge to yourself ...success is all about knowledge sharing and collaboration”*. Thus an ideal of equality and relations of co-operation seems to dominate the picture within Tools Ltd., but simultaneously traits of rivalry unfold (in both case studies).

One example of rivalry is seen when professional games within the workplace also seem to become part of the team members work practices. Through rotation and continuous knowledge sharing within (and sometimes also among) teams, the management seeks to enlarge the range of variation in the team members’ work tasks, their co-operation skills and their ability to shift roles within the teams. In this form of work practice, informal learning through equal relations of cooperation seems to flourish, but participation and engaging in performing the work tasks also encompasses more subtle relations of rivalry over who obtains the best professional competencies, the best skills and abilities to handle the work, or over who is best at suggesting new improvements for the team. Such competing rivalry dynamics appear to trigger the team workers’ aspirations and capacities to learn with and from each other. Another example of the positive dynamics of rivalry can be seen in the team workers continuously upgrading skills through knowledge-sharing, rotation and training programs. Engaging in these activities, rivalry over being best at teaching others, managing the most work processes, or improving ones skills also characterizes the workers’ co-operative learning culture. Such interactions of rivalry mobilize a space for learning in which more conflict based learning processes also help to continuously develop and improve the workers’ skills and know-how. In this respect, bonds of cooperation and subtle dynamics of rivalry seem to go hand in hand as connecting drivers for mobilizing learning processes among the team workers. Thus, the two examples illustrate how struggles over gaining and performing new skills and competencies as well as teaching others can be vital “ingredients” in building up a professional work identity among the team workers.

### **STRIVING FOR SOCIAL REPUTATION**

“Friendly” rivalry games over who is most often being recruited to new development projects or contests of social reputations are also prominent among the workers’ team practices.

Simultaneously, with the formal team organization structure in Tools Ltd., provisional teams are continuously constructed across functions and operating units on an ad-hoc basis according to the required competencies and resources, that is like collaborative networks relating to a given task or project. Hence collaborative team communities of employees from different units and with different skills and competencies are assembled on an ongoing basis. Often team employees volunteer themselves to join an ad hoc team or they are picked due to special skills, competencies or reputation. Participating in these ad hoc teams is seen as a prestigious affair. To be part of such development projects strengthens the team workers’ social reputation or prestige. In this light rivalry over who is most often picked to join such projects seems to further a continuous drive for learning new competencies and gaining social reputation among many of the team workers.

These more temporary and fluctuating collective practices that criss-cross the organization's basic team settings involve significant collaborative dynamics. Hereby, assemblages of divergent roles, competencies and personal life trajectories become possible. According to the employees, it is particularly this "clash" of different competencies and interplay between divergent roles within the ad hoc teams that enables a common focus and ensures a joint commitment towards the wider organization beyond one's basic unit. By participating and engaging in different collaborative settings across units/departments, employees interact and exchange knowledge and information. Hereby they gain greater knowledge about their colleagues' work functions, competencies, challenges and dreams. But in this process they also fight for social reputation and recognition. Through these ongoing interactions and exchanges, new collaborative figurations are constantly made which further the employees' knowledge of "otherness" and "self", because in this way they not only learn about others but also about themselves. Additionally, many of the employees explained that the integration of divergent competencies and roles enables continuous learning triggered by (engaging relations of) both collaboration and rivalry. It is their experience that such co-creating processes result in better innovative solutions and performance results, and therefore they have a common interest to engage in, develop with and learn from these forms of collective interdisciplinary (inter-team) activities.

The ongoing formation of interdisciplinary ad hoc teams and the strong learning culture appeal to cooperative skills and fellowship. However, contests of social recognition and respect as well as games of professional competition are also embodied in the work practice. For instance, team workers related how they sometimes compete on a friendly basis over how to perfect existing work routines or suggest new improvements within and between teams. In such situations the object of rivalry is not primarily performance result or extra bonus pay, but more aimed at obtaining social recognition from colleagues, due, for example, to one's ideas, competence, creativity or special expertise. In this way the feelings of pride and joy from a look of recognition or a pat on the back from the team mates because of personal achievements seem in themselves to be something to strive for. According to the team workers, this form of rivalry motivated and had a positive affect on their aspirations for continuously perfecting the work processes and suggesting innovative ideas in Tools Ltd.

### **RIVALRY AS A TRIGGER OF LEARNING**

How can these dynamics of rivalry be understood within social learning theory and what can social learning theory gain from them? Drawing upon a learning perspective rooted within social learning theory paves the way for an understanding of how practice-based forms of learning unfold within and between team communities. In this context, learning occurs as a result of actively participating in and engaging in the actual processes of interaction and performance in team communities.

However, the learning process within the communities of practice approach is understood as a primarily non-conflictual and unproblematic mutual engagement in action which is advanced by co-operation, equality and unity. Consequently, it tends to disregard the constructive relations of rivalry. But rivalry is also a form of engagement in practice. Turning towards Simmel's notion of conflict, I have argued that rivalry can be seen as a learning process. Likewise, this learning model enhances our understanding of practice and our ability to reflect upon it, but because of the inherent conflict on which it is founded, this form of learning tends to challenge the existent to a greater extent.

The paper's two case studies illustrate how not only harmonious relations of co-operation and equality, but also rivalry characterize the team members' participation and engagement in their work practice. Against this backdrop, rivalry works as an important trigger for learning in the team communities under study. Thus a short answer to the question above is that social learning theory provides an important framework in conceptualizing rivalry as a practice-based form of engagement and participation. However, by more explicitly embracing and integrating the dynamics of rivalry into its realm of study, social learning theory could acquire a better means for exploring and understanding the productive forces of rivalry, as well as greater insight into how they may contribute to the creation of reflexive practices of mutual learning within contemporary organizational life.

## CONCLUSION

The above analysis aims to provide insight into the questions raised at the beginning of this paper: how do different team communities create intra- and interrelations relations of cooperation and rivalry, and how do these team-based practices influence the dynamics of learning? The paper has shown that a reflexive practice of mutual learning within team communities seems to be advanced not only by equal and harmonious relations of cooperation, but also by relations of rivalry. Hence rivalry appears to have a positive impact on the team members' aspirations and capacities to learn, as well as on their ability to continuously challenge existing routines in the search for improvements and better performance.

What can you, I and we learn from all this? Or in other words, what are the implications of this finding? According to Charles F. Sabel, today's organizational revolution seems to tie organizational success to the very ability to challenge habit and routines (Sabel, 2005). In this light, ongoing processes of casting doubt on one's current routines and work habits combined with a continuous search for innovative change is important for organizational competitiveness.

By exploring the constructive links between cooperation, rivalry and learning within the structure of team communities, I have observed that rivalry and co-operation constitute two important learning processes, that in a supplementary way tend to facilitate the co-creation of new ideas, the aspiration to find smarter ways to work and establish a work environment where doubt and curiosity towards the existing work practice create the basis for innovative changes and continuous improvements. Such dynamics, however, seem to presuppose a sensed "we" both within the teams, as well as towards the wider community of teams. Constructive relations of rivalry as a vital source for mobilizing learning processes may, in other words, not flourish alone. Therefore, the team community must continuously balance rivalry and relations of cooperation in order to mobilize dynamic learning-processes. The question is how such a balance can be developed and supported. The answer to this is multi-faceted and elusive. However, an awareness of the well known saying: *you cannot design learning but you can design for learning* is important to bear in mind. With this in mind, I have sought to show that monitoring these micro-collective dynamics of learning calls for managerial action and organizing principles, which acknowledge that not only harmonious co-operation but also rivalry are closely related to the learning capabilities within team-based organizational life.

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## CHAPTER 9 - (PAPER II)

### MANAGING CO-CREATION IN AND BETWEEN COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

#### *Abstract*

This paper investigates how organizational members (i.e. employees and managers) coordinate work in highly collaborative non-hierarchical collaborative settings, and how they jointly develop management practices in such a highly collaborative environment. It is argued that managers face four managerial challenges in the collaborative work organization related to 1) the open ended nature of innovation, 2) the horizontal nature of the work organization, 3) the nature of organizational doubt and 4) the coordination of complex collaborative orders. Based on mini-ethnographic studies in two Danish located but globally oriented companies, the paper studies how two distinct “constitutional orders” develop in each company based on the principles of co-ownership or co-management that they have adopted. The two orders serve as a vital tool for managing and facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities in these firms. The paper concludes by suggesting that the progress towards collaborative communities within the corporate arena of today consequently implies the co-creation of new organizational structures of lateral accountability and more distributed management techniques based on self-management and practices of learning by monitoring.

The paper is motivated by the intention to contribute to a more nuanced and contextual understanding of how both collaborative work practices and management practices are being distributed and transformed in co-creative ways in our corporate world(s) of work and organizing.

#### INTRODUCTION

Distributed practices of co-creation through collaborative communities surely seem to function at work today. Over the last few decades, a significant growth of collaboration has occurred not only within firms but also across them, through elaboration of complex supply chain and alliance relationships based on various forms of collaborative communities (Helper et al. 2008). Accordingly, Adler and Heckscher emphasize that the demands for complex knowledge based production in the modern capitalist economy have stimulated progress towards collaborative communing practices (inside and across firms) as an increasingly central principle of social organization within today's world(s) of work and organizing (Heckscher and Adler 2007). These collaborative communities emerge when people work together to co-create or, in Adler and Heckscher's words, they materialize “*when a collectivity engages cooperative, interdependent activity towards a common object*” (Ibid. 21). In today's knowledge economy, organizations are faced with ongoing demands for developing new and better products, services and work practices through constant cost-reduction and new innovations. In order to meet these demands, the ability to continuously redefine organizational roles, to break from familiar routines and to explore, recombine and evaluate organizational resources towards further innovations must be distributed throughout the organization. While prior research has shown how these demands have placed organizational members at all levels under increased pressure to collaborate and co-create in recombinant ways and thus to engage in ongoing distributed search practices premised on various collaborative communities (Sabel 2006; Stark 2007; Herrigel 2007;



Kristensen 2008), we know little of how these emerging collaborative orders are in fact organized and managed within everyday organizational life. Taking as the point of departure the daily work organizing practices in two Danish multinationals, this paper take a closer look at how such collaborative communities of co-creation actually work. The focus is not on the companies' managerial styles and forms of leadership as such, but on their experiences and ongoing experimentation with managing processes of co-creation in and between collaborative communities.

The paper explores how distributed processes of co-creation among many layers of organizational members (i.e. employees, employers, users, partners and so on) in two Danish manufacturing companies, Tools Ltd. and Health Ltd., are organized and managed within and across collaborative communities, and consequently how these collaborative processes co-create new ways of organizing and governing organizational resources towards continuous growth. Based on mini-ethnographic studies within these two organizational contexts, my approach is to advance our understanding of the management of co-creative communities. Both companies are experimenting with new forms of work organizing practices based on criss-crossing collaborative communities. Moreover, each of them has built up a distinct "constitutional order" - i.e. an institutionalized set of practices - to support their collaborative form of work and organizing. In Tools Ltd. the "constitutional order" is based on a unique ownership structure where 80% of employees have co-ownership, while in Health Ltd. it is based on a co-managing partnership between management and union representatives. In the paper I investigate how the two different "constitutional orders" (sparked by institutionalized practices of respectively co-ownership and co-management) assist and support the organization and management of co-creation in and between various collaborative communities, as well as the co-creation of new promising ways of managing these collaborative orders.

Drawing on existing literature on managing distributed collaborations in and across various communing practices, I begin this paper by addressing the role of management within the landscape of post bureaucratic organizational forms. I identify and discuss four managerial challenges which seem to characterize today's collaborative orders of work and organizing. I use these challenges as four sensitizing focal points to structure and guide the following analysis. Secondly, I describe my research sites and applied methods before I then move on to present two empirical stories on the management of co-creation. The stories demonstrate how co-creation in and across collaborative communities is far from a harmonious matter of frictionless search processes, but rather a precarious, often contradictory and highly tentative affair. However, both stories illustrate that the development of distinct "constitutional orders" can serve as a vital tool for managing and facilitating co-creation among various collaborators and thus help to turn the frictions of collaborative communities into productive ones. I conclude by suggesting that the progress towards collaborative communities within the corporate arena of today consequently implies the co-creation of new organizational structures of lateral accountability and more distributed management techniques based on self-management and practices of learning by monitoring.

## **THE MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES**

Lenin once said: "Trust is good but monitoring is better." Now the opposite saying, "Monitoring is good but trust is better" lies at the heart of contemporary forms of management. However, we may add that today, when managing processes of co-creation in and between collaborative communities,

it is said that trust and “learning by monitoring” are best (Helper et al 2000; Heckscher and Adler 2007). Exploring new forms of pragmatic collaboration in both the public and private spheres, Charles Sabel and colleagues argue that successful and creative intra- and inter-organizational collaboration requires learning by monitoring in which multiple parties recognize the importance of pursuing mutual intelligibility and adopt an experimentalist stance toward learning and to the pursuit of knowledge through joint inquiry and mutual observation (Helper et al. 2000)<sup>117</sup>. Trust is one of the central coordinating mechanisms of these collaborations. I argue that the basis for collaborative communities is exactly this potential for experimenting, learning and co-creating through collaboration (and rivalry), which Sabel and colleagues illuminate through their concept of pragmatic collaboration. As I see it, pragmatic collaborations of learning by monitoring therefore represent an ideal type (or ideal situation) of collaborative communities of co-creation. Yet the question is how they are organized and managed within today’s post bureaucratic work organizing practices.

Existing research on post bureaucratic forms of work and organizing points towards three characteristics of post bureaucratic organizational forms. One is the above mentioned ability to collaborate across diverse organizational boundaries and, through these collaborative communing practices, to make knowledge sharing, experimentation, learning and co-creation (i.e. learning by monitoring) a general feature throughout the organization (Heckscher and Adler 2007; Sabel 1997; Stark and Girard 2002). Another important “asset” in post bureaucratic organizational life is the ability to build up heterarchic organizational structures of criss-crossing collaborative communities allowing for innovation based on complex interdependencies and competing evaluative principles (Stark 2007; Kellogg, Orlikowski, Yates 2006, Girard and Stark 2002, Grabher 2001). A third characteristic is the ability to continuously challenge and redefine routines, work roles, communing relationships, work organizing practices etc. towards continuous improvement (Stark 2009; Sabel 2007). According to this stock of research, all three characteristics seem to facilitate the capacity among organizational members to continuously draw on and question existing work practices and their routines in renewing ways. In this way they serve as building blocks for the development of an organizational “habitus” of belief and doubt, i.e. an ability to simultaneously believe in and cast doubt on existing work organizing practices in order to reorganize and innovate them<sup>118</sup>. Most scholars within the field highlight how such ability is pivotal for innovative capacity and competitiveness within companies. While the three characteristics gives us an overall idea of the organizational contours of today’s new emerging collaborative orders at work, the issue of how to manage such post bureaucratic work organizing practices (of belief and doubt) is where I now turn the focus.

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<sup>117</sup> Rooted within the pragmatist tradition, Helper, MacDuffie and Sabel’s argument is based on following observations: “Certain corporations, of various stripes and drawing on multiple sources of inspiration, have formalized and developed this potential for learning through corporation. They do so by introducing what we call “pragmatic mechanisms”: disciplines that reveal the ambiguities of current product designs, production processes and organizational boundaries. At the same time they orchestrate joint inquiry, among collaborating individuals, groups and organizations, of these ambiguities. In the process of inquiry, each collaborator can continuously monitor the performance of the (relevant) others, while learning from them and acquiring skills that can be redeployed in other joint ventures. The overall result, which we will call learning by monitoring, becomes the basis for pragmatic collaborations” (Helper et al. 2000: 445).

<sup>118</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for an elaborated discussion of these three characteristics and the term “organizational work organizing practices of belief and doubt”.

In the literature on post bureaucratic organizational forms, the management of these collaborative practices is described as a quite ambiguous, contradictory and collective process, in which the role(s) of management often is/are distributed across many organizational levels/units/practices and thus based on a dynamic mix of vertical and horizontal coordinating principles. Addressing the role(s) of management within this landscape, I have identified four managerial challenges of collaborative communities which seem to be important when it comes to facilitating dynamics of co-creation. I discuss these four challenges in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the management of co-creation and the co-creation of management within today's organizational life. This understanding will inform the subsequent analysis, which is structured around an empirical analysis of how organizational members in Tools Ltd. and Health Ltd. cope with and prosper from these managerial challenges in co-creative ways.

### CHALLENGE 1: TO MANAGE SEARCH WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT TO FIND

When organizational success becomes closely tied to the ability to continuously challenge and redefine products, services, routines, work roles, collaborative relationships etc., the issue of managing organizational practices of ongoing search-routines naturally also becomes a central challenge. Opposed to former bureaucratic and standardized forms of production, in post bureaucratic organizational forms there is always uncertainty about what is going to be produced in the future, how it is going to be produced and who is going to produce it. Here, search is not merely about looking for solutions to already clearly defined problems or ends. Instead, the exact problem, specific end or solution is often first discovered simultaneously with finding a way to resolve the problem, or in the very search for the means that can lead to the end/or solution (Stark 2009). To manage ongoing search practices in these organizational settings where there are no fixed plans or final solutions for production is not only a managerial challenge: it is also a paradox. Because how do you search without knowing what to find before you find it? Further, how is it possible to manage ongoing search routines among organizational members who (often) do not know what to look for before they find it? In short, what is at stake here is: *“the kind of search when you don't know what you're looking for but will recognize it when you find it”* (Ibid. 11). Sabel describes how a new form of governance is needed for that kind of search:

*“Governance in the classic organization, we saw, is on the principal-agent model... [here] the task for governance... is to motivate the agent's faithful execution of the project, punishing her for opportunistic, self-regarding use of gaps or imprecision in the principal's plan, and rewarding her for using her discretion to fill gaps and correct mistakes in the plan to achieve its goals. In the **pragmatist search organization** the choice of goals is at least as great a concern of governance as the control of opportunism. In these organizations there can be no clear distinction between “principals” who make initial plans and “agents” who are expected to revise or remake those plans in the course of “executing” them under volatile conditions. Choice of goals and the broad projects embodying them are as much the product as the starting point of organizational activity”* (Sabel 2007: 132).

In this light the role of management becomes to facilitate pragmatist search organizations, not by virtue of delivering a master plan suggesting fixed guidelines and solutions on how to produce/co-create, but through the distribution and coordination of ongoing search routines of belief and doubt in and between various collaborative communities, hereby also making the management of search (e.g. the task to revise and constantly improve initial ideas and plans in the course of “executing”

them) a general organizational activity. While prior organizational research agrees that this more challenging type of search is pivotal for organizational success, research on how this ability to create vibrant search routines throughout the organization (or network of organizations) is rather limited. In this analysis I ask whether and how the paradox of distributed search practices (i.e. practices of not (exactly) knowing what to find before a product or project is in process (in the making)), is in fact sought, managed and governed within the everyday life of two concrete organizational contexts.

## **CHALLENGE 2: TO MANAGE (AND BE MANAGED) WITHOUT KNOWING WHO IS THE BOSS**

Another challenge characterizing the management of co-creation is related to the coordination of increasingly complex interdependencies between, for example, divisions, departments, projects, work teams etc. within post bureaucratic work organizing practices. Because of the greater complexity in today's world of organizing, coordination cannot be controlled or managed hierarchically. Instead, it seems that the increasingly complex interdependence heightens the need for enhancing the autonomy of work units and individuals at the same time as the need for fine-grained coordination across these increasingly autonomous units (Stark 2009: 29). This coordination challenge, sparked by increasing interdependencies, therefore calls for distributed authority (i.e. for work practices of more lateral accountability in which self-management becomes the dominant modality of control/form of governance) as well as the development of coordinating mechanisms across the units of distributed authority. In continuation of the first managerial challenge outlined above, Stark describes this new order of coordination by highlighting that: *"under circumstances of simultaneous engineering where the very parameters of a project are subject to deliberation and change across units, authority is no longer delegated vertically, but emerges laterally"* (Ibid. 30). Within this landscape, organizational members might still "report to" their superiors, but increasingly they are accountable to other work teams and thus have to maneuver within and between diverse situations of multiple accountabilities. Under these circumstances it becomes less clear figuring out who is actually the boss. Adler and Heckscher describe this managerial dilemma of co-creation in and across diverse collaborative communities in the following way:

*"The monitoring of performance cannot be done only through the hierarchical superior, as in traditional bureaucracies, because in collaborative orders the boss does not have close enough knowledge of how his subordinates are performing in teams and task forces of which he is not a part. Thus peer assessment becomes increasingly central – not just peers in the abstract, but those with whom the person has worked and who are in a direct position to judge how well he has contributed and managed commitments..... A central issue is that performance goals are no longer neatly ordered through the hierarchical structure, but may often conflict. In a bureaucracy it is always clear, or should be clear, who is "the boss" for any given situation; in a collaborative order people may be working on multiple tasks and initiatives with multiple accountabilities, and they frequently find themselves in situations where they are pulled in several directions at once"* (Heckscher and Adler 2007: 52).

I agree with Adler and Heckscher when they stress that the ability to manage these tensions (of being pulled in several directions and faced with several evaluative principles at once) is one of the key capabilities required of organizational members. Working in an environment of diverse collaborative communities in which authority is more and more distributed to work teams, projects, ad hoc units and so on, organizational members must to a higher degree control and manage themselves (and each other). Self-control is a mode of control/governance which, in Boltanski and

Chiapello's words: "involves the transferring constraints from external organizational mechanisms to people's internal dispositions, and for the powers of control they exercise to be consistent with the firm's general project" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 80). While self-control enables organizational members to manage themselves (self-management) and to cope and juggle with multiple accountabilities within the overall frames and strategy of the organization, it also installs a subtle tension between the process of managing and being managed among organizational members. This tension occurs because self-management is a social and thus collective act (transaction) of mutual adjustment and inducement. It therefore also involves influencing and managing others, thus making the lines between "to manage" and "to be managed" more fuzzy or at least cloudier. In this analysis I ask whether and how these tensions triggered by distributed authority and multiple forms of accountability are managed within and across collaborative communities in Tools Ltd and Health Ltd.

### CHALLENGE 3: TO MANAGE AND PROSPER FROM PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

A third managerial challenge addressed in the literature on new forms of work and organizing is to provoke situations that may facilitate practices of ongoing search and innovative co-creation. Institutional scripts and routines (e.g. work roles, norms, lines of accountability etc.) are resources for action and therefore crucial for organizational life. But, like all forms of social structures, they tend to lock in to unreflective activity and thus to create a world of habits and taken-for-granted (causing an "organizational habitus" of primarily belief). Yet confronted with limited foresight and constantly changing structures (organizational) people cannot take the knowledge and habits of their world for granted. According to several organizational scholars, to maneuver in such a world requires reflective cognition and the ability to continuously cast doubt on existing routines based on processes of ongoing inquiry (Sabel 2007; Stark 2009; Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). Practices to help unlock the grip of habit have therefore become essential. The question is, how do such practices come into play and how are they managed? Drawing on Dewey's characterization of inquiry as provoked by "troubled, perplexed, trying situations", David Stark suggests that these search practices come into play through processes of ongoing inquiry triggered by problematic situations. Accordingly, he suggests that instead of avoiding problematic and perplexing situations, organizations should embrace and in fact foster them:

*"If perplexing situations provoke innovative inquiry, then why not build organizations that generate such situations? Instead of merely responding to external situations as they happen to present themselves, why not foster organizational forms that regularly and recursively produce perplexing situations within the organization itself. Organizations that adopt such forms would then be poised to undertake the challenging task of ongoing innovation"* (Stark 2009: 15)

Proposing this alternative strategy for unlocking the grip of habit within organizational life, Stark calls attention to the productive possibilities of troubling situations. Such situations are at the most basic level produced when there is doubt<sup>119</sup>. That is, they occur when there is principled disagreement about what is at stake or what counts, since it is the very doubt that triggers us to

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<sup>119</sup> For Dewey we are doubtful because any situation is inherently doubtful, i.e. has the traits of being disturbed, troubled, ambiguous, confused, full of conflicting tendencies, obscure etc. (Dewey 1938 in Stark 2009: 175).

make inquiry and reflect upon our given (work) situation<sup>120</sup>. Seen in this light, innovative co-creation within and across collaborative communities does not simply come into play in situations characterized by definite beliefs and harmonious collaborative interactions, but seems to require doubt and troubling situations. However, the question of how organizational members may more precisely seek to generate and prosper from such productive troubling situations remains unanswered. For instance, how do people within post bureaucratic work organizations manage the risk of deliberately putting themselves in problematic situations, and use doubt strategically? Is that at all possible? How do they balance between relationships of both conflict and collaboration as equal triggers for innovative inquiry? How do they build up a “routinization” of routine-disrupting routines (Sabel 2004). How do they develop practices of “problem finding” and “problem solving” in ways that facilitate mutual learning and distributed search practices? Within the scope of this paper, it is not the ambition to provide a set of clear-cut answers to all these questions. Instead, I seek to trace some stories of how organizational members within the two case companies actually try to manage and prosper from the everyday problematic situations that constitute their world of work and organizing.

#### **CHALLENGE 4: TO COORDINATE COLLABORATION WITHIN AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES OF CO-CREATION**

Whereas research has stressed the importance of collaboration and cross-functional integration within and between the diverse communities of organizations, scholars (and practitioners) also recognize that integrating such communities can be difficult. The fourth managerial challenge therefore concerns the issue of coordinating intra- and inter-communal collaborations within the realm of post bureaucratic work organizing practices. As organizations shift away from hierarchical control, the use of principal-agent models and routine coordination towards innovative, continuously developing collaborative practices within and across communities of distributed accountability and intelligence, the key managerial challenge which emerges becomes to coordinate this new complex collaborative landscape vertically as well as horizontally.

Simmel observed long ago how being a member of several communities was a source both of individuation for the person and of social integration for the larger collectives involved (Simmel 1964). In a similar way, the work roles and collaborative communities of organizational members seem to be more dynamic when members are engaged in several collaborative communities at the same time (Kristensen and Lotz 2007). However, because of the specialization inherent in performing their own task successfully, collaborative communities easily tend to develop different perspectives on the work and the organization and thus develop local understandings as a consequence of differences in expertise and experience. To avoid organizational fragmentation (i.e. to create integration) and at the same time secure the scope for specialization and differentiation, scholars within the field therefore emphasize that an important managerial task has become 1) to facilitate the co-creation of local work practices with distinct responsibilities and local insights into the environment, and 2) simultaneously to help coordinate these different local insights and related

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<sup>120</sup> In other words, problematic situations occur when there is disagreement about what evaluative principles should be in use. Stark therefore argues that instead of enforcing a single “world view” or principle of evaluation (i.e. one definite way of dealing with a specific work problem), organizations/organizational members should recognize that it is legitimate to articulate, explore and draw on alternative conceptions and principles of what works or counts. Stark’s basic point is that they should deliberately use this strategy to provoke dynamic innovation (Stark 2009.).

resources across the various collaborative communities of the organization (Lave and Wenger 1991; Brown and Duguid 1991)<sup>121</sup>. Accordingly, Beth A. Bechky suggests that the core task for managers who want to capitalize on the coordination of diverse collaborative work practices is to face the challenge of integrating the understandings of different communities across the organization (Bechky 2003: 312). In order to do so managers must aid the development of a work environment of collaborative communities based on distributed authority and intelligence which are able, at least potentially, to coordinate and effect “from below” not just the practice of specific communities, but the organization’s overall processes and strategies (Brown and Duguid 2001: 208). Within the frames of such an “ideal-state” perspective, collaborative communities may become ubiquitous sources of agency and knowledge driving organizational stability and change<sup>122</sup>. Still, research that conceptualizes this fourth managerial challenge has no coherent or fixed “cure” for how to actually integrate and coordinate collaborative communities towards such an ideal-state.

Despite the lack of any coherent conclusions, the literature indicates that work organizing practices where organizational members are engaged *within and across* various collaborative communities seem critical to the acquisition of a coordinating social infrastructure that allows for cohesion (integration) as well as diversity (differentiation) inside and between collaborative communities (See Chapters 6, 7 and 10/Kristensen and Lotz 2007). Accordingly, scholars suggest that a dynamic interplay within and between collaborative communities strengthens an organization’s adaptability and ability to continuously reorganize and recombine organizational resources towards further innovations. Moreover, intra- and inter-communal collaborations seem to support an organization’s ability to balance between or rather to construct a fruitful tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity within and across their work practices. These observations raise a set of new questions. For example, how exactly is such a fruitful tension achieved? How do organizational members learn to act and co-create in a connexionist world (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello 2005)? How do they in fact maneuver and balance between memberships of multiple collaborative communities and simultaneously feel integrated? When, where and how do they experience a sense of belonging at work? How do they prevent power struggles ending up blocking creative collaboration and practices of learning by monitoring and so on? These are questions that need to be empirically investigated in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the managerial challenges in regard to coordinating and facilitating collaboration within and across co-creative communities. In this analysis I ask how organizational members in Tools. Ltd and Health Ltd manage to coordinate and facilitate collaboration within and across diverse co-creative communities. Both case companies have developed work organizing practices of multiple collaborative communities, which are connected by various cross-cutting/overlapping collaborative practices. This empirical world therefore offers an interesting laboratory in which to examine how the challenge of coordinating intra- and inter-communal collaborations is managed in practice within organizational life.

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<sup>121</sup> A very basic example of these sorts of connections across collaborative communities is how, in almost all organizations, career and work role(s) changes of one sort or another most often take organizational members out of one collaborative community and into another, leaving them with an understanding of both. Such organizational members are then in the position to become translators or boundary spanners between the two (Brown and Duguid 2001: 209).

<sup>122</sup> In this regard Vedres and Stark very precisely point out how: “A social group [e.g. a collaborative community] in time is both a constraint and an opportunity for action, and its life is a result of agency” (Vedres and Stark 2007: 2).

Summing up, drawing on existing literature, I have identified four managerial challenges of collaborative communities (of co-creation) within the realm of post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. These are: to manage ongoing search processes, to manage distributed authority, to manage and prosper from problematic situations and to manage collaboration within and across communities of co-creation. I have used these four typical challenges as a starting point for raising questions about the nature of work roles and communities<sup>123</sup>, the work organizing practices and forms of management that seem to be necessary in order to meet, tackle and prosper from these managerial challenges of facilitating co-creative dynamics within and between collaborative communities at work. Taken together this analysis will therefore be structured by four overall questions: In what ways do organizational members within the two case companies actually try to build up pragmatist search organizations? How do they seek to distribute authority and make accountability lateral within and across collaborative communities? How do organizational members in fact seek to manage and make use of problematic situations in productive ways? And in what ways do they manage to create dynamic intra- and inter-communal collaborations throughout the organization? Exploring these questions within two empirical organizational settings - each characterized by distinct work organizing practices and a “constitutional order” to facilitate these practices – the aim is to contribute to a contextual understanding of how collaborative communities of co-creation are organized and managed in practice within the realm of Danish manufacturing. Before I go on to present the empirical case studies, I introduce the research sites and empirical sources.

## **METHODS: RESEARCH SITES AND EMPIRICAL SOURCES**

The empirical world underlying this paper’s analysis encompasses two Danish manufacturing companies: Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd., which are both tapped into a larger global network of collaborative communities, either due to a takeover by a multinational corporation or by becoming a small multinational themselves operating on the global scene. The two companies are identified by pseudonyms; likewise, their products are referred to in general terms.

Health Ltd. is one of the world’s leading providers of medical analyzers. The company employs nearly 1700 people worldwide and their products are sold in more than 100 countries. Its headquarters are in Denmark and its global organization comprises three product companies and a number of international sales companies responsible for the worldwide sales and distribution of its products and services. Thus the story about Health Ltd is one about a Danish family-owned company going multinational by developing excellent products and services that make it possible to cultivate close ties to departments in hospitals all over the world. However, in 2003 Health Ltd. was taken over by a large multinational corporation, which has implied a radical reorganization along the lines of the multinational’s Lean model, and a more intensive and constant pressure for innovative changes. The particular research site for the study was Health Ltd’s main production plant, a Danish site with more than 800 employees (approx. 450 of them are so-called unskilled) located at the company’s headquarters. While the medical analyzers and production of instruments is the core métier, the company also offers a wide range of, for example, liquids, samplers and services such as process analysis, IT systems, quality and technical support and training. Hence, co-developing

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<sup>123</sup> I sometimes apply the term role(-ing) and communing instead of role and community to connote the two concepts’ processual character.



collaborative communities (the company uses the term 'partnerships') with colleagues, consumers and suppliers is characteristic of Health Ltd's experimentalist work environment (Information sources: Field notes, Health Ltd.'s website (20-02-07), written company materials, brochures, etc).

Tools Ltd. produces industrial tools, but sees its main business as offering customers production optimizing consultancy services, tool management and maintenance and education and training. The company has moved from standard to very specialized tools and service solutions, and has built up its international capacity since 1995 to become a small Danish multinational with subsidiaries and sales offices abroad. Today it employs 650 people of whom approximately 450 are working in Denmark. It is fully owned by management and employees, and ownership comprises 85% of the employees. The employees are team working in very unconventional physical facilities. As "roofed villages", all Tools Ltd. companies are designed along the ideals of a village community, with production and sales/administration situated in the same location and with no walls separating departments. Research was conducted at the company's headquarters in Jutland situated in one big 20,000-m<sup>2</sup> building in which approximately 450 employees working in production, stores and administration are literally placed on the same floor in one open room.

The company is a genuine success story, which is reflected in both financial results and in an excellent work environment. It has never operated at a loss in its 42 years of existence. In the financial year 2005/2006, group equity amounted to 73 million euros and revenue equalled 86 million euros. Year after year it figures among the best workplaces in Denmark. By continuously expanding its activities, Tools Ltd. has transformed itself from a small local supplier into a service-oriented total supplier, operating on the global scene in a tight interplay with customers in need of high quality tools. Driven by the mantra, *what we learn from one customer can be used to service others*, the company has, through its close interaction with customers, developed a wide range of competencies. Production optimization, according to Tool Ltd's working methods, is therefore a continuous joint process, built on collaborative communities (Information sources: Field notes, Tools Ltd.'s website (20-02-07), written company materials, brochures, etc).

The two case companies were selected because they are particularly rich in information on organizing and managing collaborative communities of co-creation within and among diverse communities in dynamic ways (i.e. extreme cases), and due to their successful experiences may operate as a prototype for future practices of managing co-creation within post bureaucratic work organizing practices (i.e. paradigmatic cases) (Flyvbjerg 2001). Tracing the management of co-creation within and between collaborative communities requires a focus on the work experiences and lives of organizational members, i.e. an understanding of what people actually do, how they collaborate, how they manage and coordinate their daily work practices in order to accomplish their work etc. To achieve this task I have triangulated between three different data sources: talk, observation and documents, conducting a "mini" ethnographic study in each company including various observation and interview techniques (Kunda 2006; Stake 1998; Kvale 1997; Spradley 1979; VanMaanen 1988). Case studies were conducted over a period of 2 years (2005-2007). They comprised several interview sessions and included an intensive "mini" ethnographic study when I

spent one week in each company<sup>124</sup>. In total approximately 50 formal and informal interviews were conducted.

## **TWO EMPIRICAL STORIES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CO-CREATION<sup>125</sup>**

Evidently, to tackle and prosper from the four identified managerial challenges is not in any way an easy task. Dealing with these challenges may as easily result in counter-productive lock-in situations inside and among collaborative communities, opportunism and fragmentation as in collaborative dynamics of co-creation within organizations. Since each challenge rests on a paradox: 1) to manage search without knowing what to search for 2) to manage authority without knowing who has it 3) to manage and prosper from productive possibilities of problematic situations and 4) to manage dynamic collaborations within and among multiple communities, they are all characterized by an inherent tension. These four tensions cannot be solved, only tentatively managed. Consequently, when it comes to facilitating work environments of collaborative communities of co-creation, dealing with these four managerial challenges and their inherent tensions always generates both pitfalls and possibilities within organizational life.

The development of a distinct “constitutional order” in each company seems to help manage these tensions. In Health Ltd. the “constitutional order” is rooted in a tradition of collaborative co-management between management and trade union representatives, whereas in Tools Ltd it is founded on a tradition for co-ownership comprising 85% of employees. In this analysis I more closely explore how these distinct “constitutional orders” help to tackle the four identified managerial challenges in ways that facilitate the management of co-creation (and the co-creation of management) within and across collaborative communities. I do not claim that the two constitutional modes of ordering in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. offer a set of fixed answers of how to organize and manage collaborative communities of co-creation. Yet because of the long experience in both companies with experimental work organizing practices of collaborative communities, I believe that they can provide important insights into the challenges of managing dynamics of co-creation within today’s collaborative world of work and organizing. Drawing on these empirical stories I further hope to identify some possible routes towards constructing novel forms of governance that may support pragmatist search organizations based on dynamic intra- and inter-communal collaborations of ongoing co-creation.

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<sup>124</sup> I use the term “mini” ethnographic study to describe the intensive phase of exploration. This phase has been based on a one-week visit of detailed observation and interviewing in each company. While the case study design represents my all-encompassing method covering multiple empirical sources, I conceive of the “mini” ethnographic study as one of several methods underlying the case study design. I am, of course, aware of the fact that conducting a “mini” ethnography is therefore different from the traditional method of data collection associated with ethnography that requires long periods of time in the “field”, detailed observational evidence and lengthy narratives (Yin 2003; Fetterman 1989). In short, the case study approach should be seen as a form of inquiry that draws on, but does not depend solely on ethnographic or participant-observer data.

<sup>125</sup> The two empiric stories on the management of co-creation are each derived from several empiric stories articulated by the organizational members within the research sites of respectively Health Ltd. and Tool Ltd. Said differently, both stories consist of a larger collective of “individual” empiric stories (or voices) which have emerged through the interviews, observations and use of documents within the two organizational fields, as well as through my subsequent interpretation of the empirical material produced in those two fields.

## CO-MANAGEMENT: A CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER IN HEALTH LTD.

In Health Ltd., a unique partnership between convener/shop stewards and top-production managers has cultivated the company's work organization and ability to co-create within and across diverse collaborative communities. Developing this tradition for co-management, union representatives have been integrated into the management structure. Through this process union representatives have changed from distributive demands - in favor of integrative bargaining - toward an offensive up-skilling strategy. The convener describes the strategy like this: *"In the groups of shop stewards, we... take care of the human dimension and make sure that the labor force in production is flexible and qualified"* (Christa, union representative 04-01-07). Consequently in Health Ltd., conveners and shop stewards have shifted roles towards being facilitators, problem solvers, mediators, change masters or motivators in the organization. Having had a voice even in creating the strategy of top management, they negotiate this in place with middle managers and employees at all levels, where they can combine strategic goals with personal aspirations much more effectively than any manager. This co-managing partnership permeates the organization and manifests itself in a wide range of committees and ad hoc groups across units, departments, management levels, etc., i.e. arenas where the partners share information, discuss strategies, negotiate, evaluate options and draw on each other's knowledge and expertise in an ongoing process<sup>126</sup>. The institutionalization of such a co-managing architecture has created the basis for a highly trained and engaged workforce with flexible capabilities to respond to internal and external changes in innovative ways.

When asked about the advantages of this form of management, organizational members in Health Ltd. highlight how the partnership between top-managers and union representatives has helped to strengthen collaboration across teams, enhanced transparency, enabled the delegation of authority to teams and the creation of a better flow of information within and between units. This in return has resulted in a strongly committed workforce which - because it is directly represented at the managerial top-level through the convener and shop stewards - is more keen to legitimize the strategy of top-management and take an active part in the company's ongoing reorganizations towards continuous improvements. Moreover, because personnel in Health Ltd. are always informed about the company's activities and future challenges, they not only engage in the work activities of their own work teams, but also seem to be oriented towards the wider organizational context and the common interests and objectives of the firm. In this way, Health Ltd's managerial order of co-management seems to have facilitated the development of a highly collaborative work environment premised on interdependent team communities of multiple co-creative dynamics. However, the company's model of co-management seems in general to have a positive impact on the organizational members' capabilities of coping and developing with all four managerial challenges identified in the first part of the paper, namely, the challenge of managing and prospering from problematic situations and of managing collaborations within and between collaborative

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<sup>126</sup> Examples of such committees are: The Dialogue Group (shop steward and management meet regularly to discuss/inform about the internal staffing situation - who wants to be moved, who needs help, etc.), Coach group meetings (shop steward, department managers and section managers meet once a month. The shop steward often renders visible the need to thinking and working across boundaries, and though it seems contradictory, s/he is often the one coaching the managers in that respect.) JOB2 committee (shop stewards and middle managers regularly meet in order to coordinate the shift/swap of jobs among employees from different teams or units. The employees typically volunteer for a JOB2 themselves. Sometimes they are encouraged to take a particular job by the shop-stewards) (Field notes 08-01-07).

communities, which seem to be tackled in appealing ways through this form of collective governance.

### **CO-MANAGEMENT: A TOOL FOR MANAGING AND PROSPERING FROM PROBLEMATIC SITUATION?**

Since team organization was introduced in Health Ltd. several decades ago, it has continually changed with the overall purpose of giving employees increasing influence over the development of work practices, enhancing the distribution of authority throughout the organization (company materials, union representative, Christa's PowerPoint Slides). However, after the acquisition, Health Ltd. was introduced to the multinational's Lean model. This could easily have resulted in the abolition of the company's long tradition for experimental co-managing team work practices. Instead, top-managers and union representatives have worked towards merging the company's traditional work organizing practices with Lean principles, thereby avoiding a stringent adaptation to the new Lean rules. Walking the talk – so to speak - of Salman Rushdie's quote: *"A little bit of this and a little bit of that; that is how newness enters the world"* (Rushdie in Hannerz 2003). What seems to have come out of this merger is a new experimental order of collaborative communities where the confluence of former and current work practices invokes inquiries into and leads to reinterpretations of previous work practices and reflections on how to perfect and improve the present work situations. One of the team workers describes the "merger" in this way:

*"We take from Lean what we can use... that is, we make it work within the specific unit ... We are good at finding creative solutions when necessary"* (Isac, team worker).

This attitude reflects that by working in teams, the organizational members in Health Ltd. are used to taking action, not orders, to making creative solutions out of perplexing situations and to searching for novel solutions through their everyday problematic situations. No doubt, Lean is a two-edged sword. It is a technique to slim down the organization by getting rid of all waste, and it is also a one that triggers reflexivity and continuous relearning, its rational being a constant search for improvements. From this perspective, Lean is not a fixed concept, but a set of principles always being translated into a specific context. In the case of Health Ltd, Lean has been translated into a context of highly experimenting team based work organizing practices framed by a co-managing constitutional order. Within this context the company's Lean principles seem to serve as a helpful technique for revealing problematic situations, and for using them to provoke innovative inquiry triggering new search practices and a constant endeavor for smarter ways of co-creating. As Peter puts it:

*"It is the black magic that we are doing that makes it fun to work here... that is what makes work exciting... we often have to extinguish many fires to achieve the desired result... Pride has much to do with delivering on time with high quality... When we are allowed to run it, it runs much better – not to be smug, but that is just how it is"* (Peter, team worker)

Peter's experiences and stories of what makes work fun and exciting articulate the productive possibilities of troubling situations, i.e. situations that produce doubt and (in Peter's case) call for black magic and extinguishing fires. Many similar stories can be traced in the interview material.

They indicate that troubling situations are not only necessary in order to accomplish the daily work activities (since they trigger reflection and provoke new ways of doing things/co-creating), but also that they contribute to making work more challenging and fun. Thus, although problematic situations of for instance conflict, misunderstandings, ambiguity, disagreements, rivalry, and doubt and so on can be stressful experiences that invoke negative consequences, they are not merely seen as shortcomings by organizational members in Health Ltd. On the contrary, they are frequently experienced (and spoken about) as productive situations that spark processes of thinking in new ways (reflective cognition) and of trying out new things (reflective action). To learn to relearn from everyday problematic situations and to build up mutual search routines based on ongoing problem exploration, problem identification and joint problem “solving” is of course not a smooth and frictionless process. The urge to avoid conflicts, situations of high ambiguity or the fear of making and exposing one’s mistakes is common. Likewise, organizational members in Health Ltd. do not in any way find the challenge of deliberately putting themselves in problematic situations or exposing their doubt an easy task. Quite often they do not succeed. However, most of the people interviewed describe how the company’s Lean principles, in particular, help them to keep focusing on the task and to experiment with building up work organizing practices that seek to strategically incorporate and use problematic situations in productive ways (e.g. Kaizen events among teams, systematic procedures for error detection or daily info-meetings are just a few examples of the organizational arrangements being used to develop such practices).

In sum, it seems that Health Ltd’s constitutional order of co-management between top-managers and union representatives, the company’s tradition for experimenting with collaborative team work-practices and the implementation of new Lean principles have together paved the way for work organizing practices that are able to make use of problematic situations in order to trigger innovative inquiry and continuously explore new ways of working and co-creating. Together, these three “building blocks” constitute a promising tool to continuously help unlock the grip of habit in Health Ltd through the development of collaborative communities of co-creation based on self-reflective search practices, i.e. search practices that draw on problematic situations and thus make it possible to undertake the task of ongoing innovative co-creation. Health’s co-managing constitutional order therefore offers interesting insights into the co-creation of new managerial practices that enables organizational members to become better at using and prospering from problematic situations.

### **CO-MANAGEMENT: A TOOL FOR MANAGING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES OF CO-CREATION?**

To coordinate collaboration within and across team communities is another managerial challenge which is dealt with in dynamic ways through Health Ltd.’s co-managing mode of ordering. According to top-managers and the convener, one of their crucial ongoing challenges is to cultivate lateral collaboration and to create a stronger common “we” feeling in order to avoid organizational parochialism. The convener expresses the challenge like this:

*"We have too much of 'who is most important' and of silo mentality... that is everyone attends to his own business without thinking of the whole... but collaboration across units and sections is imperative and therefore the silos must die!" (Christa 04-01-07)<sup>127</sup>.*

Consequently in Health Ltd., two different institutionalized set of practices have been used to foster collaboration within and across its team communities. The first is the institutionalization of a role-division within all team communities. The second is a permanent second job (JOB2) arrangement, which invites employees to swap jobs with colleagues across units on a temporary basis in order to learn new skills and competencies that, of course, increase organizational flexibility.

As a way of developing and monitoring work roles that facilitate a collaborative and co-creative work environment, the company has designed and implemented a role-matrix within each production team that, apart from their operational roles, includes:

- Quality control responsibility (process employee)
- Coordinator (planner)
- Documentation responsibility
- Capacity responsibility
- Stock responsibility
- Technical responsibility
- Education and training responsibility
- Environment responsibility
- Information and IT responsibility

This set of formal roles has been developed by union representatives in collaboration with managers and employees. To reach the highest degree of flexibility, more than one person within each team must, as a rule, be able to perform each role and employees are encouraged to change roles. The institutionalization of these different roles aims at reaching several objectives. The manual for the co-managing team lists the following objectives:

- Clear division of realms of responsibility
- Visibility among the co-managing teams and the environment
- Co-ordination of tasks across groups in own unit, section and in the whole production is facilitated
- Instruction, training, and course activities involving the individual roles can be established
- Information and communication channels become more transparent and thus faster

(Source: manual for co-managing teams 2006)

With explicit roles the division of responsibility becomes more transparent, and across teams and towards the wider surroundings, formal roles facilitate coordination and decentralization of work

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<sup>127</sup> In Health Ltd., particularly among middle managers, there is a widespread tendency to only focus on the needs and short-term goals of ones own section, and the multinational's new bonus and benchmark system has reinforced this tendency.

and authority. Moreover, “role masters” with similar responsibilities exchange experiences and ideas across teams, creating a dynamic of learning and innovating across teams. Given that the team members perform the different coordinating roles and often do it in turn, they are all actively engaged in and share responsibility for the tasks and obligations of the nine roles. Through this form of mutual collaboration the individual team member becomes better able to take on the roles of others, reflect on these and thus becomes able to contribute with new ideas and suggestions for improvements. Such practices of role taking and role shifting seem to strengthen the intra- and inter-communal collaborations and learning processes within the organization.

The institutionalization of changing jobs reinforces these tendencies. The JOB2 arrangement implies that workers are given the opportunity to and are expected to shift jobs across teams or units. In fact many have voluntarily been “expatriated” to a JOB2 more than once. The arrangement allows new skills and competencies to be acquired and increases the functional and numeric flexibility within the organization. Over the years the JOB2 arrangement has been readjusted several times. A committee of union representatives, managers and employees is in charge of generally managing and adjusting the arrangement, but the practicalities of job shifts are self-organized by the teams. JOB2 arrangement is used in the following situations:

- Moving and adjusting capacity
- Employees’ wishes for new challenges
- To ensure flexibility in relation to bottlenecks and key functions
- To currently expand the ability to change

(Source: Material from the JOB2 committee)

One of the shop stewards describes the genesis and current scope of the JOB2 arrangement in the following way:

*”30% of the labor force move around in JOB2 every day. They do it on a voluntary basis and management has no influence. The JOB2 arrangement has existed since 1995. The idea emerged when we were closing down a spray factory. A works council conference focused on how we could create job security and decided that we in return had to do something about the flexibility... according to our job security agreement we must move... that is, use JOB2 actively”* (Mia, 13-02-07).

Organizational members in Health Ltd. view JOB2 as a genuine success. The arrangement increases exchange of resources (of e.g. people, best/worse practices, ideas, knowledge) across team communities and units, and it helps to cultivate a “collective conscience” and collaborative communities across units and skills. In this way new competencies and roles are assembled and mixed on an ongoing basis. The union representatives list the following advantages of the JOB2 arrangement:

- Employee capacity is movable within 24 hours
- Employees move on a voluntary basis to different units or different shifts
- Capacity within a production area can be increased by 10% within 24 hours
- Employees develop – personally and professionally

- Employees maintain abilities to learn
- Employees are kept in the labor market in spite of changed job conditions
- Employees feel more secure about change
- Job security creates pleasure, motivation and readiness to change
- Conflicts among employees can be solved without dismissals
- Culture and traditions are constantly affected
- Experience is exchanged across the organization.

(Source: Material from JOB2 committee)

Looking at the many advantages listed above and at the same time recalling the employees' stories about their experiences with changing jobs, the JOB2 arrangement, as I see it, represents a very unique "organizing instrument" that not only facilitates the coordination of collaborative dynamics within and across communities of co-creation, but also enhances the lines of lateral accountability and distributed intelligence (in that it triggers ongoing reflexive cognition) in and throughout these various collaborative settings.

Taken together, the empirical findings indicate that organizational members in Health Ltd. by means of constructing a co-managing constitutional order have managed to limit fragmentation between collaborative team communities, thus neutralizing their so called internal "silo mentality". Through the creation of a role-matrix within each team and the introduction of a JOB2 arrangement which in particular nurtures cross-collaboration and practices of sharing knowledge across the boundaries of team communities, the organization's diverse collaborative communities have been prevented from developing into separated islands of cohesion. The empirical stories of Health's Ltd's world of work and organizing also show that creating such overlapping collaborative communing practices allows different perspectives and work practices to be more easily shared and transformed into greater or new innovative understandings of organizational products, services, practices and so on.

Significantly, within the organizational context of Health Ltd., these criss-crossing collaborative practices seem to both enhance organizational members' knowledge of the internal organization of diversity (e.g. the existence of different practices, organizational principles, co-existing orders of worth across teams/units/silos) and their knowledge of the organization as a whole (e.g. a shared understanding of the organization's overall purpose and strategies). Thus, the company's institutionalized practices of co-management offer a promising tool for managing criss-crossing collaborations within and between diverse communities of co-creation.

I now change research site to Tools Ltd. The aim is to have a closer look at how this company has constructed other novel forms of governance through the development of a constitutional order of co-ownership. All four managerial challenges seem to be tackled in rather dynamic ways through this constitutional order. Yet in this analysis I only focus on the two challenges that appear most significant in light of the empirical material. Tools Ltd.'s distinct order particularly supports dynamic co-creation of ongoing search routines and the distribution of authority.

### **CO-OWNERSHIP: A CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER IN TOOLS LTD.**

A unique tradition for co-ownership comprising 85% of employees constitutes a distinct constitutional order in Tools Ltd. When the share scheme was implemented in 1977 the company



employed 38 people. Today, approximately 475 employees are co-owners, holding a significant amount of stocks (typically worth approximately Euro 100,000 each). The price of stocks, dividends, etc. is dependent on the company's revenue, earnings, and equity. The argument for becoming a co-owner is that by contributing to the overall performance of the firm, the individual works for his/her own benefit. The company explicates the purpose of their co-ownership scheme in this way:

*"The reason for offering employees shares in Tools Ltd is a wish to make competent and loyal employees in all group companies joint owners of the company and in this way motivate to commitment and interest in Tools Ltd...Through the employee share scheme Tools Ltd. is....ensuring that we make the most of all the employees' resources"* (source: Tools Ltd's URL/website 02-01-07).

Tools Ltd. has made arrangements with a number of banks concerning terms of loans, interest rates, etc. It is therefore easy to see the level of results which will create a break-even when comparing incomes from stocks against expenses on loans. Ancient models for co-owning a fish-boat and dividing earnings inspired the whole scheme. Moreover, all employees are paid fixed salaries (within three salary levels: blue, white-collar and managers) and these are surprisingly low. In addition, all employees and managers are subject to identical "profit-sharing", i.e. a similar nominal bonus based on the past month's surplus compared to budgets. No discrimination between owners and non-owners, only absence due to sickness implies a reduction in bonus share. These arrangements reflect how it is the extended "we" of the entire company, not the individual unit, rank and/or department, that is in focus. The beneficial outcomes of Tools Ltd's order of co-ownership are job satisfaction, a high degree of responsibility towards colleagues, workplace and the financial bottom line (Source: Field notes, documents and Tools Ltd's URL/website 02-01-07). Organizational members in Tools Ltd. all highlight these benefits. Typically, they emphasize how the arrangement facilitates a work environment characterized by a high degree of involvement, mutual responsibility, commitment and distributed authority. Their stories about work indicate that these features trigger aspirations for knowledge sharing and joint search practices for continuous improvements as well as the distribution of control and accountability. Consequently, it seems that Tools Ltd., through this co-ownership arrangement in particular, has managed to cope with and prosper from the managerial challenges of managing ongoing search practices and of distributing authority in alternative ways. Let us therefore further explore how these challenges are more precisely being dealt with within the frames of Tools Ltd.'s organizational landscape.

### **CO-OWNERSHIP: A TOOL FOR MANAGING ONGOING SEARCH PRACTICES?**

Tools Ltd's ownership structure underpins and monitors a work environment close to the ideal-type of the pragmatist search organization. Organizational challenges such as facilitating ongoing search practices throughout the organization and tackling the paradox of managing search without exactly knowing what to find before a product or project is in the process (in the making), are very much enabled by the mutual responsibility, strong commitment and joint "profit-sharing" among organizational members that spring from the company's constitutional order of co-ownership. Looking at Tools Ltd's organizational landscape, the ownership structure in particular make possible two sets of institutionalized practices that give rise to dynamic coordination of ongoing search practices. The first is centered on integrating work processes of planning and execution, and the

second is a highly fluctuating organizing form based on various criss-crossing collaborative communities.

It is remarkable how the people of Tools Ltd. have worked (and are still working) towards integrating organizational processes of planning and execution and integrating their customers and partners into collaborative search practices for ongoing (co-) improvements and innovative co-creations (of products, services and practices). The company's physical layout, designed as a "roofed village" in which production and sales/administration are situated in the same location with no walls separating departments or units, very much underlines this integrative work style. Deliberately drawing on both sources of knowledge (planning and execution) provides the basis for more flexible processes of co-creation driven by joint knowledge sharing and distributed searches for improvements. In this way, former linear and less flexible production processes have been substituted by processes of experimentation based on close interactions between development and fabrication. Not only have more tentative and iterative work practices evolved from this form of functional integration; this way of working also in itself creates a commitment towards the larger we or community feeling in Tools Ltd:

*"CTU (planning/ construction) and production are collaborating closely... it clearly pays... the flow becomes much better when we involve production people from the beginning. It increases the understanding of the job and enhances mutual understanding across units. Sometimes we even do it [involve production]) even though it is not necessary. It clearly pays to spend a couple of hours on an introductory meeting briefing all involved parties. It creates common insight and focus... And engagement and mutual commitment"* (interview with Curt from the development department).

Organizational members in Tools Ltd emphasize how this work style results in better innovative solutions and performance results, and therefore they all have a common interest in engaging in, developing with, and learning from these collective interdisciplinary activities. Working together with other professions (production workers, engineers, technicians, sales representatives etc) strengthens the ability to learn, relearn and take on new work roles. The fact that organizational members in Tools Ltd. are at the same time being bound to each other by common interest and a common purpose seems to facilitate the co-creation of dynamic ongoing search practices. Moreover, through close collaborative interactions with customers, the company has developed ongoing search processes which transgress traditional organizational boundaries by integrating customers and other "outside" partners in their search practices for continuous improvements. Within the context of Tools Ltd., therefore, the co-ownership structure serves as a vital tool for managing dynamic search organizations.

Secondly, Tools Ltd's highly fluctuating work organizing form premised on various criss-crossing collaborative communities seems to support the capability to make ongoing search processes a general feature throughout the organization. In Tools Ltd. people work in teams. The work within and across these communities is highly collaborative, creating a pattern of employee and customer driven innovations. The entire formation of teams operates in very informal and fluid ways. In principle all areas of the company may become involved in changing combinations, depending on particular customer needs. Each unit (e. g. regrinding of metal tools, the calibration center, the sales or construction department etc.) represents a form of *basic team* divided into smaller sub-teams

depending on the units' actual work functions, operations and work tasks. Strong professional bonds and feelings of pride towards the units' specific work activities, competencies and performance results characterize life within different basic teams. Simultaneously, more provisional, *ad hoc teams* are continuously constructed across functions and operating units depending on required competencies and resources related to a given task or project (of search). Hence, collaborative team communities of organizational members from different units and with different skills and competencies are assembled on an ongoing basis. This way of forming criss-crossing temporary teams not only unfolds locally (for example in Denmark), but is today connecting all the sites of Tools Ltd. on a global scale and at numerous levels. In this way the organizing practice of the roofed village circumscribes a global search organization (*cf. interview with Paul and Chris from the development department*)<sup>128</sup>. These more temporary and fluctuating collective practices that criss-cross the organization's basic team communities spur ongoing search processes which involve significant collaborative dynamics, whereby individual organizational members learn to take on new roles, enhance competencies and create novel working careers.

This almost organic form of organizing collaborative communities based on ongoing distributed search practices with hardly any centralized hierarchical coordination seems to be monitored by collective processes of involvement and the experience of a common purpose. Clearly, the joint ownership structure enhances involvement and helps coordinate these processes, in that it makes organizational members work and connect for a common purpose. Asking the employees how this formation of team communities is being monitored often made them look bewildered, replying "*that's just something we do...we seldom think about it*" (Interview Tim and Steve). Without really noticing, people in Tools Ltd. seem to monitor these criss-crossing collaborative team practices on the basis of sharing a common purpose (initiated by the co-ownership structure connecting them through a common purpose), mutual involvement and reciprocal adjustments. Consequently, the order of co-ownership gives the impression of working as a vital tool to facilitate and coordinate the ongoing formation of collaborative team communities of search within Tools Ltd.<sup>129</sup>

### CO-OWNERSHIP: A TOOL FOR MANAGING DISTRIBUTED AUTHORITY?

The fourth and last managerial challenge I wish to address in this paper is the management of distributed authority. Also in this matter, Tools Ltd's constitutional order of co-ownership offers interesting insights into how it may be possible to organize for and manage collaborative orders based on lateral lines of authority.

A direct consequence of the co-ownership model is a very horizontal and participative form of authority and a high degree or level of transparency. For example, organizational members in Tools Ltd. are informed daily about turnover, and each month they receive a detailed report of accounts,

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<sup>128</sup> Often it is the R&D or the construction department that initiate moves to form new ad hoc teams. The R&D basic team normally consists of only six-eight members, but temporary ad hoc teams of fifteen-thirty employees of diverse professional skills are typically formed to work on the same development project. The organizing form is very loose and organic in its structure. It relies to a large extent on self-management and decentralized coordination among the basic units. Thus the basic team units decide for themselves who to "lend" and for how long (most often managers and employees make such decisions jointly). Either employees volunteer to join an ad hoc team or they are picked due to special skills or competencies.

<sup>129</sup> In addition, the more new customers are engaged, the more they will call for setting up such ad-hoc teams of ongoing search practices which trigger internal learning processes. This probably also explains why the company has been able to expand into a small multinational with such ease and at low cost over the past decade. Forming an ad hoc team of multiple competencies within the Denmark site makes it possible to enter a new market with force, though employees are only gradually recruited in the new country. As a result, more than 80% of the employees in Denmark have already gained foreign experience through being engaged in setting up a foreign subsidiary, thereby turning Tools Ltd. into a thoroughly global village.

strategies, assessment of outcomes, etc. All relevant information is communicated on a daily basis through notice boards located near the canteen and by intranet. Every second month all employees participate in so called café-meetings, where the CEO informs them about results, strategy, future challenges, etc. Management describes the company's information and communication philosophy in the following way:

*"Good communication is a basic element in our culture ... The perfect manager really wants to inform, so all get involved and committed. We recognize that question and constructive criticism is foundational for development and better decisions. We shall dare make information, decisions and acts visible"* (Brochure: from Tools Ltd).

According to Weick (1993) these are very important steps to engage a group in virtuous circles of mutual commitment, from which procedural justice and learning by monitoring (Kristensen and Zeitlin: 2005) may emerge and constitute an effective governance system. Additionally, organizational members of Tools Ltd. stress how one cannot be a part of the team community if (s)he is not willing to continuously learn and teach others. One employee puts it in the following way: *"Here we are all equal, whether you are a newcomer or one of the old ones we get the same salary – you can't gain anything by keeping knowledge to yourself.... Success is all about knowledge sharing and collaboration"* (Group interview). At Tools Ltd., creating such collaborative circles of mutual commitment implies the distribution of authority and the willingness to constantly share knowledge. The empirical stories from the company indicate how the ability of organizational members to manage (and be managed) without always knowing who is the boss seems to be enabled by their organizational ideal of equality (joint responsibility as a direct outcome of the co-ownership structure) and a strong willingness to learn from each other's experiences. Also their ability to juggle with multiple accountabilities and to manage the tension between them seems to be strengthened in this way.

Moreover, the company's "roofed village" design makes it easy to access people across organizational divides and to see who is available. One obvious result of being assembled in one open space is that everybody (is able to) watch everybody else. Inevitably, therefore, the setup leads to a widespread mutual control in the organization. As an example, the panoptic tones are highly reflected in the following quote. *"Due to our physical surroundings we don't need a system to officially register the hours worked – because by looking around we can easily see who is here and for how long.... It's a very sufficient indicator"* (Interview with Morten and Karina). No doubt, in this way the co-ownership structure and physical design also provide good opportunities for organizational members to mutually exert pressure on each other and to manage themselves through the eyes or gaze of others.

Thus, on one hand the constitutional order of co-ownership enables increased lines of lateral authority, delegation of responsibility, transparency, experiences of communing and involvement through a common purpose and so on. On the other hand it is also clearly being used as a management tool to control and make the most of human resources. Both effects of the co-ownership model are openly discussed in the company. Also, the organizational members' experiences of working within and between several collaborative communities indicate how the lines between "to manage" and "to be managed" are very fuzzy in Tools Ltd. because of the co-ownership model. In fact, in order to accomplish their work, members frequently have to shift between taking on the roles of managing others and of being managed, depending on their particular collaborative work situation(s). Hence, Tools Ltd's highly fluctuating work organizing practices of

various basic and ad hoc teams very much seem to rely on distributed and continuously transforming structures of authority enabled by the company's tradition for co-ownership. Summing up, Tools Ltd's constitutional order of co-ownership therefore depicts some interesting contours of how to constitute novel forms of governance that may organize and manage contemporary collaborative orders of distributed authority in dynamic ways.

## CONCLUSION

I have identified four managerial challenges of collaborative communities (of co-creation) within the realm of post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. These are: 1) to manage search without knowing what to search for 2) to manage authority without knowing who has it 3) to manage and prosper from productive possibilities of problematic situations and 4) to manage dynamic collaborations within and among multiple communities. It is argued that the four challenges are related to the open ended nature of innovation, the horizontal nature of the work organization, the nature of organizational doubt and the coordination of complex collaborative orders. Based on mini-ethnographic studies in Health Ltd and Tools Ltd. the paper shows how the development of a distinct "constitutional order" in each company of respectively co-management and co-ownership allows for the overcoming of the four managerial obstacles through different mechanisms.

In Health Ltd. a constitutional order of co-managing practices works by establishing work roles in which organizational members must adopt multiple perspectives, accept new challenges, move among work roles, participate and develop new collaborative communities of co-creation to solve problems and search for innovations. This is accomplished by establishing a set of roles, rules and guidelines (e.g. a JOB2 arrangement) that requires such collaborative and interactive behavior and sets it as an objective. In other words, Health Ltd has routinized a set of behaviors that make organizational members behave in a way that allows them to overcome the lack of hierarchy and benefit from it. Institutionalizing and "standardizing" such practices within and across collaborative communities allows (and requires) them to doubt, co-create and search for new solutions by recombining resources in new ways.

In contrast, in Tools Ltd., facilitating such practices occurs through a very different mechanism – that of co-ownership. In other words, the financial interests of the firm are aligned with the financial interests of workers in a very significant way (as opposed to other models of employee ownership where employees have only small shares of ownership). In this way, organizational members in Tools Ltd. are able to sidestep the principal-agent problem because all agents are also principals. At the same time, distributing authority to so many voices inevitably has the effect of generating conflict. As such, the distribution of ownership has the effect that there could be as many opinions as there are organizational members (employees) about any given problem, and all members become concerned with the multitude of roles present in the organization. In this way, they hold an incentive to engage in search and co-create novel solutions to new problems by virtue of their stake in the company.

Taken together, although by means of different mechanisms, the two constitutional orders of Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd serve as two vital tools for managing and facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities. Hence, this paper concludes by suggesting how the progress towards collaborative communities within the corporate arena of today consequently

implies the co-creation of new organizational structures of lateral accountability and more distributed management techniques based on self-management and practices of learning by monitoring. Whether organizational members experience these managerial practices as enabling opportunities or constraining demands is an ambiguous question, which may only be answered empirically. Nevertheless, the question is important to investigate and constantly (re)consider if we wish to continuously improve our capability to organize and manage collaborative communities of co-creation towards both human and organizational growth.

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## CHAPTER 10 – (PAPER III)

### TAKING TEAMS SERIOUSLY IN THE CO-CREATION OF ECONOMIC AGENCY: TOWARDS AN ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIOLOGY OF TEAMS

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#### INTRODUCTION

Almost twenty years ago Richard Whitley (1987) wrote a programmatic article "Taking Firms seriously as Economic Actors", which played a prominent role in initiating studies of how firms became socially constructed in different ways in different societies, i.e. the literature on national business systems (Whitley and Kristensen, 1996; 1997; Whitley, 1999 and Morgan et al. 2005). His article started from Coase, Williamson and Chandler's discussion of the importance of large firms and how we could explain them. Contrary to these authors, however, Whitley insisted that the existence of firms should be given a more open-minded and yet systematic consideration:

*Taking firms seriously as economic actors implies that their boundaries, constitution and development become significant foci of analysis and that the conditions under which particular kinds of firms become established, interact and change require systematic consideration. Rather than reducing them to epiphenomena of market processes or class conflicts, firms needs to be conceptualized as interdependent, semi-autonomous economic agents, which are able to control and direct the uses of resources by virtue of delegated property rights in ways which make a difference to economic and social outcomes (Whitley, 1987, p 126).*

Since Whitley wrote this article and gave one of several impetuses to the study of the nature of firms, we have accumulated new knowledge about how differently they are constructed in different national contexts. In some societies firms are part of business groups which in many ways change their behavior compared to the typical Chandlerian corporation as the individual firm takes part in a political-economic coalition that limits its autonomy and independence, but increases its resource base, while in other countries they are regulated to be atomistic economic actors in a more strict way.

While we were studying firms in their social and institutional context, the global landscape changed dramatically. In some countries clusters of innovative firms came to challenge the dominance of large, multidivisional firms – e.g. in the US. Outsourcing and globalization changed the patterns of production logistics. The internally focused R&D labs broke up, and "open innovation" (Chesbrough, 2003; 2006) taking place in global networks offers a new challenge in understanding firms. Within firms, work-organization changed towards the integration of planning and execution so that firms could change and redefine their roles continuously to harvest the fruit of global dynamics – trying both to achieve cost reductions and fast innovation (Herrigel, 2007). This in turn has led to a situation in which an ecology of work- and project-teams are increasingly constituting firms, and the former self-evident conceptualization of firms as fundamentally constituted as hierarchies – though built on a diversity of different institutional building blocks in different

countries – is being questioned. As especially Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) have made clear, the “projective city” is a landscape very different from the “industrial city”.

Therefore it is time to pose Whitley’s question concerning “work-teams”, if we hypothetically start from the expectation that teams may be the blocks building the projective city. In Whitley’s optics, teams should be studied as interdependent, semi-autonomous economic agents partly able to control and direct the uses of resources, rather than seeing them as epiphenomena of managerial decision processes and hierarchical control in the last resort. Surely, work-teams are in most cases the outcomes of top-managerial initiatives and as such expressions of the behavior of firms as economic agents. But creating teams as a novel way of organizing work may have a certain twist to the dynamics of agency.

Penrose (1959) is widely agreed in the literature to have captured the basic logic of this dynamic when it comes to the firm as a hierarchy. According to her, managers are continuously developing novel routines to expand the rational operations of firms. When these novel routines become appropriately fixed they can be left to subordinates and workers, who simply carry them out in repetitive ways. The core competence of the firm becomes the ability to create, in this hierarchical way, novel routines embraced with a certain, distinct logic. This evolutionary logic of the firm as agency is also recognized in later literature, e.g. Nelson and Winter (1982).

The National Business System approach seriously complicated the hierarchy by showing how differences in financial systems and vocational training systems helped shape differently both the social position of workers and managers and their mutual identities thereby e.g. providing highly divergent forms of authority among countries. But basically the approach took for granted that the hierarchical division of labor among workers and managers followed the Penrosian pattern.

One of the important aspects of team-organization is to delegate not only a well defined set of activities and routines to perform to work teams to carry out, but also to make the latter responsible for continuous co-creations and improvements of ideas, products, services and work routines and, to various extent, for the innovative change of what they produce. In this way they seem to break with the received wisdom on hierarchically structured evolutionary dynamics of firms.

Yet, most of the literature on team-organization neglects to seriously re-consider the evolutionary dynamics of firms from the vantage point of teams gradually gaining agency. The literature generally takes for granted that teams are delegated responsibilities top-down (and may be taken back by the higher echelons of the firm). Even very sophisticated observers of teams, such as Benders and van Hootegeem, in their analysis of teams take for granted that they operate within a hierarchical structure:

*... After all team members sell their labour capacity to the employing organization in exchange for wages. In other words, employees agree to work under the authority of managers who are appointed by their employing organizations. Thus the organization sets the boundaries within which any employee, thus also a team member, may act. Within these boundaries, employees may be expected to be given directives (Bender, 2005: 56).*

With such a framing of the object we tend not to pose such important questions as: What happens to the managerial function when teams constantly doubt and change existing routines? What happens to managerial authority, when teams become the primary contributors to improvements of performance? What happens to the political coalition making in a firm, when the ability to make continuous improvements differ among teams and over time? What happens when teams by taking seriously their obligations to do continuous improvements and innovations tend to collide in struggles over demarcations? And what happens when individual teams in their rivalry decide that the best way of developing their community is to lay off a number of its members, who – in the opinion of the majority of the members – holds a wrong attitude? Is it not fairly easy to see that in such cases teams start defining the problems that managers have to solve, i.e. teams start to delegate to managers a new role and new responsibilities? We think that it is important to actually study how a team and its members get mutually constituted, how teams mutually constitute each other and how they jointly co-create the firm as a community of team communities.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

In the next section we further specify what might be the implications of changing to team-based organizational forms and introduce the four case-studies. Then we present an outline of the two predominant team models in the literature and discuss the problems of defining teams/teamwork in order to illustrate the relevance of developing new analytical frameworks for conceptualizing contemporary forms of team organization. Then follows a section in which we describe our experiences and reflections (and re-considerations) conducting a field study of new modes of team-based work organizations in Danish manufacturing companies. While trying to take the empirical manifestations of teamwork seriously, conducting this study we were faced with many of the problems of defining teamwork. Therefore our study reflects a highly iterative re-search-journey through the empirical landscape of contemporary teamwork practices in Danish companies. Then follows a section where we take stock of our findings compared to existing “rules-of-thumb” in the team literature while also moving the focus from individual team community to that of team communities as this is important for the kind of dynamic embedded in a firm. In the final section we propose a tentative outline of this dynamic, but also emphasize how the institutional context of a firm may shape this dynamic, which suggests a new agenda for comparative studies.

### **STUDYING TEAMS AS CO-CREATIVE ECONOMIC ACTORS**

Contrary to the majority of the existing HRM literature and team research the primary study object of which is either the individual (i.e. the individual employee and his/her resources or performance) or the group (i.e. the team unit and its joint resources or output), our focal point is the community of teams, its relational dynamics, and how it serves as a constitutional device for the firm. By this we want to stress relations of interdependencies among teams and the dimension of ‘we’ within and among teams. For this reason we introduce the concept of community of team communities.

As opposed to conceiving teams merely as a formal organizational work form, we understand teams as ‘relational settings’ constituted by both endogenous and exogenous relations. In this light not only the internal relational patterns among team members, but also their relations to other teams and the wider organizational context condition its configuration. Hence, we define team community as the ‘we’ constituted by the intra- and inter-relational dynamics among members of the team. By

exploring the nature and workings of team communities from a relational approach, we aim to develop our understanding of how team communities may be supported and monitored “from below” – i.e. from the level of work organizing, how they evolve and may become constitutive for the firm and its evolutionary dynamics rather than taking for granted at the outset that the firm constitutes them in a hierarchical way.

A team-oriented change in the organization of the firm may have important consequences for how, who and through which processes the boundaries, constitution and development of both teams and firms become determined. At least in a transitory phase, traditional concepts of governance encounter a number of novel challenges. If teams are still hierarchically controlled and decisions still reside with top managers, it may create a lot of tension because with the change, managers have lost the feel for the experimental process of developing from past experience future routines for the teams and the firm. In such cases search for new routines are going on among teams, but are defined by managers cut off from the search itself. Another way of determining the future evolution of the firm could be to let an internal market mechanism take over the internal organization giving to the teams the right to define future routines dependent on their relative performance of the past. This would, however, soon lead the firm astray as emerging needs and novel, preliminary and volatile teams would be deselected to the effect that exploitation takes dominance at the expense of exploration and innovation.

In other words, if only market or hierarchy governed teams, they would lose the innovative potential that initially motivated their creation. Consequently, it seems as if we should expect that the more teams become the focal agency of a complex organization, the more difficult it is to imagine that the firm can escape from having its dynamic constituted by complex negotiation and deliberation processes among teams, involving both political and economic aspects and a strong sense of responsibility for the future among all the constitutive team elements of the firm. The question is whether the firm derives its identity and changing roles rather from the mutual negotiation process among its constitutive teams than from the entrepreneurial ideas of its principals? Will agency then have been relocated from the firm as such to rest with the community of work teams? And will the ability of the firm to become agency be dependent on the ongoing deliberation among its teams? What then becomes the nature of the firm? These are the questions guiding this paper.

Empirically the paper draws on four case studies conducted over a two-year period from 2006-2008. The cases are selected from a larger sample of companies, which we visited for a full-day in a first phase of the study. In the second phase of the study we re-visited four of these companies for a week conducting interviews, participant observations and collecting written material. We chose to closer investigate these four case companies because they seemed particular rich in information on how Danish firms experiment with novel team-based ways of collaborating and organizing work, of constantly redefining roles and rules, of changing their relations to other firms and customers, and of distributing authority throughout the organization. In what follows, we give a short introduction of the four in-depth case studies.

**Tools Ltd.** produces cutting tools, nails and nail-guns, but sees its main business as offering customers production optimizing consultancy services, tool management and -maintenance as well as education and training. It is a Danish multinational with headquarters in a small village in Jutland. Since 1995 it has built up its international capacity with subsidiaries in Denmark, Sweden, Norway,

Germany, the UK, the USA, China, and the Czech Republic. Today it employs 560 people of which approx. 500 are working in Denmark. It is fully owned by management and employees, and ownership comprises 85% of the employees. The employees are working in teams in very unconventional physical facilities, set up along the ideals of a village community. The headquarters is one big 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> building in which production, stores and administration are literally placed on the same floor in one open room. On top of the building are seminar rooms, a huge auditorium, visitor rooms, etc., offering facilities for organizing courses for both customers and employees.

Tools Ltd. is a genuine success story, which both financial results and an excellent work environment reflect. It has never operated at a loss in its 42 years of existence. From its beginning in 1964 the product program consisted primarily of tools from other manufactures, and since then the firm has continuously expanded its number of suppliers whose products Tools distribute to customers. At a point in time this position made it necessary to regrind cutting tools. It purchased a multi-purpose grinding machine, and began more generally to regrind tools for the region. Gradually it invested in more machinery and expanded the product program to service not only the woodworking industry, but also metalworking, food and graphic industries in a region that was expanding rapidly. By the late 1970s it expanded further by establishing business relations with numerous suppliers of tools for woodworking and furniture industries. From the beginning of the 1990s measurement and calibration equipment were added, and calibration services and measuring tools were offered to customers, while at the same time Tools Ltd. started to expand production of speciality tools, which could not be delivered by standard producers. In 1999 a tribology department, working with surface treatment (e.g. PVD coating and ion-implantation) and a training centre were set up. Thus offering safety courses and other forms of education and training became a new field of activity. Recently Tools Ltd. has used its knowledge to become certified as a quality toolmaker for suppliers to the automotive and aerospace industries. Technologically it has just moved into making use of nano technologies to create new surfaces of its specialty tools. In short, by continuously expanding its activities the firm has transformed itself from a small local supplier of Tjep nails to a service-oriented total supplier, operating on the global scene in close interplay with customers in need of high quality tools. The approx. 7,000 tools passing through the regrinding department every day illustrate the close interaction.

Tools Ltd. now positions itself as a problem solver and supplier of total solutions, including customized tools and know-how intensive services. It supplies “traditional” products such as cutting tools, lamina inserts, tool-fixtures, fastening systems, and measuring equipment, but always in combination with, for example, services such as tool maintenance, calibration and production optimization and to many industries (aerospace, automotive, building and construction, food, general machining, oil and gas, tele-communication, wind turbines, woodworking and furniture). Through its close interaction with customers, it has developed a wide range of competencies, and what it learns from one customer, can be used to service others. The total concept comprises competencies in production optimization, standard tools (complete tooling programs), customized/specialized tools, tool maintenance, tool management systems, and training and education. With the customers it works on continuous cost reduction and production optimization by analyzing and optimizing key processes, giving advice and guidance on machine and tool investments and offering guidance when customers introduce new products according to specific

needs. Production optimization, according to its working methods, is thus a continuous joint process, built on collaborative partnership.

**Hydraulic Ltd.** produces hydraulic, electro-hydraulic, and electric solutions for the slowly motioning vehicle industry. Its expertise is related to control and steering, work and propel functions, delivering high-performance components and integrated systems to a wide range of applications. With approximately 9,000 employees worldwide and a revenue of more than \$1.7 billion it has sales, manufacturing, and engineering capabilities in Europe, the Americas, and the Asia-Pacific region. The company's executive offices are located near Chicago in Lincolnshire, USA and in Neumünster, Germany.

The history of its making as a multinational is paradoxical. During the 1980s a German company produced a product licensed from an American company. The product was successful on the European market. In the 1990s the German company began to expand through mergers and acquisitions, and one of its targets was the American company. First it bought 50% of its hydrodynamic division and three years later the remaining 50%, and the hydrodynamic division of the American company, formerly quoted in the New York Stock Exchange, became part of the family owned German company. The Danish part of Hydraulic Ltd. is a very different story. In 1964 the first Danish hydraulic product was developed in the headquarters of at the Danish firm in Southern Jutland, where huge facilities for Hydraulic Ltd. surround the HQs skyscraper today. Between 1990 and 1996 acquisitions in the USA and Poland helped bring together global competencies in hydraulics, and in 1998 the hydraulic part was separated from (though still fully owned by) the Danish company's core business. At the same time it was making radical innovations in valve technology and introducing team organization on the factory floor. In 2000 the German and the Danish hydraulic companies merged into Hydraulic Ltd. to reach sufficient scale and scope to become an important international player. Currently it is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, but only limited amounts of shares are traded freely. Two shareholders, the German family and the Danish family each held 38.5% of the shares of the holding company until 2008. In 2008 the Germans sold part of their shares to the Danish family, which now controls Hydraulic.

When merging, the two companies did not have significantly overlapping products, but succeeded in gaining marketing advantages, boosting sales in Europe and the US. Especially sales of Danish products on the American market increased continually. Two factors were decisive for this development. First, Danish products had a competitive technological advantage. Second, American OEMs saw Hydraulic Ltd. as an American company, run from Chicago. The triumph was that Hydraulic Ltd. was elected a John Deere supplier, and later, in 2001, was recognized as Supplier of the Year by John Deere Dubuque Works in Deere's Achieving Excellence Process. This position opened the market towards other American OEMs, for instance Caterpillar, also producing slowly motioning vehicles. Employment in Danish facilities grew from 700 in 2000 to its current 2,400 employees.

**Spirit Ltd.** is located in a town in Fünen, and is specialized in bottling, storing and distributing different types of spirit and wines. During the last decades the factory, which was originally part of the Danish COOP, has been sold four times, and while it belonged to a Swedish state-owned

multinational, when we visited the plant, the Swedish government has now sold it off to a French multinational as a step in their privatization plans. These shifting positions and tough market competition have forced the factory to maintain high quality and implement continuous cost reductions. Wine conditioning, transportation and bottling must be handled so that taste, alcoholic percentage, colour and transparency do not deteriorate, while low costs are tantamount. Recently competition has tightened further, as an over capacity in the Nordic countries intensified competition among subsidiaries of the Swedish multinational. A process of rivalry and negotiations over setting, and meeting benchmarks among the different plants in Finland, Sweden and Denmark has been used to contest and evaluate the comparative advantages of each factory. Some relocation of production proved necessary, but it was difficult to determine how to organize production and which sites to close. Setting benchmarks was a complex task, having to take into consideration e.g. variations in regional marketing position, production capacity, location in relation to consumer markets and flexibility. Many of these variables were not controlled by local sites, which mainly could improve on productivity, flexibility, quality and cost reduction. For two years, uncertainty prevailed about which of the factories should be closed. Another Danish site was closed recently and partly relocated to Fünen. Hardly had Spirit Ltd. won this contest before the path was set for a new turn, when the new French owner took it over in 2008.

**Health Ltd.** has become the world's leading provider of blood gas analyzers, measuring blood gases and other parameters used to diagnose patients in critical situations, and accessories, IT systems and support services for blood gas testing. The firm employs nearly 1,700 people worldwide, and their products are sold in more than 100 countries. Its headquarters are in Copenhagen and its global organization comprises three product companies in Denmark, the US and Switzerland, and a number of international sales companies. Thus the long story of Health Ltd. is about a Danish family-owned company going multinational by developing excellent products and services that make it possible to cultivate close ties to surgery departments in hospitals all over the world.

The new story, however, is that Health Ltd. has become a subsidiary. In 2003 a U.S. Fortune 500 company committed to continuous improvement, innovation and growth took over it. This shift has primarily implied a radical re-organization along an American lean model.

Health Ltd.'s main product company, with more than 800 employees (approx. 450 are so-called unskilled), is located vis-à-vis its corporate headquarters in Copenhagen. It is surrounded by an old residential district, a shopping area and close to a beautiful lake. Inside the company the feel of locality, proximity and unity blends with employees continuously acting towards and being in touch with the world. People at Health Ltd. express pride and commitment in talking about their company and work, and do not take success for granted, but are conscious that the long process of successfully improving financial results, finding new and better ways to solve problems and expanding throughout the world has been co-authored. Thus, the takeover created new challenges, conditions and re-organizations that stirred up habits and routines causing new uncertainties and more intensive and constant pressure for innovative changes.

But it also revived former capabilities. Since its early days, Health Ltd. has developed products in close collaboration with Danish research institutions, such as the National Hospital (Rigshospitalet) and the Carlsberg Laboratories, which explains its reputation from such collaborative partnerships. During the years, when the Danish health system was leading in quality and funding, it had an ideal home market for innovative performance.

This way of operating has continued after the take-over. Though blood gas analyzers and production of instruments are still the core metier, the firm also offers a wide range of, for example, liquids, samplers and services such as process analysis, IT systems, quality as well as technical support and training. The market share of analyzers globally amounts to 40%, while it is 97% in Denmark. In 2002, 96% of its turnover derived from exports; 21% from analyzers, 63% from accessories, 9% from services, and 7%, from other products. 41% of its turnover derived from sales in the European, 25% from the US and 19% from the Japanese markets<sup>130</sup>.

Co-developing partnerships with colleagues, costumers and suppliers is characteristic of Health Ltd. For instance, it initiates a new customer relation with an analysis of the hospital's blood gas testing workflow based on dialogue, cooperation and exchange of experiences. The approach is called *The Red System* and is divided into three stages: First, process analysis of customer needs, testing environment, etc., to identify opportunities for process improvement. Second, design of solution to optimize customer testing environment, combining analyzers, IT systems and samplers. Third, provision of support in the form of training, QA, supplies of materials and technical support to ensure such degree of customer satisfaction that Health Ltd. becomes an ongoing partner, helping customers save time and increase productivity. These external ties are supported by a highly experimentalist work environment inside the firm, where everyone is encouraged to explore new ways of continuous improvements. The next step is to move towards the patient in Point of Care situations, especially around Acute Care, where the firm wants to acquire technologies, develop new measurement parameters and products and service hospitals to continuously improve operations in acute sections.

Before digging deeper into the empirical study of the team organization of these four firms, drawing on existing team literature we provide an outline of the two predominant team models. We further discuss the problems of defining teams/teamwork in order to illustrate the relevance of developing new analytical tools for conceptualizing contemporary forms of team organization. We suggest that one central step towards taking contemporary empirical manifestations of teams seriously is to develop frameworks that acknowledge the agency of teams, their relational character - and thus the organization as "a community of team communities".

## **RELATING OUR APPROACH TO THE GENERAL THEORETICAL DEBATE ON TEAMS**

While research has shown that there are many varieties of teams, the literature has predominantly discussed two kinds; socio-technical and lean teams – inspired by the socio-technical school (Benders 2005) and the lean production philosophy with its roots in Japanese models of work (see for instance Womack 1990), respectively.

According to Pruijt (2002) and Benders (2005) emphasis on the importance of 'autonomy' is a cornerstone in socio-technical team models, which in addition stress factors, such as job decision latitude and employee involvement in design as pivotal for the team-based work form. Thus the socio-technical team philosophy entails a striving towards worker autonomy, collaboration and codetermination instead of increasing discipline, preferring the absence of team leaders or the leader as facilitator, coach or spokesperson. Additionally it involves a conscious movement towards job

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<sup>130</sup> Source of information: company website and downloaded power point presentation by the HR-manager



enrichment instead of a 'Taylorist division of work, the use of workers' knowledge, continuous skill development and the reintegration of conception and execution (Pruijt 2002: 2).

Contrary, team autonomy is not the driving force underlying the lean team model (although the lean team may embody a degree of participation). As the socio-technical team model it is also developed on the background of ideas of collaboration, interdependence and knowledge sharing, but in a much more constrained framework, since emphasis is first and foremost on the bottom line performance benefits of team working. Morita (2001 in Benders 2005: 61) conceptualizes lean teams as having four central characteristics: multi-skilled workers, programs for continuous skill development, allocation of tasks to work units (one task, one team) and strong work unit leaders. Often lean teams are accompanied by practices such as quality control circles or continuous improvement systems (Kaizen in Japanese) to increase efficiency and productivity. High performance work team is familiar to the form of lean team, but incorporates to a higher degree progressive human resource practices, e.g. incentives and rewards such as investment in training, performance-based pay and employment security (Ibid.: 63).

To summarize, socio-technical and lean teams are driven by two different rationales. With the risk of oversimplifying, the socio-technical team form can be said to be initiated and seen as a means to enhance the autonomy of workers and the quality of working life, while the rationale embedded in lean teams is to increase workers' efficiency, performance, and production results. But as Pruijt points out it does not necessarily mean that the socio-technical team form puts the quality of working life before productivity. Instead it takes improvement of the quality of working life as a condition for improvement of performance (Pruijt 2002: 2). However, in many ways this seemingly bi-polar roots for discussing teams has become blurred, not only because demarcation lines are unclear, but also because the two positions represent two highly different movements that have tried to make themselves attractive to their opponents.

*Team working is the point where two movements intersect: a movement for making a managerially attractive concept – the Toyota production system [and lean teams]- socially acceptable and a movement for making a socially attractive concept – anti-Taylorism in its various forms – managerially acceptable. The double lineage of the team working concept gives rise to internal contradictions and confusion (Pruit 2002: 3).*

Sinclair (1992) assesses the combined effects of these two movements to have created a hegemonic ideology among management scholars and consultants for teams as *the* route to effective organizational performance. Thus by blurring the concepts, the ideology has become hegemonic because all groupings of practitioners can interpret the phenomena as in their best interests. Or as Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) would probably state it, today the organizational templates of team organization constitute a legitimate order from which discourses and justifications take departure.

However, given this legacy, it is not surprising that we find a wide range of bipolar team models in the team literature. Although these models classify teams in new categories they can all be said to characterize different aspects of the two prominent positions on teams, despite their distinct emphasizes on diverse dimensions of teamwork. For example the distinction between 'Swedish' and 'Japanese' models of team working (Berggren: 1993 in Benders and Van Hootegeem 1999), involvement and productivity teams (Mueller), high road and low road team working (Bacon & Blyton: 2000), neo-Taylorist and anti-Taylorist forms of teams (Pruijt 2002). In certain respects, this

dual typology of team working is problematic, as such taxonomies tend to push in the direction of classifying diverse practices into one or the other, and therefore easily tend to oversimplify the 'reality' (read: the diverse empirical praxes of team working) and the debate about what is going on in this 'reality' and how it will evolve. The dichotomies also imply a rigid separateness when in practice elements often overlap significantly and constitute a variety of hybrids of a specific bipolar model (see e.g. Benders & Van Hooft 1999).

Moreover the legacy of team concepts poses a very tricky problem, when the ambition is to take seriously the empirical manifestations and phenomena of teams.

### THE PROBLEMS OF DEFINING TEAMS AND FORMS OF TEAMWORK

What is a team and what characterizes the teamwork organizational form? The question seems simple, but on second thoughts not all that easy to answer. First of all an answer depends on the characteristics, dimensions and demarcation lines that one defines as signifiers of the phenomenon. Second, every existing team and form of teamwork, whether inspired (or defined) by lean production or the socio-technical tradition of thoughts, has its own distinct features, e.g. in terms of team design, team activity, authority structure as well as context (i.e. specific environment)<sup>131</sup>. Let us take a look at this definition problem in both a theoretical and empirical perspective.

One common theoretical problem with definitions of teams is that they are either very broad or very narrow. A very broad definition is offered by Bracharach: *"A team is a group of agents with a common goal which can only be achieved by appropriate combinations of individual activities"* (Bracharach 2005: xxi). This definition can be stretched to encompass all from couples, families, street gangs, sports teams to nations in time of war as well as workgroups and thereby risks being devoid of meaning. Sundstrom et al.'s broad conception of teams as *"Interdependent collection of individuals who share responsibility for specific outcomes of their organization"* (Sundstrom et al. 1990: 120) delimits the definition to some degree by pointing to them as formal work groups within the organization and drawing attention to their strategic use. However, the definition gives no clues as to size and characteristics. But when these parameters are included new problems arise. Mueller's classic definition can help illustrate some of these problems. According to him a team should be understood as:

*"a group of people that has between 8 and 15 members, is responsible for producing a well-defined output within a recognizable territory, where members rotate from job to job with some regularity, under a flexible allocation of tasks"* (Mueller 1994: 383-4).

Obviously this more narrow definition excludes teams smaller or bigger than eight to fifteen members. Yet, why should a group of e.g. six members producing a well-defined output within a recognizable territory not be defined as a team? As Benders points out, Mueller's inclusion of job rotation introduces yet another problem – because a group of people conducting complicated work tasks, each contributing with his/her specialization, would accordingly not qualify as a team (Benders & Van Hooft 1999: 618). An airplane crew, a group of surgeons and nurses or a shop floor unit without regular job rotation is disqualified as a team by virtue of this criterion. Clearly all

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<sup>131</sup> Accordingly, there is for practitioners and academics no unambiguous definition of team or a single form or best model of team working (e.g. Benders & Van Hooft 1999; Knights & McCabe 2000; Mueller 1994).

these theoretically derived definitions of what a team is have limitations. And why should the output be well-defined and by whom, given that the rationale for a team might be improvements in exploitation or powerful exploration?

Another general problem concerns the empirical implications of defining teamwork. According to Knights and McCabe (2000) two extreme approaches to defining team working are identifiable. The first is to generate a list of practices that can be seen to attract the label of team working empirically. In this case team working is seen to include a diverse range of features. Nevertheless, there is a problem with such inductively developed definitions, which eclectically attempt an exhaustive coverage of the content of team working. As Knights and McCabe note: *“Such definitions are either all-encompassing and therefore non-discriminating or so restrictive as to be unhelpful as a framework of research”* (Knights & McCabe 2000: 1483). Benders and Van Hooft shed light on another limitation related to the inductive approach when writing:

*“The issue [of definition] cannot be resolved empirically by studying what are called ‘teams’; whereas such studies are useful and necessary to gain insight into the actions undertaken under the label of ‘teams’, a comparison of such forms of work organizations requires a definition that may not be derived from empirical practices”* (Benders & Van Hooft 1999: 619).

Hence their argument is that an external, deductively derived framework is needed for reasons of comparison. The quotation brings the second extreme approach to definition in focus, which simply is to define teams and team working, as would a dictionary, such as for example the earlier discussed definitions (e.g. Sundstrom et al.). However, as stated earlier, the risk of such deductively informed approaches is that they are also either too generic or non-discriminating or too restrictive. What is more, we risk deducting from a material that is limited by the infancy of our understanding.

Rhetorical understandings of teams and teamwork (i.e. when the phenomenon is taken at face value according to the labels ascribed to it) are another associated pitfall. Because asking for the presence of ‘teams’ or ‘teamwork’, entails the danger of getting answers that are based on completely different understandings of what ‘teams’ and ‘teamwork’ imply. Likewise, the use of predetermined substantive understandings of teamwork (i.e. where neutral defined terms are used to describe the phenomenon) run the risk of ignoring other aspects and alternative empirical significant characteristics of the phenomenon, not covered by the researcher’s predetermined understanding (Benders, Huijgen and Pekruhl 2002: 374; Benders 2005: 64).

In short, the discussed inductive versus deductive definitional dilemma implies two classical methodological pitfalls. On the one hand, you cannot a priori define the object(s) (i.e. the forms of team and teamwork) being studied, nor is it, on the other hand, promising (or for that matter possible) to solely ground your definition empirically. But which conceptual frameworks and points of orientation may then guide the study of teams and teamwork? Confronted with the premise that teams and teamwork have no single uniform or stable character, and that any deductively or inductively derived definition is tricky, our approach to the definition problem has been highly tentative and explorative. That is, an approach, which draws on sensitizing concepts for exploring and furthering our understanding of team working and its organizational modes – i.e. concepts/understandings of team communities and team working that are continuously informed

and “tested” empirically. In this process, we make observations, criticize former beliefs and try to take a next move, but without taking for granted that we have identified the final answer.

In the next section we describe our experiences with and reflections on (and re-considerations) conducting a fieldwork study of new modes of team-based work organizations within Danish manufacturing companies. While trying to take the empirical manifestations of teamwork seriously, conducting this study we were faced with many of the above-mentioned problems of defining teamwork. Therefore our study reflects a highly iterative re-search-journey through the empirical landscape of contemporary teamwork practices in a set of Danish companies.

### **EXPLORING MICRO DYNAMICS OF TEAM COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE EMPIRICAL WORLD OF DANISH MANUFACTURING**

As mentioned earlier four case-companies constitute the paper’s empirical basis. We focus on these four case-companies because they are particular rich in information on how Danish firms experiment with novel team-based ways of organizing work at the level of everyday work organizing practices within and across units and teams. The cases are also rich in information on how the re-organization of Danish firms towards team-based work forms and collaborative work practices of continuous improvements is not a linear process with given end points. Rather these companies’ re-organizations reflect ongoing processes of recombining “new” and “old” work practices, roles and rules in experimental ways at all organizational levels. And it is exactly the multilevel experimental character of such processes that cast doubt on the relevance of both a Penrosian perspective and existing rules-of-thumb in the team literature. In what follows we take a closer look at our empirical observations and analytical reflections exploring this empirical landscape.

No doubt, Danish managers have discovered the comparative advantages of leaving responsibility to the floor-level of Danish enterprises. In a previous study, Kristensen (2003) made it clear that team-based high performance work organization (HPWO) was diffusing rapidly and constituted a core element in discussions among managers and shop stewards across the divides of distinct Danish organizations. Visiting factories, however, also revealed that one single concept may refer to very different realities. In some factories, teams were like u-formed cells, in others they looked like a department and in yet others the concept was reserved for ad hoc groups working on temporary projects. Moreover they did transcend from one to another over time. They were also constituted very differently, e.g. in some places they were created hierarchically by managers who appointed team-leaders, in others the team-leader role would rotate among the members, some teams constituted themselves by electing a team-leader and others even saw the community of team leaders as an extension of the union club, where the union board would nominate the persons among whom teams could choose their leaders. We even came across a firm, then owned by a large Danish corporation, where rather than middle-managers, a large group of shop stewards managed the floor. But the discourse across firms totally ignored this heterodox reality, meaning that people would talk about “apples”, while listeners would hear “pears”.

Informed by this former study, when we began our empirical study. Our first phase of extensive case-studies therefore aimed at identifying a set of distinct types of team-based HPWOs. We believe to have identified four different types from in the four selected case-companies.

Spirits Ltd. constituted a lower boundary case in which teams had been formed, team leaders were selected jointly by management and union representatives, forming a partnership of enthusiasts, but struggling with a majority of lukewarm opponents, that would rather gossip negatively in the corridors than engage in serious discussion about possibilities for improvements in quality-circle meetings. This partnership was highly interested in an investigation that could reveal additional organizing principles by studying other firms. Much of our further inquiry into other firms thus concerned finding a solution to this problem.

For example, it seemed as if factories in which the team-leader job rotated among members of the team, were less prone to split into fiery souls and lukewarm opponents. Here team members would be less critical and more constructive in their approach; they would watch and learn in order to prepare for the coming team-member role. This minor change helped improve the ability of team-members to take on the roles of others, and to improve on their own roles in the role-matrix of the team. Yet, in most cases where the principle of rotation had been tried, it had failed because many of the involved neither wanted to lead others, nor being leaders.

In Hydraulic Ltd. we found a fascinating constitutive principle that seemed able to solve this problem in turn. Hydraulic had introduced a TPM-concept, which meant that in a team all members would have operational duties *and* managerial responsibilities, the latter being distributed on organizing (the team-leader role), maintenance, logistics, quality and safety and environment. In addition to being a member of an operational team, each employee was part of a secondary cross-team, responsible for each of these managerial tasks. In this system operational teams were rivalling over performance, yet they were learning from each other, which improvements could be made. Thus all team-members were located in a nexus, receiving impulses and ideas for continuous improvements and innovations, making it easier for everyone to achieve the feel of actively contributing, making team-members much more egalitarian. Furthermore the team-leader role was continuously being elaborated by a sophisticated joint educational program organized by the further training institutions in the region and the plant's HR-department. Hydraulic Ltd. thus was thought to constitute the upper boundary case, and that other cases would be placed in the continuum between Spirits Ltd and Hydraulic Ltd.

Health Ltd. seemed to be a mixture. Here all workers would be part of a quite permanent team with a hierarchically appointed team-leader; and most workers would simultaneously have a second job, frequently working in other teams. Often, general workers would also join a development project constituting an additional source for role-shift. Thus a primary team would embody a group of people, who knew what was going on in most places of the factory could compare themselves with the rest, receive impulses for continuous improvements and was able to coordinate internal activities with other teams by using its many personal ties to other teams. Workers were very attentive to team-leaders' propensity to sub-optimize, and they would evoke the intervention of a very active group of shop stewards to take action, when more system-level initiatives for coordinating across teams were needed. Interventions from shop stewards, often jointly with upper-managers, would then use the formal works council to form across the firm ad hoc committees on novel issues for improvement, and engage members from a variety of teams to take part in these committees.

Finally, Tools Ltd. provided what looked like a utopian dream for how to organize work. First, all employees were part of each their primary team encircling a distinct industrial process, administrative function, etc. In addition, they would continuously and in abundance form ad hoc teams, e.g. to serve a new customer, engage in an R&D project, or to set up a foreign subsidiary. The variability of ad hoc teams was high, they were typically led by the little group of seven people from the R&D-team, and most primary teams were involved in a number of ad hoc projects. This continuous recombination of teams by ad hoc teams would bring challenges and impulses for improvements to the primary teams, and the firm seemed to run close to top performance despite no monitoring system would measure individual teams and persons. Exactly because the monitoring system was not measuring individuals, teams or departments, ad hoc teams could be formed with ease and would not have to first overcome suboptimal concerns of individual fiefdoms in Tools Ltd. Tools Ltd. had a monitoring system, but it worked in a very different way than is normal for lean forms of work organization. As more than 85% of employees owned stocks in the company, they were highly interested in its overall performance, and reports would be published every morning covering the year up to yesterday. Outcomes higher than budgeted would lead to bonuses of the same absolute size to all employees, if they had not been on sick-leave, calculated on a monthly base. Budgeted performances, on the other hand, were made with an eye to make it possible to pay such dividends to stockowners that they would cover the eventual interest rates paid on banking loans, raised to buy the stocks. Thus the individual would always be able to follow the progress of the firm from the view of his/her personal economic prosperity.

All companies but Tools Ltd. imagined possibilities for improving their constitution as HPWOs, so we expected that these four firms would make it possible to investigate four very diverse types of logic enabling us to construct a typology of evolutionary paths. However, when returning to the companies everything had changed. In both Hydraulic Ltd. and Health Ltd., pressures from American headquarters to change into Americanized lean-systems had overruled the past work organization. In Hydraulic Ltd. this even implied exchanging the former Danish manager with an American, which had caused a major breakup in the former tight collaborative pattern among union representatives and top managers. Furthermore, the formerly coherent TPM system had collapsed, and the factory had fragmented into a set of fiefdoms within which collaborative ties were attempted maintained. American managers were simultaneously increasing capacity to meet the exploding growth in demand for Hydraulic Ltd.'s products, considering which parts to subcontract and introducing lean principles in a chaotic way. In Health Ltd. the change had created such a mess that, the union representatives were primarily interested in finding strategies for preserving the managers with whom they had been partnering over many years, so that they could jointly search for a compromise between their former and the new organization. In both Health Ltd. and Hydraulic Ltd. workers and shop stewards were struggling to compensate for ongoing mismanagement trying to prevent the processes of restructuring from ruining their reputation among customers. Spirits Ltd. had in the meantime changed to the better. The owner had proclaimed that subsidiaries would be benchmarked in preparation for a set of plant closures. This had changed the game and everybody was struggling for performing to the limit of the possible. By introducing a second job, as in Health Ltd., and by engaging a large amount of people in changing lines and building new ones, the whole plant was up to its eyes in making changes and improvements. Thus in each of the three subsidiaries, the situation was chaotic, and yet the participants showed no signs of despair.

The cases demonstrate a totally surprising changeability, which a third visit confirmed. Once more the situation had changed. Hydraulic Ltd. had got rid of American managers and a managerial team was eager to repair damages towards the union representatives in order for a new partnership jointly to find ways of coping with an incredible expansion. Health Ltd. had lost the managers they thought they needed to be able to repair damages, but the American headquarters had sent a Polish manager, who was eager to learn how to combine lean with Danish high discretion. Spirit Ltd. had won the battle and was integrating a former Swedish plant into its activities, introducing whole new lines and making surprising fast improvements in order to prepare themselves for a new owner. Most of the practices from the first visits were still in place and had been recombined in novel ways, new elements had been added, but hardly anyone could tell how a comprehensive view of the current HPWO looked. Only in Tools Ltd. the few basic principles were still in place, apparently because they allowed the firm to absorb continuous changes and redefinitions of roles within and without changing the basic constitution of the organization. What runs through these stories is the general observation that the firms are able to re-adjust in autonomous ways despite highly volatile ownership structures, shifting managerial templates and highly diverse and shifting customer relations.

### **THREE RECURRENT OBSERVATIONS OF TEAM WORK PRACTICES – DERIVED FROM OUR FIELD STUDY**

Trying to understand this empirical landscape of very diverse and highly changeable modes of team organizing by existing bipolar team models and fixed definitions of teamwork seemed of little help. Analyzing the study's empirical manifestations of teams we also realized that the construction of a typology of different team-based organizational forms was rather problematic, as no typology could account for the changeability of work forms and team organizing practices demonstrated in our case studies. Instead of bipolar teamwork patterns (of e.g. high road and low road teams) or a set of common types of team-based organizational forms, what rather seemed to emerge from the empirical landscape was a “hotchpotch” landscape of diverse and constantly changing team organizing practices both among and within teams. However during our fieldwork we identified three recurrent observations – or three common characteristics of team-based work organizing practices in the four case-companies.

The first recurrent observation was that all four cases had developed an ability to constantly re-organize and re-combine their work organizing practices within and across units and teams. Accordingly, the case-companies' different work organizations showed a common ability to capture, compensate for and yet try to get the best from the new team models and formulas that headquarters or top managers had imposed upon them. For example, both Health Ltd. and Hydraulic Ltd. anticipated that they would learn a lot by introducing some elements from the lean principles, but contrary to their American principals they had no expectations of implementing a final system. In view of 25 years' experience, one holistic system after another had constituted the template for a new direction, and the result of this process was a long experimental search for useful building blocks that could be integrated into their way of operating. In a way many, not least among shop stewards and convenors, were curious and eager to see what might be the outcome of experimentally introducing lean principles, and yet they had no expectations of being watching the

coming into place of a perfect and stable new organization. After these changes others would follow and new lessons would be learned.

The second recurrent observation – derived from our case studies - was that each of the firms had managed to build up a significant ability to collaborate across traditional organizational divisions in co-creative ways. Consequently, within the four case companies, organizational members (i.e. employees, employers, users, partners and so on) at all levels were typically (and often in collaboration with their surrounding institutions) engaged in ongoing distributed search practices within and across various collaborative communities reflecting a significant ability to continuously co-create and innovate through the daily work activities. As an example we observed how operators in close collaboration with construction developed new products and processes, searched for better technical solutions together with their machine suppliers or found novel ways to solve problems for customers. The following empirical story from Bruce's world of work illustrates how the re-organization of work practices, collaboration and innovative co-creations among organizational members take place within and across various collaborative team communities:

***Empirical glimpses of everyday re-organizations and the co-creation of collaborative co-designing teams***

Bruce is an EXPERT when it comes to Tools Ltd's most hardcore technically refined measuring machine. He has worked at the company for about six years and describes himself as a bit of a nerd and a workaholic. For example, he says: "Working with the measuring equipment makes me all electric. I'm really passionate about it ... it's my hobby as well as my work. I just can't stop ... That's why I'm so good at what I do."

Bruce started off in the grinding department. After two years he wanted to learn something new and asked his boss whether he might work with the measuring machine. This was accepted and since then he has trained himself and some of his colleagues in measuring techniques. Just now Bruce is instructing two co-workers. He mentors them one afternoon a week. They receive training and test the programs and settings they have learnt supervised by Bruce. The training process has become a formalised 18-month program. Meanwhile Bruce has developed an appetite for new challenges. He has grown tired of just instructing others without receiving any input himself. So last week he submitted a proposal to the team leader and the production manager ... to break down a wall between two different measuring rooms. This will enable him to get acquainted with a new measuring machine, whilst continuing to train his colleagues on the other machine. The proposal was presented, discussed and decided within a day. The wall will be pulled down between Christmas and New Year so that the new setup is ready in January. Bruce is happy with his new job role and that his idea was well received. He says, "it's cool to feel that people are listening to you".

Bruce continues about his work: "I've had many opportunities to constantly learn new stuff, to widen my horizon and try out new things." Bruce describes how he works with the German company, the producer of the measuring machine, sharing experience and exchanging views to build up a joint pool of know-how on the programming of the machine and its potential. He has also translated the instructions from German into Danish and from Danish into English and has adapted the manual. He has agreed with Walther to carry out other similar jobs. According to Brian



these tasks take most of his spare time, but he cannot resist the challenge. He adds that it pays in the long term because the machine supplier depends on his knowledge and expertise. “This gives us an advantage when buying new machines,” he says. (Extract from field notes ML2007).

Imagine Bruce’s story in a sea of similar individual stories, then you have a glimpse of what might be happening in organizations, where organizational members are constantly trying to change their routines, thereby incrementally reshaping the work roles and team communities of the organizations of which they are part. The story also illustrates that the continuous improvement of one’s individual job jurisdiction might occupy a greater part of the aggregate attention of employees than do the recurrent changes stemming from shifting managers and owners.

This brings us to our third recurrent observation, namely that the companies had developed an ability to distribute authority throughout the organization, hereby delegating responsibility (giving agency) to teams. In all case companies, teams were typically characterized by lateral accountability as well as intelligence creating a governance system based on mutual involvement. In most countries organizational changes and innovations are directed by the top, but in Denmark, where 60% say they work in “learning organizations” (Lorenz and Valeyre, 2003), 85% say that they are often or sometimes using their own ideas at work and working in a high discretion environment (Andersen, 2003), we can talk about widely distributed and highly participatory team-based innovative processes. These are not necessarily and most often oriented towards the invention of a new “product”, but are rather oriented toward re-defining the role of the firm on a multiplicity of levels and dimensions, making the firm an ever-changing partner to other firms, new owners, etc. Yet it is a change process that has no epicentre or centre of gravitation. Even relations and networks to other firms are distributed (as 59% of all DK employees say that they work with people from other firms on a daily basis), and more employees say that they receive their job tasks from customers rather than from subordinates (Undervisningsministeriet, 2005)). Consequently we seem to be living in a world where many organizational members are constantly changing relations internally and in concert with employees in other firms. In this way, they provide bottom-up inputs to role- and routine redefinitions and to the co-creation of various team communities that constantly may contribute to renew team organizing practices.

In light of these three recurrent observations, our study of team-based work organizing practices within Danish manufacturing companies illustrates that the legacy of bipolar team models as well as prescribed definitions of teams within existing team literature lacks adequate explanations for why and how contemporary teams at work come in many shapes/modes and not only seem to operate as a bi-product of managerial action. Put differently, the literature does not take into account the diverse relational dynamics and continuously changing modes and combinations of collaborative and highly laterally accountable team practices at the empirical level of everyday work organizing. When such a community is in place it will work both on external and internal challenges in an organic and community wide basis, where managerial intervention and change is only one among many ways of triggering change processes. The course of changes will be more shaped by the constituted community of team communities than by interventions from high positions in the formal hierarchy. We therefore argue that new sensitizing, - relational and agency based - conceptual frameworks are necessary for the development of more fine-meshed understandings of the workings and co-creative

dynamics of teams and teamwork in contemporary firms. Hence, we suggest that in order to further our understanding of the micro dynamics of teams and the collaborative orders they facilitate in today's corporate arena, we need to study teams as economic co-creative actors constituted through ongoing processes of intra- and inter-relational dynamics within and among team communities. In the remaining part of this paper, we discuss the possible contributions and implications of such a shift in the study of teams.

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO THE IDIOMS OF TEAMS WHEN TEAMS ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS ECONOMIC CO-CREATIVE ACTORS?**

By shifting away the study of teams from the ordinary by-polar classifications of teams and insisting on studying them as communities within a larger community of teams certainly implies a radical shift in our understanding of the phenomena and questions many positions within the tradition of team studies.

One of the core concepts in the debate has circled around “autonomy”. And one of our core findings is that the more individual team members shift roles within the teams, and the more they participate in organizational activities outside their operational teams and become meshed up in inter-team activities, the more they can contribute to the teams’ reflexive practice and with new stimuli to the internal rivalry over how to allow for continuous improvements in performance. Thus the more individuals are not only members of a single autonomous team, but are also participating in activities in the community among teams, the more they will take on the role of changing routines within their autonomous, primary teams. The more widespread the stimulus is to change role, the more team members become able to take on the roles of others and reflect on these roles. The more they take part in cross-team discussions, the more new information and new points of reflection they can introduce in the primary team. When in principle all team members become equipped with these capabilities, it becomes a game to initiate reflexive meeting-points that may lead to deliberate change and elaboration on day-to-day operational activities in the primary teams. Conversely, the more this happens, the more the members can carry back to the cross-team committees to help other teams reflect on their jobs. Thus for a community to evolve in the individual teams, it is very important that a community of deliberation is formed among the teams.

In teams where the life of the individual team is less meshed up with the larger organizational framework and gatekeeper roles of communicating/coordinating with the larger organization are allocated to a limited number of specific persons (and it seems not to make a difference whether a person is elected by the team or appointed by top management), the “passive” ones become a major issue for these “activists” as they are inactive and thus not committed to the ongoing reflection on past and current practices. In this situation, employees become divided into typically three diverse positions: the enthusiasts, the lukewarm defenders with an ironic distance, and the opponents that prefer to raise their voices outside the reflexive meetings, as we observed at an early stage in Spirit Ltd. Whereas the former group tries to create a formal system that sustains the evolution of a community of reflexive practitioners within and among the formal teams, the latter group tries to create an informal community (very similar to the workers collective of Fordist factories) in opposition to the formal system. Among them they fight for making a coalition with the lukewarm. In such a system it is fairly difficult to develop a reflective community.

Thus a community of deliberation in its continuous self-reflection is dependent on its interdependence with others and thus breaks with the first rule, which theorists have set for the optimal function of socio-technical teams, namely that they must be granted relatively high autonomy over a discrete set of tasks. Second, it breaks with the rule that within the teams, individual members should be granted fairly high autonomy over tasks that involve both planning and execution. Rather the evolution of a community of deliberation is dependent on involving all, also opponents, and on giving them several roles to play in which their own practices are called into question and from which they are obliged to question others.

Thus the better functioning team communities have broken another, very important, rule in the team literature, namely that of role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964). In this view role conflicts are sources of conflict and ambiguity and therefore lead to stress, which should be avoided. This is also why Burns and Stalker (1961) see the “organic organization” as only temporary possible and utterly unstable, and see formalization, hierarchical role division and rule-bound behavior as ways of stabilizing the organization and enabling the life of individuals and teams. A community of deliberation around team communities seems to be another way of dealing with the problem by “institutionalizing” that the individual plays several roles – so that all individuals become triggered by continuous role conflicts.

Finally, all the firms in our study break with the rule that measuring performance and relating it to inducements has negative effects on teams, when it comes to the community dimension. The literature informs us that the more this is the case, the more the teams should become part of a neo-Taylorist rather than an anti-Taylorist form of team dynamics (Pruijt, 2002). But our cases seem to indicate that the more elaborate measures have become, the better does the community of teams improve not only its performance, but also its internal communication over performance. Without a system that can monitor the effects of improved ways of performing routines and roles and detect the consequences of making changes in role matrices, the process of deliberation within the community of teams communities will lack an apparatus for navigation. Perhaps performance measures need not be tied to inducements in pay – and actually this seems to cause a lot of trouble, when inducements are not encompassing the entire community of team communities.

A number of similar observations that conflict with the usual dichotomies could be made, but we think these suffice to indicate the need for a radical re-interpretation of the dynamics of team-based work organization. This we shall try illustrate next.

### **EVOLUTIONARY DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITIES OF TEAM-COMMUNITIES: A NEW CHALLENGE TO COMPARATIVE BUSINESS STUDIES**

In the cases studied, the current “design” of the team-based system is not an outcome of a discrete planning process. In two of the cases, experiments had gone on for around a decade, and in the other two experimentation dates back to the early 1980s. None of the cases is expected to have found a final form. In strong opposition to the concept of two dual ideal-types of each their defining characteristics, the four populations studied are strongly aware of having been involved in a long lasting, and in principle endless, processes of experimentation. Furthermore, the participants

seem to share the view that in these processes they will have to change opinions and points of departure many times. In a way the most radical shift from previous Taylorist ideas is that there is no such thing as an “ideal state”. Our study seems to indicate that communities of team communities might evolve from less communitarian to higher forms, indicating that there is some kind of “route to improved practice”, which is not, however, intentional or cannot be planned. On the contrary the process unfolds as a sequence of highly frustrating events, which only in retrospect reveal their benefits and help create a constituting narrative of the firm – or the community of team communities.

In the first phase of developing a team-based organization, there are a set of typical problems to over-come. Accepting that the “work organization” is an ongoing experimental project is not easy for people trained in the logics of Taylorist management practices (e.g. optimization of routines for overall productivity gains and measuring time in order to optimize on single routines and jobs). In all of the studied cases, the genesis of team based work has been painful and entailed role conflicts, ambiguities and stress, and in the early phases opponents among the workers have been able to create coalitions with middle managers and mobilize support from the group of only lukewarm defenders. If such a coalition had become the dominant coalition in our cases, we would not have been able to visit these plants to study them as examples of team-based organizations. In three of the cases, the experimental process of team-based organization has only been continued because top managers were among the enthusiasts, were able to accept that progress might involve temporary drawbacks and that some of the sources of renewal are discontent, stress and conflict. In one of the cases, the enthusiasts among top management built a coalition with the convenor and shop stewards and enlarged the coalition by appointing middle managers in support of experimental processes. In another case, the top manager appointed a project leader among the crew that he knew had strong viewpoints concerning handing over discretion to workers, so he could speak the voice of his colleagues when opponents made troubles. In yet another case, the owner was so strongly in favor of the company as a community that he modeled the entire firm along the ideas of two communitarian organizations: the village and the fishing boat, which both provided highly legitimate and visionary metaphors to make the “crew” join the exploration.

In an earlier study, (Kristensen, 2003) we have shown that in the Danish case convenors have been potentially important for visionary managers to form partnership with. Such a partnership would then become a powerful and legitimate agency that could implement reforms of the workplace and convince external and internal stakeholders to support the process. This partnership, of course, plays an important role during the initial process in making reforms deal with existing problems of the workplace. But when the reform process gradually gives way for the separation of the firm into enthusiasts, lukewarm defenders and opponents; when frustrations occur because of performance drawbacks, and when role conflicts give way to frustrations, the convenor’s support to reform managers has probably played a prominent role in continuing the experimental process and not retreating to a more traditional form of work organization. But building the reforms on such supporters also means that top managers lose control over the process. The experimental process gets its own momentum and managers’ jobs become defined and delegated from this communitarian team experimentation rather than vice versa.

Perhaps it is only under certain social conditions and institutional legacies that a community may evolve from a team-based work organization. It is easy to imagine that in places where enthusiastic managers struggle in solitude for the evolution of a team-based HPWO, they can easily start to see performance control as a means to overcome resistance and thereby introduce the measures as a new post-Fordist form of discipline. On the other hand, in situations where the informal worker collective is strong, the same measures and teams may give a new impetus to maintain the social oppression among peers that make all conform to established “codes of conduct” under the banner of “Work Autonomy”. Thus the evolutionary dynamics of team communities and communities of team communities are highly dependent on the contextual framework, e.g. the national business system and/or the national industrial relations system in which it takes place.

In Denmark, where managers have formed the mentioned partnerships with union convenors, this partnership frequently takes over the momentum and shifts the nature of the organization. This can happen by design, e.g. by creating among the primary teams, overlapping teams which discuss matters of common interests (improvement of health and safety, psychological working milieu, cross team logistics, further training, etc) so that each team member is given several roles to play – roles that are both reflecting functional needs of the organization and the institutional landscape in which the emerging community of team communities is embedded. Or it may grow out of an evolutionary logic of partnering. For instance in countries with a tradition for negotiating in Works Councils, managers will feel obliged to, before initiating new initiatives, bringing up the issue in the WC to the effect that the WC becomes overloaded with issues. This might give rise to the formation of a number of subcommittees for which the shop stewards and convenors must recruit other workers to participate in negotiations over an explosive number of novel issues. Gradually, a system emerges in which team members participate in many overlapping committees, reflexive communication goes on in many places, and no managerial position is able to be neither fully in control, nor fully informed, why it might be self-destructive for managerial discretion and legitimacy to act hierarchically. Managers would rather have to search for a role by engaging themselves in these larger negotiation processes, which then become the de facto activities that lead to the delegation or redefinition of task allocation among the primary or operative teams, including in the last resort also managerial teams. In all the cases we have studied, the mutative formation of such a system has been spontaneous and only a few are able to draw up a list or a hierarchy of such “committees”.

This ongoing system of negotiation is where deliberation over missions, tasks and goals – and of new routines - are done for the teams and their interaction, but as the system is invisible, there seems to be no deliberation over the apparatus of deliberation. Currently, such a system is concealed in and has taken over the informal sphere of the organization. It is, however, quite obvious that if teams, through partnerships between convenors and managers, have gained such an important role in the continuous evolution of the firm, then managers can only regain control by controlling and refining deliberately the process of deliberation. However, we expect that in a system that has developed through an evolutionary process to create a rich flora of polyarchical committees of different teams and levels of the organization, it would be most logical to create committees that deliberate over deliberation as negotiating bodies where the parties decide on basis of the mob of ad hoc committees, which to preserve or to institutionalize and which to abandon, when their tasks have been concluded.

In such a system, where the order is negotiated from a need to involve a plentitude of communities, the teams seem to hold as much agency as does the managerial hierarchy. Whether they will hand over the role of agency to the firm or keep it within the team depends on how the community of team communities (including the diverse managerial teams) sees and defines the situation. Ongoing deliberation would, in different situations, allocate to different teams shifting hierarchical roles and eventually also position managerial teams in classical hierarchical positions.

One of the perhaps unexpected advantages of bonuses, profit sharing and co-ownership is that firms have been pushed to become much more financially transparent with the introduction of such schemes. Of course, the team analyst, who sees such means as pointers for the work organization to evolve in the direction of neo-Taylorism, is right in interpreting such inducements and measuring instruments as pressures towards higher performance, and they may also institutionalize rivalry among teams and among team members mutually. But this perspective simultaneously neglects that such schemes also provide participants in the community of team communities with very important and timely information, without which they would have to imagine much more intuitively the situation of the firm. In the cases we studied, people at all levels were surprisingly well informed about how well the teams perform comparatively and how the total outcome translates into the performance of the entire firm. The team members get information about individual and team performance enabling them to assess whether they should “try harder” individually, to consider whether their team has much to teach or a lot to learn from other teams. Thus in day-to-day dealings such schemes furnish the members with questions and a willingness to search for answers when they meet with representatives of other teams in bodies of ongoing systems of negotiations. No doubt such inducement systems lead to operational rivalry, but they also trigger the possibility of reflexive collaboration. When the figures show unsatisfactory performance of the entire firm, the situation raises the question of who should take agency to cope. It may trigger the need for fully-fledged involvement and a multitude of diagnostic search processes so that negotiations can establish at what levels to look for solutions and who should hold natural agency.

The evolutionary pattern we have sketched above is dependent on a balance of power between hierarchical managers (that gradually becomes entangled as teams into the community of teams, without losing the capability and potential of being granted a unique role in the evolutionary process) and employees, eventually expressed in the standing and role of union representatives. Control and coordination go on at many levels, and it is left to the individual teams to look for the driving force for developing new routines as well as implementing them.

Readers may resist accepting this evolutionary logic from the expectation that by definition managers hold a veto, as they might decide to claim their right to fire their “opponents” or to close down the entire plant. We have no difficulty in accepting this point of view at a more general level, and would expect it to happen often. After all managers are seen from the outside, at least, to hold formal responsibility and to have hierarchical control – e.g. from shareholders, foreign headquarters, banks and other financial institutions, regulatory authorities, inspectors, certification bureaus, etc. – and there is an immense pressure on them to make themselves look professional and responsive to the general waves of mimetic isomorphism that originates from the business press, -schools and -consulting (Meyer and Rowan (1991)). Moreover, in the cases we have studied the managerial groups are highly volatile, are frequently shifting positions, not only within the firm but also move across firms. Very often they have very limited knowledge of the complex ecology that is constituted now as a community of team communities. What they do have, however, is a set – often determined

by the cohort of business students they represent - of templates for managerial interventions and solutions that they think may solve the problems that the firm encounters. In the firms we have investigated managers do impose such templates on the organization – almost as self-assured about their hierarchical role as were the Penrosian managers of the past. Informed by our case-studies, what happens, however, with these templates, is that they become captured by the deliberating team and cross-team committees that react to these in an experimental way that spurs the process of reflecting on past practices, gives new impulses for recasting roles, etc. that set in motion processes which, on the one hand, change the role matrix of the firm, but on the other hand, highly activate processes that make highly busy the community in which the teams are embedded.

Paradoxically, then, managerial action leads not to the design of new routines and routine integrates, but rather evokes a process of self-doubt and –reflection that triggers processes where old ways of performing roles are questioned, evaluated and assessed to effect a clearer diagnostic sense of in what and where the strengths and weaknesses of the current constitution of the community of teams lie. Empirical glimpses of such processes we observed in all four case-companies, but there is no doubt that traditional students of teams would have seen these moments as ruinous to the very autonomy of teams, role coherence, etc. whereas we would gradually learn to understand that these were the great moments for expanding the role of the community of team communities.

With these remarks we can return to some of the problems that we raised concerning the cases that had evolved more elaborate forms of deliberating communities of team communities. We said that they had not developed deliberation of their systems of deliberation. This, however, does mean that they are communities without governance. The source of governance, however, rather remains with the multinationals that owe them than with the managers that are expected to run them. As Mueller and Purcell (1992) and Kristensen and Zeitlin (2005) have clearly demonstrated, MNC HQs play out subsidiaries against each other through a continuous flow of benchmarks in association with investment and head-count bargaining. The rationale underlying this flow of shifting benchmarks is to force the subsidiaries to evaluate themselves and continuously question their own practices in the light of best practices from “somewhere”. In many ways, this governance form stimulates the ongoing deliberations of the community of team communities within the subsidiary, as it spurs the ongoing process of casting doubt on its current figuration. But the restless mutant, external flow of questions and reporting make it very difficult to imagine that it becomes possible for the community as such to reflect on its reflective practices and through this to evolve a deliberate organization of deliberation. For this reason we hold it unlikely that communities of team communities within this formal frame can develop into the dominant agency and radically undermine the firm as agency. On the other hand, MNCs force their subsidiaries to make increasingly use of subcontractors, to the effect that they force subsidiaries’ communities of teams to collaborate across the formal boundaries of firms. Therefore, what the agency of teams becomes strongly depends on how they enable deliberate relations among firms at the local or regional level. This again is a matter that differs among regional and institutional settings and should be studied comparatively.

As has been already indicated above, the evolution and character of “communities of team communities” has drawn on many distinctive institutional features of the Danish system, for instance the culture of negotiation and collaboration among employers and unions, the network among firms in a small enterprise economy, etc. We could also have emphasized the role of further

training, as this system has made it possible under periods of intensified change for employees to make role-changes and to cultivate new forms of quasi-professions associated with the evolution of team-based organizational forms. Thus to gain knowledge of the general evolution of these organizational forms we are in bad need of a new wave of comparative studies.

Furthermore, it is possible to imagine that in some countries, already in the process of changing from distributive bargaining towards integrative bargaining (Sisson and Marginson, 2000), unions and their local representatives start to master the language of benchmarking and the methods of continuous improvement and turn these into instruments for negotiating evolutionary dynamics to take into consideration issues such as human improvement and local economic prosperity, that is, how improvement within a firm may contribute to the prospects of a region in terms of finding new comparative advantages. In such hypothetical cases it is possible to imagine very interesting deliberations over forms of deliberation as they might constitute examples of situations in which communities of team communities in the wider sense of the term set goals for capital, rather than vice versa. Comparative search for such cases and their investigation would provide very useful material about the wider perspectives of the changes in work-organization that we are observing. A search which also would provide insights into the future possibilities and implications of taking teams seriously in the co-creation of economic agency



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## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the business of co-creation and the co-creation of business among organizational members within the field of Danish manufacturing companies. More precisely, based on qualitative case studies, it has aimed at attaining a nuanced view into how work organizing practices of belief and doubt are co-created (and of what they co-create) among organizational members by exploring the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enable the co-creation of such work organizing practices and vice versa.

The empirical exploration has been informed by theoretical understandings of work roles, communing and work organizing practices. Applying an approach that seeks to understand company dynamics by focusing on the level of work roles, communing and everyday work organizing practices, the dissertation contributes to the inquiry into the micro-dynamics of co-creation within Danish manufacturing firms. Studying the co-creation and nature of work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices that enable (and become possible within) this organizational topography, the analysis has brought together three central building blocks of the firm and its activities. The overall contribution of this dissertation is to show how the interplay of these three building blocks (analytical dimensions) makes the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt possible.

A second contribution is to identify the nature and workings of work roles that facilitate (are a key component of) the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt in the cases studied. As the preceding discussion makes clear, work roles in the organizations under study combine the dimensions of “planning” and “executing” at the level of everyday work practices and operate as transactional routines which give access to various resources. Moreover, they are not fixed and organizational members are continuously renegotiating them.

A third contribution is to identify the nature of communing relationships and their role in the process of co-creation. The dissertation illustrates through case studies that communing among organizational members is typically experienced as a practical logic of connecting for a purpose, that communing is both constraining and enabling, and that it facilitates learning and the release of new energies. Moreover, it shows that the modes of communing are numerous and take place at many organizational levels transgressing traditional bureaucratic organizational divisions. It has been argued that the sense of community has been lost in contemporary society. However, in light of the empirical world of work under study, it would appear that this is not actually the case. What has happened is that communing is transforming and new concepts are necessary to understand how it takes place. This dissertation develops and deploys such concepts in the context of the company.

Finally, a fourth contribution is to show how Danish manufacturing companies by means of continuously reorganizing their work organizing practices have managed to continuously co-create growth. By illuminating the inner workings of these work organizing practices and of how they allow

for human and organizational growth,<sup>132</sup> the study contributes with empirical insights into how these work organizing practices, in turn, seem to give content to the empty signifier of the so-called “learning organization” and offer some promising routes towards creating such organizational forms. In this way, the dissertation enhances our knowledge of this empty signifier and its role in the Danish transformation process towards new organizational patterns of production, organizing and innovation able to meet (and prosper from) the demands of the global economy and the rising competitive pressures it brings.

In this dissertation the concept of co-creation emerged as an *in vivo* concept derived from the voices and experiences of the organizational members in the case companies under study. I have not used the concept as something definite with which to provide fixed prescriptions of what to see. Instead, I have used co-creation as a sensitizing concept that has guided my approach and suggested directions along which to look in order to explore how organizational members together become able to continuously reflect upon, redefine and recombine their resources (e.g. work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices) for further co-creation.

Together with work roles, communing and work organizing practices, all four concepts have guided my inquiry into and “mapping” of the distinctive expressions of co-creation within the studied empirical landscape. I elaborate how this study qualifies our understanding of these concepts and their interplay theoretically as well as empirically in the next sections.

## **LEARNINGS - THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL**

Let me now bring back the concept of co-creation to the field (of work and organizing) from which it emerged by outlining the basic reflections and findings (i.e. learnings) of this study.

### ***On the role of role theory and community studies***

Theoretically, the dissertation addresses the role of roles and community at work. The purpose of revisiting these two classic sociological terms has been two-fold: 1) to bring role and community theory back into the study of work and organizing and 2) to introduce a sociological framework for understanding how work roles and communing are being shaped and reshaped within contemporary work organizing practices of belief and doubt, and how they in return enable and shape these practices. The dissertation introduces the concept of “situated work roles” as an attempt to develop an approach to role theory which seeks to merge the two often presented role-images: “prescribed work roles” and “negotiated work roles” of role theory, by four conceptual takes on the role of roles. That is by: 1) acknowledging the dynamic nature of structure and agency in role behavior, 2) understanding social (work) roles as resources with which to create new practices as well as social structures, 3) recognizing roles as genuine, meaningful social objects, and 4) viewing role redefinition as ongoing processes of social creativity triggered by the problematic situations organizational members encounter through their everyday work lives. Moreover, the dissertation identifies and debunks four dogmas of community with the purpose of redefining them into four alternative takes on communing. The common dogmas are: 1) a conception of community as only composed of harmonic and equal collaborative relationships, 2) to mainly study communities in isolation, 3) to look at community merely as a matter of trust and long-lasting ties, and 4) an understanding of

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. human growth as progressive learning, Chapter 1 on Dewey’s understanding of growth.

community as simply articulated forms of sociality. Based on a relational approach, the dissertation redefines and transforms these four dogmas into four heuristic takes on communing. Accordingly, it suggests that communing (at work) should be explored: 1) as a nexus for collaboration and rivalry, 2) as something that never unfolds in isolation but vis-à-vis other communing relationships, 3) as relationships that are made up of a vast variety of ingredients and 4) as relational bonds that are both articulated and unarticulated. Based on these reformulating steps - from roles and community to role(-ing) and communing - the dissertation's theoretical contribution is a relational analytical framework for understanding the nature and workings of role(-ing) and communing within post bureaucratic work organizing practices of belief and doubt (cf. Chapter 3 and 4).

### ***On the business of co-creation – and the co-creation of business***

Drawing on this framework, the dissertation contributes empirically with insights into how the interplay of three core dimensions of the world of work and organizing - role(-ing), communing and work organizing practices - makes co-creation at work possible. Tracing the business of co-creation (and the co-creation of business) between these three components within concrete organizational contexts, the dissertation shows how each of them are co-created among organizational members and how, in combination, they generate a unique setting for the development of new organizational forms based on extended collaborations, reflexive production and continuous learning (i.e. human and organizational growth). Accordingly, the dissertation illustrates how these three dimensions together allow organizational members to productively experiment, reflect, doubt (and believe), collaborate and engage in rivalry within and across their units and teams. This enables processes of co-creation that allow firms to continuously revisit and update their routines and thus build up learning organizations.

### ***On the co-creation of work roles***

The dissertation provides three main insights into the role(s) of work roles. First of all, it shows that work roles in organizations like Health Ltd and Tools Ltd all carry the responsibility to plan, coordinate, execute and innovate, in sharp contrast to those in traditional bureaucratic organizations. In this way the work roles among organizational members combine the dimensions of “planning” and “execution” at the level of everyday work practices. Once the traditional boundary between these two spheres is removed, the empirical cases illustrate, work roles are not prescribed but need to be constantly renegotiated. The analysis further shows how this opens the space for collaborative and mutually involved work roles. These enable much more collaborative and mutually involved modes of work organizing than the rigid work division and routine coordination of former more bureaucratic organizational forms.

The second contribution is that contemporary work roles appear 1) as genuine co-creations, 2) operate as micro modes of organizing giving rise to both structure as well as agency, 3) are (re)shaped according to the resources they give access to and 4) “materialize” as transactional routines through a discursive, practical, physical and emotional level. Based on these four observations, the analysis demonstrates that work roles are cumulative in character as they give access to resources for further reflexive role performance. Thus, the more work roles organizational members engage in, the more they seem able and motivated to try out. The analysis further illustrates that, in particular, the assemblage of many different work roles generates the capacity to both believe and doubt among organizational members. As a result of these features, such work

roles generate work organizing practices that are at the same time stabilized and transformative because they are organized around questioning (based on belief and doubt) and negotiation. The analysis shows that the co-existence and co-evolution of various interdependent work roles among organizational members spurs processes of reflexivity, which simultaneously invoke communing relationships of ongoing reflexivity at work. These features of work roles, their co-creation and the interdependence of organizational members because of their work roles (and communing relationships) are a key component of the development of work organizing practices based on belief and doubt. Hence, the overall contribution of the analysis is to show that work roles in organizations such as Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. are an essential component of the ability to co-create work organizing practices of belief and doubt with the capacity to continuously reorganize and recombine “old” and “new” resources in the process of innovation (cf. Chapter 5).

### ***On the co-creation of communing***

The dissertation shows that the sense (i.e. the experiences, ascribed meanings and use(s)) of communing among organizational members in firms like Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. is shaped by three features. First, communing is commonly experienced both as a sense of belonging and as a practical logic of connecting for a purpose. Secondly, that communing seems both to enable and constrain the interactions and role-figurations of organizational members. And thirdly, that communing experiences facilitate learning processes and emotional energies. The analysis also demonstrates that contemporary communing figurations at work are 1) multiple/overlapping/omnipresent and 2) that some are permanent while others are temporary.

Organizational members' multiple (often overlapping, omnipresent, both short- and long-term) modes of communing seem to constitute an important source for developing and performing differentiated work roles, for generating and distributing knowledge sharing and for creating social integration, not only within but also across communing settings. In the firms under study, the outcome is the shaping of dynamic work organizations based on strong internal and external communing relationships (of collaboration and rivalry) where diverse, highly collaborative, redefining and accountable work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt are distinctive features.

Communing is therefore of central importance because it enables organizational members to transact and co-create in today's connectionist and highly collaborative world of work. Within this context, organizational members significantly seem to become able to interact and co-create (e.g. ideas, “things” and their use) within and across their collaborative work orders by engaging in and continuously developing various modes of communing figurations at work. The senses of communing that organizational members “carry” provide a stable space (even when the communing figurations are temporary) within which work roles can be redefined and continuously cultivated. Through their communing relationships at work, they learn to collaborate and compete (engage in rivalry) with a wide range of colleagues, they learn to continuously reflect upon and redefine their work roles and they learn to take and share responsibility on the basis of mutual involvement. Hence, contemporary communing at work within firms like Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. appears to be a vital asset for both human and organizational growth, not least because it enables dynamic work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt (Cf. Chapter 6).

### ***On the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt***

The dissertation studies how the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt takes shape by analyzing the integration, organization and management of the organizational members' diverse work organizing practices within the case companies under study. Hereby the analysis contributes with three main analytical findings. First, it shows that organizational members in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. integrate and continuously innovate their various work organizing practices in dynamic ways through the institutionalization of different team-based collaborative work forms. This further facilitates an integration of diverse work roles which enables organizational members to develop new roles and communing relationships and thus to cultivate and expand their role-sets and bonds of interdependencies. The analysis moreover indicates that the engagement in and continuous mix of diverse work organizing practices enhance the ability of organizational members to both believe and doubt in what they do, and thus to continuously refine and improve their activities at work.

Second, in addressing how the work practices in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd are organized, the analysis demonstrates that collaborative and competitive communing practices operate as a vibrant organizing principle within and between basic units, basic teams and ad hoc teams, which triggers organizational reflexivity and learning among organizational members. Accordingly, the analysis illustrates that the organization of work within basic units structures the work organizing practices of the organizational members because of their collaboration and rivalry with other units. Their basic teams recreate that same dynamic of collaboration, competition and confrontation within the basic unit, while their ad hoc teams generate a collaborative, competitive and recombinatory process by bringing together practices and knowledge from individuals, teams and units who do not usually collaborate (and compete). The analysis therefore argues that collaborative and competitive communing relationships – within and across various forms of team communing - serve as a vital organizing principle, which enables the co-creation of dynamic work organizing practices (and work roles) “from below”.

Third, investigating the management of organizational members' work organizing practices, the analysis shows that three managerial principles in particular seem central in governing and underpinning the co-creation of highly collaborative, redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices among organizational members within Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. The first is a constitutional order of distributed authority based on co-management in Health Ltd. and on co-ownership in Tools Ltd. The second is the pragmatic use of and constant experimentation with templates for organizing continuous self-doubt (and belief). The third is the co-creation of a guiding “corporate we”, built on a pool of corporate-based “generalized others”/phantom communities representing the collective voice(s) of past and present and other significant organizational members. The analysis argues that all three managerial principles contribute to the development of highly distributed ways of managing work organizing practices of belief and doubt. In this way, the three principles seem to offer a solution to the problem of stability in organic organizations, which Burns and Stalker feared lacked the rule and routine bounded structures of bureaucracy and therefore risked involving organizational members in endemic conflicts and war of all against all (Burns and Stalker 1961). All in all, the empirical vignettes of work organization and management demonstrate how processes of integrating, organizing and managing “from below” facilitate the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt, practices that seem to enable and cultivate various



situated work roles and communing relationships that support continuous human and organizational growth (cf. Chapter 7).

### ***On the co-creation of learning, managing and organizing***

The last part of the dissertation (Chapters 8, 9 and 10) gives insight into the co-creative dynamics that emerge from the relational interplay between these three analytical dimensions. Focusing on the wider “outputs” and implications of this interplay, this part of the dissertation more closely illuminates *the co-creation of business* that takes shape within Danish manufacturing companies experimenting with post-bureaucratic modes of work organizing of belief and doubt. Based on three papers, it explores how new ways of team learning, managerial principles and modes of organizing towards continuous human and organizational growth are co-created among organizational members. In this way each paper identifies different aspects of the co-creation of business within the Danish manufacturing firms under study.

The first paper, “Team Learning: Through the Relational Dynamics of Co-operation and Rivalry in Team Communities”, shows that reflexive practices of mutual learning within team communities seem to be advanced not only by equal and harmonious relations of cooperation, but also by relations of rivalry. Hence, rivalry appears to have a positive impact on the team members’ aspirations and capacities to learn, as well as on their ability to continuously challenge existing routines in the search for improvements and better performance. By exploring the constructive links between cooperation, rivalry and learning within the structure of team communities, the paper concludes that rivalry and co-operation constitute two important learning processes, that in a supplementary way tend to facilitate the co-creation of new ideas and the aspiration to find smarter ways of working and establishing a work environment where doubt and curiosity towards the existing work practices create the basis for innovative changes and continuous improvements.

The second paper, “Managing Co-creation in and between Collaborative Communities”, contributes with empirical insights into how organizational members coordinate work in highly collaborative settings, and how they jointly develop management practices facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities. It identifies four managerial challenges of collaborative communities (of co-creation) within the realm of post-bureaucratic work organizing practices. These are: 1) to manage search without knowing what to search for 2) to manage authority without knowing who has it 3) to manage and prosper from productive possibilities of problematic situations and 4) to manage dynamic collaborations within and among multiple communities. The paper shows how the development of a distinct “constitutional order” in Health Ltd. and Tools Ltd. of, respectively, co-management and co-ownership, can help overcome the four managerial obstacles through different mechanisms. It is empirically demonstrated how the two orders serve as two vital tools for managing and facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities. Hence, the paper concludes by suggesting how the progress towards collaborative communities within the corporate arena of today consequently implies the co-creation of new organizational structures of lateral accountability and more distributed management techniques based on self-management and practices of learning by monitoring.

The third paper, “Taking Teams Seriously in the Co-creation of Economic Agency: Towards an Organizational Sociology of Teams”, explores how teams and their members mutually constitute

each other and how they may jointly co-create the firm as a community of team communities. Drawing on a field study of new modes of team-based work organizations in Danish manufacturing companies, the paper takes stock of in situ work organization and compares it to existing “rules-of-thumb” in the team literature. It also moves the focus from individual team community to that of team communities as this is important for the kind of co-creative dynamic embedded in the firms under study. Accordingly, the paper suggests that one central step towards taking contemporary empirical manifestations of teams seriously is to develop frameworks that acknowledge the agency of teams, their relational character - and thus the organization as “a community of team communities”.

Taken together, the dissertation concludes that the unique combination of work roles, modes of communing and work organizing practices present in the Danish firms under study constitutes a vital building block in the business of co-creation and the co-creation of business. This process of co-creation - wherein organizational members are enmeshed in work roles that are constantly shifting and being redefined, workplaces where communing experiences foster a sense of belonging and common purpose, and work organizing practices that lead organizational members to constantly experiment and innovate through reflection, doubt (and belief), collaboration and rivalry – enables these organizational forms. It is exactly the co-creation of these 3 dimensions that promotes human and organizational growth and enables these firms to be dynamic and adaptive organizations based on a “habitus” of belief and doubt.

The case companies underlying this study were chosen because they are particularly rich in information on experimenting with new forms of work organizing practices characterized by the ability to collaborate, redefine resources and distribute authority throughout the organization (i.e. extreme cases), which therefore may serve as successful prototypes (i.e. paradigmatic cases) in co-creating work organizing practices of belief and doubt. However, it is open to question whether it is at all possible to generalize from such cases. Although “generalization” is primarily linked to quantitative research I believe that qualitative research preoccupied with complex contexts and detailed observational data can suggest ideas and findings of a general rather than a purely case-bound significance (Poder 2004), particularly when the cases are strategically selected (Flyvbjerg 2001). Accordingly, I argue that not in spite of but actually because of the fact that the case companies under study are extreme and paradigmatic cases rich in information about the business of co-creation, it is possible to generalize the study’s analytical findings and conclusions in relation to similar companies with the same characteristics. Yet an important qualification of the dissertation’s findings is that more comparative research into the issues raised in this study is required.

### **SOME BLIND SPOTS**

I started out this dissertation by pinpointing four “blind spots” within the field of research on post-bureaucratic ways of organizing concerning a tendency towards structural determinism, an inclination to focus mainly on so-called “knowledge intensive” companies, the application of primary abstract or macro/meso-orientated analytical perspectives and the frequent use of polarized frames/views. This dissertation has sought to overcome these four shortcomings by drawing upon a relational framework that addresses and analyzes the transactions and “lived” experiences of co-creation between work organizing practices, roles and communing inside the realm of Danish

manufacturing. The question is what shortcomings are entailed in this framework? In other words, what blind spots have I created by applying such a perspective and line of argumentation? I will attend to three likely objections to my approach addressing 1) the downsides of the organizational forms under study, 2) the issue of power and 3) the level of analysis.

First, the stories about the business of co-creation (and co-creation of business) in this study primarily focus on the positive dynamics and advantages of contemporary work organizing practices of belief and doubt within Danish manufacturing companies. In this way, they do not address the downsides and implications of taking part in a world of work and organizing of high ambiguity, constant change and increasingly complex collaborative interdependencies within and across various organizational settings. Working in an environment of highly collaborative, continuously redefining and laterally accountable work organizing practices naturally also implies demands and a constant pressure on organizational members to constantly co-create, refine and innovate organizational resources for further improvements. This implies that organizational members are “equipped” with the “right” values, attitudes and basic tools (or weapons) necessary to live with the constant changes and pressures of such a work life. To take, make and play with various work roles as well as to engage in a multitude of communing relationships in constant transition entail distinct social competences, interactional skills, communicative abilities or what Michal Maccoby (2007) terms an “interactive social character”. Organizational members without such a character may risk being stigmatized/categorized as inadequate, whereas the ones suitably “equipped” risk the cost of continuously redefining work organizing practices of multiple roles and collaborative communities governed by mutual involvement and self-management. Such costs can come in the form of stress, burnout or what Richard Sennett terms “the corrosion of character” (1999). Certainly, the work lives of organizational members in the case companies under study are challenging and often stressful. As organizational members within this context they are all thrown into and co-creators of a world of shifting demands and expectations (often self-imposed) to be on the move continuously, develop skills, new roles, extend their collaborations, manage themselves (and each other) and cope and juggle with multiple accountabilities within the overall frames and strategy of the organization. As Legge points out, in such a world of work a downside may be that the organization's ‘care’ for the individual appears essentially to be a respect for the employees’ ability to be developed in ways that the organization deems appropriate (1995). The inherent tension between socialization and valorization, and skill upgrading and exploitation is always present within capitalism. Whether it is the humanizing or dehumanizing face of capitalism that dominates the scenery is an empirical question. While the empirical stories of co-creation among the organizational members under study leave traces of both, it is the humanizing and enabling dimension of work and production that dominates their everyday experiences and tales of the co-creative links between work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

Second, it may seem that focusing on the positive dimensions of this new organizational form neglects a key feature of the workplace – power – in favor of seemingly harmonious features such as collaboration and communing. In fact, quite the opposite is true, as the analysis gives power differential relations and their implications a central role. This dissertation focuses on the enabling and promoting sides of a certain form of organization that has distributed authority, in which organizational members are given authority to improvise, doubt, question and engage in communing practices that instill a sense of belonging and better collaboration by doing so. While such an

approach may seem to emphasize the benefits of working in concert, the dissertation in fact creates a frame and relational approach that recognizes and conceptualizes power as a central feature of even the most harmonious relationships. Hence, the beneficial outcomes generated by the process of co-creation are frequently the result of power differentials. For example, Chapter 4 on communing emphasizes that all communing relationships involve ongoing struggles of recognition (based on both collaboration and rivalry) and thus power relations. Consequently, rivalry is one of the key features of the argument and is based on power differentials. Thus, by focusing on the ongoing struggle that is part of the work organizing practices of belief and doubt, power is distinctly present and the analysis considers its productive forces. In other words, the ability to reflect, doubt and question involves engagement in conflict and rivalry over the process of questioning and thus inevitably also power.

Although power is present in the analysis, the dissertation does ascribe analytical power to features that are not part of the traditional hierarchical firm where power relations are formalized in the classic principle agent model through the role of manager/worker or boss/employee. The analysis gives hierarchy only a small part in the story of this new organizational form, and this choice deserves some clarification when considering alternative possible explanations. In the highly collaborative and adaptive firms studied here there are bosses and managers as there were in more traditional organizational forms. That said, in these new forms there has been a distinct attempt to distribute authority and make hierarchy a much less important feature exactly in response to the perception that more rigid hierarchies are unable to perform in the same manner and respond effectively to a rapidly changing landscape. According to Casey, within such a landscape, the chain of supervisors, the overt structures and rigid lines of authority of traditional industrial workplaces are gone. Instead: *"They are replaced by the new flexi-structured, "soft" (or "dotted") lines of management and the filial collegiality of the team. But power control and discipline, however transmuted, have not gone, rather they now operate less overtly in the emotional and intra-psychic domain"* (Casey 1995: 123). The testimony of both managers and other organizational members repeatedly and consistently testifies to the fact that these changes have reshaped the relationship between those who are designated managers and other organizational members. While managing is certainly still important, it is only a small piece and not a highly characteristic feature of this work landscape. In other words, as the preceding chapters show, the locus of initiative and coordination has shifted and spread across the organization. Moreover, to borrow a distinction from Padgett and Ansell, managing has come to carry much more the role of a "judge" in these contexts, and less the role of a "boss". In their depiction of Cosimo de Medici's ability to build a powerful state, *"[a]mbiguity and heterogeneity, not planning and self-interest, are the raw materials of which powerful states and persons are constructed"* (Padgett and Robust 1993). Similarly, the advantage of this new organizational form comes from the fact that ambiguity and heterogeneity give rise to benefits that were not present when relying on top-down command. Padgett and Robust make the point that rulers can occupy the role of judge or boss. The latter gives top down commands while the former is a mediator/coordinator and organizational power actually comes from taking this latter back seat position and from the network that forms to fill in the empty space. In much the same way, those at the (so-called) top of the remaining hierarchy recognize that the co-creation of work organizing practices by organizational members from below is vital to the problem solving that has allowed these firms to promote human and organizational growth.

Finally, let me discuss what might be missed by looking at the micro-level of everyday work organizing practices as this dissertation has done. In other words, what might we neglect by looking at the dynamics among organizational members and not at national or global features to explain the continued high performance of Danish firms? A different analysis could more directly have taken into account, for example, institutional factors and context issues to understand if and how these practices might be dependent on Danish institutions. This dissertation focused at the level of organizational members because so little is known about how their interaction contributes to the distinctiveness of the Danish model. This is a necessary first step toward understanding variation in the success of Danish firms, which have not all thrived across the same institutional context. Hence, the purpose of this dissertation was to explain the impact of micro-level features in a new and successful organizational form. Moreover, there is already a vibrant literature that studies the national institutional features that account for different varieties of capitalism and national business systems. However, the question remains as to whether and to what extent the work practices studied here are dependent on Danish institutions.

### **FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

This points to an exciting direction for future research, given that firms such as those studied here have not only had to develop innovative new work practices to meet and thrive from the pressures of the global economy; they have also had to expand into that global economy by off-shoring and following their customers' global steps.

In the past a successful multinational corporation (MNC) had a strong R&D facility supported by a national innovation system that would support technological and innovative leadership. Instead, firms today increasingly innovate by tying into a widespread global network of customers, suppliers and public R&D institutions (Sabel et al. 2008) and redefining roles, organizational elements (Herrigel 2007) and governance practices (Kristensen and Zeitlin 2005; Whitley 2001). MNCs can no longer depend on cues from a centralized R&D lab or top management. Instead, they are required to decentralize responsibilities to various levels and sites of the organization that can respond quickly to rapidly changing situations. Said another way, a shift similar to that inside the organization has also emerged among affiliated units of a multinational corporation. Thus, today's knowledge economy places employees, managers, users, suppliers, partners and their surrounding institutions under increased pressure to engage in an ongoing distributed search for innovations within and across various collaborative communities (Sabel 2006; Helper et al. 2000; Dorf & Sabel 1990; Hecksher and Adler 2007; Stark 2002).

This trend offers a unique opportunity because we can ask: is it possible to co-create work practices that replicate the pattern of the Danish firms when they establish foreign affiliates? In other words, this opportunity permits an examination of whether these practices can be transferred (and further developed) abroad or are dependent on the legacy of Danish institutions, such as high social trust and the system of social services, public education and training. On one hand, it is possible that these Danish firms have developed managerial and organizational templates that make transfer easier. On the other, the function of these practices may be highly dependent on the Danish or Scandinavian institutional context. Future research should compare the success of highly adaptive firms that have developed work practices similar to those described above across different

institutional contexts to understand whether and how these work organizing practices of belief and doubt respond when blending with new contextual landscapes, i.e. countries with different organizational and institutional settings as well as traditions for co-creating and innovating.

## ENGLISH SUMMARY

The dissertation explores the business of co-creation and the co-creation of business among organizational members within the field of Danish manufacturing companies. Danish manufacturing companies collaborate and compete in a global environment characterized by relentless change and high ambiguity. In response firms have developed increasingly complex collaborative interdependencies within and among organizations in order to promote continuous innovations and growth. These collaborations call for (and enable) organizational members to engage in ongoing distributed search for co-creative innovations. The dissertation studies this poorly understood process, exploring how people in Danish manufacturing companies co-create new work practices and products in experimental ways.

More precisely, the dissertation generates a micro-level understanding of the dynamics of co-creation in modern organizations asking: what and who co-create(s), and how does this operate in contemporary organizational life? It seeks to analyze and understand these firm dynamics of co-creation by focusing on the level of everyday work roles, “communing” and “work organizing practices” that generate a constant sense of belief and doubt thus helping organizational members to redefine existing work practices, learn and improve. Based on qualitative case studies in seven Danish manufacturing companies, the dissertation aims at attaining a nuanced view into how such work organizing practices of belief and doubt are co-created (and of what they co-create) among organizational members by exploring the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enable the co-creation of such work organizing practices and vice versa. By illuminating the inner mechanisms (or relational dynamics) of these work organizing practices and how they allow for human and organizational growth, the study gives content to the notion of the so-called “learning organization” and offers some promising routes towards co-creating such organizational forms. It thus casts light on the Danish transformation process towards new organizational patterns of production, organizing and innovation.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part is a “mini”- monography consisting of Chapters 2-7 focused on the business of co-creation between work roles, communing and work organizing practices of belief and doubt (i.e. work organizing practices of organizational members that are able to believe in and at the same time doubt existing practices in order to continuously reorganize and innovate them). The second part consists of three individual papers (Chapter 8, 9 and 10) illuminating different aspects of the co-creation business within the Danish manufacturing firms under study. Chapter 11 concludes.

The empirical exploration is informed by theoretical understandings of work roles, communing and work organizing practices. Applying an approach that seeks to understand company dynamics by focusing on the level of work roles, communing and everyday work organizing practices, the dissertation contributes to the inquiry into the micro-dynamics of co-creation within Danish manufacturing firms. Studying the co-creation and nature of work roles, communing relationships and work organizing practices that enable (and become possible within) this organizational topography, the analysis brings together three central building blocks of the firm and its activities. The overall contribution of this dissertation is to show how the interplay of these three building

blocks (analytical dimensions) makes the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt possible.

A second contribution is to identify the nature and workings of work roles that facilitate (are a key component of) the co-creation of work organizing practices of belief and doubt in the cases studied. The analysis shows that work roles in the organizations under study combine the dimensions of “planning” and “executing” at the level of everyday work practices and operate as transactional routines which give access to various resources. Moreover, they are not fixed and organizational members are continuously renegotiating them in highly co-creative ways.

A third contribution is to identify the nature of communing relationships and their role in the process of co-creation. The dissertation illustrates through case studies that communing among organizational members is typically experienced as a practical logic of connecting for a purpose, that communing is both constraining and enabling, and that it facilitates learning and the release of new energies. Moreover, it shows that the modes of communing are numerous and take place at many organizational levels transgressing traditional bureaucratic organizational divisions. It has been argued that the sense of community has been lost in contemporary society. However, in light of the empirical world of work under study, it would appear that this is not actually the case. What has happened is that communing is transforming and new concepts are necessary to understand how it takes place. This dissertation develops and deploys such concepts in the context of the company.

Finally, a fourth contribution is to show how Danish manufacturing companies by means of continuously reorganizing their work organizing practices (and thus also the work roles and communing relationship among organizational members) have managed to continuously co-create growth. By illuminating the inner workings of these work organizing practices and of how they allow for human and organizational growth, the study contributes with empirical insights into how these work organizing practices, in turn, seem to give content to the empty signifier of the so-called ‘learning organization’ and offer some promising routes towards co-creating such organizational forms. In this way, the dissertation enhances our knowledge of this empty signifier and its role in the Danish transformation process towards new organizational patterns of production, organizing and innovation able to meet (and prosper from) the demands of the global economy and the rising competitive pressures it brings. Below follows a brief summary of the dissertation’s chapters.

Chapter 1 describes the background to the aim of the thesis and introduces its analytical perspective on co-creation. Chapter 2 introduces the dissertation’s empirical world of work and organizing. It outlines the dissertation’s empirical horizon by asking how Danish manufacturing companies actually have managed to survive and compete on a global scale. It theoretically defines the term ‘work organizing practices’ as well as the notion of work organizing practices of belief and doubt. Chapter 2 also introduces the study’s empirical landscape of seven case companies and provides case descriptions of the dissertation’s two core case companies. Finally it presents the research design and methodology of the study.

Chapter 3 addresses the role of roles at work. The link between the dissertation’s thematic coordinates; work roles, communities and post-bureaucratic work organizing practices of belief and doubt is explored in this chapter through a theoretical discussion of the workings of work roles. The



overall aim is to develop an analytical framework to guide the study on the co-creation and nature of work roles that enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt. Chapter 4 focuses on the notion of community and the question of how present-day communities within the world of work and organizing may be analyzed and explored. The aim of the chapter is to develop an analytical framework for understanding the co-creation and nature of communing among organizational members that may guide the exploration of (whether and) how communing relationships enable work organizing practices of belief and doubt (and vice versa). The chapter identifies four common dogmas of community and develops such a frame by introducing and identifying the notion of communing together with four analytical takes on communing. Based on these reformulating steps - from roles and community to role(-ing) and communing - the dissertation's theoretical contribution is a relational analytical framework for understanding the nature and workings of role(-ing) and communing within post bureaucratic work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

Chapter 5 analyses how the co-creation of work roles (and communing relationships) among organizational members in the case companies under study shape (and enable) work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The analysis aims to illuminate 1) how situated work roles are co-created through communing relationships of organizational members and 2) how this co-creative interplay enables and shapes their work organizing practices to generate belief and doubt. By applying this analytical perspective, the chapter contributes to a micro-based understanding of how the co-creative interplay between work roles, communing and work organizing practices allows for organizational doubt and belief and thus the ability to constantly recombine and reorganize organizational resources (human and non-human) for further co-creations.

Chapter 6 explores how organizational members' communing relationships enable them to develop work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt. The chapter starts out by studying the experiences and meanings of communing among organizational members within the case companies under study. It then identifies some general characteristics of how communing is shaped and reshaped within these organizational contexts. Finally the chapter discusses how distinct organizational patterns of communing facilitate the co-creation of work roles and work organizing practices of belief and doubt.

Chapter 7 places work organizing practices of belief and doubt in the foreground of the analysis exploring how they are integrated, organized and managed. Overall, it contributes with empirical insights into how organizational members co-create and govern work organizing practices of belief and doubt that may embrace and continuously cultivate various situated work roles and communing figurations towards continuous human and organizational growth.

The next part of the dissertation is based on three papers that explain different aspects of the co-creation of business within the Danish manufacturing firms under study. Chapter 8 "Team Learning: Through the Relational Dynamics of Co-operation and Rivalry in Team Communities" explores the co-creative links between co-operation, rivalry and learning within the structure of team communities. Chapter 9 "Managing Co-creation in and between Collaborative Communities" addresses how organizational members coordinate work in highly collaborative settings, and how they jointly develop management practices facilitating dynamics of co-creation within and across collaborative communities. Chapter 10 "Taking Teams Seriously in the Co-creation of Economic

Agency: Towards an Organizational Sociology of Teams” investigates how teams mutually constitute each other and how they jointly may co-create the firm as a community of team communities.

Taken together, tracing the business of co-creation (and the co-creation of business) between work roles, communing and work organizing practices within concrete organizational contexts, the dissertation shows how each of these components are co-created among organizational members and how, in combination, they generate a unique setting for the development of new organizational forms based on extended collaborations, reflexive production and continuous learning (i.e. human and organizational growth). Accordingly, the dissertation illustrates how these three dimensions together allow organizational members to productively experiment, reflect, doubt (and believe), collaborate and engage in rivalry within and across their units and teams. This enables processes of co-creation that allow firms to continuously revisit and update their routines and thus build up learning organizations.

Chapter 11 concludes on the dissertations theoretical discussions and empirical findings. It returns the concept of co-creation to the field (of work and organizing) from which it emerged by outlining the basic reflections and findings of the study. The chapter also addresses alternative explanations and outlines some perspectives for future research on the business of co-creation and the (co-creation of business) as Danish firms expand abroad.

This dissertation has explored the business of co-creation and the co-creation of business among organizational members within the field of Danish manufacturing companies. More precisely, based on qualitative case studies, it has aimed at attaining a nuanced view into how work organizing practices of belief and doubt are co-created (and of what they co-create) among organizational members by exploring the nature of work roles and communing relationships that enable the co-creation of such work organizing practices and vice versa.

## DANISH SUMMARY

Afhandlingen ”The Business of Co-creation – and the Co-creation of Business” handler om, hvorledes danske produktionsvirksomheder tackler globaliserings udfordringer og muligheder gennem udviklingen af nye former for sam-skabende arbejdsorganiseringsskaber. Studiet udforsker hvordan disse arbejdsorganiseringsskaber bliver sam-skabt, (og hvad de sam-skaber) gennem en empirisk analyse af de arbejdsroller og fællesskaber, som muliggør sam-skabelsen af dem. Og omvendt, hvilke arbejdsroller og fællesskaber, der bliver muliggjort indenfor disse organisatoriske praksisser.

På baggrund af kvalitative case studier i syv danske virksomheder analyseres specifikt, hvordan disse ”nye” måder at organisere arbejdet på er baseret på evnen til at samarbejde (og rivalisere) i, og mellem mange forskellige fællesskaber. Der ses endvidere på evnen til kontinuerligt at redefinere og rekombinere arbejdsroller og øvrige organisatoriske ressourcer mod øget vækst (menneskelig såvel som organisatorisk). Et andet træk ved disse arbejdsorganiseringsskaber er, at autoritet og viden er distribueret lateralt, og at sam-skabelsesprocesserne mellem organisatoriske medlemmer er baseret på evnen til både at tro og tvivle på det man gør. Det vil sige på evnen til at tro og tvivle på eksisterende praksisser, hvilket er en forudsætning for kontinuerligt at kunne forbedre dem. Afhandlingen udforsker de menneskelige og organisatoriske praksisser og dynamikker, der knytter sig til disse samskabelses-processer blandt organisatoriske medlemmer. Det vil sige blandt både medarbejdere, ledere, kunder, leverandører og øvrige organisatoriske partnere indenfor nutidens arbejdsliv i danske produktionsvirksomheder, der opererer globalt.

Afhandlingens empiriske undersøgelse er teoretisk informeret af en diskussion og reformulering af tre sociologiske grundbegreber: arbejdsorganisation, roller og fællesskab. De tre begreber redefineres relationelt, og udgør tilsammen afhandlingens analytiske perspektiv. Et perspektiv der sigter efter at videreudvikle forståelsen af de sam-skabende relationer mellem de tre begreber blandt organisatoriske medlemmer. Hermed søger afhandlingen at forstå nutidige virksomhedsdynamikker og -udfordringer ved at rette blikket mod samspillet mellem arbejdsroller, fællesskaber og arbejdsorganiseringsskaber på et hverdagsligt mikro-niveau. Afhandlingens overordnede bidrag er at vise, hvordan samspillet mellem disse tre analytiske dimensioner (byggesten) faciliterer sam-skabelsen af arbejdsorganisatoriske praksisser med evnen til både at tro og tvivle på det man gør - for dermed kontinuerligt at skabe innovation (work organizing practices of belief and doubt). Med andre ord praksisser som fordi organisatoriske medlemmer både tror på det de gør, men også stiller spørgsmål til deres arbejdsrutiner og handlemønstre, rummer evnen til at forandre og forbedre deres arbejdspraksisser (eks. arbejdsrutiner, roller, fællesskaber, koordineringsmønstre etc.) gennem kontinuerlig re-kombination og reflektive sam-skabelsesprocesser.

Et andet bidrag er at identificere karakteren af de arbejdsroller, der muliggør sam-skabelsen af disse arbejdsorganiseringsskaber. Analysen viser at arbejdsrollerne i de case studier der studeres typisk kombinerer dimensionerne ”planlægning” og ”udførelse” på et hverdagsligt plan, og opererer som trans-aktionelle rutiner, der giver adgang til mangeartede ressourcer blandt organisatoriske medlemmer. Analysen viser også, at arbejdsrollerne ikke er predefinerede, men at de forhandles og transformeres løbende gennem sam-skabende fællesskaber, der åbner op for kontinuerlige læreprocesser.

Et tredje bidrag er at indkredse karakteren og betydningen af de fællesskaber, der faciliterer arbejdsorganiseringspraksisser baseret på både tro og tvivl. Analysen illustrerer at fællesskab blandt organisatoriske medlemmer typisk erfares som en praktisk logik ”of connecting” bundet op omkring et fælles mål, at fællesskab (fællesskabelse) er både mulighedsskabende og begrænsende, og at det åbner op for læring og emotionel energi. Disse fællesskaber giver anledning til multiple rolledannelser. Analysen viser desuden, at fællesskaber på jobbet folder sig ud på mange organisatoriske niveauer, og derfor overskrider traditionelle bureaukratiske organisatoriske skel.

Afhandlingens fjerde overordnede bidrag er at vise, hvordan danske produktionsvirksomheder gennem kontinuerlig reorganisering af deres arbejdspraksisser (samt arbejdsroller og fællesskaber) har formået at skabe både menneskelig og organisatoriske vækst. Ved at belyse samspillet mellem arbejdsroller, fællesskaber og arbejdsorganiseringspraksisser giver afhandlingen empirisk indblik i, hvordan disse organiseringspraksisser bidrager til sam-skabelsen af såkaldte ”lærende organisationsformer”. På den måde øger afhandlingen vores viden om indholdet af denne organisationsform, og dens rolle for danske produktionsvirksomheders evne til kontinuerligt at transformere sig, og udvikle nye konkurrencestærke organisatoriske praksisser for produktion, organisering og innovation i en mere og mere globaliseret verden.

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